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A Public Speaking of Life

Kip Williams

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FORM C
COLLEGE SCHOLARS PROJECT APPROVAL

KIP WILLIAMS LO PRESSER
Scholar Mentor

A PUBLIC SPEAKING OF LIFE
Project Title

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

(Minimum 3 Required)

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DATE COMPLETED 4.26.04

*A Public Speaking of Life:
Creativity, Nonviolence, and Social Change in Knoxville, Tennessee*

Submitted by Kip Williams
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation in the College Scholars program,
emphasis in Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity Studies.

When I set out to organize the recent social action that has developed into the “involve knoxville” campaign, I was only dimly aware of what the action would mean to me and my life. In fact, even as I begin writing this document – almost two weeks after the public act of civil disobedience – I’m still working out the meanings and implications of the action. The first thing that occurs to me in constructing a written account of my experiences is that I ought to thank the people who have been my support structure over the last months: my family who, despite their disagreements with my sexual identity and their reservations with my activist work, continue to love and support me and struggle with me in an attempt to understand and tolerate; my friends – particularly Lance, Rhett, Ticie, and Tom – who patiently let me ramble and think out loud and who always respond with the deepest insight and empathy; my co-conspirators in organizing and carrying out this action – particularly Angelina, Stefanie, and Jason – who have laughed and cried along with me, helped me to bear the burdens of organization, and made themselves vulnerable with me to family, friends, the media, and the masses; and, of course, my committee, Drs. Howard Pollio, Lo Presser, and Teresa Hutchens, who allowed me to shift my senior project during February of my last semester in college, and who have been my friends, mentors, and teachers.

In a general sense, I hope that the words in these pages can help to address the meaning of the involve knoxville campaign at both the personal and social levels. My intention here is to identify documents and media that can later be used as data for a piece of action research and to do some of the preliminary thinking about what that data means. When the involve knoxville campaign was a vague idea in my head about a one-time social action, a friend and colleague of mine interviewed me on the experience of

organizing a social action. We referred to this as a “political” action in the interview, but I have since come to recognize that I am interested in and do work that takes place in a social arena, rather than a political one, though my methods often touch on the political. This interview served my colleague as data for an assignment for one of his graduate courses, and I am grateful to him both for conducting the interview and for treating it with a qualitative analysis for thematic content that models after the applied phenomenological method. The interview and my colleague’s breakdown of its thematic content have been included as the first piece of data for research.

After receiving the blessings of my committee to pursue this project and finalizing my plans to travel to San Francisco to meet with some of my activist friends for input and guidance, I began to keep a periodic journal on my experiences of organizing this action. I kept this journal in the same pages that I used to take notes at organizational meetings. The pages of that notebook are copied and included in full as the second piece of data.

The first act of civil disobedience organized and carried out by the involve knoxville campaign received national attention through the Associated Press. Initially, we were covered in every local television news show at every broadcast during the day of our action, and we received attention from several of the local radio stations, such as WIVK and WUOT. Our action was covered on the front page of the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, the *Daily Beacon*, and *Out and About* (Tennessee’s LGBT newspaper), and the Associated Press story appeared in the *Tennessean*, as well as in the Nashville, Jackson, Chattanooga, and Memphis newspapers and in several online political journals. As for national attention, the story was covered by CNN, MSNBC, FOX, and National Public Radio, and I received calls after this initial coverage from friends in Chicago, San

Francisco, and Washington, D.C., reporting that they had seen our action on television. In the weeks following the action, I have appeared on several radio talk shows as a guest to discuss the movement and answer callers' questions. Radio appearances have included an 850 AM talk show called "Left Turn," a student broadcast on MTSU's radio station, and several appearances on Knoxville's First Amendment Radio. I have collected media coverage when and where possible, and media coverage is included as a third piece of data.

During the months of organization for and the weeks following the first event, several people from the community contacted me via e-mail with questions, concerns, and thoughts about the involve knoxville campaign. Many of these communications represent the general issues that activist organizers have to address in the community, and some messages that stand out to me as important have been included as a fourth piece of data.

My journal ends abruptly on the night before the first action. In the weeks since the action, I have been so busy dealing with my ongoing life and dealing with the fallout – interacting with media, working toward understanding and reconciliation with my family, settling in to my new apartment, responding to the calls and e-mails of friends and ministers from my past, and addressing responses to the action from members of the community – that I haven't made time to journal. The last piece that I offer is to share some of my thoughts about the sections of this project, why I've done what I've done, what the implications have been, and where I find myself now.

Interview and Thematic Analysis

Overall Topic for Interview:

- Experience of organizing a political action

Possible Subtopics:

- How are choices made in terms of who to involve?
- How are social networks utilized to organize an action?
- How are people brought in from outside the social network?
- How is the purpose of the action conceptualized?
- What is the relationship between the way the action is conceptualized and enacted?
- How is this purpose conveyed to people who might participate?
- How is power conceived of in the organizing effort – is it centralized in a single person; is it shared amongst those inside the social network; is it shared by the whole group involved?
- What is the relationship between the conceived distribution of power, and the actual form it takes?
- How is the “message” of the action conveyed?
- What decisions are made in terms of participants to convey this message?

Interview Protocol:

While I was interested in the topics listed above, I used a phenomenological interview technique, allowing the interviewee to determine the topics addressed, and the order in which to address them. Two follow-up questions were asked during the untranscribed portion of the interview.

(1) Main question: What is your experience of organizing a political action?

(2) Topics for follow-up:

- Who to involve?
- How to involve?
- Purpose?
- Telling people about / seeking participants?
- How getting your point across? Within group? People seeking to influence?
- How are decisions made?

Two Part Interview with S.

Part I: Informal interview (part of observation)

Date: 2.15.04

Time: 3:35 pm

Place: Coffee Shop in West Knoxville

Int: Rhett Graves

Resp: S.

Topic: *I am observing at the coffee shop and S. and I start talking about what he would like to do for his senior thesis project. The conversation involves a particular political action he is planning and how he is getting the word out concerning this particular action.*

Part II: Formal interview**Date:** 2.15.04**Time:** 6:15 pm**Place:** Center for Applied Phenomenology, Aryes 105**Int:** Rhett Graves**Resp:** S.**Topic:** *Organizing a grassroots political action*

Background on respondent: *S. is a 21-year-old white male student in the college at UT, who self-identifies as non-heterosexual. His studies involve gender, sexuality, and creativity, particularly in relation to political activism. He will be beginning a doctoral program in feminist studies/anthropology in Fall 2005.*

S. grew up in a conservative Protestant home in Knoxville. Three years ago he began his studies at UT. Along with starting college, he began exploring his sexual identity, and became involved in human rights and peace activism. His sexual identity and political activism have led to conflict between he and his family. He is troubled by this conflict over his activism as he maintains that his actions are directly motivated by the religious values that he learned as a child. S. is a member of various local and national activist groups, and the activism he has participated in so far has been organized by these groups. In the particular case studied here, S. has chosen to independently organize a small-scale nonviolent action involving approximately 20-40 people. This action concerns a timely gay-rights issue, and his motives for organizing this action have given him some pause. Admittedly, it is the first time he is acting politically for both personal and religious reasons, and the first time he is organizing an action on his own.

Part I: Interview at Coffee Shop

Initial part of interview at the Coffee Shop immediately after respondent has begun talking about how he is making people aware of this action, and assessing their interest.

I: Do you mind if I record this?

R: No, you're welcome to record. I sat down and these two women had come and they sat down by the bay window, just yesterday, and I didn't know them, but I just assumed they were homosexual because there are lots of ways to read that into people, and so I sat down at the table and I said excuse me, um, I know that this is very presumptuous what I'm about to do, but right now, this cause is important enough for me to be presumptuous, and I begin to address it all and I basically started, um, an underground sort of movement to carry out a gay action in Knoxville, and incidentally I say this as we're tape-recording it, as far as this particular action goes, um, I'm keeping it very much on the hush hush, the only people that I told about it are people who will be involved in it or who are helping it to take place, um, or in this instance I'm talking to you because you can help me with the academic end, but um, please don't speak about it to anybody **[THIS IS THE REASON FOR THE BLACKED-OUT PORTIONS IN THE TEXT TO FOLLOW – THESE PORTIONS OF TEXT CONCERN THE DETAILS OF THE ACTION S. IS PLANNING]** because the first time we carry out this action, and I imagine we will carry it out several more times in the future, but the first time we carry it out, we want it [pause] to first off be a surprise, and secondly, we want for there to be no opposition whatsoever, we don't want the counter-protesters to be there, we don't want for anybody

to try, to try to block us from doing it, we want to be able to do it [speech becomes more emphatic here] and if we do it in the future, then let the counter protesters be there, if anything it will just get us more publicity, but um, and by people being there to oppose us they make it a current event, because people are taking their stances it becomes a public issue, or whatever, but the first time that we do this, we don't want any opposition, well, we just want to be able to do it, um.

I: What do you think they are going to do? [referring to people who will be asked to respond to this political action]

R: Well, um, I think they are going to tell us no, like [pause – laughs a little] that's about all they can do, um, they can't, I mean if we have a large enough group, and it certainly will take a long time for each [REDACTED], they can't tell, just all of us, to go away, 'cause we're all going to take part in this action, [REDACTED] will come up and you mean to tell me "no"? well alright, I'll leave not quietly, but certainly peacefully, and um, nonviolently, but um, but the action won't be over when we're gone, you know, and I really don't know what form it's going to take yet, but like, I have ideas about where I see it going, for example, like one idea I have is, will you turn this off for a second?

I: Oh, yeah, yeah.

End of first interview in Coffee Shop.

Part II, Formal Interview at Lab

I: What is your experience of organizing a political action?

R: Yeah, is that the question?

I: That was the question, my man. [laugh]

R: [laugh] um, starting interviews is always hard.

I: Yeah, tell me how you, um, tell me about today at the coffee shop. Like when, when you were trying to decide to talk to one person as opposed to another.

R: Let me talk about that in a minute, I'll talk first about, I always feel the need to do this, to give sort of a context for what this action is [I: umhm], this context, that there is a lot of queer activism going on right now, um, over the past few months there been several actions where groups that are, [REDACTED] and it's usually been happening up in the [REDACTED], um, a few other places, and um, in [REDACTED] as a result of one of these actions one [REDACTED] successfully brought a lawsuit against the city for [REDACTED], they brought this to this state Supreme Court level, and um, the state Supreme Court found it unconstitutional, ah, to [REDACTED], and um, so they have until [REDACTED] to rectify the situation, um, so that [REDACTED] and also for, um, there has been all this talk about an amendment to the United States Constitution [pause] that would [REDACTED]

[redacted], um, [pause] and [redacted] has just officially said that he will endorse that amendment to the Constitution, so already there's [pause] there some sort of tension, that needs to be dealt with, then obviously people are opposed, seeing it as a problem, in people who are in power, the president, um, ah, the justices of the Supreme Court [redacted], people who have some sort of political power are having to address a problem right now that people are raising, and um, in [redacted] where it happened in the last few days the mayor and the city officials [redacted] have worked out an organized effort to, um, to [redacted] [redacted] and they're doing this in spite of the protest of a lot of counter groups, and um, and in fact these counter groups are trying to find legal routes to block the mayor in the city officials from being able to do this, but those who have the power to stop it are the people who are doing it to begin with, so they are having a hard time being able to stop it

I: Yeah

P: Um, so here you have a very, very clear and very big and active opposition [long pause] a very loud action were people are saying, um, you know the way things are being done cannot continue, we demand there to be a change now, um, and is not just a popular movement, people taking part in this just civilians but it's even government officials who are using their power, their authority to help bring about social change as well, [pause] all that to say there's a lot going on right now, and right now for whatever reason, whatever the historical, you know, context, that, that this happens in, right now is the time when queer activists are, um, are having their day basically, that you know, you, you can't help but to see the similarities between this and the civil rights movement of the '60s and '70s, it's it's different in a lot of ways, but there are a lot of similarities to so that [really long pause] this is something that is figural even at a cultural level to the nation and to the, in terms of the presidential election that's coming up, in terms of, um, legal decisions that have been made in terms of people doing things that are dissident, that are oppositional to an established structure, but right now things are being done, and um, [long pause] and so that's a little bit of the background of where I found myself over the last week [I: umhm] when I found out about this action that it has taken part in [redacted], well I found out the day of, that [redacted] and I was really excited by it, that this, um, [pause] and I guess right now what I'm talking about is the conception of an action that can be organized, this is the conception of the action itself [pause], so I'm feeling excited about this cause both because it's something that's major, a lot of very visible unrest and a lot of big newsworthy things are happening because of it, and because it's an issue that's very personally meaningful to me, that I may or may not choose [redacted] [I: umhmm] and what's going on right now with these actions is very personally meaningful to me because this has a lot of bearing on whether [redacted] [redacted] have the freedom [redacted]

I: Umhm

P: Um, [long pause] it sounds like I'm rambling but this is all really important to me, how the process comes together, [redacted] is a city that I'll be moving to in, later this year for graduate school [I: umhmm] and even my academic work is about gender and sexuality, this is really where my interest is, or a passion, and I've been planning for about a month now a trip to leave in just a couple days to go to [redacted] with a mentor of mine so I can meet my professors, I can see the University, explore the city

and play around for little bit, um, [pause] so it seems very, um, serendipitous to me that my trip [redacted] is coinciding with when this major movement is really starting to take form [l:umhmm], um, and there is all this chaos going on there now and the trip that I've already planned, I get to be there, I get to be in the middle of this chaos and not only this being something that's personally meaningful to me, but having been an activist myself for several years for lots of different causes, um, it's exciting to me to get to go and, and see this activism taking place, see people getting riled up, and see, um, see the process of social change, like, taking place right there in the city, and um, [long pause]

I was working at my coffee shop the night that I found out about, about this action that had started about [redacted] and I started thinking about [redacted]

[redacted] which accomplished several things, um, it brought attention to the issue because it, it got some sort of, um, of public attention in terms of the media, the news, and so it raises awareness that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with, and also [pause] forces people to be aware that there are some people who aren't going to be quiet about this issue until it's dealt with [l:umhm], um, and if you look geographically at where these sorts of actions take place, you get certainly a lot in the [redacted], um, [redacted] obviously, and I don't know but I would imagine probably in [redacted] state [l:umhm], um, in there are pockets where, where these kinds of actions happen, um, and I was thinking that it was interesting that here in my hometown nothing like this is been done, um, that we don't have an organized activist queer community in Knoxville, um, and I guess there are a lot of reasons for that, I don't know, but [pause] was thinking to myself well, no action can ever take place unless somebody organizes the action, then I was thinking about that for a second and then it occurred to me, that, that I'm in activist [chuckles] and I can organize, I've been organizing, um, different political actions for other causes usually: peace, antiwar, anti-nuclear weapons, death penalty abolition, I've been involved in a lot of different groups and have helped organize actions for going on two years now, and um, [long pause] and so there's no reason that I shouldn't begin organizing an action here in Knoxville to address this [redacted], and uh, to address queer rights, um,

Because like I said before now [pause] be considered going on in the national level, sort of give the cause not only more immediacy, but uh eh, almost more legitimacy, because there's more reason to be taking action now because a lot of other people are taking action to, um, [pause] so a friend of mine was at the coffee shop and we were talking about these actions and I had already been thinking through this process that I might organize something like this, and um, [pause] and I asked him, you know just sort of hypothetically, what if an action like this got organized where we [redacted]

and trying to get some sort of media attention for the action

l:umhm

P: and um, he was interested in it, but he said I wouldn't want to take part in an action like this without [redacted] I value [redacted] so much I wouldn't want to [redacted] and so [pause] I totally admire that, and I respect that, and so it was something to had to address for me to be able to take this stance, and to be able to want to carry out this action that became a question that I, I had to [pause] struggle with myself and respond to so I can be aware of why I was going

to take part in the action, why I wanted to organize it, and um, and so I responded to him by saying I do respect that and certainly no expectations for you to be part of the action if you're not comfortable with it, whereas from my sake [pause] I think two things about: 1. that this action is a symbolic action and so it's OK for me [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

I: umhm

P: um, and also [pause] kind of like getting to be a trickster I can call this [REDACTED] a farce [REDACTED] for the sake of making a statement that as long as this institution can only recognize and affirm [REDACTED] [REDACTED] of only certain types of people, then in a lot of ways, it is in fact a farce, um, [long pause] and what's in the back of my mind the whole time is that OK, sure, I am experienced at political activism [I:umhm] and social activism, this is a cause that I care about, and, you know I'm a pretty smart and creative guy who's capable carrying something like this off [I:umhm] but at the same time it occurred to me that there are plenty of people in Knoxville who are considerably more experienced, more um, more creative, smarter than I am, and who are just as if not more passionate about this and other causes than I am, and so this sort of an action is a possibility why hasn't been done, you know, um, that I must be missing some piece of this puzzle that surely somebody's tried something like this, and for one reason or another it just doesn't work here [pause], and I don't really know how to address that except to say that it's worth it to me to try it anyway that to my knowledge nobody has tried anything like this and also to my knowledge there's never been, um, the sort of a historical situation like right now where this kind of action is timely.

