



The author wearing a
Queer Nation jacket.
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QUEER ACTIVIST FASHION

We were to have a new family photo, paid for and orchestrated by my brother as an anniversary gift to my parents. My siblings and I were all now more or less adult and this was to be the first family picture to include our various spouses and offspring, and thus the first family photo since we lived altogether as one family. But it almost didn't happen, and by day's end, my siblings were furious at me, my parents said this time I had gone too far, and even the very patient photographer's wan smile grew thin and tight. What happened, they said – indeed, they still say – was my fault. But in trying to explain myself, I hope as well to explain the power of activist drag, and why I held our family photo hostage to it.

Weeks before the shoot, we received explicit instructions as to what to wear. Jackets were mandatory for the males, with a preference for suits. But I was having none of it. In the stilted lexicon of the formal family photograph, this preference for formal wear serves to telegraph many things: class status (or aspiration), gender, adherence to social norms and, not least, an untroubled evocation of that social code, visible only in its breach, mark-