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(Re)Writing One's Self as an Activist Across Schools and Sexual and Gender Identities: An Investigation of the Limits of LGBT-Inclusive and Queering Discourses

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Abstract

This study draws on in-depth interviews in which Jared, a queer trans man and high school arts teacher, grappled with what it means to him to be an activist to explore how his conceptualizations of queer activism have been supported and limited by LGBT-inclusive and queering discourses and to consider other discourses that might better represent and facilitate the teacher's activist intentions. Together, Jared and I reflected on three periods of his life. In high school, as a lesbian and then a dyke, Jared wrote himself into the world as an activist in ways that were clearly identifiable and aligned with LGBT-inclusive discourses. In college, as someone who identified as butch dyke, trans butch, or gender queer, Jared wrote himself into the world as an activist in ways that were strongly aligned with queering discourses. Then, as a graduate student and teacher, Jared identified as a queer trans man and his activism was more aligned with humanizing discourses. As such, Jared has written and rewritten himself into the world as an activist in different ways and different contexts, each of which accomplish different but valuable work in the world.

Key words: trans, activism, teacher

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Introduction

I came to interview Jared through a project being conducted by the Pink TIGers. The Pink TIGers is a teacher inquiry group that began meeting in the fall of 2004 and has been meeting regularly ever since. The group is explicitly committed to combatting homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism in central Ohio schools. Most recently, the Pink TIGers have committed themselves to exploring the research questions about the factors that support and/or interfere with adults' willingness to provide support to LGBTQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning) youth, why some educators intervene while others do not, and how teachers and parents might learn to advocate more actively for diversity in sexual identity and gender expression in schools. In an effort to answer these questions, many members of the Pink TIGers have conducted collectively approximately 70 interviews with administrators, teachers, counselors, social workers, librarians, coaches, students, families, members of Boards of Education, and ecumenical youth group leaders, using an interview protocol that we developed together.[1] Jared was one of the people I interviewed for this project. Here, I focus solely on his story.

Throughout our interviews, Jared seemed to be asking himself what a queer activist looks like, given who and where he is now? By "activism," he meant the idea of taking actions aligned with values that result in social and/or political change, although, as you will see, his understanding of activism varied across time, space, sexual identities, and gender expressions. By "who and where he is now" he meant that he teaches art in a high school in a mid-sized Midwestern city. If you came to know him as a teacher, you would know him as a man, and you would likely know little to nothing about his sexual identity. If, however, you came to know him well, slowly, gently, kindly, you might eventually come to know him as a queer trans man[2]. Or you might not. But this is how you will come to know him in this article. That is who he is now. And the city is one that is, for the Midwest, relatively queer-friendly. It seems to me that Jared has been asking some version of this question—that is what it looks like for him to be an activist as a queer trans man and high school teacher in this city—for as long as he has been a teacher.

Literature Review

As I share Jared's story, I use the word trans* as an umbrella term to refer to "all non-cisgender gender identities, including transgender, transsexual, … genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, … two-spirit, … trans man and trans woman," among others (Killermann, 2014). Trans* (with an asterisk) is most closely aligned with my understanding of transgender. I use the word trans (not followed by an asterisk), which is "best applied to trans men and trans women," that is people who experience gender dichotomously, but their gender identities are different than, indeed opposite than, the ones they were assigned at birth (Killermann, 2014). Trans (without an asterisk) is mostly closely aligned with my understanding of transsexual. I opt to use trans* and trans rather than transgender and transsexual because trans* and trans have a more

[1] This project has been funded by two grants: the American Educational Research Association's Educational Research Service Projects Grant and the Ohio State University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion Faculty Research Grant, with additional support provided by the Department of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University.

[2] I define this term in the following paragraph.

contemporary, less pathologizing connotation. Of course, Jared's choices of words will always trump my own.