Right now [long pause] a lot of these actions are taking place in the past there haven't been any of these actions anywhere else, and um, [pause] and shouldn't seem any surprise that a progressive, liberal cause like this would start in places like [REDACTED], and take a while to work themselves into Tennessee because this culturally, this environment is less, um, supportive and affirming of, of the types of ideas and values that we'd be supporting in this kind of action [I:umhm], so I started calling a lot of my friends to see if I could find some interest, and um, and of course it was important for me to call friends to do identify in some non-heterosexual way, you know like I have lots of friends that identify as gay, transgender, or bisexual, um, and all of these different classes of individuals, um, [pause] but the common theme in all of us is that were all interested in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [pause], so I called some of them, but it occurred to me that since an action like this is so fundamentally supposed to be about [pause] diversity, um, understanding and tolerating different kinds of people, and living, um, a sort of open community of those types of designations will keep us from [REDACTED], um, but I would like for an action about [REDACTED] to reflect this idea first to be in a tolerant, understanding, so I want people who are involved in this action to come from [pause] from different places, I want, I want it to be inclusive of different religions, I want it to be inclusive of different genders, I want to be inclusive of, um, different ages, different racial backgrounds, different educational backgrounds, even I want this to be including people of different sexual orientations,

So I called several friends of mine, who um, self-identify as heterosexual and started mentioning the idea of this action to them [pause] and all the while everybody that I'm talking to [pause] I'm talking to first off who I have some sort of personal relationship with

and secondly who I know would either be interested in directly involving themselves in this, or who in the very least would be very supportive of it, because I only want to let people know about this will be supportive, not people who are going to put up blocks to me, not people who are going to, um, [pause], maybe not themselves put up blocks to talk to other people who would put up blocks to me, some very careful about who I'll talk to about this, and I'm also very careful as I'm thinking about who I want to talk to, um,

In talking to different friends of mine, I was invited to several different organizations, um, including Lamda, which is UT's, uh, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, ah, student organization, I was invited to Lamda to speak about this action, and to get interest there, um, I have friends who have connections to other groups – Tennessee Pride, PFLAG, um, -- which are all organizations [long pause] that are not really concerned with activism and equality for non-heterosexuals, these organizations are about, uh, um, [pause] a support structure for people and their families and friends, um, and so I'm sure I could find people from these organizations who would be interested in activism, although I don't imagine a great many would be, but also I'm very careful because I don't want to bring this action to an organizational level, I want it to be organized, but I don't want it to be brought to the level of, um, [pause] of an institution that has a name, and has, um, already has some structure about it because this whole movement being so avant-garde, I wanted to be very grass-roots, whatever, whatever happens here in Knoxville, I don't want it to be like "this action brought to you by the Lamda student union," or you know, I want it to be you know "this action brought to you by human beings who care about other human beings," um, [pause] so I'm very aware the whole time of who I want to talk to, who I want to let know what's going on, and I'm aware of that because I don't want certain people to know about the action and I don't want for the group that does this action to take on [pause] the structure of an organization that already exists, and already has a name, and already has meetings and officers, and that sort of thing, and already has [pause], um, a statement of purpose, or anything like that, I just wanted to [pause] let it emerged as it will, um, [pause] so certainly I call a lot of my friends who identify as non-heterosexuals, but I also made an effort to call one friend in particular who is a Methodist minister, um, [cough] and a heterosexual woman, um, who has traditionally been very outspoken in terms progressive religious activism, and even in terms of sexual equality and rights she's been very outspoken.

I: Did you want some water?

R: No, I'm good, thank you, actually, and um, I brought the idea to her just hoping that she would talk to some of her friends [pause] who might be interested in taking part in the action . . .

I: You sound hoarse, I'm sorry; I'm offering you water [laughs].

R: [laughs] I can talk forever.

I: Ah, okay, so she, she is organizing religious actions?

R: Right, and she's, she's not to my knowledge ever really organized an action, but she has been active in groups that could have done organizing work and she's come to take part in, in [cough] playing that out, and also she's been very outspoken within the religious communities in Knoxville about sexual equality, sexual rights, and um, she's interesting for a lot of reasons, first off because she's a woman minister, which is interesting enough, um, she's also a woman Protestant minister who is accepting and

affirming of non-heterosexuals [I: umhm] who is herself an activist and who is herself heterosexual, um, [long pause] so this is interesting sort of person [pause] to bring some sort of merit to our, to our action because if we can get her some media attention, we can get her interviewed and being able to make public comment, then it becomes clear that not all of us who are involved by doing this just because it's a selfish action, you know, I want this right for me, I want this right for me, that [pause] we can have her saying things addressing the religious community and saying [pause] as Christians, as whatever, we need to show equality, we need to show understanding and tolerance, and acceptance an'... [cough, cough] and [I: Is this bugging you?], no not at all, and also to be able to say I myself am a heterosexual but I still stand in solidarity with my friends here, um, so she can address religious communities, she can address feminist communities, she can address, um, other women's communities, she can address the heterosexual community in ways the rest of us can't address them because we don't share those designations in the way that she does [pause, sirens in background] I also have a heterosexual friend, um, and he has two brothers who are both, um, they both identify as gay, and one of his brothers is partnered and lives in [REDACTED], so all these issues are very salient to him to, because even though it's not [pause] he's not directly affected by it his family is, and [long pause]

I: Is his brother among the group [REDACTED]?

R: No, as far as I know his brother has not [REDACTED] [REDACTED], um, although in the next week maybe he well I don't know, but I saw my friend, and um, again knowing that he was a heterosexual, but also knowing that this would be personally meaningful issue, I addressed him about the possibility of an action, and um, [cough, cough] both he and the Methodist minister, um, [long pause] expressed not just an interest, but a deep passion and conviction that they wanted to be part of this action and both of them committed to me that [pause] with, without my even asking, which is interesting, I, I didn't even ask them for a commitment, but it was important enough to them to make a commitment to me to say I would take part in, in the action that unfolds, um, [long pause] so up until now what I've been thinking about [pause] is finding people who can make an action take place [I: yeah], um, [pause] we still don't know what the action is exactly, uh, I have some vague ideas about what I would like to see happen, and I'm sure they do to, but um, [long pause] I don't [pause] know [pause] no decisions have been made yet [I: yeah], um, and is not time for that, right now it's time to get a base of people who are interested in taking action at all [I: umhm], and then later on we'll go over with what we're going to do and how we're going to do it, um, so I'm knowing that here in just a few days I'm traveling out to [REDACTED], for a trip I've already planned, um, and I'm thinking this will be a great opportunity for a lot of reasons, not only just to get to go and get away for a few days, play in the big city, meet my new professors, um, but also to get to see firsthand what some of this chaos looks like, I'll be going to the [REDACTED] and to, uh, to see what's going on with, um, [pause] with these counter activists trying to block this from happening, and I'll be going to [pause] uh, to one other location to visit which these [REDACTED], just to see it happening, and uh, I've got friends there, um, I've got friends in [REDACTED], one friend who himself, he did not [REDACTED] [REDACTED], um, [REDACTED] happened on Friday, the second day of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [I: umhm], so I know people who have been involved in this, in the forefront of all this, and um, in the very city that's making all of this so [pause] so salient, um, [I: yeah] so urgent, um, and uh, I guess I look at that as sort of a, a training, or an education, or a preparation for coming back here, not only with the excitement of having seen what's happening somewhere else, but having talked to

the people who are a part of it, and um, [pause] and hearing about their experiences and their perspectives, and um, [pause] what advice they might have to lend to actions to get done in the future in a more conservative area, um, second, to go and, and [pause] get a sort of, not really a model for what I wanna do, but get, get some counsel from people who are doing it on how I can make it happen here, and um,

the people that I've gotten in touch with here in Knoxville who are interested in the action, and actually I've only thought about calling people that I already have relationships with, but um, and actually approached people who I didn't know it all, the coffee shop where I work, um, is actually a [long pause] a very welcoming environment to non-heterosexuals, and we have a lot of, of non-heterosexuals who, who patronize at the shop, and um, [pause] yesterday while I was at work [pause] to two men had come into the shop, and I don't know these men, um, and there was no real reason for me to assume that [pause] they weren't heterosexuals, except, um, something but I don't know what it was about them, just sort of clued me in that they probably weren't [pause] heterosexuals, so after they'd gotten their drinks, and they'd gone to sit down, when I had a few moments of spare time at my work, I approached them at the table where they were sitting, and I asked them if they wouldn't mind if I sat down and talked to them for minute, they said, no, that would be fine, and I said, um, I'm sorry and I certainly don't mean to be presumptuous or offensive in any way whatsoever, but right now [long pause] there is a situation that justifies my being so, I have, have to be a little bit presumptuous, and I started ask them if they knew about was going on with the queer actions around the country in [redacted] and [redacted], and they knew that was talking about and expressed interest in what I was talking about, so that was a good way to lead in to the conversation, and um, I asked them if they were interested in taking part in any sort of, of um, social change work and they were, and so I started to tell them about having an idea about working on an action here in Knoxville, I said, you know, I want to keep things pretty quiet right now, I don't want people to know that it to don't need to know about it, who won't be playing roles in it somehow, and um, [pause] but I said also in order to get enough people to do it this action, I need for you to talk to people to you think would be interested in it, um, and again, being very quiet about it, being very subtle, um, and I gave them the [pause], my e-mail address, and I said, um, feel free to contact me, and also anyone who you know of, who um, you think would be interested in this kind of action, please give them my contact information also, and um, and have them get in touch with me [cough],

and I can start pulling together a group out of this, but um, since, since going to an organizational level, this whole, uh uh, by which I mean to the, to the institutions like to unions and to groups that are already established, and I'm trying to do this very, quietly, kind of subversively, and also um, well vary subversively, um, and also in a grass-roots, independent kind of way [long pause] [! :uhuh], the only way that I have to organize is based on personal relationships with people, and so it's a word-of-mouth sort of thing, getting it out with people that I'm already friends with, approaching people who I think might be interested in helping, uh, and risking offending somebody or, um, [long pause] or being you know too presumptuous [cough] and asking them to continue getting the word out, um, and giving myself [pause] getting contact information for myself out, so that there's some hub, so that people who are interested, that maybe had, had thoughts about doing something like this before, but never really had any way to make that happen, so that they have a hub to go to now, they have a, uh, [pause] they have an organizer, they have somebody [pause] by getting affiliated with me, they can become affiliated with this cause [! : umhm] um, [long pause] what I've been telling people is that

after I come back from [REDACTED], I will get in touch with all of the people who have expressed some sort of an interest, and I will hold a preliminary, um, organizational meeting for us to get together, and several things are really important to me about this, mainly from my experiences of having helped to organize other political actions [pause] [l: umhm], um, especially for something that's as controversial as this is, something that's as delicate, and um, something that people are so passionately opposed to each other about, um, I want to make sure that any action that does take place [side one of tape ends].

THEMATIC STRUCTURE

For this interviewee, six themes emerge, defining his experience of organizing a political action. The essential ground, or context, against which these themes emerge is what the interviewee calls: "Right Now." The ground presents a time constraint, a sense of immediacy, that necessitates action on a current human rights issue. The six themes are (1) Secrecy Versus Getting the Word Out, (2) Personal Passion versus Personal Struggle, (3) People With A Common Theme, (4) Conflict and Tension Raise Awareness, (5) Showing the Message through People, and (6) Not Being Blocked / Making it Happen. See diagram of themes (pg.).

Themes From Interview With S.

The Ground: Right Now

The context in which the themes emerge concerning the interviewee's experience of organizing a political action surrounds a current national issue in American politics. S articulates a sense of immediacy and urgency for this political action to happen "**right now**":

... there's a lot going on right now, and right now for whatever reason, whatever the historical, you know, context, that, that this happens in, right now is the time when queer activists are, um, are having their day basically" (150-152).

He sees the immediacy and growth of this particular political action to the national level as legitimizing the action he plans for Knoxville:

Like I said before now [pause] be considered going on in the national level, sort of give the cause not only more immediacy, but uh eh, almost more legitimacy, because there's more reason to be taking action now because a lot of other people are taking action to (214-217).

For S., because the action has reached a national level, many people are taking action, it necessitates the action he is organizing. He views "right now" as a unique time in American political history: "**To my knowledge there's never been, um, the sort of a historical situation like right now where this kind of action is timely" (253-255).** He makes some historical parallel to the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960's and

1970's, but maintains that while the issues addressed then were somewhat different, both movements are organized around the idea of human equality and fundamental cultural change: **“The way things are being done cannot continue, we demand there to be a change now” (146-147).**

He has discussed this sense of immediacy in terms of his own personal feelings and a set of “serendipitous” circumstances that are allowing him to witness first hand what is happening in another state: **“[It is] serendipitous to me that my trip to . . . is coinciding with when this major movement is really starting to take form” (181-183).** He articulates the personal meaning that this political activism has for him as a “non-heterosexual” man: **“What's going on right now with these actions is very personally meaningful to me” (168-169).**

He has connected personal and historical events with the national salience of gay-activism happening “right now.” It is the sense of immediacy and timeliness that grounds his experience of organizing a political action here in Knoxville.

Theme 1: Secrecy Versus Getting the Word Out

The first theme that emerges from this ground illustrates a conflict that he is encountering between secrecy concerning the action he is planning and the necessity of **“getting the word out”** to others who may be interested. On the one hand he is **“keeping [his plans for this particular action] very much on the hush hush” (66-67),** yet at the same time he needs to connect with other people to **“pull together a group” (421)** for the action. So far, most of his organizing efforts have been through his established social network. More recently he has also been approaching people he encounters publicly whom he feels may have an interest in participating:

The only way that I have to organize is based on personal relationships with people, and so it's a word-of-mouth sort of thing, getting it out with people that I'm already friends with, approaching people who I think might be interested in

helping, uh, and risking offending somebody or, um, [long pause] or being you know too presumptuous [cough] and asking them to continue getting the word out (425-430).

He discusses this aspect of his organizing work in terms of **“getting the word out,”** yet still feels a conflict concerning who to trust to help him in terms of this networking: **“I’m trying to do this very, quietly, kind of subversively, and also um, well very subversively, um, and also in a grass-roots, independent kind of way”** (423-425).

Secrecy and subversion connect to a notion of this action being independent of already established organizations, and to a concern that the action will not be blocked – both salient themes addressed below. He is aware of who can play a role in this action, and how he can **“get the word out”** and **“pull together a group”** while still maintaining a degree of secrecy about the particulars of the action:

I want to keep things pretty quiet right now, I don’t want people to know about it who don’t need to know about it, who won’t be playing roles in it somehow, and um, [pause] but I said also in order to get enough people to do it this action, I need for you to talk to people to you think would be interested in it, um, and again, being very quiet about it, being very subtle” (411-416).

He has considered approaching some gay-rights organizations on campus, but fears that his message will be co-opted by the organization. I infer that because this is the first political action he is organizing on his own, he worries that it may be taken out of his hands if a large organization, such as Tennessee Pride, becomes directly involved in the planning:

I was invited to several different organizations, um, including Lamda, which is UT’s, uh, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, ah, student organization, I was invited to Lamda to speak about this action, and to get interest there, um, I have friends who have connections to other groups – Tennessee Pride, PFLAG, um, -- which are all organizations [long pause] that are not really concerned with activism

and equality for non-heterosexuals, these organizations are about, uh, um, [pause] a support structure for people and their families and friends, um, and so I'm sure I could find people from these organizations who would be interested in activism, although I don't imagine a great many would be, but also I'm very careful because I don't want to bring this action to an organizational level, I want it to be organized, but I don't want it to be brought to the level of, um, [pause] of an institution that has a name, and has, um, already has some structure about it because this whole movement being so avant-garde, I wanted to be very grass-roots (290-302).

He views established gay-rights organizations as not suited to the purpose of the message he wants to convey by this action. He also feels that Knoxville does not have an established gay-activist community. He does note that there are established 'support communities' in the area from which he could possibly bring together people for his action. He talks about his reasons for avoiding institutional affiliation in terms of wanting this to be a grass-roots action, and that an established organization will undermine the grass-roots nature of this action.

Theme 2: Personal Passion versus Personal Struggle

S. has experienced a conflict between his personal passion for this cause and the particulars of what he is planning to do during this "symbolic action": **"This is really where my interest is, or a passion . . . " (178). "I had to [pause] struggle with myself and respond to so I can be aware of why I was going to take part in the action, why I wanted to organize it" (230-232).** To directly participate in the action he is planning will require some duplicitous moves on his part, moves that may either support or undermine the message he wishes to convey. For him, this symbolic action is **"kind of like getting to be a trickster, I can call this . . . a farce . . . for the sake of making a statement" (239-241).** He makes reference to the anthropological notion of a "trickster." A trickster is usually a religious figure, who during certain sacred rituals will

violate social norms to make a statement about the significance of those social norms for the culture. S. views a particular cultural practice in the United States as a “farce” because it is inclusive to **“only certain types of people” (241)**. He wishes to point out the exclusiveness of this cultural practices and the conflict it poses for our culturally-shared principle of human equality.

He has also been concerned by the fact that no action of the type he is planning has ever taken place in Knoxville, perhaps because of the conservatism of the larger community, or because there has never been an organized gay-activist movement in the city. He recognizes the need for this action and for his personal stake in the action, yet he experiences some conflict about himself in regard to others who are equally capable of **“carrying something like this off.”** The two following quotations concern how he is making sense of this situation concerning himself and his abilities in regard to the action:

No action can ever take place unless somebody organizes the action, then I was thinking about that for a second and then it occurred to me, that, that I'm in activist [chuckles] and I can organize, I've been organizing, um, different political actions for other causes usually: peace, antiwar, anti-nuclear weapons, death penalty abolition, I've been involved in a lot of different groups and have helped organize actions for going on two years now, and um, [long pause] and so there's no reason that I shouldn't begin organizing an action here in Knoxville to address this (206-212).

Why hasn't someone else done it? I'm a pretty smart and creative guy who's capable carrying something like this off but at the same time it occurred to me that there are plenty of people in Knoxville who are considerably more experienced, more um, more creative, smarter than I am, and who are just as if not more passionate about this (245-248).

Theme 3: People With A Common Theme

S. envisions the action he is planning as one that includes a diversity of people. He bases this understanding of diversity in terms of how people socially designate, self-identify, or label themselves. He maintains that in spite of these designations, he wants to bring together a group of **“people with a common theme”** to convey a message that articulates human equality, regardless of religious, ethnic, or sexual identifications. Among his close social network, this has been a fairly easy task, as he knows these people well. However, when going outside his social network, he has to take some risk in terms of figuring out who to approach, who might be interested, and what role these people could play in the action. This concern returns to the first theme of maintaining secrecy while **“getting the word out.”** During the two interviews, he told of how he has approached people he does not know in order to assess their interest in participating. Both of these cases follow a similar narrative pattern and concern how he assesses the cultural identifications of the people he is approaching. In gathering people for the action from outside his immediate social network, he has emphasized sexual identifications, primarily because the action concerns a current gay-rights issue:

I sat down and these two women had come and they sat down by the bay window, just yesterday, and I didn't know them, but I just assumed they were homosexual because there are lots of ways to read that into people . . . (59-61).

