



Draft Sample Opinion Editorial (Op Ed) for Placement by Students

## **It's time to End Violence and Discrimination Based on Gender Stereotypes**

By Student USA

It's been two years since I got out of high school, but I still remember what it was like. So many kids just did not "fit in." They were either too masculine or too feminine. They were too passive or too aggressive. Some liked books more than girls or sports more than boys.

In gym class, they were teased and harassed to the point of tears because they "threw like a girl" or acted too much "like a boy." Some of these kids were gay. Many weren't. A few were transgender. Most weren't. But they all had one thing in common: they faced ostracism and ridicule – or worse, violence and physical assault – simply because they failed to meet our classmates' expectations for what it meant to be a *real man* or a *proper woman*.

At my high school, no physical harm was inflicted on these kids though I am sure the invisible scars of years of taunting and name-calling took its toll. But in other places around the country, failing to fit into rigid gender roles can get you seriously hurt – or killed. Take, for example, a 12 year old Russian American athlete, Aaron Vays, who was beaten to the point of hospitalization by bullies who warned him that only girls and sissies figure skate. The Vays family left Russia to pursue a better life – a freer life – for their son, and that's the all-American welcome he gets in Rockland County, NY.

Complaining that he was taunted by other students as "wimp" and a "bitch," Charles "Andy" Williams, at 17, fought back with a .22 caliber revolver, leaving two dead and 13 injured. Recent research by masculinities expert Michael Kimmel has shown that in 27 out of 28 recent school shootings, the assailant's need to reassert his sense of masculinity and identity was a prime motivator.

School shootings are, of course, extreme examples of the codes of school yard masculinity that are enforced in subtle and not-so-subtle ways every day in American classrooms, playgrounds and cafeterias. But even when the results are not as shocking and violent, the pain and memories can be deep and lasting. Imagine what it was like for the 2 Florida high school seniors from different schools who were excluded from their own yearbooks when they refused to wear the low-cut, traditionally feminine dress and pearls opting instead to wear the tuxedo.

It is examples like these – and countless others -- that have made me and hundreds of students at campuses across the county say "It's time, past time, to end violence and discrimination based on gender stereotypes." That is why [your school name] is joining a nationwide public education campaign, "Drop the Labels, Back to School!" sponsored by the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition's Gender YOUTH Network.



*Drop the Labels!* is a student-led, student-organized initiative to combat discrimination and bullying based on gender stereotypes on campuses and in the surrounding communities. \_\_\_ colleges in \_\_\_ states are leading the way alongside our \_\_\_ GenderYOUTH Chapters in \_\_\_ states and our numbers are growing. There are over 180 schools on a waiting list who want to start chapters and join the GenderYOUTH Network.

Here at [your school], [fill in details of your activities - examples] [do we support or not support the bill this year? If we don't we should take this out as an example?]we will be gathering support for an inclusive federal anti-bullying bill which would make schools accountable for initiating policies to prevent harassment and bullying and for providing appropriate training, and complaint procedures when policies are violated. We'll also be asking the Administration to add *gender identity and expression* to our school's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/non-discrimination policy.

*Gender expression* refers to an individual's manifestation of masculinity or femininity through clothing, behavior, and grooming. *Gender identity* refers to an individual's inner sense of being either male or female, other or in between. Over two dozen colleges and universities have adopted such policies, and they apply to every worker, male or female, gay or straight, queer or not. We'll also be going into the [name of city] high schools to talk with high school teachers, students and parents about preventing gender-based bullying and harassment in the classroom, so that students can focus on learning while they are at school.

I invite you to join us in these efforts as a supporter. We believe that everyone – and by that we mean *everyone*, male, female, of color, gay, straight, transgender, young or old – has the right to learn and grow in a safe environment, regardless of whether they fit someone else's ideals for masculinity or femininity. It's time to drop the labels. And to let each of us be who we are, all the time, without fear, shame or omission.