In coming to understand Jared's story, I wondered if the notions of LGBT-inclusive and queering discourses may help me understand what is at issue in his question. So, my questions were:

-How have Jared's various conceptualizations of queer activism been supported and limited by LGBT-inclusive and queering discourses?

-Are there alternative discourses that might better represent and facilitate Jared's activist intentions?

LGBT-inclusive and queering discourses are ideas my colleague and collaborator Caroline Clark and I came up with in our analysis of talk in a LGBT-themed book discussion group (Blackburn & Clark, 2011). Caroline and I have since applied these discourses to literature read in that group (Blackburn, Clark, & Nemeth, in review) and more recently to award-winning LGBT-themed young adult literature (Clark & Blackburn, in review). In those analyses, we recognize an LGBT-inclusive discourse as one that combats homophobia but also tends to reinforce heteronormativity and a queering discourse as one that interrogates heteronormativity and foregrounds the sexual (Blackburn & Clark, 2011, p. 232).

Methods

In an effort to explore if not answer both Jared's and my questions, I first interviewed Jared in June of 2013 for the Pink TIGers project at his request. I wasn't sure whether he wanted to focus on his experiences as a queer student or a queer teacher, but through this interview, which was about an hour and fifty-one minutes, he talked about both. Shortly after the interview, he contacted me to ask for a follow-up interview. He had been reflecting on our discussion, thinking about things said and unsaid, and felt like he wanted to offer some clarification. It was less than two weeks after the initial interview that we shared a second interview, this time for about an hour and twenty-one minutes. The transcripts of these two interviews totaled approximately 149 pages and were the foundational data for this article.

I pulled together the stories I understood to be about Jared's conceptualization of activism and clustered them according to his evolving sexual and gender identities. These clusters correlated to various periods of Jared's relationships to schools. I shared these clusters of data with Jared, who read them and, in response, told me a few more stories. Then, as I converted these chunks of data into prose, Jared and I were in conversation via text and messaging, mostly my asking and his answering questions about details not addressed in the interviews. Each time I completed a draft of a period, I sent the draft to Jared who responded with stories he thought I needed to know to understand what was really going on in the stories I was trying to retell. I then revised the drafts, pulling on the additional stories he shared. Once I had a draft of the full set of findings, I shared that with him. Again, he shared more stories to facilitate my understanding. Once I had a complete draft of the paper, I invited him to edit and revise my draft, which he did multiple times. Although our intense collaboration throughout the analysis was at least to some degree driven by Jared's fear of my outing him as a trans man, the findings are stronger as a

result of our collaboration. I share those findings next.

High School: Being Seen, Being Heard

By his sophomore year in high school, Jared identified first as a lesbian and shortly thereafter as a dyke. This was in the mid-nineties. It was in the suburbs of a mid-sized Midwestern city, where he was, in his words "the only queer person [he] knew." As markers for the era, Jared explained that his family didn't get internet at home until his senior year, and even that was dial-up; before that when he wanted to connect to the internet, he "had the modem phone number of the library system [so he] could get on the library computer." He also recalled when Ellen DeGeneres came out publicly, which was the middle of his junior year, that "Everyone was like, 'Her career is over.'" It was, in short, a different time.

At this time, one image he encountered of queer activism was an art teacher at his school who "had a little rainbow sticker on his car." This small act did not go unnoticed by Jared:

> I would see him in the hallway. … And I just remember that I signed up for art class because I thought I would get his class, and I wanted to be in the gay teacher's class. … I was just really desperate for like, just gay people in my life or something. … I just always remember being like, "Please, help me."

Given this early image of activism, it is not surprising that his earliest queer activism took the shape of discrete queer iconography intended to connect himself to queer people:

> I had all these books, and so I was kind of learning these symbols and things in these books, like rainbows and pink triangles. I was figuring out what all these things were…. I would sort of put these things on like my backpack or I would put them on my books. … in this desperate quest to kind of broadcast these signals to see if I could find people.