Yesterday while I was at work [pause] two men had come into the shop, and I don't know these men, um, and there was no real reason for me to assume that [pause] they weren't heterosexuals, except, um, something but I don't know what it was about them, just sort of clued me in that they probably weren't [pause] heterosexuals (396-400).

Concerning his gathering from his preexisting social networks, he says the following:

It was important for me to call friends to do identify in some non-heterosexual way, you know like I have lots of friends that identify as gay, transgender, or bisexual, um, and all of these different classes of individuals, um, [pause] but the common theme in all of us is that were all interested in . . . [pause], so I called some of them, but it occurred to me that since an action like this is so fundamentally supposed to be about [pause] diversity, um, understanding and tolerating different kinds of people, and living, um, a sort of open community of those types of designations will keep us from . . . , um, but I would like for an action about . . . to reflect this idea first to be in a tolerant, understanding, so I want people who are involved in this action to come from [pause] from different places, I want, I want it to be inclusive of different religions, I want it to be inclusive of different genders, I want to be inclusive of, um, different ages, different racial backgrounds, different educational backgrounds, even I want this to be including people of different sexual orientations (264-278).

In terms of his role in organizing this action, he views himself as a “hub” for diverse types of people who might be interested in participating in this action. His role as a “hub” for organizing this action is framed in terms of affiliation. As he sees it, by affiliating with him, one is also affiliating with the action:

Getting contact information for myself out, so that there's some hub, so that people who are interested, that maybe had, had thoughts about doing something like this before, but never really had any way to make that happen, so that they have a hub to go to now, they have a, uh, [pause] they have an organizer, they have somebody [pause] by getting affiliated with me, they can become affiliated with this cause (430-435).

In the preceding quote, one can see both his degree of identification with the cause around which he is organizing this action. As an organizer, he feels the need to carefully structure interaction and information flow until the group for this action has formed.

Theme 4: Conflict and Tension Raise Awareness

This theme represents a shift in focus from the immediate organization of the action to the aspects of the national problem he seeks to address through the action. He discusses how political actions raise awareness by making personal issues into public issues, by making people take a stand on an issue. Political actions can create “visible tension that needs to be addressed”: **“So already there's [pause] there some sort of tension, that needs to be dealt with, then obviously people are opposed, seeing it as a problem” (132-133)**. He discusses the necessity of bringing out opposition in terms of political actions creating current events: **“They make it a current event, because people are taking their stances it becomes a public issue” (79-80)**.

In this theme, S. is in some senses justifying political action as a means of social change through creating opposition and conflict:

It raises awareness that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with, and also [pause] forces people to be aware that there are some people who aren't going to be quiet about this issue until it's dealt with (197-199).

S. also discusses this theme in terms of trip he is taking which will allow him to see first how the type of action he is planning works, and second to see the chaos of social change first hand. He refers to the process of social change as one of excitement, chaos, and people getting riled up:

I get to be there, I get to be in the middle of this chaos and not only this being something that's personally meaningful to me, but having been an activist myself for several years for lots of different causes, um, it's exciting to me to get to go

and, and see this activism taking place, see people getting riled up, and see, um, see the process of social change (184-188).

He understands the excitement and chaos of social change in terms of increasing the public visibility of a cause, making it newsworthy: **I'm feeling excited about this cause both because it's something that's major, a lot of very visible unrest and a lot of big newsworthy things are happening because of it (164-166).** In this sense, the reasons for conflict, chaos, excitement, and opposition concerning a social cause is to increase its visibility by making the general public more aware of what is happening and how it might concern them. It is perhaps through this public concern that he views the emerging possibilities for social change.

Theme 5: Showing the Message through People

A fifth theme concerns how a message is shown to the public by way of the image produced by the action through its news coverage. The public is shown a diversity of people involved in an action and may relate to the particular social categories, labels, identifications of the participants. In one part of the interview, S. discusses the grassroots level of organization for this action, and that he does not want to involve already established organizations because the wrong image might be presented:

Whatever happens here in Knoxville, I don't want it to be like 'this action brought to you by the Lamda student union,' or you know, I want it to be you know 'this action brought to you by human beings who care about other human beings' (302-305).

In discussing the role of a minister in the action, S. talks about the people that she can reach because of her religious affiliation. In the untranscribed portion of the interview, I asked if he worried that having this minister as a spokesperson might affiliate his cause too strongly with a preexisting religious institution. He replied that she will be participating as an individual who happens to be a protestant minister, but her affiliation

is different from the message conveyed if the protest were being organized at the level of *The Baptist Church*. S. describes the role of this minister in the action:

She's . . . a woman Protestant minister who is accepting and affirming of non-heterosexuals who is herself an activist and who is herself heterosexual, um, [long pause] so this is an interesting sort of person [pause] to bring some sort of merit to our, to our action because if we can get her some media attention, we can get her interviewed and being able to make public comment, then it becomes clear that not all of us who are involved by doing this just because it's a selfish action, you know, I want this right for me, I want this right for me, that [pause] we can have her saying things addressing the religious community and saying [pause] as Christians, as whatever, we need to show equality, we need to show understanding and tolerance, and acceptance an'... [cough, cough] and . . . and also to be able to say I myself am a heterosexual but I still stand in solidarity with my friends here, um, so she can address religious communities, she can address feminist communities, she can address, um, other women's communities, she can address the heterosexual community in ways the rest of us can't address them because we don't share those designations in the way that she does (333-347).

S. more fully articulates the role of publicly visible designations in terms of reaching an audience. Because of the conservative protestant community in Knoxville, he feels that involving someone who affiliates with this group will lend greater legitimacy to the message he is trying to convey. He worries that a non-heterosexual man talking about religious values would be seen as selfishly attempting to sway the local Christian community to his point of view. He feels that having a supportive member of the Christian community present for the action will add strength to a message he feels is about human rights and equality. He is aware of the strong conservative and religious culture of Knoxville and that his message may be misunderstood:

Shouldn't seem any surprise that a progressive, liberal cause like this would start in places like . . . and take a while to work themselves into Tennessee because this culturally, this environment is less, um, supportive and affirming of, of the types of ideas and values that we'd be supporting in this kind of action (260-262).

Theme 6: Not Being Blocked / Making it Happen

The theme of “not being blocked” concerns his belief that for this action to convey the right message, it has to be a surprise when it first happens:

We want it [pause] to first off be a surprise, and secondly, we want for there to be no opposition whatsoever, we don't want the counter-protesters to be there, we don't want for anybody to try, to try to block us from doing it, we want to be able to do it (73-76).

S. is concerned that if anyone finds out the particulars of the action, they may try to block the action the first time it happens. He feels that future attempts to block the action will be useful in terms of bringing visibility to the issue. He is very careful in terms of seeking out people who will not block his action by revealing exact details of the action before it takes place:

I only want to let people know about this who will be supportive, not people who are going to put up blocks to me, not people who are going to, um, [pause], maybe not themselves put up blocks to talk to other people who would put up blocks to me (284-287).

This point is articulated best by S. when he discusses the role of a protestant minister and a friend who are “committed” to participate in the action:

Both he and the Methodist minister, um, [long pause] expressed not just an interest, but a deep passion and conviction that they wanted to be part of this action and both of them committed to me that [pause] with, without my even asking, which is interesting, I, I didn't even ask them for a commitment, but it was

important enough to them to make a commitment to me to say I would take part in, in the action that unfolds (358-363).

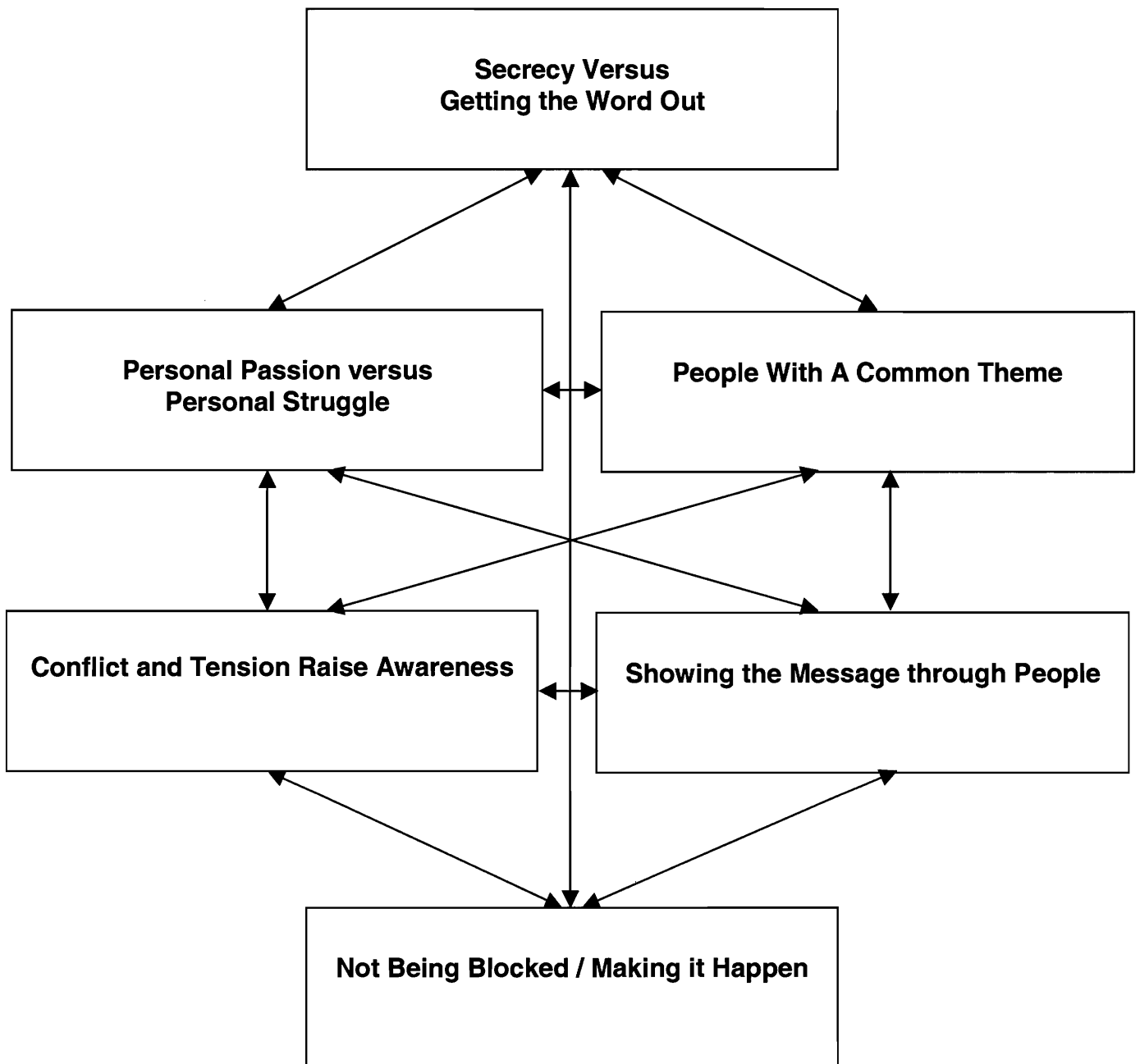
Further, the he discusses the possibilities for social change when political authorities become involved in a cause, as he has noted is happening at the national level: **“People who have some sort of political power are having to address a problem right now that people are raising” (134-135).** He seems to express the idea that power structures are typically against social change – hence the need for political activism. In a few particular cases, the power structures of government are actually facilitating rather than hindering action: **“It's even government officials who are using their power, their authority to help bring about social change as well” (148-150).**

These counter groups are trying to find legal routes to block [names officials] from being able to do this, but those who have the power to stop it are the people who are doing it to begin with, so they are having a hard time being able to stop it (139-141).

S. also discussed talking to other people involved in a national level action to get some “training,” “education,” or “preparation” for bringing this action to “a more conservative area of the country.” He says he is not looking for a model, but instead **“some counsel from people who are doing it on how I can make it happen here” (389).** He views this action as one that will bring Knoxville into line with what is happening in other parts of the country, and will make the issue a relevant one at the local as well as national level.

Thematic Structure for the Experience of Organizing a Political Action

GROUND: RIGHT NOW



On A Coffee Shop Misplaced

I'd been there a few times before. A little coffee shop hidden behind layers of buildings on a West Knoxville block, fronted by big, bright, fancy stores – luggage, jewelry, restaurants. It's a weird place to find this little coffee shop – there's no Blue Mountain, or that exotic Indonesian coffee that my sister once told me about – digested by leopards, cleaned, processed, and sold at an exorbitant price. I'd expect that from the locale; well, maybe in another city. The Coffee Shop's coffee is about as exotic as a piece of the urban Midwest in the mountains. "Chicago Intelligensia" is the fare, and I'm not picky – it doesn't come in a glass jar, powdered and prepared for a grad student's usual fix, quickly stirred into hot water.

I turn left off Kingston Pike and begin to drive behind the buildings with the swank shops. Soon enough, I reach the back lot, parallel steel rails running the periphery of one side. It's half raining, half snowing – about 2:45p.m. – I turn left again and park in front, not too close to a concrete parapet spanning the shop's lawn: *stay low, here comes the ethnographer!* It's cold outside. Exiting my car with my school bag, I push up the concrete steps and put myself level with the path to the shop doors. On either side, bay windows enclose two semi-private seating areas. The bright yellow frames blast back a shocking contrast – it's a little too yellow; way-too-yellow patterns that appear as stitched suspensions in the glass. The entry itself, sitting quietly between this two-part yellow stitching, consists of black metal-framed doors, panes reflecting a dark sky – I can't really see in; I probably can be seen. (It reminds me of Jay Appleton's book: The Experience of Landscape.) It's interesting. A weathered sign, wood peeling a bit on the edges, passes on my right as I move up the uneven brick path toward the doors.

I enter the Shop: My friend, S., sits at a round wooden table about 45 degrees to the right and approximately 15 feet from the door. Short brown hair, brown eyes, a steel ring through his eyebrow, a faded, gray shirt advertising some movie I've never seen,

but suspect is as weird as, say “A Clockwork Orange” or “Liquid Sky.” He’s working on something, a crossword puzzle? . . . no, it’s paper work. I see all the official IRS-looking boxes where the numbers are supposed go. My typical greeting comes out: “What’s up, man?”

“Hey, Rhett, are you here to observe me making coffee?” he asks with a semblance of sarcasm.

“Yeah, did you at least make some decent coffee for me to drink while I follow you around, ask really personal questions, and generally make a nuisance of myself?”

He laughs.

I notice the shop is empty, empty except for the two of us and a white-haired couple sitting about four tables away (see diagram). It’s a Sunday afternoon, bad weather; I’ve been here before on a Friday, and a Saturday – it was significantly more populated. The couple in the corner: definitely professors – the man, probably writes stuffy books just called Goethe, or Ancient Mesopotamian Agrarianism, or God forbid, Thoreau’s Walden – the woman, appears more interesting, probably started her career reading Boas and Benedict, then Freud, and in the 1980’s-1990’s moved on to teaching classes called “The American Travelogue from de Tocqueville to Baudrillard” or “Foucault’s Sexual Aesthetics,” something like that. Now, they are a quiet couple, who planfully left their umbrella sitting open and drying by the door.

S. and I walk to the counter and get some coffee (see diagram). I notice that there is only a single dispenser for house coffee this time, and no snack food in the glass case to the right of the register – the light within is off. There’s a whole heap o’ death and dying symbolism going on ‘round here. It’s creepy and S. seems unaware. There are almond biscotti in a glass jar, and that’s it:

“Are these good?”

“Yeah, but they’re a bit stale, it’s how they’re supposed to be. How do you want your coffee?”

I try to impress him with my questionable cross-cultural knowledge of coffee drinking practices, “in Istanbul they say: ‘real coffee is black as night, hot as hell, and thick as love,’ or something like that.”

“Uh, so you want it lukewarm with milk and sugar, then?” He makes a threatening gesture toward the milk jug.

“No man, as is, as is.”

This kind of exchange is typical. He knows exactly how people take their coffee, but he torments them nonetheless. And they *try* to torment him back – it’s a losing battle; after all, he’s the guy with the coffee.

I pay, and we walk over to one of the tables near the bay windows (see diagram). The floor in this seating area near the window abruptly shifts from a dark-mahogany stained wood to a medium-red painted concrete – the walls turn a loud yellow, with holiday lights neatly strung up and out above the windows. It is another world. The wicker chairs, with soft blue and green cushions, are comfortable; a small coffee table sits squarely between the two chairs. The colors in this space oddly juxtapose in a festive and breathing way, making this small area feel years distant from the 19th century urban-intellectual aesthetic of the coffee shop proper.

Out there feels like 19th century Chicago, *in here* it feels like a current-day cantina in Texas. It’s like home, but its missing that ubiquitous skeleton figurine who proudly proclaims: “To the valiant death of my mother!” In here, the color scheme is nearly right, the details are not – and without the cultural trappings of the cantina, it ends up looking like a perverse celebration of burger condiments. I chuckle because I have never seen that color scheme decontextualized in that way before. I set my school bag beside the table. The bay window seating areas are fairly private, but I can see and hear almost

everything, a good place to observe. S. asks, “did you get my message earlier? I want to talk to you about something.”

“No, I didn’t; probably was on my way here when you called. What’s up?”

“Uh, wait a minute . . .” He takes off.

So, I’m doing some “deep hanging out” *ala* Clifford. I pull out my field notes and start writing. The music is Simon and Garfunkel, but one of their not-so-completely-terrible songs. The music is not as loud as usual. When I was here last time, electronica-techno music was shaking the air:

Pulsing, pulsing, pulsing, loud, pulsing, pulsing, loud, loud – then, mandatory electronic screeching sound – **eeerrrggghhhh!** -- the beat kicks in (4/4; 160 bpm):

Bass				Bass				Bass				Bass		Bass	Bass
		Snare							Snare				Snare		
	HiHat	HiHat				HiHat			HiHat	HiHat	HiHat			HiHat	

A woman, who I imagine as Franka Potente from the movie *Run, Lola, Run*, starts a monotone recital of raunchy lyrics in English, but with a strong German accent. Heavy on the sexual themes and pounding beat, it repeats *ad infinitum*.

