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SpiderBaby visits Duluth

By [David Beard](#) on Oct 6, 2014 at 11:59 a.m.

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Terrance "SpiderBaby" Griep

As many Americans watch a single wrestling match on a single night as will watch a year's worth of performances of "Hamlet." And in the same way that Hamlet can teach us what it means to be human, so can wrestling.

Having spent the last two days with pro wrestler and author Terrance Griep, I feel like I understand the complexities of identity inside and outside the wrestling ring a little better. Griep recently visited students at Lake Superior College and University of Minnesota Duluth to talk about his work on the page and in the ring. He helped me see the complexities of performing one's identity every day.

Griep is comic book writer known for contributions to Superman, Batman, Green Lantern and Scooby-Doo. He is also a pro-wrestler who is openly gay while professionally active. Every other week, he steps onto the stage in the most popular form of American theater and places stereotypes of gay men in a submission hold.



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I thought that his story would be one of hostile wrestlers, using extra violent moves to hurt him in the ring because he is gay. Never happened. Once or twice an opponent complained that a poorly wrestled match was "so gay," but that quickly stopped. The other athletes respected what Griep brought to the ring.

I thought his story would be one of rowdy audience members throwing things at him or chanting hurtful things because he is gay. That has happened, but it's rare. Griep's wrestling alter-ego, the "SpiderBaby," makes it clear: "It's OK to boo me for what I do, but it's not OK to boo me because of who I am. And, surprising me not at all, the fans got it." He found acceptance.

I thought that, in meeting Griep, I was meeting professional wrestling's Jackie Robinson, smashing the stereotypes held by white people. Robinson showed white players that he was their equal and showed white fans that their sport needed to open to the best players of all races.

But Griep had a different agenda. He was reaching out to his younger self, "someone who grew up loving professional wrestling and hating being gay," he told an audience of about 30 at the Zeitgeist Sept. 29. Griep was reaching out to what he called "ambivalent gay youth."

For Griep, coming out as a gay man and a professional wrestler wasn't about changing the minds of the beer-chugging homophobes in the audience. It was about affirming the young men in the audience who wanted to believe that they belong, too. In that sense, Griep is like Fox News anchor Dan Hanger, the first openly gay main television anchor in Duluth, taking a position that might inspire young people

Duluth needs more people brave enough this way. I'm grateful for the ones we have and grateful for ones like Terrance Griep who visit us.

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