In other words, Jared mirrored the activism he saw in school, even though neither his nor the teacher's efforts seemed to fulfill the intention of connecting queer people in the school.

Rather, it was in his production and distribution of 'zines[3] that Jared engaged in the sort of activism that worked on behalf of himself and others who were similarly marginalized by the experiences and performances of sexuality and gender. According to Jared, "I used to write 'zines where I would just put everything out there" and then distributed those to people he met online and through their 'zines, "like a network of penpals." It was this sort of activism that made him feel like he "made a huge difference." He explained that he "would get letters from people all the time saying, 'It really helped me to read what you wrote.'" So, he said, 'zines "really like saved my ass, me and a lot of people." In other words, Jared wrote himself into 'zines and thus wrote himself into the world as an activist.

Such a notion of activism as embodied by Jared as a high school student is aligned with LGBT-

[3] A 'zine is a self-published work of art, usually images and words, like a magazine. It is typically reproduced by photocopier for a very limited circulation and not at all for profit.

inclusive discourses in that seeking connection with other LGBT people so that they might unite within and against homophobic contexts is one way of combatting homophobia. Moreover, it is a way of combatting homophobia that essentially leaves heteronormativity alone, to its own devices.

College: Being True, Being Disruptive

Jared's senior year English teacher told his class that they "would go to college and meet all these new and diverse people who would challenge our beliefs and open our minds." It wasn't until he got to college, though, that he came to understand himself as one of the people his high school English teacher was talking about. Indeed, he said his teacher's message was "something that made me feel like just being out and visible was this form of education that I could do." He could, that is, write himself into the world in this way.

So, it was in college that he became the most "openly and visibly queer," where he was, in his words, his "true self." According to him, "college was really when I got to be like super-out. I just started off like, "I'm in college. I'm here. I'm queer."… I was like the gay person in the dorm. … And I was like—That was what I did." In part, this was his activism, just being the queer person that people knew, not unlike the high school version of himself wearing pink triangles on his backpack. But he also

> got really involved with like queer campus groups. I did a lot of, you know, like dorky college protests and … was really involved with Take Back the Night. I was really involved with the LGBT group on campus.

He explained that the culture he was coming from was "very much NOT interested in approval from straight people," which was, he explained, "the main way in which [the radical queer culture he was coming from] seemed to differ from mainstream gay and lesbian culture." Neither was it, or he, interested in connecting with lesbian and gay communities. His peers and he were

> very critical of like, "We're just like you.' We're like, 'We're not just like you. We're our own thing.… We're okay the way we are. We don't have to be this." Like, very critical of like, the gay marriage movement, very critical of the general consumerism and like body image, and just like the kind of mainstream values that came through in the gay community, that were just basically the same bullshit that mainstream straight people deal with, but just in gay packaging.

This critique, however, came from a place of love. He explained that the problems in lesbian and gay communities "wouldn't bother me so much if I didn't love it." This loving disposition was one that he maintained over time, as you will see.

The shift in how he authored himself as an activist mirrored other shifts in his life. He no longer identified as a lesbian or dyke but as a butch dyke, trans butch, or gender queer. He described himself like this:

> I wore shirts and buttons with all kinds of strongly-worded pro-queer and feminist

> slogans, I went to see bands that did things like play topless (they were women) and hack up dildos with machetes, and I thought that was awesome.

There was, in other words, a commitment to the disruptive in the ways that he authored himself into the world as an activist. He acknowledged, though, that what he called his "queer punk leanings were [at odds with his] sense that being a nice and friendly openly queer person was this useful form of activism."

Here, we see a shift in how Jared writes and rewrites himself as an activist as he moves from high school to college, from lesbian or dyke to butch dyke, trans butch, or gender queer. He shifted from "just being out and visible," which I associate with LGBT-inclusive discourses, to something more disruptive, which is aligned with queering discourses. He worked to interrogate heteronormativity even within lesbian and gay communities, and he foregrounded the sexual, at least in terms of what appealed to him with respect to band performances. As such, Jared's college version of activism, in my mind, was solidly aligned with queering discourses. But it also pointed toward what was coming next, particularly with his disenchantment with lesbian and gay communities and his valuing of being nice, friendly, and open.