Today, I can actually relax without sound waves throbbing asunder the sinew that strings body together (and without making me think too much about Franka Potente); still, the atmosphere feels so much more somber than before. The world in here feels subdued and meek – like its dying; last time it felt more vibrant and intense – charged and living. I know that this is the last day S. will be working at the coffee shop; is that what he wanted to talk to me about? I already knew that from his email last night. I hear machines: coffee grinding, a machine singing slurpings and whirrings to “Bridge Over Troubled Water.” Perhaps I have not escaped the techno.

S. comes over and sits down. He begins talking about the changes he wants to make to his senior thesis project and whether a particular professor will go for it. He begins to tell me about recent gay-activism going on around the country. I can tell he is excited by what is happening. As he explains the situation, his speech gets louder and faster, his gestures more animated. The older couple glances over as it becomes apparent he's rolling.

"Well, I can see something like that working in Nashville or Memphis, any large city, but here?" I said.

"Of course 'here,' it's already being organized."

"Who?" I ask.

"I'm organizing it."

"Shit, that's really cool," I was surprised, "but aren't you going to grad school in the Fall?"

"Yeah, that's what I want to talk to you about. Do you think P. will go for it?"

"Well, you'll have to talk to him. Just tell him, P., this is what I want to do, and I want you to be part of it. He'll grumble some because you're changing topic a little late, but it's not that drastic a change, I bet he'll support it, but you're gonna have to present a good argument."

"Hmm."

The professors pick up their umbrella, thank S., and venture into the weather.

A young couple comes in, probably around 25 years old, male and female. The guy has a tan-and-blue plaid golf cap, machine-gun earrings, and a 10 pounds of hemp strung around his neck, beads and all, falling across a shirt that says "Alien Sex Fiend" above a fluorescent green sci-fi mutant creature. The woman has a vicious chop with rainbow colors spilling out in 10,000 directions, too many earrings to count, a painful looking nose ring, and heavy, 1950's-style Buddy Holly glasses. She's wearing a shirt

that just says “Fuck Off!” She seems like a happy person and probably smiles a lot – I’m not being ironic here – that’s the feeling I get, in spite of the shirt. S. makes a weird comment under his breath about foot-fetishists; I’m set to the task of studying their feet trying to figure out what he means. These look like regular feet to me. S. takes off to make them coffee.

I begin working on my field notes again. “Eleanor Rigby”: finally, the Beatles are playing – some good music. The art on the walls has changed since last time – from nude photography to abstract modern painting. Maybe that is another reason it feels somber in here. The paintings consist of boxy shapes and squiggles in gray, blue, brown, black and white (see diagram for drawing of artwork). I preferred the old art – did they sell it? The wall against which the paintings are hung is a faded brownish-red, but perhaps it is not so much faded as dulled by the shadow cast by an upstairs balcony. I listen a moment to the conversation going on between S. and the couple – not much happening.

The balcony area is beautiful – a wrought iron guard rail, connecting to steps that wind down to the first floor – a ceiling of black stretching just above it. Three street lamps, that again look like something from 19th century Chicago, form a row through the middle of the ground floor. Maybe this place is intended to look like a 19th century city at night? I sit back a moment in my burger condiments and take in the juxtapositions, the ironies, the contradictions – all the images and colors playing off each other. The punk kids – male and female – leave with their coffee through the same door as the professors, and a pair of women smile at me as they come in. They seem really nice.

S. is chatty with these folks. They are probably around 20-24 years old, college students; they strike me as a couple. Both have short, boyish haircuts, one, a baseball cap, and both, flannel shirts, blue jeans, and sneakers. It appears that maybe they have been painting or working on a house together, a bit of dust and paint on their blue jeans

– they have to be working on something inside, its way to cold to be outside. Curious about them, I start eavesdropping. There is miscellaneous discussion of what they study, where they went to high school, where they work, some comment about differences in coffees, vegetarianism and then a discussion of kosher slaughter – but they are all vegetarians! I caught the part about being vegetarian, but missed the part of the conversation that linked all that together. Why would vegetarians be concerned about kosher slaughter as opposed to any other kind of slaughter? The coffee house seems a place for political discussion: in this case on the virtues of vegetarianism and an odd point of concern: kosher slaughter. S. rings up the two women, and they leave.

S. comes over to where I am sitting. We talk about the weather for a minute.

“Is it snow, yet?”

“I can’t tell, do you see the bits splashing in the puddles? Like hail.”

Two men come in, probably in their late 20’s. Nicely dressed on a Sunday, like they came from church. He immediately recognizes them as regulars. S. meets them at the counter and they begin talking about music, mutual friends, and what they are going to have to drink. S. is making jokes about various things that can go terribly wrong with cappuccino. They talk about the shop closing, and the first time they had come in. S. asks:

“Is this for here?”

“Yes.”

They all talk for about a minute longer, then they take their coffee and sit in the other yellow-red-green-blue bay window area. I hear a cell phone and then some mumbling. Still the Beatles: the music must be from Sgt. Pepper; at least, it’s something decent.

S. comes back over and sits down.

“Do you want another cup?”

“Sounds good.”

I get some more coffee and he prepares a glass of tea with steamed milk for himself. We again begin talking about what he wants to do for his project. I propose that I can help him with his project by studying his experience of organizing a political action. It will serve as a kind of bracketing for him, and will give him a start on the academic end of his project – I suspect he was hoping I would go there – he is pressed for time and needs the help. It is also a way that I can study the experience of a person while doing something they have never done before, which fits one of my areas of interest: people’s experiences of exploration. I ask: “Do you mind if I record this?” “No, you’re welcome to record.” It is around 3:35pm. (Refer to the first part of the interview transcript for this conversation.) The first interview lasts only a few minutes, as S. doesn’t want the details of the particular action he is planning to get out before he can organize and complete the action (see thematic analysis).

I’m feeling physiologically worked at this point. Too much coffee, only a biscotti, and Mike’s party until 4:30 am the night before – but most of all, I’m getting hungry. S. and I talk about nothing serious for about 10 minutes until a couple of women walk in with someone I recognize from another visit to the Coffee Shop – a philosophy student who works here – we had talked about phenomenology. The women have an artsy look. Dark, long, straight hair, clean-cut, with a modernist hippie-, disco-, European-style; they have clunky shoes and probably spent a fortune raiding a thrift store in Atlanta, New Orleans, or Houston to get all the “cool” 1970’s garb their parents vomited out of the house 20 years ago.

I know the routine: I went digging through my dad’s 1970’s stuff while I was in college; my father laughing: “Oh, even the bad fashions come back; I remember I thought I was so cool wearing that...I looked like an idiot.”

“Silk, butterfly collar, baby-shit-yellow with stripes of green, snap mother-of-pearl buttons...Dad, it is horribly super cool; can I have it?”

The philosopher has a similar look to the women; he’s gangly, a brown-haired dude with a goofy grin, about 24-25 years old. I talk to him for a while, as S. gets coffee for the two women. “Are you here to work?” S. asks. The philosopher says that he is just hanging out, not there to work. Not much conversation is going on between S. and the women.

The philosopher and I talk for a minute about an Algerian guy who is interested in purchasing the shop. So maybe the place is not dying after all. He was talking about creating a more 1960’s French café aesthetic. I’m not sure how well that will go over – there are not too many Sartre’s and Camus’s, smoking hand-rolled cigarettes and talking over *freedom*, *bad faith*, and *inauthenticity*, here in Appalachia. Of course, at this shop it could work. The clientele is diverse: philosophy students, punk kids, lesbian and gay folks, vegans and vegetarians, disco-hippies, professors – it’s populated with counter-cultural types and with people who just want to be somewhere different.

I go outside to smoke; it’s getting really cold and I worry about the water on the road freezing. The philosopher goes to his car and does what philosophers do when they really are “just hanging out” – he comes back a little stoned, and we talk some more about what might happen with the Shop. He’s happy; if the Algerian guy buys the Shop, he will retain all the old employees; the philosopher will still have a cool place to work.

It’s about 4:00 pm, an older woman comes downstairs. She has curly hair, cut close. She looks a bit conservative – looks can deceive; she smiles at me in a friendly way and goes to sit with the disco-hippies who had arrived with the philosopher. S. is cleaning up; his shift is over.

“Do you want to get a bite to eat? I’ll buy.” I ask.

“Sure.”

“I know its got to be vegetarian; right off hand, we can hit Stir Fry Café, or get pizza.”

“I’m all about pizza, right now.”

I step away for a moment, while S. finishes up draining yellowish water from a valve on a stainless steel machine. The bathroom is dark, tile floor, and there is a small table in the corner presenting *Chicago Tourism Bureau* flyers. I suppose the theme has got to be Chicago; it took a visit to bathroom to find this out! I guess in a place that serves caffeinated beverages, one absolutely can depend on customers to pay a visit to this place. There are no paper towels in the dispenser. A roll sits on top. I look at my face in the mirror and brush some biscotti crumbs off my beard. I need to get some real food.

When I return, S. is talking to the person who will be working the next shift. Another philosopher. Blond guy with a *Dutch-boy-gone-bad* haircut – as usually seen on 60-year-old history or philosophy professors – a goatee, and a plain blue shirt. He is sitting on a stool in front of all the soda-water flavoring bottles – cinnamon, strawberry, macadamia nut, etc. We chat for a minute and shake hands in an odd way – his left hand inverted to my right hand – *philosophers?* – and S. and I take off to get pizza.

2.18.04

all three members of my committee have said they will support a shift in my senior project, and i'm on a plane to san francisco. so far my thinking for this project has centered on two things -- why i want to take action and how to find others who want to take action as well. i've found ways to get my contact information into loose communities so that lots of people who might be interested can find me but people who wouldn't can't. i've received several e-mails and calls now from people i don't know but who express that they want to take part in an action. this is exciting -- there are people with a passion ~~to~~ to act on this topic, but there's been no one to organize us. this should be terribly interesting.

overall, this plane ride hasn't been a great time for me to generate new ideas about the action -- i'm too excited about the trip itself, and tired and i have been busy talking about all the problems of the world...

2.19.04

san fran is the most wonderful place i have ever been. i can easily make this my new home in six months; i already feel like i belong here.

last night i ate dinner at the home of a gay couple whom ticia is friends with. they're in their mid-forties and have ~~be~~ been partnered for about six or seven years. this was very interesting for me because i only know one other committed man-man couple, and not well at that. but i got to see their home and their life together and see a sort of model for what a same-sex committed partnership can look like. i like it.

they let me ask a lot of really intrusive questions about growing up, coming out, meeting each other, and committing to each other. ~~we actually~~ we actually spent only a very little time talking about marriage equality, and nothing much that was interesting was said it seems that my developing and organizing of ideas is happening not against a backdrop of political/social theory and battles, but rather against a backdrop of learning about people's experiences and coming to a richer understanding of my own sexuality. incidentally, oliver and jon have not yet pursued a license, and they said they may or may not end up doing it at all & it won't significantly change the way they live their lives. this confirms the idea i've been trying to communicate from the beginning -- this movement is ~~is~~ about marriage equality only in an aesthetic sort of way. the ability to marry is something that is not particularly meaningful to all people, so the movement (it seems to me) is really about two things. first, it's about identity and the institutions that coerce us into conforming our identity. secondly, it's about trying to foster a more understanding, tolerant, and equal climate for human beings in the world.

this afternoon, ticia and i had lunch with one of the professors at stewart king school for the ministry. i had fallen in love with the school last year and i'm sad that the new master's program didn't work out because i would have loved to have been a part of this community. it was nice to finally see this place and the people here so i could see what i already feel so connected to. at any rate, liberation is a long-time queer activist and self-identified fellow queer (i want

2 human being, not a gender"), and his work is around the intersection of sexuality and spirituality. he's an overwhelming individual, but he's very kind and gentle. he stands at 6'7", is a large black-indian man with tattoos and piercings (he traded piercing and eastern scarification!) who, until recently, had dreadlocks past his hips but now has a shaved head. his queer activism has centered around bisexuality and polyamory, as well as resisting gender-typing. his eight-year-old son is a, for example, has recently decided that he wants to play what he calls the "boy role" for a while, which his parents initially support, but they have helped him to resist gender roles until now, when he has made a choice about his gender. my experience with him reminds me of two things - not all ~~relationships~~ relationships even want to end in marriage, and even more deeply rooted than the heterosexist bias in this movement is the monogamous bias. i'm not ready to challenge this bias in a social/political way yet, but i have to admit that i see nothing wrong with polyamory. i'm close to a lesbian tripe in Knoxville and it seems to be a wonderful setup for them.

2.23.04

i'm flying home, and i have most certainly left my heart in san francisco.

on friday, i had lunch with another friend of mine who came out to me as a polyamorist. i've met a beautiful, fun, and thoughtful man who reminds me of both of the men i've been in love with. i've walked through the haight-ashbury and castro districts with my arm around another man, and i've been queue-listed into one of san fran's premiere queer clubs by a friend of mine who is a go-go

dancer there. i've had dinner with a professional activist, and i've spent several hours walking the streets and hills of the city with another activist friend. in all of the experiences, little talk about the marriage equality movement has happened. instead, this whole trip has been about increasing with people who challenge the sexual paradigm - some in more "deviant" ways than others - ~~while~~ ^{while} talking about ~~our~~ our own experiences, ~~understandings~~ understandings, and self-identifications. we've been challenging each other's paradigms and talking about their limits and possibilities, ~~and~~ i've even been able to play with and affirm my sexuality simply by walking in public places with my arm around another man. in all of it, not once have i been met with hostility, nor have i ~~even~~ even heard hostility toward nonheterosexuality expressed indirectly at someone else or to a group.

this whole trip has been about the emergence of sexuality. little has been done to actually organize the action in Knoxville, but the meaning of this trip has itself been ~~in coming~~ ^{in coming} to a richer understanding of my own sexuality, which is precisely what this action is about (to me) to begin with-- exploring and affirming the possibilities of human sexuality rather than denying and ignoring them. this trip and this action are both about sexuality lived.

it's no surprise that a trip about sexuality lived has also resulted in a ~~an~~ infatuation with a man i met. it will be good to see him again -- and just to be a part of the city again -- when i move here in august. san fran already feels like home.

* media attention

* people power

* logistics

* possibilities

- face painting to reflect solidarity; androgyny of dress

SUNDAYS - 4-5

TUESDAYS - 6-7

Until Sunday

Jason and Stephanie - process to get license

Everyone - outreach

Stephanie - contact list

Stephanie - comes naked

3.03.04

Last night was the first organizational meeting. I started it by talking about the historical context that makes this sort of action necessary right now, and I shared my own background as an activist and organizer.

I would be happy doing this action with four people. I was pleased, though, that eight showed up to the meeting. I also know of at least five people who want to take part in the action but could not make the first meeting, and everyone present could think of several people they wanted to invite. We identified queer groups we might want to invite, such as Lambda from

we and lgbtq organizations from ntsu and ztsu. we're already strong, and we apparently can expect our numbers to grow even more.

we are an inclusive group. we have people of all ages, relationship statuses, religious affiliations, educational levels, and sexual affiliations (of the right present last night, all identify as "nonheterosexual" with four primarily sexually interested in the other gender and four in the same). we're all white, though. we are focusing on people we already have contact with for outreach right now, but within the next two meetings we will focus on developing a more ethnically/racially diverse group.

during our meeting we identified four key areas that we need to be attentive to while organizing. first, we need to focus on how we can get media attention for our action while keeping our group and plans secret enough to avoid being blocked or being confronted by hostile/violent people. secondly, we want to work on outreach and our people/activist base - drawing in more people and more types of people. third, we need to focus on the details/logistics - how does one actually go about obtaining a marriage license, and how much of this action do we want to actually follow the process vs. how much of this action do we want to be simply symbolic/representative. last, we need to focus on possible situations that might emerge during the process of the action - being blocked by hostile/violent people, unwarranted intervention by law enforcement, the unlikely possibility that we may be issued

we postponed focusing on outreach until future meetings. in terms of diversity, stephanie had a great idea - we might all paint our faces a solid color to reflect that this is an issue about unity, equality, and universal connection as human beings. i suggested we might also dress in an androgynous sort of way to de-gender the whole action, reflecting both the human connection and our conviction that the institution of marriage should itself be de-gendered.

we're now arranged to have two one-hour meetings per week so that anyone who wants to be involved has two opportunities each week to do so. i will be present to facilitate at all meetings, at least at first.

between now and the next meeting, contact and research projects have been assigned. i will begin creating the listserv tonight for information sharing/organizing, and i will send a mass e-mail with the minutes from the meeting, the current status of our project, and our future plans.

after the meeting tuesday night, i went to see two plays at the lab theatre. one of these, "the night larry cramer kissed me," was queer themed and, much like our production of "the laramie project" last year, addresses the violence and hostility nonheterosexuals face from childhood on. it was difficult to watch because it was so intense - often violent - and so close to home. it also addressed the aids virus. overall, the main theme/message that kept coming up was "silence = death." i mentioned the action to a few friends there,

and one of the actors is a friend - we graduated high school together. i have added him to the listserve, and he said that he would get information to the rest of the cast/crew. it will be interesting to see how heavily they involve themselves off the stage - though the stage is, of course, a form of activism itself. at any rate, the play was hurting and passion and ~~and~~ awareness and calling and involvement all over again. it continues that the meaning, need, and work of this project all develop against a ground of my very heart and soul. the personal is political.

i'm grateful for the blessing of courage, strength, creativity, and support it continually takes to keep going deeper into both my own heart and the world itself in spite of the pain, sadness, and vulnerability it opens. i'm also grateful that there is another side to this experience - the excitement, the fun, the satisfying, the affirmation, and the opening of new visions and possibilities.

i have a midterm in the morning and much work left to do tonight - -

~~www.dumblaws.com~~



* logistics - legality issues
any - constitutional/legal precedents

* Josh, Amy, Julia - ~~visual~~ ^{visual over} committee
* Stephanie - more licensing details

* timing - last week March / first week of April
APRIL ???

