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Transgender Issues

Transgender Inclusivity in GSAs

GSAs can be a powerful force in the fight against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender nonconformity, issues which are often at the root of homophobic harassment. However, many GSAs have not yet addressed gender/transgender issues because they do not know how to go about it. Here are some tips and suggested activities that can be used to help your GSA become more gender-inclusive, begin talking about gender and transgender issues, and make your school safer for transgender or gender-questioning students.

1. **When your GSA asks for gender on a form or a survey don't have people mark either male or female.** Leave a blank line and allow people to write it in.
2. **Don't separate your GSA into "boys" and "girls" for activities.**
3. **As a GSA, watch and discuss movies with gender nonconformist characters**, such as Boys Don't Cry, My life in Pink (Ma Vie en Rose), All About My Mother, Joan of Arc. Consider hosting a screening of one of these movies as an educational event at your school, or design a curriculum for teachers to use if they show one of these films in class.
4. **Bring in books and newspaper articles about people who are transgender.** Talk about them in your GSA.
5. **Research statistics about transgender-related harassment and use them in your outreach and publicity materials.**
6. **Be sure to include gender identity issues in your plans to implement AB 537** (The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act) at your school. Gender nonconformity is covered along with sexual orientation in this anti- discrimination law.
7. **Campaign to create a unisex bathroom at your school. Write a proposal to the principal and the staff.** Tell them you think that there should be one bathroom (that is not used very much, such as in the nurses office) which is open to anyone. Let them understand that you want a safe space where a student of any sex, gender, or gender identity can change for a sport or use the bathroom and feel safe.
8. **Design and lead a gender sensitivity training for students and/or teachers at your school.** Consider using the following activities to get folks talking about gender categories and gender-related expectations**:

    1. Give everyone a chance to chose pictures of people out of magazines or books. (ask them not to show anyone their picture.) Ask everyone to describe the person without referring to the persons "privates" or using pronouns that we associate with a specific gender. Have each person read aloud their description and then have everyone "guess" the gender. Here are a list of questions you can use for discussion when the "guessing" is done: Why did you associate some adjectives with men or women? Is something wrong with a person who's attributes are not considered normal for their gender? Why or why not? Can someone be both masculine and feminine, does that change their gender?
    2. Break everyone into small groups (or one on one if your group is small already) give each person a bag of mixed jelly beans or M's (anything will work as long as they are the same size and shape and that they do vary in color) Tell each group to divide their bag up into two categories, using any criteria they can think of. Give people as much time as they need. Here are some follow-up questions. How did you divide up the contents of the bag? Was it hard to think of criteria? Can some objects fit into both categories? If not can you think of an instance when an object could? Or where one couldn't fit into either group? Do you think some people don't fit into one particular gender category? Do you think if someone has the body of a "man" and acts like a "woman" (or vice-versa) that they should alter their body or dress/style to fit the gender that they act like? Why or why not?
9. **Get a copy of My Gender Workbook by Kate Bornstein for your club.** Look through the book for other activities to use both within your club and for outreach or education purposes.
10. **Always keep in mind that when you talk about gender not to make a huge issue out of it;** allow people to feel comfortable. If you sensationalize people who are transgender or questioning (and members of your GSA may be struggling with issues of gender identity) you may make them feel even more uncomfortable or confused. You want to create a safe place for your peers.

These activities were designed by GSA Network Youth Council Member Max Cohen. If you wish to republish them, please contact GSA Network.

Trans Youth Resources

Trans Youth Groups:

- Changeling, Wednesdays 7-9pm at LYRIC (123 Collingwood St., S.F.). More info: 415.703.6150 x22.
- TRANSmission, Thurs. 7-8:30pm at the Pacific Center (2712 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley). More info: 510.548.8283.
- Transgender & Questioning Youth Group, Wed. 6-8pm, The Youth Drop-in Center, 12800 Garden Grove Blvd, Suite F, Garden Grove. More info: (714) 590-3140
- Brandon's Corner, FTM youth support group, Fri., 6-7:30pm, Jeff Griffin Youth Center. 7051 Santa Monical Blvd, Los Angeles. Call 323-461-8163 to register.

Other groups to check out:

- FTM International, (mostly adults, youth welcome), 2nd Sunday of each month, 2-5pm, SF. More info: 415-553-5987.
- Transaction, (many young adults involved), see www.transactionsf.org [1] for more info.

Download the pdf version [2]

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