Graduate School: Doing Less, Becoming More

Immediately after Jared earned his undergraduate degree, he entered a master's program. By this time he was identifying first as transgender and eventually as a transsexual man. He had "backed off from activist work and groups," in part because he "didn't really feel like trans people were widely accepted in the LGB community, or if they were, it was pretty much token or lip service …. The gay community only seemed interested in trans people as a vehicle for theorizing about their own genders" but also because "school was so demanding that [he] just didn't have time for that." He had stopped going by his feminine name, started going by initials, and began dressing in the attire associated with men in his particular realm of the arts. Although school and identity work were in some ways taking Jared away from activism, they were, in other ways, teaching him a lesson in activism, showing him a way activism might look very different than critiques, rallies, and protests.

Jared told his teacher, with whom he had worked extensively over the course of 5 years, about his intention to transition. Together they strategized about how to ease his transition in her class, which was really a cohort with whom both of them had spent considerable time over the years. According to him, "She and I had a lot of good conversations about professional kinds of things, like how you impart this information." Ultimately, she suggested that he talk to the department head because, "he's really good with this kind of stuff and he's an out gay man." Following her advice, Jared talked with the department head, and together they thought it through:

> "Well, let's see. If someone gets divorced or someone has a baby, how do we handle this?" [The department head] worked with me and brainstormed with me on how we do this. … Yeah, and so it was great. So he and I drafted and email and we sat down and made a list of all the people that I felt like needed to know. … And he drafted an email that was just like, "This student is going through this thing. We're going to now call him this. I assume and expect that you guys will give him your full support. He is a member

> of our community. If you have any questions, you can email him directly or you can email me about it." … He sent it out and then it was the funniest thing. I would get teachers come up to me, who were like, "Congratulations." … It was like great.

Then, one of the teachers who received the email called a meeting of Jared's studio class, meetings which were typical; and, in it, the teachers invited Jared to make his announcement. His classmates, as Jared described them, were "straight Midwestern college kids. …You know, they're good, kind people. They like football. They don't really know anything about gay much of anything." But they were also, his "primary social circle, [his] family, [his] main colleagues." Understandably, he was anxious about making the announcement, which his classmates could perceive, but once he told them, "it was fine." A conversation followed, in which his teacher said, "'So we really value you and like you. We will be supportive.'" And after the meeting, his classmates said, "'Oh, we're so relieved, we thought you were going to be dropping out.'" One class mate in particular, who Jared described as "a sweet guy. He's like a big dorky guy. He likes football and sports. … And meat and whatever," so, this guy asked Jared,

> "So, if you're a guy now, does this mean we get to joke around and pretend to be gay together?" …So I was like, "I guess so." He was like, "Cool." And so he slapped me on my butt and ran off. That was it. That was the end of it. … It was like a total non-issue. … It was great. It was easy.

When Jared reflected on this experience, he said,

> I guess that's where I saw people be the best to me. When people had good values and were like kind and open, like, they didn't have to know everything about trans issues. They didn't have to be able to use the right lingo. They just had to be kind people who were open to considering how they affect other people.

I understand this as a lesson Jared received in graduate school about being and becoming an activist: that one way of being an activist is being good, kind people, "open to considering how they affect other people." This is not something that gets taken up in either LGBT-inclusive or queering discourses, but it is something that stands out in Jared's efforts to write and rewrite himself into the world as an activist.

