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about and upfront than I could have been," she says. "When I was young, there was a lot of abuse toward me around the gender issue."

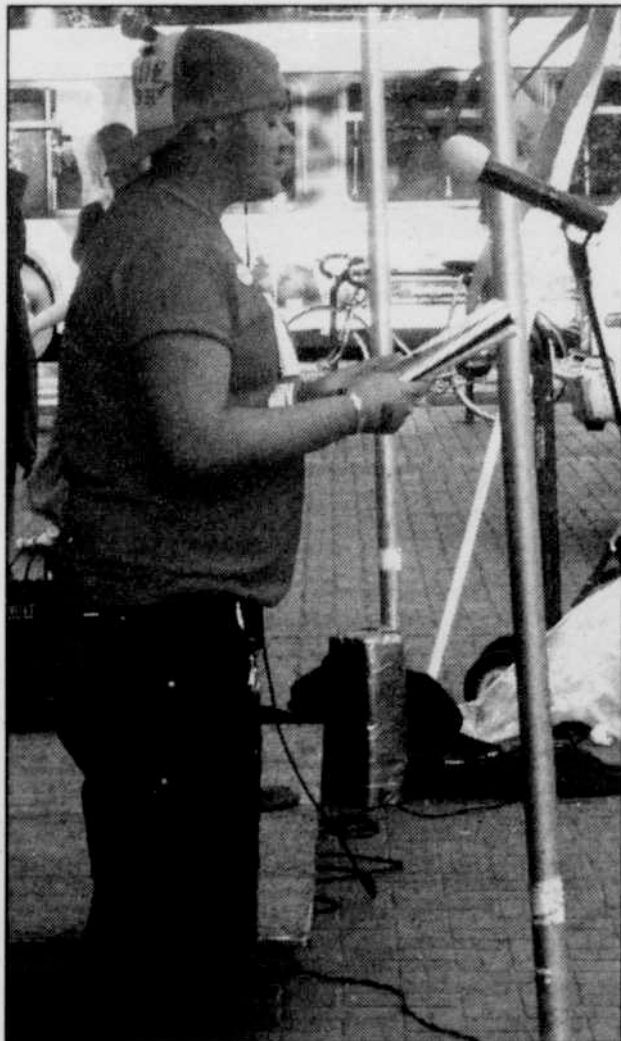
Nelson, who facilitates the Trans Youth Group at the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center, concurs. "A lot of young people are getting more comfortable coming out earlier," she says.

Schaefer notes: "Because older people fought hard for the gains that have been made, younger people have a different history. Sometimes for older folks, my being pre-op MTF and lesbian is anathema to them. Younger people just seem to accept me for what I am."

### A new wave of gender pioneers

Adriyn Hayes, an 18-year-old self-described "queer femme in training," is an example of such a young and open person. She became involved with TAG through her more extensive involvement in BRO's Youth Advisory Council. Her experience there has taught her a great deal about gender.

"YAC is gender creative," says Hayes. "It is the first place I've been where everyone indicates their preferred pronoun when they intro-



Click Patterdale reads from one of his zines at the Night of Noise

duce themselves. That is important because it means that a person can't look at another person and know which identity they have. Most times you just can't tell."

While YAC is a group formed more around age than gender, Hayes says the fact that YAC is gender aware changes the group.

"They don't just accept body as identity," she says. "Being a part of a group with gender newness allowed me to explore my own gender and learn to relate to gender in general. Now the idea of pinning people into two genders seems silly to me, but before, it made sense."

Hayes explored questions about her own gender and was a boy for a year while in high school. (The pronouns used here reflect her current identification.) She changed her appearance to more closely reflect her internal feelings, called herself by a different name and asked those around her to address her with male pronouns. She says she experienced a great deal of resistance to her requests for recognition, primarily in refusals to use the pronouns and name she had chosen for herself.

As a result of her change in gender presentation, Hayes endured a lot of direct harassment.

"People felt justified in walking right up to me asking if I was a boy or a girl," she says. "Sometimes they called me 'it.'"

This type of dehumanization is just one example of the ridicule individuals can face when their perceived sex is read as being at odds with their gender presentation. Once when Hayes was living as a boy, she endured two opposite gender-specific homophobic slurs against her during the same bus ride. First, one rider called her a dyke. After stepping off the bus and embracing a male friend, she heard a different passenger shout, "Fags!" out the window.