- Outreach

mtsc - kate

zpsc - kate

lsg - kip

gmsg - kip

ashville - angel

lambda - kip

hrc - kip

mcc - kip

tvuc - kip

wvuc - kip/kate

ovuc - stephanie

morgville colt - stephanie / julia

holston valley uc - kate

racial/ethnic - stephanie

ihssc - angel

* fifth area: money/fundraising

- Joe shirts - julia

- kip and stephanie - undercover court work

- outreach
- post-natal action
- fundraising
- flyer

outreach

- * out and abouts - kip
- * metro pulse - kip
- * random straight guys - stephanie
- * sanctus - ~~kip~~ jason
- * target lambday ^{members} ~~kip~~ - mikey (L) / kip
- * nonviolent and highlander communities - kip
- * queer clubs/bars
 - ↳ elcote - kip
 - carousel - jason
- sb
- kurts - kip
- rainbow wass - stephanie → phil ?

post-natal action

- * march to federal building
- * dramatized ceremony
- * sign-holding
- * education
- * NEXT MEETING
- * free speech areas - kip and stephanie
- * press releases
- * RAINBOW DIRECTORY? - jason

fund-raisi-

* t-shirts; one couple's marriage license

* cake walk

* bikini car wash

* collections for group

* businesses

↳ * bridge sale

* pawn stores - Stephanie

* lawn care

* bars/clubs

* urban bar/grill

* structure of group - NEXT MEETING

* Jason - carousel fundraiser - J-drag queens?

flyer

* -historical situation

- name and info about group

- yahoo group moderator as contact

- voicemail number

↳ * setup voicemail service - Jason

* moderator - Stephanie

* writing/design of rough flyer - Stephanie/rob

Sunday's agenda

* outreach identification and update

* financial situation

* structure/organization

* organization of post-natal action

* education

* flyer

* website

christine - xorwrath@hotmail.com

3.12.04

the theatre: still playing roles to make things happen.

Stefanie and I wanted to see what it would be like to get licenses - check out the geography of the area and the relative ease or difficulty of formally requesting a marriage license. So a few days ago, we dressed up like a cute little couple and went to find information.

Everyone we asked to direct us toward the licensing office smiled their approval and congratulated us on our new life together. It was funny, and it was sad. I wonder if I'll ever get to do that for real.

Anyway, chicks working at the office told us everything we could want to know. Without any rehearsal, Stefanie and I began making up our story - we would be coming back at the beginning of April with a group of couples. All of us are getting married together over the first weekend of April and taking our honeymoons together. That was how we explained why we needed more than one license application. She asked how we needed. I was about to say "fifteen" but stopped as I heard Stefanie say "six." That could have been funny.

Anyway, the lady working said "here - just in case you mess up on some of the forms" and she handed me a whole stack. Thirty-one, to be exact. They made this part of the coup too easy.

We have chosen a logo for our group and are working to develop t-shirts. We've also got a group working on informational flyers that include contact information

for our group. we've also got a few people working on fundraising. i mentioned at today's meeting that - again, despite my own distaste for structure - the moment that money comes into our organization, someone has to be responsible for keeping that money. we've also already begun organizing beyond our first action. this group seems to be becoming something. first on the agenda at sunday's meeting is a discussion of what that something is.

second on the agenda is a discussion of what sort of demonstration we want to do after we are denied licenses, because of jason's mishearing me when i said "post-denial action" we now refer to this as the "post-~~denial~~ action." this is another aspect of activist organizing that even i forget about a lot - the time you spend organizing resides in stories and jokes you can share with the others who are active. now, more than simply sharing a conviction and a cause, we share experiences that bind us ~~together~~ together as a unit. i think that's great.

and of course, the sex jokes abound. that's fun, too.

the listserve has more than fifty people now. people know about us, and some even care about us. we're doing things.

Mark Lamm - Circle Modern Dance

2.1. 379.2317
antiestars@zsl.com
woodymph101@yahoo.com

flyers
website/voice-mail
structure of group
post-natal action
commercial?
indymedia
fundraising
table?

- * make stefanie moderator
- * tuesday - choose date for fundraising
- * stefanie - keep up with coursework
- * 2.1. - closet and ballroom
- * jason - voicemail
- * 2.1. - indymedia

* friday - table at uu

- * tuesday - theoretical part of post-natal
- * tuesday - peacekeeper training

Julie Auer

673-8604

lower to ask questions

sign-making
two weeks from sunday

affinity groups:

- * merge theatre/radical cheerleading - 2.1.
- * educators - stefanie
- * sign-holders
- * peace-keepers - March 27 - peace-keeper training - kip

* e-mail a.l. - website, e-mail, locations

tuesday's agenda

- * outreach/medial/ ~~other~~ fundraising updates
- * flyers
- * tabling on friday
- * theoretical aspect of peace nat 2)
- * peace-keeper training
- * sign-making party

-
- a.l.: 3 submissions
 - ~~other~~ a.l. - queer clubs
 - kip - renegade theatre people
 - kip - contact UC about tabling
 - julia - "talking up" at board
 - kip - UUC youth groups; lauri go about UUC youth groups
 - molly - Spectrum
 - a.l. - high schools in area
 - kip - stay in touch & discuss about peacekeeper training
 - ↳ saturday @ march @ 2 Feb @ 1-5
 - ↳ contact church of savior and TVUC
 - sign-making - last two meetings before action
 - richard - e-mail kip to contact for security at federal building

sunday's agenda

- * outreach/medial/ fundraising updates
- * tabling account
- * affinity groups
- * peace-keeper training
- * security/boundaries updates

SUNDAY

- * call TVUC and LOS
- * contact Justin Rubenstein - renegade theatre
- * RICHARD - education booth
- * contact Rob & Scot - making a display

3.23.04



~~short mem.~~

Tuesday's AGENDA

- fundraising / media / outreach ✓
- affinity groups
- preschool training ✓
- signmaking party ✓
- table - flyers, education
- t-shirts → NO!!!
- venue? ✓

- we are posted to indy media
- we have contacted K-FAR
- josh - lord lindsay's contact
- kip - post lesbian social group

fundraising:
thursday
↳ 2

~~kip~~ - talk 2 lissa about pt

Market square → UT conf center

10 @ office

kip - tomato head

jason - media liaison - press release - bring to smdgy

booth:

* postcards to send to ~~ips~~

* flyers

* clipboard for e-mail

rally:

* speakers - tom, chris, bob, temple beach st, larry jo

* paul - rick and bob

* jason - temple beach st

paul - \$20 for TVOC

miken - \$100

Sowdy's agenda

- * fundraising/audience outreach
 - * affinity groups
 - * flyers and press release
 - ~~* ~~handouts~~~~
 - * postcards - action
 - * update on speakers
 - * sign-making
-

3.24.04

i talk a lot.

facilitating involve meetings is much different than facilitating other meetings. i have to talk, ask ideas, assign responsibilities, and make decisions - people are excited and passionate, but seem too unsure to speak, offer their ideas, and volunteer for responsibilities.

i have an idea about why this might be - with the exception of two of us, everyone who regularly attends is new to activism. this is like a training and learning experience for new activists/organizers. the more time and meetings that go on, the more open and comfortable people seem to be getting.

the practitioner training/nonviolence workshop meets this saturday. i've reserved the room at Tennessee valley unitarian universalist church, and i've collected \$20 from the group to cover its cost. lissa mclord of the oak ridge environmental peace alliance will be leading the workshop. it'll be hella tight.

another observation: ~~there~~ a new man came to last night's meeting - probably in his 40s ~~or~~ 50s, those coming to

organizational meetings have generally been in the 18-25 age range. he suggested we reach to "heterosexuals" who may well care about the issue as well. i informed him that more than half of those involved in this campaign so far ~~are~~ have ~~romantic~~ romantic and sexual interests primarily in the other sex. further, none of the committed ^{same-sex} couples we have spoken with have expressed any interest in taking part, nor have they done anything to help. this movement - at least this particular movement in Knoxville - does not fall along the lines of sexual identity or relationship status, but rather, it falls along generational lines. as a self-identified single gay man, he appears neither as a majority nor as a minority in our group. coming from outside of generation y, though, he is spotlighted as a minority. we have at least four others who will take part in the action who are from ~~the~~ other generations, but he is the only one so far to have taken part in organizing.

3.28.04

- press releases - finalize
- affinity groups:
 - * rob. & charle edus - a.l./mikey
 - * peacekeepers - paul, mikey, mikey, rob, kip, jason, a.l., richard, stephanie
 - * information - richard
 - * marriage licenses - mikey, rob, a.l., kip, jason ---
↳ E-MAIL

- a.l. - ribbons
- rob - flyers tuesday
- mikey - postcards
- keep up on speakers

- gov. website? - permit
↳ call city hall for permie monday morning

- kip - m.c.

- kip - call metro police

tuesday's agenda

- permit/legal yadda
- flyers/press releases
- postcards
- speakers
- ribbons and umbrellas
- sign-making

3.28.04

the peacekeeper training and nonviolence workshop was yesterday. lissa melsod did beautifully. we watched a clip from the gandhi movie, talked about fears and concerns in our action, and did several role-plays to challenge how we might choose to act nonviolently to diffuse hostile or violent situations.

the clip from the gandhi movie was nice, and it reminded me that by being frank about our intentions - hiding nothing and introducing no surprises - i can help myself and our group remain in control.

this sense of power and control is novel to me - i had similar experiences when working with my kids at the village, i guess, but now, the whole group expresses its dependence on me to organize, make happen, and insure safety.

rob still hasn't brought in the flyers we should have had weeks ago - which itself doesn't really bother me - but when i asked if we could count on having them Tuesday (to review and have ready for the action on Friday), he snapped and said "yes! - i'll have them done already!" - which frustrated me. if you don't want to do it, don't volunteer. i felt from the communication that he was feeling that these flyers (like the action altogether) were my responsibility. very few people seem to have the sense of ownership that i have in this action, and a great deal of responsibility winds up on my shoulders.

i still have to secure the permit for our rally (no clue how to do this) and i need to confirm with our speakers - the CEO of planned parenthood, 2 of the 3

candidates for the sqa presidential elections, several ministers from the area, etc.

tonight i got a call from the knoxville reporter from the nashville-based paper "out and about." note: i have been in touch with them on three occasions, and they have expressed no interest in covering us, and they never even intimated that a knoxville reporter existed — they certainly did not put me in touch with her. she started by criticizing me for my irresponsibility in not having contacted her.

she described herself as a "lesbian separatist" and kept playing the "i have 20 years of activist experience" card. she asked me to move the date of the action — to which i responded that wheels were already in motion and speakers invited, so it was too late — BUT — there would be future actions. she was livid i had no lesbian activist speakers — i told her that, from the outset, i knew that people would be excluded because we wouldn't know how to find them but, rather than throwing my hands in the air and doing nothing, i figured the work was important enough to pursue anyway. i told her there was no intentional exclusion, and she responded that it was my youth and ignorance. she was livid that this work is being done now in its 15 minutes of fame, and that the work that had been done for years was ignored, as were the people doing it. i told her that she and her work were clearly not visible to me or to many people i know, so i was doing work that is visible to me and my communities.

i informed her i had made announcements at the lesbian social group and posted to their website - she said "those people just want to have dinner and socialize - they don't want to do the work." i said "i don't like their tendency toward self-righteousness in activist communities - telling others they are worthless for not liking to do the sort of work that we do. those women live their lives, and that is itself activism."

she kept asking me if i knew particular women from the history of lesbian activism in Knoxville, and i responded "no" every time. she would say "see - you don't even know the history." she doesn't get that i'm not interested in lesbian separatist work. she classifies as a separatist - and then gets angry with me that i am not aware of her separatist organizations. if i'm not aware of them and unable to contact/network with them, then hasn't she succeeded in separating?

she kept referring to the queer community as something i know nothing of - i reminded her that i'm part of the queer community. she said - "no, you all are the wannabes. we've been doing this work, and you don't even know - then you don't network with us when you organize your own action." she asked if i planned to stick with queer activism after this movement was over. i said "in fact, no i don't - i'm committed to nonviolence work, and i'm only here because i saw no work in this area being done, so i chose to serve by using my experience as an activist to help organize the

so i'm leading myself to this movement for a time"

she jumped quickly in to say "no, this is not about violence" and continued to talk even when i offered to explain the connection that i was making - marriage inequality is a part of a ~~the~~ structure that systematically alienates, hurts, and shows hostility (VIOLATES) nonheterosexuals. she did not want or intend to engage with me. further, when i told her that two lesbian activists - suzanne pharr, ~~a~~ director of the highlander center, and shelly wascom of many nonviolence groups - were involved, she snickered that she doesn't even know them, and highlander "does some good work, but does nothing for queer rights" and that "shelly wascom maybe a lesbian, but she is not a lesbian activist."

whatever. you just win. i give up.

i chose just to become deferential. ~~she said~~ she said she would be present at the action and would cover it for her paper. she asked to be put on the listserv and said she would get word out to her communities. ~~i~~ i said "thank you for your help - it's a treasure to have someone of your experience and with all your relationships involved." she asked if she could share some nostalgic stories with me, and i said i'd be honored.

after she was done, ~~she said~~ she said that she appreciated me and looked forward to ~~the~~ meeting me. it ended well, but i was worn out.

paul was there with me. there's a ~~and~~ strange but nice

paternal aspect to our relationship. He let me talk through the conversation. He praised me for being kind but firm - and specifically for remaining committed to my nonviolent orientation.

I wonder how many conversations she's had like that through the years. It wore me out - she seems to get fired up by that. I don't get it. I ended our conversation by quoting the last line of the website group's description - all are invited and welcome to participate in our nonviolent approach to social change. I said "all are welcome to come, but I want to be entirely clear that we will be nonviolent in speech and in action, and we will ask people to leave if they do not stay within that boundary." She said she understood, would pass it on, and looked forward to the action.

Whether it's my family, conservative-religious friends, other social/political people, or often even members of queer activist communities, it seems there's assault from all fronts. Paul let me talk about how sad I was. Even my acceptance to my grad program doesn't seem so exciting to me now. This, like the action this Friday, seems sad and scary and unsure now. He hugged me, and started crying. He was so empathic. He let me talk about how afraid I am that ~~all~~^{all} of the criticisms from these groups is true. I feel like the disappointment that they all tell me (and I am afraid) I actually am.

That pity party comes and goes, but I pretty consistently keep going. I expect that the excitement will hit again. He murmurs maybe there could be some manic-depressive

cycle. i don't think it is.

these research projects going, 200 essay exams to grade
this week for psych 220, two lectures to organize, and
the last minutes plans for friday's action. i've got work
to do.

3.30.04

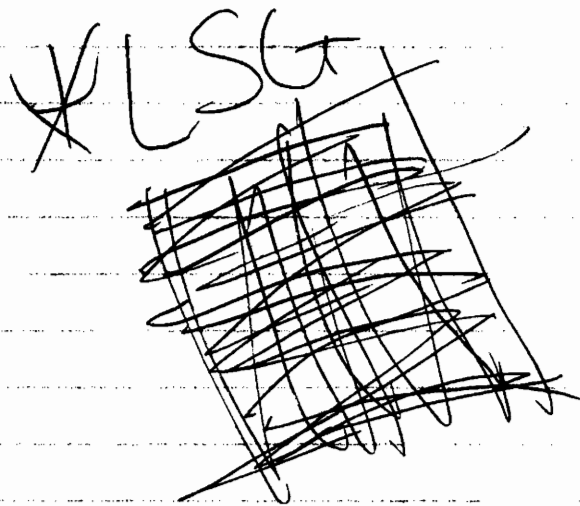
- * permit/legal jobs
- * flyers/press releases
- * postcards
- * ribbons and armbands
- * speakers
- * sign-making

* STEF - NS

press releases

- ↳ signwire
- out and about
- npr
- knoxville news-scene
- tv stations
- journal
- foregut press enterprise
- hottender
- metro pulse
- beacon
- gospel notes
- oak ridge
- tennessean
- kfar

* STEF -
entertainment
sevierville



* lambda 1/201

* offices

Dr. Kochue
Chris Holmfund

Dr. Mendolz

* OTSU
M.TSU
BGLMONT

* NCCS

* JWCA

* PAUL - KURT'S

4.1.04

affirmation comes in queer packages.

first, bech is a friend and advocate now.

the office of special events ~~person~~ told me i need no permit and, after giving me a bit of a run-around (and some bogus story about needing a certificate of insurance) came around and reserved the space for our group. i called them to thank them for their help and for taking that burden from my shoulders.

carolyn, the lady in the special events office, called me back yesterday. she told me that she ~~wanted to share~~ wanted to share something on her heart. she said that she had done her job and reserved the space, but that she had reservations because she does not agree with same-sex marriages. i told her i appreciated that she shared that, but more, i appreciated that, in spite of the difference of attitude, she did her job anyway. she said i was welcome, and she added that she loved me as christians are supposed to love, and she asked if i was a christian. i said yes, and she asked me what i thought about the bible. we talked about it for a few, expressed gratitude and love for each other, and left lines of communication open for future contact.

i called her back today. i told her i wanted to share two things with her. first, i wanted to address the comment about loving me like she was supposed to as a christian. i told her that comment recognizes the differences in how she and i think about

christianity - i do not see christianity as a mesh of rules and regulations and obligations, but rather, as a series of stories and metaphors and meanings that can encourage people to choose kindness and understanding and compassion. i told her i loved her not because i am supposed to, but because i choose to. she shared a story about her recent mission trip to nicaragua, and said that she has a deep passion for people's hearts and souls. she said that is why she wants to speak with me - she cares about my heart and soul and wants me in heaven with her. ~~i~~ said that we should recognize that as a connection - our political, social, religious, and sexual identities may be different, but we both care deeply about people's hearts and souls. sounds like we're not so different.

second, i extended a special invitation to her. i told her about the requesting of marriage licenses. i told her that i know she's busy, but i wanted her to know she would be welcome to come to bear witness and to see a small part of history work itself out. she told me she was honored - i could tell from her voice that she was - and said that she would come. we again expressed love and respect for each other and she said she was really ~~so~~ touched by the friendship that we had started.