Teaching Here Now, Authentically

In preparing to enter the profession of teaching, Jared reflected on his experiences as a student when he yearned for an adult in his school with whom he could talk about problems he encountered as a result of his sexual identity and gender expression. "My 15-year-old self sees my 32-year-old self as having this responsibility. … Of having the responsibility to be out," "to be this role model." He remembered thinking "'Okay, I can be that person in the school for those kids.'" He even imagined,

> Oh, I'm going to go in and those kids are going to love me. And it's going to be great. … then I can be open and great and like, "Welcome my little queer babies." They're all going to do their homework for me and they're all going to behave themselves. …

> They're going to be so polite because they'll be so happy to have a [queer] teacher.

But, in his words, "That was not true at all." It wasn't true for a number of reasons: it was a different world than the one Jared had grown up in, but it was also a different kind of school, and Jared, too, was different.

With respect to it being a different world, at least in his part of the world, Jared explained:

> [T]he world has changed a lot since I, you know, was in high school. … my sense of it is that being a queer high school kid now is, at least in [this city] and I don't know about anywhere else, is a lot easier than it was when I was in high school. … Because if nothing else, you at least have the Internet. You can connect to people. …There's Ellen DeGeneres selling makeup. … You know, Rachel Maddow is on TV. There's actually like queer-ass people on TV, on mainstream TV outlets. … like there's a butch woman who is a person on MSNBC. … There's a kind of andro-butch woman selling Maybelline and has a talk show. … [And] Housewives fucking love her. … They have Glee on TV. They have all this shit that we just didn't have. … And they can access the Internet from their damn pockets. … It's a lot better. … so I feel like, you know, what I aspired to be in my teaching program is different because high schools are different. …But it's just a different world.

But Jared was different, too. By the time he started teaching he was living his life fully as a man. As he explained,

> I'm a man. That's what I'm going to be. … when I was 20 years old and decided I wanted to transition …That's when I came out. … Right? And now I am a man. … Job done. I don't need to come out.

Herein lies the tension with respect to his activism, though. In high school, as a lesbian and dyke, he understood activism as being visible and heard; in college, as a butch dyke or trans butch or gender queer, he understood activism as disruption. Both of these versions of being an activist relied on being out. Such an understanding of activism is widely accepted, particularly within LGBTQQ communities, but this understanding of activism, in these communities, is part of the problem for Jared as a trans man. Jared explained:

> I think that in the gay community at least, there's this idea of being out is the way to be true to yourself …. Which yeah, if you're gay, okay. [But] because gay and trans get lumped in together so much, um, that gets extended to trans people. … Being out as a trans person and being out as a gay person is totally different. … For gay people, coming out is how you get to be seen as yourself. For trans people, I came out so that I could become myself. And now I am myself … if I were to disclose my true trans history now, that to me is like--That's not me. … for me, I am being my authentic self by being a man.

But coming out or not is more than about being true to yourself; it is also being an activist. According to Jared, "there's a lot of just kind of rhetoric in the gay community that coming out is

activism," and it is neither a role nor a rhetoric he dismissed with ease. When I asked him whether he wanted to be an activist teacher, he said, "Yeah. I mean, of course. Who could sit back and watch the shit happen and not want to be part of that?" Moreover, he expressed that he was "at a point where I have the emotional … capacity" to return to the work of activism. He acknowledged that his privilege is part of the struggle when he said, "I am able to take a lot of things for granted as a mostly-stealth man," but he asked himself, "Am I not an activist because I'm not coming out?" And he wonders what the alternatives are: "I'm trying to just figure out like, how do I [be an activist] now … it's always something I'm thinking about. And like, especially as a teacher." Being a teacher activist is quite different than being any other kind of activist, he explained:

> Now, I can't [write zines]. I feel like as a teacher I can't just put all my shit out there in the world in print, with my address on it. … And be like, "Hey everybody, this is my deepest darkest feelings." It might be really useful for someone else to read that, but I can't just put that out in the world like that now.

The tension, then, is how this trans man can be simultaneously true to himself and write himself into the world as an activist.