While some might find it difficult to relate to Hayes' desire to play out and experiment with different gender identities, it feels like natural exploration to her.

"The only sacrifice I've made to express my gender is my public safety," she asserts. "But I have never had to sacrifice anything internally."

"For me, 'genderqueer' means not taking gender for granted," Hayes continues. "It is being consciously gendered rather than accepting that the doctor spanked me and said, 'It's a girl!' I can play at this role and then take it off and do something different. Gender should be fun. If it is not fun for you, you should look into that."

Hayes feels that changing identity puts her at the margins of the queer community. "I feel included right now because, visibly, I look like a girl is 'supposed' to look," she says.

However, she says she feels excluded



Adriyn Hayes welcomes a friend to sit with her at the Night of Noise, a queer youth event

because of her age. Also, she says, not all queers "know how to respect pronouns or how to respect people who date many sexes and genders."

As a young person exploring gender, and as a person who believes gender education is a vital part of building queer community, Hayes thinks conversation is the best way to start learning.

"Everyone needs to chill with the language so we can talk to one another," she says. "Take a breath and focus on the respect. If we could get the words 'fluid' and 'spectrum' into everyone's gender vocabulary, I think we might actually solve the problem of exclusion."

Click Patterdale, another young participant in TAG, identifies as "trans and genderqueer, with queer sexuality."

"I pass as male about 80 percent of the time, I think," says Patterdale. "I'm not sure what people think of me."

Like nationally known transgender pioneer Kate Bornstein, Patterdale rejects the common personal pronouns of "he" and "she" due to their inherent gender and sex specificity. Patterdale prefers the alternative gender-neutral pronouns "ze" and "hir" (pronounced "here").

Requests for the use of gender-neutral pronouns are becoming more common among trans folks who don't feel they fit into categories of "he" or "she." Patterdale has found that gender-neutral language does not come naturally to many people.

"I often ask that people use gender-neutral pronouns for me, but it doesn't usually happen," says Patterdale. "Outside the bubble of SMYRC, most people have difficulty with it. Even in the queer community."

Patterdale was born female-bodied and is receiving testosterone hormone therapy but does not identify as a female-to-male transsexual.

"I don't believe that I am either male or female," says Patterdale. "It is not that black

and white for me. I am not changing from one specific thing to another. I am not having surgery."

Instead, Patterdale says ze feels "more at home in my body this way, even though that ambiguity confuses people. Outwardly, people don't understand that decision because most people would not be happy living the way I do."

Practically speaking, this means continuing to take testosterone, which Patterdale says "puts me in a more fluid place, presentation-wise." But ze is not ruling out future changes, including ending hir hormone treatment.

"I have no plans to stop," says Patterdale, "but that's not saying that there may not come a day when it doesn't feel right anymore. I am open to that."

Patterdale's presentation of genderqueer is representative of a growing movement among young people to expose what they see as the absurdities of the gender binary by consciously choosing a nonclassifiable gender presentation.

"The reason I like to create confusion is to make people aware," says Patterdale. "I don't want to become invisible by passing as one thing or another. I am definitely most comfortable being in a visible middle ground."

The confusion that Patterdale's presentation sometimes causes is not confined to straight folks.

"I know older dykes who see trans as moving away from butch identity," says Patterdale. "That is where a lot of confusion lies for female-bodied people—that line dividing butch dykes from transies."

Friction around Patterdale's choices comes from within the genderqueer community, as well.

"Sometimes my trans friends who do want to pass are frustrated because by purposefully not passing I draw attention to them," says Patterdale. "Some people are concerned that the trans aspect of my identity devalues what they are doing with their gender."

Patterdale has received the criticism that by living in a state of ambiguity ze undermines the legitimacy of transsexual transition. Ze has come under fire for deciding to take testosterone without also intending to have chest revision surgery.

"It is important for people to realize that identifying as genderqueer is not necessarily a temporary position on its way to transition but can be its own permanent identity," says Patterdale.

Though sometimes difficult, these are just the types of conversations and interactions that Patterdale values. Ze concurs with Schaefer, who says: "We have to talk to people, show them that human face. That is what helps to change culture." ■

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