

My name is Andi Tisdell and I am an eighth grade student at Peoples Academy Middle Level. In the past year my school has made a lot of progress in LGBTQ+ representation and opportunities. Working together, as students and administrators, we have made a GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance), established more Gender Neutral bathrooms, formalized name-change procedure, and made a little bit of queer-inclusive education. In comparison to a lot of Vermont schools Peoples is pretty good. But just because things are good doesn't mean they can't be better. We have do our problems. This is a spoken word poem I wrote about my personal experiences.

Andi M. Tisdell
3-13-19

Just A Word

In most of America this word is simple

Gay:
noun

a person who is sexually attracted to people of their own sex.

In a middle school things get twisted

Gay:
Adjective

Bad, awful, smelly
Boring, annoying,
Freaky, weird
Dumb, slut

But it's just a word
Hearing your identity used like that couldn't 'possibly' hurt you mental health

It couldn't possibly make you feel bad
It couldn't possibly make you feel worthless
It couldn't possibly make you want to hurt yourself
It couldn't possibly make you want to kill yourself
Words could not possibly make anyone kill themselves

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than the straight youth

Sticks and stones break bones
Words break hearts
Breaks minds
Break souls

And now, for a real life quote from a real life middle school locker room

“Well he’s just a faggot so...”

By the time he is even to the end of the slur my heart is racing
And I can't stop thinking
“Is he talking about me?”
“What comes after the dot dot dot?”
...”So he has an excuse”?
...”So of course he sucks at sports”?
...”So no one will miss him”?
...”So it’s okay if we gut him and dump him in a river”?

But what’s all the fuss?
Why the overthinking?
Why the panicking?

It’s just a word

But words are important
Important to teachers
Important to future employers
Important to me

Since words are important to me, why don't I share my words?

My name is Andi

My gender is Genderqueer

My orientation is Pansexual

My pronouns are They and Them

And right now, my emotions are anxious and angry

Because it's not just a word

These aren't just words

If your joke

Or tease

Or roast

Or insult

Makes someone try to kill themselves

Then it is not

“Just a Word”