Being an Authentic, Activist Teacher

Jared talked about ways of being an authentic, activist teacher that challenged more typical understandings of activism. He pulled from his experiences as a graduate student during his transition, when his administrators and teachers were thoughtful, receptive, and respectful and his classmates were good, kind, and open. He said, "I try to do that. …with my students. … I mean, in a really direct way." That he understood this as activism was evident when he paralleled being respectful and kind with inarguably activist actions. He said being good, kind, and open was some of his "best work, as opposed to lobbying or as opposed to like big protests or opposed to whatever. … people do. Or you know, [as] opposed to putting my own body on the line."

Jared also pulled from his experiences as being an artist to conceptualize activism as being and helping others be more than just queer. He reflected on the time when he was "really dyke identified … [when] that was really important to [him]." During that time, art, too, was really important to him, and he explained that having "something else … So I never felt like that had to be my whole world … that is part of what helped me survive …. I was never just a dyke. … I was a dyke, but I was also [an artist]." He further explained that when being queer "becomes a struggle or when you're in a place where you're not safe, to have something else that defines you besides just your sexuality … [is] potentially life-saving." Not only did his art give him an identity beyond a stigmatized one; it also connected him to other people, including but not limited to queer people, and gave other people who might not be able to connect with him on queer grounds another way to connect with him through art. He said being something more than queer "connects you to greater humanity," which is, he asserted, especially important for people who are isolated as a result of their sexual identities or gender expressions.

Offering opportunities for queer students to be more than queer is, from Jared's point-of-view, one of the real strengths of the school where he teaches. In fact, he stated this is something all

schools should aspire to do, that is to be places where "gay kids don't have to be the gay kid. …Or like where kids are not just safe, but safe and also free to do--to explore their interests and figure out how they want to contribute to the world." This notion undergirded another way he understood activism. He explained:

> [W]hen I work with my queer students and I, … I think about my—one student who's queer and like into—into [art] and … my goal with him is to not let him become just another gay [artist]…. But for him to be like, you know, to—to not just be gay….And not just [practice his art], but to really be embodied and know what his work is and have a–have his own creative voice and someday contribute [to his art].

In other words, helping students be and become more than queer is one way this trans man conceptualized and embodied queer activism without, in his words, "putting his body on the line."

But whether to put his body on the line has, more recently, become more of a question. In the school year since our interviews, two of Jared's students came out as trans*. These were students he taught three years in a row and mentored beyond the classroom as well. His art was their art, generally speaking. They were, in his words, "closer to my heart." With them, he did the things all teachers should do for their trans* students: he called them by the right names and used the right pronouns, but he also offered "concrete bits of advice," like how pointing them "in the direction of colleges that have good transition resources and health care available to trans students" and suggesting that they "get in touch with LGBT student services at … school to find out about dorm assignments and name changes." As he articulated, these are not things that he had to be openly trans* to do. He had to be informed and be comfortable being explicit, but he did not have to be out to write himself into the world of this school as an activist.

Discussion

Let's return, for a moment, to the question that provoked this exploration: How have Jared's various conceptualizations of queer activism been supported and limited by LGBT-inclusive and queering discourses? In high school, as a lesbian and then a dyke, Jared wrote himself into the world as an activist in ways that were clearly identifiable and aligned with LGBT-inclusive discourses. In college, as someone who identified as butch dyke, trans butch, or gender queer, Jared wrote himself into the world as an activist in ways that were strongly aligned with queering discourses. But what about since then? Since Jared began identifying as transgender and then as a transsexual man? Since his transition?

When analyzing Jared's embodiment and conceptualization of activism since his transition through the lenses of LGBT-inclusive and queering discourses, one might argue that he is not, really, an activist at all, not here, not now. He no longer combats homophobia by being seen and heard, as he did in high school and college. He no longer queers the world around him by aggressively interrogating heteronormativity or foregrounding the sexual, as he did in college. One could interpret these facts as indicative of his failure to be an activist.

