

Being transgender in high school

One senior's personal story

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For everyone else auditioning for the school play in the auditorium, it was probably a phrase that they didn't have to think twice about.

"Boys line up stage left; girls line up stage right," or something similar. I don't remember exactly. What I do remember, however, was the dread I had twisting like a knife in my gut as I awkwardly fumbled towards the stage.

If I lined up with the girls, I would betray myself. Sure, it was the safe option, but I've never felt comfortable being viewed as a girl, even if external forces assigned me as such. Not only that, but I had struggled for so long with self-acceptance, so why sell myself short now? I already played the role of a girl in real life, and I was fed up with being something I was not.

I lined up with the boys. I tried to project an aura of confidence despite my shaking legs. We were lined up shortest to tallest, and, bless my Asian genes, I was on the short end.

I glanced nervously off the stage. I was out to a few friends and one teacher, but there were so many people there who knew me as a girl. *What would they think?* I thought about what might happen if my parents found out. *Oh, God. What would they think?*

My anxious thoughts were soon interrupted.

"Excuse me."
I winced.
"Are you a freshman?" the guy next to me asked.

Phev.
Joke's on him, I was a junior, aged 17. I told him this, trying to keep my voice low. He then explained that he wanted to know if he was the only freshman trying out. The situation made sense. After all, looking young for your age is part of the package when you're a trans guy.

That ended up being the only hitch that happened that evening. At one point, we had to get into groups, be assigned characters, and perform snippets of the play on stage. Ironically, as I was playing these other characters I felt that I was truly able to be myself, even more so than how I often felt for most of my life.

Even though I was later forced to resign from the play for academic reasons, I still hold onto the events of that evening as a personal victory. Even though it was a relatively small challenge, it was a step I took towards being myself after years of trying to be something different.

I started questioning my gender identity when I was 12. I came across a YouTube video in which the speaker came out as a transgender male, and though I didn't

realize right away that I was also trans, it got the gears going in my head. It wasn't like I pointed at the video and said, "I want to be just like that." It wasn't like I decided to be "special." It was more like I was finally given the vocabulary to explain what I've already experienced. Soon I started wearing baggy t-shirts and cargo pants, and I got my first short haircut.

What started as me innocently dipping my toes in the water ended up turning into my biggest sources of guilt.

Soon after my parents found out that I liked girls, I was confronted by some of my family members about my "troubling"

behavior. I was even told by someone I trusted that the reason I felt so depressed was that God was

punishing me for my actions. I was already fragile from having a hard time at school, but even home started to feel unwelcoming.

Things got better my freshman year. I felt somewhat content identifying as a "lesbian" at school, but some things were off. I wore a dress to homecoming. My mom took me bra shopping. At one point I was someone's "girlfriend."

The thing is, and this is not a trans-exclusive issue, but when you pretend to be something you're not, it seriously messes with your head.

"I started questioning my gender identity when I was 12...Now, as a senior, I'm the most confident I have been in my entire life."

Toward the middle of my sophomore year, I started coming out to a few friends and going by a different name and male pronouns. It started through text and then through hushed conversations. This was difficult for me to talk about. However, coming out to friends and acquaintances progressively got easier. One of my friends went from being openly weirded out by Caitlyn Jenner to being 100 percent supportive of me and other trans people.

School was still difficult. I still felt stressed from my strained relationship with my family. There were days where I couldn't stand my higher-pitched voice and my rounder face and my chest. There were times I felt alienated in my mind because not everyone was on board with my name and pronouns, and there were a few times where people were just flat-out cruel. But at least I had my friends.

Now, as a senior, I'm the most confident I have been in my entire life. I still have my bad days, but I'm living more authentically, so it's worth it. High school has been difficult for me, but it was also where I met some of the kindest and most genuine people. Without these friends and teachers, I might still be the shy, angry, withdrawn kid that I was not so long ago.

My parents are coming around, too. They think that I'm just some really hardcore lesbian, but at least they accept that I'm different. Being raised as a girl, I've always felt like I was playing a poorly-assigned role, but now I have the guts to live as myself.