

I feel a profound and continuing compulsion to *make*. I find the process of making inherently liberating: in the face of crisis, injustice, and confusion, the act of creation shines, a beacon of solution. The independent maker comes from a place free of the constraints of the present.

Starting around age three, my bedroom began overflowing with creative projects of all kinds. In elementary school, knitting anchored itself in my life, the beginning of a fixation with fibers, patterns, designs. These three-dimensional, whimsical sculptures in yarn laid the groundwork for future work in design. Knitting failed to survive public middle school's notions of masculinity, but a new obsession brewed regardless. I am a designer and software developer now—I spend hundreds, nearing thousands, of hours a year focused on writing code, designing websites and creating apps. My early work with my hands and fiber quietly, but directly, transformed itself into working with code to spin the webs of digital experiences. After the Orlando shooting, I made an app to empower voters to easily visualize their Congresspersons' funding from the NRA; following the 2016 election, I designed a viral website enabling anyone to call their Representative in one tap.

Making is not merely a mode I choose for my life; I see making as the vital next step for my generation. In the face of oncoming catastrophe, our only way out is through building creative solutions, yet as a whole, my generation lacks a sense of agency. If our problems are solvable, the solutions revolution can only begin by consistently lowering the barrier to entry. We need millions of young, imaginative minds innovating on our most significant challenges, so I'm currently dedicating myself to help. For example, my high school teaches an appallingly minimal sex ed curriculum, so I designed an inclusive, comprehensive introductory zine with my local Planned Parenthood organizer. Last year, after we moved into a new school building, the complete lack of gender-neutral bathrooms alarmed especially the gender non-conforming among us. My principal refused to budge, so turning to guerrilla action, we packed the school board

with the largest number of students in a decade, and I led the charge with a series of televised speeches, finally resulting in the opening of more inclusive facilities for everyone.

In retrospect, I see coding as what first brought true agency to me personally. Due to inadequate computer science curricula and inclusion initiatives, the majority of my classmates have yet to experience coding, and my school distinctly lacks a culture of creation. Coding epitomizes creation in this century: now drastically more accessible, exponentially more powerful, tragically underutilized. In response, I founded a high school “Hack Club” and started Pennsylvania’s first community-organized hackathon to teach high schoolers coding. I mentor new developers and contribute to open source on the side. Collectively, we must instill a sense of agency, painting our societal failures as directly addressable through continuing creativity.

Whether knitting or JavaScript, the making is only half the story; the maker holds the remainder. The things I create exist as tangible manifestations of my identities: queer, non-binary, and young in America. Enabled and emboldened by these identities, I find making deeply empowering. Coming out as non-binary, declaring a lack of conformity to traditional expectations, I arrived not disenfranchised but armed with a toolbox of abilities to create significant change. In the same week, I can craft JavaScript, strut a runway, argue before my school board, attend a hackathon, and train for my second-degree black belt in taekwondo. These might seem like dramatically different avenues, but together, they point toward the building of the rich and inclusive future I dream of inhabiting. The deepening of our agency begins with setting aside outdated constructions, asserting new identities, and forging onward. A culture of independent creators, representing all backgrounds and working in concert, is the world we always needed, and the one I hope to shape.