otherwise, my phone has been ringing off the hook - ~~at~~ talking with the media and speakers and lots of other stuff. i'll be going on a talk radio show this weekend.

my best friend's mother has discovered she has breast cancer, and there's been a rush to find a good doctor and get her into surgery. i haven't been able to be with ~~stay~~ because i have limitless more responsibilities for this action. she's been really understanding of that.

my dad went to court today. i recently found out that, not only does he have the two felonies, he also has a shoplifting charge. the cases were delayed again. we've never talked about my sexuality, but i guess he'll figure something out tomorrow when he sees me on tv. i thought i might call and tell him today, but i'm not interested in processing with him, and i just don't have the heart to talk to him at all right now. on the advice of one of my mentors, i'm leaving this be for now.

my mother asked me to leave home today. it's the first time she's actually used the words "disappointment" and "embarrassment" with me. she was angry and says she criss about my activist work all the time. she called me selfish again and again and finally told me to look for another place to live. i told her i was ~~to~~ sorry it hurt her and our relationship and i loved her. sarcastically, she said "i can tell" and that, if it were true, i'd stop doing the work.

in talking to another mentor of mine, i allowed myself to realize that my work is not an act of hate or violence to my mother, and that it does not mean i do not love my mother. i do not choose to be

this work; it chose me, and i have no choice but to do it. ~~one~~ ticia today suggested that i had brought this energy to knoxville. that's a fallacy in understanding the meaning of an activist organizer. the energy was already here - otherwise, i'd be doing this action alone. i have served to facilitate and organize the energy and passion that already existed into tomorrow's action. and i did not choose to do this. the role was set before me to play, and i simply went where i was led.

on the other hand, the role consistently demands that i make choices and give directions. i feel insecure and vulnerable and lost a great deal of time, but no one in this movement wields the power that i do - when i make a suggestion, it is taken as a direction. sometimes the other activists will offer me counsel, but ultimately, my words become doctrine and agenda. that's scary, humbling, and altogether surreal. i was given that power; i did not choose it. i was chosen to organize this movement in knoxville; i did not choose to do so. i feel a deep sense of calling, mission, and responsibility.

i have started making plans to diffuse leadership of this group after tomorrow. this group can and will survive my move to san francisco.

tonight we finalized plans. we know what we'll do at the courthouse, rally, and sign-holding. media and authorities all know to be present and what to expect. i can't believe it's tomorrow.

oh! i forgot - another experience of affirmation.
we had our banner made - "marriage equality
for all" - and the company knocked off 20%
when they found out what we were doing. that
took it from \$100 to \$80. when i went to pick
it up today, the lady in the office said "you
know - i think that people should be able to take
care of whoever they love. i know you're on a small
budget, and i know it's not much, but this is
how i want to help."

now.

and tonight, when the kick-ass black lesbian
couple who is buying the coffee house from cwi
sensed how heavy my heart is, they grabbed me and
gave me a motivational speech straight from the
civil rights movement of the 60s. it was fiery.
and it's nice to hear god's name called on to support
and affirm this action rather than ~~condemn~~
condemn it.

stacy did something similar, but she's white and
my age, so it wasn't nearly so fun.

my sister said she totally disagrees but she loves and
supports me. i'm not entirely sure what that means
at the moment, but that's ok. that seems to be
the extent of our relationship arguments.

in the morning, those of us requesting licenses will
meet an hour early to take a sort of communion
together and to get ready for the day. i feel very

quite and relevant right now. this time is saved.

at 10 sharp, i will begin speaking at the rally. this is as good a place as any to start working on what i will say. i'm going to start with the poem i wrote a few weeks ago, "there is a tendency to forget."

POEM

↳ ... there is, however, a tendency to forget.

there is a deep undercurrent of intolerance in ~~our~~ society. i say it is an undercurrent because, once it is institutionalized and justified by the legal system, no one even has to act on it. it becomes quiet and passive and subtle, but it is very much present.

people do not come ~~to this courthouse~~ to this courthouse with members of their own biologic sex to request marriage licenses simply because they know they will be denied. this morning, ~~each of us with a symbolic partner,~~ we have ~~to~~ come here anyway to ~~elicit a response~~ elicit a response from the city of Knoxville, and we envision one of two possible outcomes.

you will notice that each of us standing here has a strip of black or of white cloth on either shoulder. if the city of Knoxville chooses to afford to us the marriage licenses which we deserve just like any heterosexual couple that enters these doors, we will

emerge wearing white armbands. ~~to~~ to celebrate that the city of Knoxville has taken one step in making right a tradition of ~~very~~ intolerance. If, however, ~~but~~ ~~I will not say "more likely"~~ the city of Knoxville denies us, we will emerge with black armbands in mourning that ~~the~~ the undercurrent of intolerance has surfaced, ~~and the city of Knoxville has chosen to act in the spirit of intolerance with which our country has struggled since before it was founded.~~

during the minutes that we spend inside of this building negotiating with the government, we would ask that you remain here outside, but with us in a spirit of ~~an~~ openness and love, ready to bear witness ~~and to~~ ~~participate~~ ~~with us~~ ~~as the case may be.~~

we would also ask that you spend what moments you have here in whatever form of a prayer, meditation, or thoughtfulness that you are comfortable with, ~~remembering~~ ~~on~~ on the intolerance in the world, and hoping on something better.

thank you for your support. we love you.

we will go into the courthouse and ask for applications for ~~an~~ marriage licenses, if they give us the applications we will sit down and fill them out. if they do not give us applications, we will pull out the ones we have already prepared. all couples will hold hands together, and the first couple will approach to request a license. 12:50pm and

i will be the first couple. when denied, i will turn to him and ~~say~~ have him tie the black armband around my arm

~~ask you to tie this black armband on my arm to present our solidarity for the intolerant which~~

~~then i will turn to the person who denied the license, and i will say —~~

~~i leave this white band with you. this is not a time of celebration for ~~us~~ us.~~

then i will drop the white band in front of her. — because an action's not an action without a little drama (or a little melodrama).

then i will tie jason's black band on his arm, and he will drop the white band. we will return to the group, link our hands with them, and the next couple will follow suit, but without speaking the script. all couples will cycle through, and we will return.

d.l. will announce what has happened, make our public statement, and announce our move to market square. she will ~~ask~~ ask that the time of mourning end at the courthouse, and proclaim the rest of the day

for celebrating and rallying for change.

then will go to market square.

now, i have a lot of work to do. it's one in the morning, and i'm still in the office. i have supplies for tomorrow at home, and i want to sleep there tonight. mama will already be in bed.

i imagine this will blow over like usual, and i will continue to live at home. we usually bear up under our differences and continue living with each other, we always have, as a matter of fact.

i'm very overstimulated. ~~the~~

4.11.04

- * discussion of 4.2.04
- * civil disobedience in future
- * April 21
- * Rhiz Looney - May 8 ; Dollywood; MLL Pride - May 16
- * Equality Knoxville
- * facilitator training
- * future meetings
- * postcards / e-mail addresses

- in touch w/ Ashley O'Neal
↳ Thursdays @ 7 at Beaver

- facilitator training - mid-may

- HR - discrimination action

- civil disobedience - first Friday of month

- Sundays 4-5

- e-mail group 2 updates

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Description

involve knoxville is a grassroots campaign that seeks to address discrimination along lines of gender and sexual identity in east tennessee. we are currently organizing a marriage equality and queer rights action to take place in early april.

the marriage equality and queer rights movements are well underway. people are challenging the social and political institutions that coerce us into conforming our identities and punish us for being different. the massachusetts supreme court has ruled that denying marriage rights to same-sexed couples is unconstitutional. san francisco began a movement in early february in which city officials issue and recognize marriage licenses for same-sexed couples. the definition of family and the issue of so-called 'gay marriage' have become focal points in the 2004 presidential campaigns. caving in to re-election pressures, president bush has officially endorsed a constitutional amendment that would deny rather than affirm the rights and liberties of people living in this country. and here in knoxville, we've decided it's time for us to get involved.

the involve campaign is picking up speed. we're doing lots of exciting things. all are invited and welcome to participate in our nonviolent approach to social change.

Most Recent Messages

[View all Messages \(39\)](#)

- Apr 23 [Diversity Prom for Knoxville Area Youth - hargrovesfire368](#)
Dear Friends, Spectrum Cafe is holding East Tennessee's first "Diversity Prom"
- Apr 20 [Oppose Expansion of the Death Penalty under the PATRIOT Act - hargrovesfire368](#)
From:Matt Howes, National Internet Organizer, ACLU To:ACLU Action Network Membe
- Apr 20 [Internet Hate Sites Growing - hargrovesfire368](#)
Internet Hate Sites Growing by 365Gay.com Newscenter Staff
Posted: April 20, 20
- Apr 19 [next meeting - sedatedwordsmith](#)
hey, kids. this is just to let you know that our next meeting will be on tuesd
- Apr 19 [University of Tennessee students, community to observe Day of Silenc - beth_maples_bays](#)
University of Tennessee students, community to observe Day of

Category: Civil Rights

Membership

You are a moderator of this group

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Pending Activity

0 Members
0 Messages

Group Info

Members: **161**
Founded: **Mar 4, 2004**
Language: **English**

Group Settings

- Listed in directory
- Restricted membership
- All messages require approval
- All members may post
- Archives for moderators only
- Email attachments are permitted



involveknoxville.

WHAT: MARRIAGE EQUALITY ACTION AND RALLY
WHERE: MARKET SQUARE, DOWNTOWN KNOXVILLE
WHEN: FRIDAY, APRIL 2

On Friday, April 2, a group of same-sex couples will request marriage licenses from the city courthouse. The action will be followed by a rally in Market Square from 11:30-4:30. Speakers include leaders of Knoxville's religious communities, long-time nonviolence and queer rights activists, social workers, and political leaders from the city and university. During rush hour, we will move to Henley Street in front of the UT Conference Center for a sign-holding.

involve knoxville is a grassroots campaign that seeks to address discrimination along lines of gender and sexual identity in east tennessee.

the marriage equality and queer rights movements are well underway. people are challenging the social and political institutions that coerce us into conforming our identities and punish us for being different. the massachusetts supreme court has ruled that denying marriage rights to same-sex couples is unconstitutional. san francisco began a movement in early february in which city officials issue and recognize marriage licenses for same-sex couples. the definition of family and the issue of so-called 'gay marriage' have become focal points in the 2004 presidential campaigns. caving in to re-election pressures, president bush has officially endorsed a constitutional amendment that would deny rather than affirm the rights and liberties of people living in this country. and here in knoxville, we've decided it's time for us to get involved.

all are invited and welcome to participate in our nonviolent approach to social change.

contact: involveknoxville-owner@yahoo.com
groups.yahoo.com/group/involveknoxville

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact Person: Kip Williams, dedalus@utk.edu, (865) 454-0173.

3.31.04

Knoxville Activists Rally for Marriage Equality.

Knoxville, Tenn. -- On Friday, April 2, a group of same-sex couples will request marriage licenses from the city courthouse. Following the approval or denial of their request, there will be a rally in Market Square from 11:30-4:30. Speakers will include leaders of Knoxville's religious communities, long-time nonviolence and queer rights activists, social workers, and political leaders from the city and university. During rush hour, there will be a sign-holding on Henley Street in front of the UT Conference Center.

This action and rally is being organized by involve knoxville, a grassroots campaign that seeks to address discrimination along lines of gender and sexual identity in East Tennessee.

The marriage equality and queer rights movements are well underway. People are challenging the social and political institutions that coerce us into conforming our identities and punish us for being different. The Massachusetts Supreme Court has ruled that denying marriage rights to same-sex couples is unconstitutional. San Francisco began a movement in early February in which city officials issue and recognize marriage licenses for same-sex couples. The definition of family and the issue of so-called "gay marriage" have become focal points in the 2004 presidential campaigns. Caving in to re-election pressures, President Bush has officially endorsed a Constitutional amendment that would deny rather than affirm the rights and liberties of people living in this country. And in Knoxville, a group of activists has decided it's time to get involved.

All are invited and welcome to participate in this nonviolent approach to social change. For more information, e-mail involveknoxville-owner@yahogroups.com or visit the group's website (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/involveknoxville>).

Media are invited and welcome to be present for all of the day's activities.

###

[<<Back](#)

Gay couples fail to get marriage licenses in Knox Co.

April 2, 2004

By TEARSA SMITH
6 News Reporter

KNOXVILLE (WATE) -- A national debate hit home Friday as four gay couples tried to get marriage licenses in Knox County.



Gay and lesbian couples walk to the Knox Co. Clerk's Office.

The same-sex couples entered the Knox County Clerk's Office Friday morning with the intent of getting marriage licenses, saying they should have the same right as any other couple to take their relationship to the next level.

But County Clerk Mike Padgett turned down their application. "I am sorry, under TCA Code 3631-13 I cannot issue a marriage license in the State of Tennessee, here in Knox County, because marriage is between one man and one woman," he told them.

Padgett told the couples they have every right to apply, but he had to uphold state law.

"I am bound by TCA codes in my position as Knox County clerk to uphold the state statute. And I will do that," he said. "It would be a Class C misdemeanor for me to not do that."

According to Padgett, he was notified in advance that a number of marriage applications would be submitted by gay couples Friday.

Tonya McKenzie and Stephanie Pike-Miles have dated for a couple of months, but they say they are ready to get married. They didn't resent Padgett's action.

"There's no hard feelings against him," said McKenzie. "He's just doing his job."

"We aren't trying to change him," Pike-Miles added. "We are trying to change the law."

Same-sex marriage supporter Tom Rhodes is a local minister and is married to his wife of 12 years. He says the law is discriminatory "because the Bible also says that God is love. Straight out, God is love. Not that God is heterosexual love or that God is love between man and women alone, but that God is love."

For now, same sex love in Tennessee will have to take place without the confirmation of a marriage license. But gay activists say they are urging Rep. Jimmy Duncan to oppose a resolution that would deny same-sex marriages.

Earlier this week, the state Senate voted in favor of a bill preventing same-sex civil unions from other states to be recognized in Tennessee. Gov. Phil Bredesen called on lawmakers to stop playing politics on divisive issues such as gay marriage. He said fighting for a constitutional amendment creates an "us versus them" mentality.



Search

Search on: "gay license"

Home

GAY COUPLES APPLY FOR KNOX MARRIAGE LICENSES

News

Five gay couples applied for marriage licenses Friday morning at Knoxville's Old County Courthouse.

As Seen On

County Clerk Mike Padgett denied their applications, saying that under Tennessee law, only marriages between one man and one woman are recognized.

Consumer Reports

Recalls

The applicants weren't deterred by Padgett's rejection and welcomed the media who came to observe the process.

Around the Region

"This is the first time anything of this momentum has been done in a long time," explains Kate McKinnon, who was seeking to marry her partner. "I'm hoping this is gonna get attention, especially with all of you people here, the media. I'm hoping that people are gonna notice, people are gonna care."

WBIR Mobile

Week in Review

Survey USA

The couples who applied today say they hope Tennesseans will want to change state law so same-sex couples can someday marry legally in the state.

Radio Simulcasts

USA Today

The Knox County Attorney says that if anyone in the County Clerk's office were to have knowingly violated the law and granted the marriage licenses to today's applicants, that individual could face misdemeanor charges.

Weather

Sports

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DISCUSS THIS STORY IN THE WBIR TALKBACK COMMUNITY:

Traffic Tracker

[CLICK HERE](#) to discuss the issue of gay marriage in Tennessee.

Live at Five

Style

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4/6/2004 3:42:47 AM
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KnoxNews

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URL: http://www.knoxnews.com/kns/local_news/article/0,1406,KNS_347_2779810,00.html

Same-sex couples try to get wed

Gay partners first in state to be denied marriage licenses

By **DON JACOBS**, jacobs@knews.com

April 3, 2004

Surrounded by television cameras, four couples walked Friday into the Knox County Clerk's Office and became the first same-sex applicants in the state to be refused a marriage license.

"We're taking this action to show that interest in gay marriages isn't just in big cities but is also in small-town America," said Jason Marcus, 31, one of the four men and four women who were denied marriage licenses.

Advertisement

Knox County Clerk Mike Padgett was ready for the media onslaught because Kip Williams, who organized the effort, and his partner, Marcus, had been in contact with his office about the planned event.

"These people, I'm sure, have an agenda," Padgett said. "They've been in contact with me about two weeks, and both have been very accommodating and very sincere."

In anticipation of the same-sex marriage-license requests, Padgett on March 12 sent his employees a two-page memo outlining the procedure to be followed. The memo directed employees to process the application to the point of obtaining a valid photo identification document until the same-sex issue is encountered.

The memo noted the laws restricting marriage to "one man and one woman" and that the clerk could be charged with a misdemeanor for issuing the license. If the applicant continues to question the denial, the memo tells them to direct further questions to the county law department.

"DO NOT enter into any dialogue regarding your beliefs or opinions in this matter," the memo stated.

In accordance with the memo, Padgett declined to make any personal comment about the license requests from the same-sex couples.

"I took an oath of office and I do not break the code," said Padgett, who has been married 33 years.

Padgett said from talking to other county clerks across the state, this was the first attempt in Tennessee by same-sex couples to get a marriage license. Hedy Weinberg, executive director of the ACLU in Tennessee, said she was unaware of any sex-same couples being turned down for marriage licenses in the state.

Before entering the Knox County Courthouse, Williams spoke to about two-dozen supporters gathered outside. Williams, 21, is a senior at the University of Tennessee and founded a few months ago the group 'involve knoxville' to address discrimination because of sexual identity.

"We see this as a human issue, not as a gay issue," said Williams, who described himself as "non-heterosexual," rather than gay.

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Ralliers support gay marriage

Karen Smith
Staff Writer

Volume 95 Number 55
Monday, April 05, 2004

sections

[news](#)[entertainment](#)[sports](#)[viewpoint](#)[crimelog](#)[classifieds](#)[cartoons](#)

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UTK Home Page

It happened in Knoxville for the first time on Friday.

