

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. Examples include Boys Don't Cry, My Life in Pink (Ma Vie en Rose), All About My Mother, Salmonberries, Just one of the Guys, Something Special, Priscilla Queen of the Desert. 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 & 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 nurse's 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**:

- 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 person's "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 whose attributes are not considered normal for their gender? Why or why not? Can someone be both masculine and feminine and does that change their gender?
- Break everyone into small groups (or one-on-one if your group is small already) and give each person a bag of mixed jelly beans or M&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.

Look on the back of this sheet for gender and sexual orientation terms and definitions!



For more information and resources for Gay-Straight Alliances, contact GSA Network:

Statewide Office: 1550 Bryant Street #800, San Francisco, CA 94103, ph: 415.552.4229, f: 415.552.4729

Central Valley Office: 928 N. Van Ness Ave. Fresno, CA 93728, ph: 559.268.2780, f: 559.268.2786

Southern California Office: 605 W. Olympic Blvd, Suite 610, Los Angeles, CA 90015, ph: 213.534.7162,

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Gender and Sexual Orientation Terms and Definitions

Androgynous: a term for a person who expresses or presents merged socially-defined masculine and feminine characteristics, or mainly neutral characteristics.

Bisexual: a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to men and women.

Crossdressing (CD): dressing as someone from a different gender category; may be done by people from all genders and sexual orientations. Crossdressers sometimes referred to as transvestites (TV).

Drag: crossdressing, especially in public or in a performance.

Feminine: concept of what is "naturally" or traditionally female in terms of appearance, behavior, and personality.

Gay: a person who identifies as a man who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to men.

Gender Binary System: a social system that requires everyone to be raised as a boy or girl (dependent on what sex you are assigned at birth), which in turn forms the basis for how you are educated, what jobs you can do (or are expected to do), how you are expected to behave, what you are expected to wear, what your gender and gender presentation should be, and who you should be attracted to/love/marry, etc.

Gender Characteristics: characteristics that are used by others to attribute gender to an individual, such as facial hair or vocal pitch.

Gender Expression/Gender Presentation: the way a person expresses his or her gender through gestures, movement, dress, and grooming.

Gender Identity: a person's understanding, definition, or experience of their own gender, regardless of biological sex.

Gender Nonconformity: not expressing gender or not having gender characteristics or gender identity that conform to the expectations of society and culture.

Genderqueer: a term which is used by some people who may or may not fit on the spectrum of trans, or be labeled as trans, but who identify their gender and sexual orientation to be outside of the gender binary system, or culturally prescribed gender roles.

Gender Role: culturally accepted and expected behavior associated with biological sex.

Intersex: refers to a series of medical conditions in which a child's genetic sex (chromosomes) and phenotypic sex (genital appearance) do not match, or are somehow different from the "standard" male or female. About one in 2,000 babies are born visibly intersexed, while some others are detected later. For more information, please visit <http://www.intersexinitiative.org>.

Lesbian: a person who identifies as a woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to women.

Masculine: concept of what is "naturally" or traditionally male in terms of appearance, behavior, and personality.

Pansexual: a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to folks of all genders.

Passing: crossdressing well enough to be seen as a member of a different sex/gender category.

Sex: one's biological assignment as male, female, or intersexed.

Transgender (TG): a term for designating those who transcend or transgress gender by not looking, acting, being, or identifying as traditionally male or female; can include crossdressers, transsexuals, intersex people, and other gender nonconformists.

Transsexual (TS): a person who feels that his or her gender identity does not match their biological sex ("I'm a woman in a man's body" etc.); a pre-op (preoperative) transsexual is a TS preparing to have sex reassignment surgery, and a post-op (postoperative) transsexual has already undergone sex reassignment, although not all transsexuals desire surgery; some transsexuals take hormones to make their bodies look more male or female.



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