Alternatively, one could point to the limits of the discourses. It really should not be surprising

that LGBT-inclusive discourses do not help us access meaning well from a trans man. It is common knowledge that oftentimes people use LGBT but mean LGB or really LG. The T is even sometimes referred to as the "silent T" (Mott, 2013). It worked fine when trying to understand Jared's activism when he identified as a lesbian or a dyke, but not so well once he identified as a trans man. And even though queering discourses, at first glance, seem like they might be more useful, they are not. Foundational to queer theory is the understanding of sexual and gender identities as fluid, multiple, and variable. And whereas that might resonate with someone who identifies as gender queer, as Jared did in college, it does not resonate as well with someone who experiences his gender as essential and dichotomous, as Jared does now. In other words, LGBT-inclusive and queering discourses actually hinder a conceptualization of activism based on Jared's life as a transsexual man and teacher.

Conclusion

So, how might we better conceptualize activism, given what we know about Jared? Or, to rely on his question: What does being a queer activist look like, given who and where he is now? For Jared, it looks like being thoughtful, kind, open, and aware of how his actions might impact others, as a model for but also a teacher of his students. It looks like working hard to make sure his queer students are comfortable being queer but are also more than queer, that they have something else to identify as, to be proud of, and to connect to others around them. It looks like being explicit about students' realities and informed about the decisions they will have to make and the possible consequences. Does it still mean what it used to mean: being visible, heard, and disruptive. Not here. Not now. That doesn't mean not ever. Jared suggested as much when he said, in reference to working with the two trans students I mention above, "the idea of disclosing my trans status to them has definitely seemed more appealing." So maybe some time, somewhere, but maybe not.

This brings me to the only remaining question that framed this exploration: Are there alternative discourses that might better represent and facilitate Jared's activist intentions? They must be discourses grounded less in combatting, interrogating, and disrupting and more in loving, comforting, and educating. I believe they are humanizing discourses. Here, I am inspired by Paris and Winn's recent book on *Humanizing Research* (2014). In their preface, they describe humanizing research in ways that I think might be understood in the context of humanizing discourses, that is: ways of "understanding not only how inequality happens across multiple communities and from multiple perspectives, but also how can we be part of the solutions that support equality" (p. xix). This to me seems a discourse saturated in the notion of activism, making it an appropriate notion to turn to in trying to understand Jared's authoring of himself as an activist. But its appropriateness is even more evident when we turn to Freire's conceptualization of humanization (Blackburn, 2014).

According to Freire, as humans, we are always "imperfect, unfinished, incomplete beings, who exist in and with an ever-changing world" (Freire as cited by Roberts, 2000, p. 41). This conjures images not only of Jared's evolving sexual and gender identities but also his activist identities and the contexts in which they have taken shape. Freire (1998) asserts, "No one is born already made. Little by little we become, through the social practice in which we participate" (p. 79). Activism may or may not be among the social practices in which we participate, but it is among

those in which Jared participates, and this participation matters to him. That activism is a social practice that connects to humanizing is evident in Freire's discussion of action. Action, he explains, combined with reflection, is praxis. And undergirding praxis is the aim to transform the world. Because praxis is, according to Freire, a uniquely human capability, it can be uniquely humanizing. In other words, if I understand Jared through humanizing discourses, rather than LGBT-inclusive or queering discourses, I can read well, and by "well" I mean as he intends it, Jared's writing of himself as an activist when he puts a pink triangle on his back pack, publishes 'zines, and protests mainstream lesbian and gay communities. But so too can I read him as an activist when he is good, kind, and open with his queer students, helping them to become artists and giving them informed and explicit guidance. I do not understand being good, kind, and open as the only way of being an activist, for Jared, for trans men, or for anyone in particular, but one way of writing one's self into the world as an activist, one way that works for Jared right now. Roberts (2000) states that "Given an ever-changing world, humanization is a continuous, unfinished process, with new problems to be addressed as each epoch unfolds" (p. 51). With this in mind, writing and rewriting one's self into the world as an activist in different ways in different contexts, as Jared has done, might be exactly what is most needed.

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