Four men and four women applied for same-sex marriage licenses at the Knox County Clerk's Office and were denied minutes later. After the visit to the clerk's office, they gathered in Market Square to rally for support.



**Printer
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version**

"We're not interested in 'gay marriages' or the rights of 'gay people,' per se, but rather the right for human beings, regardless of their genders, sexual identities and biologic sex to be able to publicly and legally affirm their relationships with whomever they choose," said Kip Williams, senior in college studies.

Williams and his partner, Jason Marcus, 31, applied for a marriage license and helped to organize the efforts through Involve Knoxville, a grassroots campaign to address gender and sexual identity discrimination.

The group had notified Knox County Clerk Mike Padgett of their intentions to apply for the licenses and were aware of the application process weeks in advance, Marcus said.

"Everyone was very cooperative," he said, "(Padgett) said he would be charged with a misdemeanor if he issued the licenses. Our main function here is to get out the word and educate people. We want to show that it's not just happening in big cities, but in Knoxville, too."

A microphone amplified speakers, including Lissa Mcleod, recipient of the 2004 Peacemaker Award from the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance.

"State-sanctioned bigotry is wrong," Mcleod said.

"We have to say that all people are worthy of equal treatment," said Mcleod, who is in a heterosexual marriage. "I believe straight-married people have an obligation to speak out."

Some supporters wore yellow armbands to represent the need to remain peaceful, she said.

"Lasting changes happen non-violently," she added.

Another attendee, Beth Maples-Bays did not attempt to marry her partner, but voiced her support for those who did.

"They are here to save the (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community," she said. "There is an active gay community in Knoxville, but there hasn't been an active voice."

Maples-Bays, a graduate of UT, wore a black armband representing mourning.

"The last time I wore a black armband was when Richard Nixon was at Neyland stadium and I was protesting the Vietnam War," she said.

Mark O'Mara, a senior in architecture, was passing through Market Square and offered his

(04.02.04 Same sex 1)

Supporters of gay marriage held a rally in downtown Knoxville today. The event took place shortly after four same-sex couples unsuccessfully attempted to secure marriage licenses at the city courthouse. Kip Williams is with Involve Knoxville, the group that organized the rally...

Kip Williams 1A :10 ...to do so
(We believe that---regardless of gender or sexual identity and regardless of biologic sex---everyone should be able to affirm, publicly and legally their relationship with whomever they choose to do so.)



Civil unions and same-sex marriages are not legal in Tennessee. And earlier this week, the Tennessee Senate overwhelmingly passed a measure that would prohibit the state from recognizing same-sex unions that originated in other states.









(04.02.04 Same sex 2)

Supporters of gay marriage assembled at Knoxville's Market Square for a rally today. The rally featured several speakers, including Minister Chris Bice of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church...

Chris Buice 1A :12 ...and caring
(In a world where there's so much hatred, we don't need a Constitutional Amendment against love, and where there's so much indifference and apathy, we don't need to pass laws and policies against commitment and caring.)

Earlier in the day, four same-sex couples went to the city courthouse and requested marriage licenses. They were refused. Tennessee state law currently defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

 **WebMail - a little activism never hurt no one** 

Date Sent: Saturday, February 28, 2004 09:17 PM

From: dedalus Add to Address Book

To: dedalus

Subject: a little activism never hurt no one

Status: Urgent New

hey, kids. this e-mail is about the upcoming marriage equality/queer rights action. you're receiving this invitation because you've already expressed interest or because i think that you might be interested.

anyway, the first organizational meeting will be held tuesday evening at 5:30 at the beantree coffee house (5115 homberg drive; the old java), and it will be no longer than two hours MAX. we will begin working out the details of the action at this meeting.

if you are interested in being part of the group but can't make it tuesday evening, please let me know. also, feel free to contact me with questions or ideas, and please share this invitation with anyone who you think might be interested.

shalom,
kip
dedalus@utk.edu
454.0173 (cell)

p.s. of course, if you don't want to receive any more information about this action, tell me to bugger off!



"All who do not love all [people] are against me."
--Joshua, in the play Corpus Christi









"Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes."
--Ovid, Metamorphoses, VIII, 188



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 **WebMail - invitation for a speaking engagement** 

Date Sent: Thursday, March 25, 2004 06:44 PM

From: dedalus [Add to Address Book](#)

To: 

Subject: invitation for a speaking engagement

Status: Urgent New

hello, friends. this e-mail is being sent to all of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates for this year's sga elections.

my name is kip williams, and i am a senior. i have designed my own major in gender, sexuality, and creativity studies through the college scholars program. i am involved in several nonviolence activist groups in the area, and i am currently organizing a marriage equality and queer rights action, which will include a rally in market square. we are looking for speakers of all religious, sexual, gender, and political identities who can come to talk about equality, tolerance, and social change. if any of you are interested in speaking or supporting our action, feel free to e-mail me back (dedalus@utk.edu) and i will share with you the details.

as a point of interest, two of the three campaigning parties already have representation in our action.

i hope that you understand this invitation as an honor, and i look forward to hearing your responses.

shalom,
kip



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WebMail - Use the Passion

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Date Sent: Tuesday, March 30, 2004 01:34 PM

From: [REDACTED] [Add to Address Book](#)

To: dedalus <dedalus@utk.edu>

Subject: Use the Passion

Status: Urgent New

Dear Kip,

I mentioned far reaching effects of the excellent work that you are doing and thought I'd take the opportunity to share a little. The action was promoted in Rick's discussion group last night and people were encouraged to help spread the word. The buzz is building.

Two people found out that they work in the same UT building on Henley Street. This opportunity to discover new friends and allies has an important personal and lasting effect. Similar cases of people coming together will occur.

Another observation is that the need for more collaboration and coalition work has become powerfully evident. Your efforts have pointed out areas for improvement and show the importance of cooperation and solidarity. We need to respect leaders and help them rather than sit back and criticize.

Your commitments to diversity and non-violence are highly admired and I hope that the support you so rightfully deserve will become evident on Friday. Your skills are deeply appreciated. I am extremely pleased that you are using them to benefit GLBT causes.

Highest regards, Paul

Something in our human nature longs for that experience of complete emotional absorption, that magical moment when we are swept away. It is passion that entertains us. When a book is written without passion, you lose interest. When a team plays without passion, the game becomes boring. "These guys are asleep," a fan complains. To feed this appetite, we reward those who can stir our emotions to the greatest heights. Actors, athletes and rock musicians make millions because they know how to turn on our passion. Barbara De Angelis

Sent via the WebMail system at iqonline.net



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WebMail - RE: Friday's event
✕

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Date Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2004 01:19 PM

From: [REDACTED] Add to Address Book

To: dedalus

Subject: RE: Friday's event

Status: Urgent New

Nice response kip. I also responded privately to Will urging a united front in spite of differences of linguistics. Will does feel strongly about this issue (its come up before in our church) but he has also circulated the info on the action to friends. So there is no permanent ill will just to let you know. Thanks for your leadership.

[REDACTED]
Tennessee Valley UU Church
2931 Kingston Pike
Knoxville, TN 37919
(865) 523-4176

----- Original Message ----- From: "dedalus" <dedalus@utk.edu>
To: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2004 1:19 AM
Subject: RE: Friday's event

> thank you for your response. if you've heard all of the arguments before,
i
> won't seek to make any of them to you now, but i do hope to lend you a new
> perspective.
>
> more than half of us who have been involved in organizing this campaign
have
> romantic/sexual relationships primarily with members of the other biologic
> sex. all of us, however, identify somewhere on a continuum of gender and
> sexual identities, and reject altogether the binary terms
> 'homosexual/heterosexual' and 'gay/straight.' 'queer' simply means
> 'nonheterosexual' and is inclusive to all of us. further, it has an [REDACTED]
anarchist
> edge that represents the affinity of our members to violate social norms.
> while i do apologize that the term alienates and excludes you, i myself
find
> the term 'gay' distasteful and do not identify with it, as i do not think

of
 > myself as either gay or straight (or even bisexual). since this attitude
 is a
 > mark of those of us who have organized this action, we chose to be
 inclusive
 > of ourselves and use the word 'queer.' we are not interested in the
 rights of
 > 'gay' people per se, but rather in the rights of ALL people to publicly
 and
 > legally affirm relationships with the person of their choice, regardless
 of
 > gender and sexual identity.

>
 > again, i apologize to you and to all who may find this term alienating.
 if
 > you choose not to take part in our action, we will regret your absence,
 but we
 > do hope that your thoughts, love, and prayers are with us.
 >
 > thank you again for sharing your perspective with me.

>
 > shalom,
 > kip

> >===== Original Message From dunklin@kornet.org =====

> >Friends, I just wanted to weigh in on the social action planned for
 > >Friday. As a gay man in a long time committed relationship I heartily
 > >support the protest and demonstration planned. Good luck.

> >
 > >I do take one STONG exception. I DETEST and DESPISE the use of the word
 > >"queer." I have heard all the arguments about "reclaiming" the word for
 > >our own use. I find the argument disingenuous and shallow.

> >
 > >Just because pop culture embraces the lowest standards of behaviour is no
 > >reason for those of us concerned about real moral issues to use visious
 > >perjoratives. I don't and won't be associated with anything "queer" and
 am

> >DEEPLY offended by people labeling me and my companion as such.

> >
 > >I won't attend and be called "queer" by you or anyone else. Otherwise
 good
 > >luck with the event.

> >
 > >Knoxville, Tennessee



>
 > -----
 > "All who do not love all [people] are against me."
 > --Joshua, in the play Corpus Christi









> -----
> "Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes."
> --Ovid, Metamorphoses, VIII, 188
> -----
>
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 **WebMail - RE: Prayer** 

Date Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2004 08:37 PM

From: dedalus [Add to Address Book](#)

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Prayer

Status: Urgent New

thank you for sharing this with me, [REDACTED] i admire the gift of expressing differences without hostility or violence. continue in the spirit of tolerance and kindness that i believe you were expressing here. whether or not our religious, social, or political identities are compatible, i believe that we can at least offer each other an understanding and respectful gratitude.

shalom,
kip williams



>===== Original Message From Austin Rutledge <austinrut@hotmail.com> =====
>I will pray for this group...that they may come to an understanding of God's word and see homosexuality the same way God does: as sin. I'm in the same boat, while I'm not a homosexual I sin against God everyday. It's not the sinner I'm against...it's the sin. In my attempt to live the holy life to which I God has called me, I will continue to keep this group in my prayers.









>
>In Christ,
> [REDACTED]



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 **WebMail - RE: Hello I would like to help** 

Date Sent: Thursday, April 01, 2004 06:15 AM

From: dedalus [Add to Address Book](#)

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Hello I would like to help

Status: Urgent New

hello, [REDACTED]. again, i'm very glad that you've contacted me.

i've been looking at your site, and an idea occurs to me. i've been working as an activist and organizer for two years now with nonviolence work - anti-war, anti-nuclear weapons, death penalty abolition, etc. i've lent myself as an organizer to the queer rights movement because i didn't see anything happening in our area. i'll be graduating in may and moving to san francisco for graduate school in august, and i've been hoping to start diffusing leadership of involve knoxville throughout the group so that it can survive my move. perhaps we should talk about joining our groups together - with the leadership of you and your friends and some of the other members of the involve knoxville campaign, i think that you could develop a very powerful and active organization. in the meantime, i could lend a lot to you and your group in terms of organization - help you to develop a clearer mission statement, help with training organizers and facilitators for meetings, connect you to the greater progressive network in east tennessee, etc. if you're interested and would let me share my experience and resources with you, i think that neat things could happen. i'd also feel like i've helped to do something meaningful and lasting in knoxville before i move.

what do you think?

shalom,
kip



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WebMail - Invitation to Radio Appearance
✖

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Date Sent: Thursday, April 01, 2004 11:47 AM

From: [REDACTED] Add to Address Book

To: involveknoxville-owner <involveknoxville-owner@yahoogroups.com>

Subject: Invitation to Radio Appearance

Status: Urgent New

Hello, April 1, 2004

My name is [REDACTED] and I host a local radio program, "Left Turn." It airs from noon until 1 p.m. on Saturdays. I was hoping that one or two people from your organization can show up and be interviewed for my radio program this Saturday, April 3. It would be a great follow-up to your event planned for tomorrow. Please drop me a note to tell me if you are able to do this. All the best, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] PS "Left Turn" is a non-traditional radio program in that it unabashedly speaks from the left side of the political spectrum, and addresses topics too often left out or misrepresented on radio.

=====
[REDACTED]

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http://promotions.yahoo.com/design_giveaway/



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WebMail - RE: 4/2

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Date Sent: Thursday, April 01, 2004 04:50 PM

From: dedalus [Add to Address Book](#)

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: 4/2

Status: Urgent New

[REDACTED]

thanks for responding. in fact, i myself am terribly disinterested in the institution of marriage, and marriage equality is not an issue of much significance to me. on the other hand, i AM interested in the structural discrimination, intolerance, hatred, and violence that pervades our society, and one way that i know to address that climate is to join in a movement that has a great deal of national energy and momentum.

i'd like to share with you a response i wrote to a self-identified gay man who sent me an e-mail protesting the use of the word 'queer.' i think that my response sheds some light on the meaning of this action and on the hearts and minds of its organizers. here it is included in full:

thank you for your response. if you've heard all of the arguments before, i won't seek to make any of them to you now, but i do hope to lend you a new perspective.

more than half of us who have been involved in organizing this campaign have romantic/sexual relationships primarily with members of the other biologic sex. all of us, however, identify somewhere on a continuum of gender and sexual identities, and reject altogether the binary terms 'homosexual/heterosexual' and 'gay/straight.' 'queer' simply means 'nonheterosexual' and is inclusive to all of us. further, it has [REDACTED] edge that represents the affinity of our members to violate social norms. while i do apologize that the term alienates and excludes you, i myself find the term 'gay' distasteful and do not identify with it, as i do not think of myself as either gay or straight (or even bisexual). since this attitude is a mark of those of us who have organized this action, we chose to be inclusive of ourselves and use the word 'queer.' we are not interested in the rights of 'gay' people per se, but rather in the rights of ALL people to publicly and legally affirm relationships with the person of their choice, regardless of gender and sexual identity.

again, i apologize to you and to all who may find this term alienating. if you choose not to take part in our action, we will regret your absence, but we do hope that your thoughts, love, and prayers are with us.

thank you again for sharing your perspective with me.

like you, i understand that the institution of marriage is to a large extent about power and control. also like you, i choose to take part in this movement anyway because i see value in it.

feel free to find me and introduce yourself on friday. i'll be the young man with a patch of green hair who's running around [redacted] it fall apart.

shalom,
kip

>===== Original Message From Paul H deLeon [redacted] =====

>thanks for the notice about the April 2 event. I plan to attend, because
>I don't like discrimination and violence against my friends and neighbors.

>
>I will attend even though my presence might be construed as my support for
>the corrupt institution of marriage. Marriage has always been and
>continues to be primarily about property --one person's ownership of
>another-- centrally based in sexism and homophobia, and a source of
>vast suffering over so many generations. Why should folks beg priests
>and other politicians for permission to hang out with the people they
>love? To me gay people looking to get married would be like African
>Americans campaigning for the right to join the KKK.

>
>I know some folks are going to cling to tradition. I write this only to
>urge you to cast the event in the broadest anti-discrimination terms.
>*Everyone* deserves equal access to health care, kids, naming their
>next-of-kin, and all the other privileges now accorded only to those
>who meet utterly arbitrary standards of membership in particular groups.
>
>Thanks for all your work against discrimination. Hope to see you Friday.

>
[redacted]



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WebMail - RE: Radio Program

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Date Sent: Friday, April 02, 2004 03:55 AM

From: dedalus Add to Address Book

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Radio Program

Status: Urgent New

it occurs to me to ask what you'd like to talk about. as a humanistic psychologist and nonviolent activist, i'm competent to talk about the meaning of this movement and of activist work in general. my major at the university of tennessee is gender, sexuality, and creativity studies, so i'm also able to talk with some authority on gender and sexual identity and development. i'm terribly ignorant of public policy and legal issues regarding gender and sexual discrimination, though, and i wouldn't feel comfortable discussing them or fielding questions about them on the air. i'll be looking for someone more suited to those questions.

overall, it would help me to get some general idea of what you want so that i can locate someone appropriate for you. i hope i can help, and thank you very much for your interest in our work.

shalom,
kip

>===== Original Message From Mark Harmon <markdharmon@yahoo.com> =====
>Dear Kip, April 1, 2004
> Thanks for being able to do "Left Turn." The
>program is on the Horne Radio stations, frequencies
>850 and 670 on the AM dial.
> It is from noon to one this Saturday, April 3rd.
>Directions: Take I-40 West to the western edge of
>Knox County. Take the Watt Road exit. Turn left on
>Watt Road. You'll see a truck stop on either side.
>Just as the road turns up and to the right you'll see
>a driveway off to the right with a sign reading Horne
>Radio. I look forward to speaking with you on
>Saturday. All the best, [REDACTED]
>
>
>
>=====

[REDACTED]

> [REDACTED]
> [REDACTED]
> [REDACTED]
>
>

>Do you Yahoo!?
>Yahoo! Small Business \$15K Web Design Giveaway
><http://promotions.yahoo.com> [REDACTED]




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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

 **WebMail - involve knoxville campaign** X

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Date Sent: Friday, April 02, 2004 09:41 PM

From: dedalus Add to Address Book

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: involve knoxville campaign

Status: Urgent New

hello, friend. i noticed that you have applied for membership in the involve knoxville yahoo group. as you are a member of the media, i'm not sure how to interpret your request for inclusion in our listserv. if you are genuinely interested in knowing about and possibly getting involved with our campaign, i will happily approve your request for membership. on the other hand, if you're seeking to follow the course of our group for possible news leads, i ask that you respect our desire for sanctuary from media attention and public awareness and allow us to contact you as we choose to share information.

again, though - if your interest in our group is not about your position in the media, i will happily approve your request for membership.

thanks much for understanding my concern!

shalom,
kip williams



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WebMail - thanks for your courage

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Date Sent: Sunday, April 04, 2004 10:07 PM

From: [REDACTED] [Add to Address Book](#)

To: dedalus

Subject: thanks for your courage

Status: Urgent New

Kip,
I just want to let you know how incredibly proud I am of you for the courageous stand you and your friends took last week. When I saw the article in the News Sentinel, I was proud, and also very concerned, because I know the risks you all are taking in your relationships with family and friends. I have always thought you were one of the best and brightest to have survived Karns High School. Now I am absolutely sure. Please know that all your friends at Westside support you.
[REDACTED]



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WebMail - RE: [involveknoxville] time to move again

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Date Sent: Friday, April 09, 2004 12:25 AM

From: [REDACTED] [Add to Address Book](#)

To: dedalus

Subject: RE: [involveknoxville] time to move again

Status: Urgent New

Kip,

I've thought a lot about what we did and what we accomplished in this past week. I've been admonished by classmates for being too high profile in a school where being gay is a liability. I've had people talk to me being just curious and wanting to know more. I've had people say that since we weren't couples our action was foolish. I've had people smile with that longing look in their eyes and congratulate me on speaking out. The full gamut. But of course you've experienced that, too. Tomorrow I leave for home and plan to tell my parents that I'm gay so I can share with them my pride and joy. I hope I maintain the courage to enter that dialogue with them, as I have often backed out, a scared child, afraid to confront what haunted me and exiled me in that community for eighteen plus years; that which drove me into a depression that almost ended my life. I think I have grown enough to confront it, thanks in some part to your role in my life.

I know people have expressed many sentiments to you since the action, both affirming and detrimental. I just want you to know that you have earned a very dear place in my heart. Your humanity is so genuine and so encompassing that it leaves me in awe. You show the real face of love in all your actions. It takes a lot of courage and heart to do what you do, and I genuinely respect and admire you for it, especially when family doesn't always support you. I just wanted you to know how I felt, that I am behind you, and that I genuinely love you. And now, as I run the risk of being over-the-top and way too melodramatic, I will

end. Wish me luck on my dialogue with my parents. I'll see you at Sunday's meeting.

Shalom,
[REDACTED]

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Yahoo! Small Business \$15K Web Design Giveaway
http://promotions.yahoo.com/design_giveaway/ [REDACTED]



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I'd like to close with some reflections on the sections of this project and what they mean as a whole. Then I hope to make a clear connection between my sexual and nonviolent identities and to consider the relationship between nonviolence and social change.

The interview and thematic analysis conducted by my colleague served as a sort of bracketing before I began the work of organizing this action. It attended to several important aspects of my experience in the beginning of this project. Particularly, the analysis emphasized both my sense of the urgency of this action given the historical context and my felt need for a social, religious, and sexual diversity of people to communicate a controversial political statement to a large and diverse audience. The interview and analysis miss one important, overriding aspect of my experience, however: the influence of my relationships with other people on organizing and making sense of this movement.

When I first read the second theme in the analysis, "Personal Passion versus Personal Struggle," I expected that the "struggle" referred to my awareness that my passions were at odds with the values of the family, friends, and church who helped to raise me. Instead, I believe that the analyst was emphasizing the idea that, though I had a passion to involve myself in this movement, I felt that someone else should be organizing it. The analyst refers to the following passage.

Why hasn't someone else done it? I'm a pretty smart and creative guy who's capable of carrying something like this off but at the same time it occurred to me that there are plenty of people in Knoxville who are considerably more

experienced, more um, more creative, smarter than I am, and who are just as if not more passionate about this (245-248).

He refers to an anxiety that I might not be qualified to organize this movement. In going back to the transcript of the interview, I expected to find passages in which I discussed the anger and sadness that my family and friends have expressed to me in the past about my sexual identity and my public activist work. I thought these segments had been disregarded by the analyst when, in fact, they did not exist to begin with. Although I was aware of and could articulate this theme at the time, it did not find expression in the interview, though it did stand out as the dominant theme in the journal entries that comprise the third section of this project.

If I could add to the interview and thematic analysis now, I would speak to the sense of embarrassment, disappointment, sadness, and anger that family and friends from my childhood have expressed to me, and I would talk about choosing to act in spite of the resulting guilt and shame that I continually felt for doing this work. As first pointed to in the theme of “Personal Passion” from the interview, I would also emphasize that this action was not about one anonymous nonheterosexual engaging with injustice; this was about my making sense of my own experiences and using them as a starting point to do something meaningful in the world in a deeply personal way. I refer here to the journal entry from March 3.

it continues that the meaning, need, and work of this project all develop against a ground of my very heart and soul. the personal is political. i'm grateful for the blessing of courage, strength, creativity, and support it continually takes to keep going deeper into both my own heart and the world

itself in spite of the pain, sadness, and vulnerability it opens. i'm also grateful that there is another side to this experience – the excitement, the fun, the satisfying, the affirmation, and the opening of new visions and possibilities.

It seems appropriate that, since the idea for this action occurred to me so suddenly and I felt an urgent need to begin the organizational process without delay, the immediacy of the circumstances was the ground against which the experience was understood at the time of the interview. With the time that has passed and the experiences I have since had, I would suggest that the experience has come to be understood as a figure against two backgrounds: first, the “ground of my very heart and soul” as stated in the journal passage above; second, against the ground of other people. These “other people” were sometimes family and friends, and they were sometimes people I did not know. In organizing and working out the meaning of this action, I found that other people sometimes provoked fear and sadness from me, and they sometimes showed me understanding and love. This passage is from the March 28 journal entry.

whether it's my family, conservative-religious friends, other social/political people, or often even members of queer activist communities, it seems there's assault from all fronts. paul let me talk about how sad i was...the action this friday seems sad and scary and unsure now. he hugged me, and i started crying. he was so empathic. he let me talk about how afraid i am that all of the criticism from these groups is true. i feel like the disappointment that they all tell me (and i am afraid) i actually am.

E-mail messages included in the fourth section of this project also demonstrate the ground of other people as a source of love and support. Consider this message from one of my high school teachers who attends the Unitarian Universalist church where I am a member.

I just want to let you know how incredibly proud I am of you for the courageous stand you and your friends took last week...Please know that all your friends at [church] support you.

Consider also this message from one of my fellow activists in the days after we held our first public action. It not only demonstrates the support offered by other people, but it also shows that others in this movement faced the same love/hate relationship with other people that I faced.

I've been admonished by classmates for being too high profile in a school where being gay is a liability. I've had people talk to me being just curious and wanting to know more. I've had people say that since we weren't couples our action was foolish. I've had people smile with that longing look in their eyes and congratulate me on speaking out. The full gamut...Tomorrow I leave for home and plan to tell my parents that I'm gay so I can share with them my pride and joy...I think I have grown enough to confront it, thanks in some part to your role in my life...I just wanted you to know how I felt, that I am behind you, and that I genuinely love you.

I'm trying here to capture one of the dominant themes of this project: the overwhelming humanness of activist work. The experience of social action doesn't take place fundamentally on street corners or in courtrooms and politicians' offices. Social

action takes place in the human heart and in the individual's personal relationships with other people. Further, the adjectives I've been using to describe experiences with social action reflect the dynamics of what it means in some sense to be most fully human: sad, happy, angry, gentle, hurtful, supportive, hateful, loving, embarrassed, proud, etc.

Now that I've introduced these words to represent the paradoxes and dynamics of the social activist experience, I want to shift and focus on language as it is used both for narrative and for social identification. In the case of media attention, the words used to tell our story often shifted the meaning of the action, and this twisting of words often blurred the boundary between history and fiction. Further, the vocabulary used to identify our activist community alienated some potential members.

Let me start by telling part of my account of the action. On Friday, April 2, 2004, ten people went to the Knox County clerk's office paired as five same-sex couples to request marriage licenses. Our intent was to make an important public statement about intolerance: You may not see it, but intolerance exists. We communicated clearly to members of the media that we were not actually couples. We also communicated that we did not necessarily expect the clerk's office to deny us the licenses. We expressed that we would go in good faith – that is, with an openness about what would take place – and allow the government officials the opportunity to do the right thing. Further, in our opening public statement, we expressed that we were prepared to celebrate or mourn the officials' decision, as the case may be. The overarching theme of our statement was that we did not seek to change people's opinions or beliefs about sexual identity, but that we wanted to show the world a tangible event of tolerance or intolerance and appeal to them

that, in spite of our differences and disagreements, we can and should show each other tolerance.

The story told by members of the media was significantly different than the event that took place. For example, the title of the WATE piece on our action was “Gay couples fail to get marriage licenses in Knox Co.,” as if our intent had been to get married in the first place, and we failed at what we had set out to do. Even the story in the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* was titled “Same-sex couples try to get wed,” again suggesting that our goal was to obtain marriage licenses. Clearly, regardless of what stories were told and what form the narratives took, we accomplished what we set out to do. People talked about this action for a few days and, even now, people continue to talk about the issue in a more general sense. Opinions and beliefs may not have changed, but people are more aware of intolerance now. The power of this action transcends the stories that get told about it. It is at least interesting, though, to notice how stories get reconstructed and their meanings change with the tellers and their prerogatives.

Here is another example of the media’s tendency to shift the meaning of stories with language. I offered a quote to the media when asked about this movement, saying that “we are not interested in the rights of ‘gay people’ exclusively, but rather in the rights of all people, regardless of gender and sexual identity, to publicly and legally affirm their relationships with whomever they choose.” In the *News-Sentinel* story, this quote was translated as “Anybody should have the right to legally acknowledge their love,” which is not only *not* what I said, but something that I *wouldn’t* say. Again, I am not especially bothered by the consequences of the misquote because it puts me on the side of a two-sided dialectic that I would ultimately come down to. Whether people

understand the subtleties of my particular stance is irrelevant. I've still done what I intended to do. It is again interesting, though, to remember how closely journalism borders on fiction. As a character in the narrative, I spoke a line that I never spoke in real life and that I *would not* speak in real life.

As stated before, language also had the power to divide the community of potential activists. I am referring specifically to our group's adoption of the word "queer." Like our public statements, the use of the word was entirely intentional, and we used it with an awareness that it would alienate many people. We were reminded of this by such e-mail communications as this:

I heartily support the protest and demonstration planned. Good luck.

I do take one STRONG exception. I DETEST and DESPISE the use of the word "queer." I have heard all the arguments about "reclaiming" the word for our own use. I find the argument disingenuous and shallow...I don't and won't be associated with anything "queer" and am DEEPLY offended by people labeling me and my companion as such. I won't attend and be called "queer" by you or anyone else.

And to follow is a small bit of my response to this message.

thank you for your response. if you've heard all of the arguments before, i won't seek to make any of them to you now, but i do hope to lend you a new perspective.

more than half of us who have been involved in organizing this campaign have romantic/sexual relationships primarily with members of the other biologic sex. all of us, however, identify somewhere on a continuum of

gender and sexual identities, and reject altogether the binary terms 'homosexual/heterosexual' and 'gay/straight.' 'queer' simply means 'nonheterosexual' and is inclusive to all of us. further, it has an anarchist edge that represents the affinity of our members to violate social norms. while i do apologize that the term alienates and excludes you, i myself find the term 'gay' distasteful and do not identify with it, as i do not think of myself as either gay or straight...since this attitude is a mark of those of us who have organized this action, we chose to be inclusive of ourselves and use the word 'queer.' we are not interested in the rights of 'gay' people per se, but rather in the rights of ALL people to publicly and legally affirm relationships with the person of their choice, regardless of gender and sexual identity.

This e-mail response also emphasizes what might be the single dominant theme of this project: rigid nonconformity. This theme extends beyond myself and out into the group of organizers and activists as a whole. As the core members of the involve knoxville campaign, we will consciously run the risk of alienating people and of being misunderstood for the sake of being ourselves. To us, social action is not about clearly communicating a message or about "reaching" people; social action is about being most wholly ourselves both in public action and in personal relationships, and for some of us, it is important to do so in a nonviolent way.

With the reintroduction of the word "nonviolent," I will make my final point about language. Violence is traditionally understand as an act of physical aggression that results in harm to a physical body. I know, however, that, though I do not act out and

hurt other people's bodies, there are times when I feel like I have hurt people and acted violently toward them. Thus, I cluster "violence" with words such as "discrimination," "intolerance," "unkindness," and "hatred." Similarly, I cluster together such words as "nonviolence," "tolerance," "gentleness," "shalom," "understanding," and "mercy." I freely admit that I am unsure of what these words mean, to me or to anyone else. I am aware that this lexicon I've developed and use quite freely (though not carelessly) is not necessarily a language that others share with me. In my stubbornness, I find myself unable to use the words that others are more comfortable with, such as "justice," or "respect," even though it might help me to communicate more clearly with other people. I feel an unease with these and several other words, and I can't bring myself to identify with them any more than I identify with the word "gay."

That said, I want to close with a personal statement. I'm aware throughout this project of the repeated use of the words "I," "me," and "my," and to say now that I'm going to make a "personal statement" sounds a bit odd. I have taken very seriously the commandment at the entrance to the cave of the oracle at Delphi: "Know Thyself." This commandment is sacred to me, and I have faith that, by seeking to understand myself and to explore my personal relationship with the world, I can be most fully loving and helpful to the world. And so I use my senior project in college as a forum both to carry out a social action and to extensively explore myself. I've spoken so personally and so frankly in this project as a way of emphasizing its overarching theme: social change takes place in my heart and in the relationships that I have with other people.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, I've nurtured a deepening obsession with nonviolence: not nonviolence in a passive sort of way, but rather, a very active kind of

nonviolence, which has taken the form of poetry, conversation, and public activism, and which I have continually found as a point of both connection and disconnection with those around me. My active nonviolence has embarrassed and alienated my family and many of the friends and mentors of my past, but it has served as a foundation for growth and sharing with many of the friends and mentors I have chosen over the last few years and with other members of the nonviolent activist community in Knoxville. Nonviolence has become more than a type of public activism. It has become a way of life for me, and of relating to other people. I'm gradually seeing nonviolence work in a new way: for example, my family has become, by and large, a more tolerant group of people, and healing and reconciliation is occurring in relationships that have been broken for a long time. These experiences are just one expression of an odd and more general relationship that I have with people, feeling both compassionate toward and repelled by them at the same time. It's a conflicting and fragmented experience, and I've been struggling for several years to absorb it into a coherent sense of what it means to be me.

When I reconstruct my past into an ongoing life story, I'm aware of a theme of struggling with my sexual identity that has followed me since some of my earliest childhood memories. In earlier years I experienced this sexual identity, which I have come to name "queer" or "pansexual," as guilt, shame, anxiety, and fear of being outcast from my family and friends and, perhaps, of facing the eternal condemnation of my soul. Interestingly, these meanings have not disappeared from my experience, but have been met with my increasing tendency toward acceptance, affirmation, and understanding that I struggle to apply both to myself and other people.

In part, I'm trying in this project to make an important connection between my sexual identity and violence. Those whose sexual identities don't match others' expectations face a climate of intolerance and hostility, of hatred and often physical violence from institutions, family and friends, and even themselves. Often, no one has to hate nonheterosexuals. We've been taught to hate ourselves.

When we speak about marriage equality or issues of "gay rights," we're not simply addressing issues of fairness. We're addressing systemic intolerance, discrimination, violence, and hatred that punishes nonheterosexuals for our violations of the social code. This takes the form of social spotlighting and ostracism, physical violence that gets justified in multiple ways and contexts (as in the case of Matthew Shepard), and the denial of rights to same-sex couples that are afforded to other-sex couples. It is the ultimate achievement of violence to justify itself. And so, in light of the present political and social situation, I align myself with the marriage equality movement because I perceive this movement as being entirely, unequivocally, and inarguably an issue of violence. The meaning of my choice to organize and act in this movement is remarkably similar to the meaning of my involvement in anti-war, anti-nuclear weapons, and death penalty abolition work. It just happens that in this instance, I'm addressing a violence not against the people of Iraq, those who suffer from the threat of nuclear weapons, or those who await their murder in an execution chamber; this violence is against me and people who are like me. Again, I'm acting on my identity as a disciple of nonviolence, and my methods of organization and action hail from a tradition and history of nonviolence work recounted in the stories of Jesus of Nazareth, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

To represent the dynamics of my family's struggle with my sexual and nonviolent identities, as this movement progressed, words like "caution," "reserve," and "worry" were transformed into words like "disappointment," "anger," and "embarrassment." When my mother (not to my surprise) said to me in the days leading to and the morning of the civil disobedience act, "For you to do this is an act of violence against me, and if you love me and are sorry that this hurts me, you won't do it," I clearly had an important choice to make. On one level, the choice was between her heart and my beliefs and values; on another level (and a more sophisticated one, I think), the choice was between being actively nonviolent to the world by doing something or being passively violent by doing nothing. My deepest complaint had been that guilt and shame are used as tools of coercion, and here this story was playing itself out in my relationship with my mother. For me there was no choice but to speak anyway. I did what occurred to me as the only possibility, but not without a great deal of anxiety, anguish, and unsurety. I acted, and I stand by my choice to do so. I have no regrets.

As I've tried as gently as possible to deal with the disappointments, angers, and concerns of my family, I've become aware of something very important – namely, that the action taken in early April changed the world. This sounds terribly grandiose, but I mean something different than what the term might generally imply. When I set out, my intention was never to change a law or to bring the world to some new and clear understanding; rather, it was my intention to make people have to talk about intolerance. Not only are the members of my family seeking new avenues of coming to terms with my sexual identity – reading books, learning about other people's experiences through the Internet, and talking with each other and their friends – but they're passionately engaging

with me about our beliefs and struggles. Though my family would still much prefer I not rock the boat, the boat has been rocked, and we've broken a silence that has allowed intolerance to maintain its power as an undercurrent, quiet and subtle. Social change doesn't take place in the bureaucracy or on the streetcorners; social change takes place in our hearts and in the relationships that we have with other people.

Like many others, I have chosen to act, and the world is a better place for it. The world is changing – bending in the direction of tolerance, equality, understanding, and acceptance – and it has been my privilege, my calling, and my choice to play some small role in bringing that change about.