

Gay in Da Hood



Opening Icebreaker

Under Pressure drawing (10 min)

Give out blank sheets of paper and markers to all participants. Tell them that they are going to participate in a “free draw.” A free draw requires that they draw something on their paper for three minutes. They must draw continuously, and stop when the time is up.

Tell participants to think of a time when they were teased because of something that was central to who they were (such as race, gender, religion, sexual

orientation, or even their personal tastes in clothing or music), how they felt, and how they responded in that situation. Next, let them know that they will have three minutes to draw a picture representing their situation. The drawings can be realistic or abstract.

Note: If a participant says that they cannot think of a scenario on their own, ask them to think of a scenario that they might have witnessed with a friend, in school, or in their neighborhood.

After three minutes are up, ask for a few volunteers to share their drawings. *[If no one wants to share their drawings, that's OK—just move on to the break it down questions.]*

Story & Workshop Summary

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: chart paper, markers, pens, crayons, blank paper

Theme: Staying true to yourself is not always easy, especially when people don't accept who you are.

Plot: Jeremiyah has known he's gay since an early age, and is constantly teased and harassed in his inner-city neighborhood. Yet he never attempts to hide or deny his sexuality. He finds ways to get through the bullying without losing his spirit.

Youth Development Goals:

- Participants will understand that it's possible, but difficult, to stay true to yourself even in the face of overwhelming pressure.
- Participants will examine feelings associated with not being accepted for who you are.
- Participants will increase their range of responses to bullying.

Break It Down (5 min)

- What are some words that describe how you felt in this situation?
- How did you respond at the time? Did the way you responded help you feel better?
- Looking back, are you happy with the way you handled the situation? Would you change anything?



Read the Story and Talk About It (20 min)

Introduce the story: Tell participants they are going to read a story about a boy who is harrassed for being different, but finds a variety of ways to get through it.

Take turns reading the story: Pause from time to time when there is a passage that you think is ripe for discussion. Ask the suggested questions, or others that you think will be helpful to your group.

Note: This story contains some explicit language. These words were kept in the story to stay true to the author's tone and message. Tell participants that they can use the word "bleep" (or another agreed-on word) in the place of the expletive when reading.

Gay in Da Hood

By Jeremiyah Spears

1. **B**ecause I'm 6'6" and hefty, people often think I should be a ball player of some sort. But once you get to know me, you'll know I'm no ball player.

In my old neighborhood, guys would always call me out of my house to play basketball, knowing that was not what I liked to do. When I missed a shot they would ridicule me and call me a f-ggot.

It's true, I'm gay, and though I look like your ordinary clean-cut Polo boy, I act a little feminine. When I'm happy, I like to buy shoes. I also like to read romances and family-oriented books. My favorite book is *Mama*, by Terry McMillan. It's about a divorced black woman with five kids who's having problems being accepted into society.

Real Men

2. **Different From Day One**

In fact, I've been different my whole life. I first realized I was homosexual at an early age, because when I was around 5 or 6 years old, I would see boys and think, "How cute." Besides, I was labeled as different by many people. I never liked to play ball or get sweaty. My favorite toy was Christmastime Barbie. When the boys used to ruffhouz and try to do it to me, I'd tell them to leave me alone. I would never do any typical boy stuff, such as sports, play fighting, or rapping.

I could never understand why anyone would want to harass me for that. I used to think, "So what if I'm gay? So what if I'm different? Accept me or don't accept me at all, honey, because I'm just me." I couldn't understand why the boys wanted to bother

me and fight me when they didn't know a damn thing about me. But they did.

The boys in my neighborhood were rough-necked, ball-playing, weed-smoking boys who picked on people to prove their machismo to their friends. I think those boys did

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what they did because of their own insecurities, because they wanted to prove they were manly men.

3. **Halloween Humiliation**

There were about nine or 10 of them and they lived in or around my neighborhood. Wherever I went I always ran into them, and often they would torture me for being gay. One Halloween night, I went alone to catch the bus to go to a party. I was wearing a pair of dark jeans and a matching jacket and a black sweater with my initials on it. My mother had spent a lot for the outfit. She had spent \$132 on the jacket alone.

While I was walking toward the bus, I saw a group of boys on bikes passing by. I recognized some of the guys. The first thought

Q. Some people who are strongly anti-gay have later been revealed to be gay themselves, and were trying to hide or deny it. Do you think these boys are secretly insecure, or may even be trying to hide homosexual feelings of their own? Why or why not?

How Do We Define Ourselves?

I had was, “Oh no, they’re going to start trouble with me.” I kept walking.

All of a sudden a partially opened bottle of urine hit me and got all over me. Some straight guys think doing something like that to a gay guy is kind of creative. They all hurried away and I screamed and cried because of all the money my mom spent on the outfit.

Then I felt the same as always—puzzled as to why I had to be their victim. I thought these guys would never understand me. They wanted to change me. They wanted to make me someone I wasn’t.

4. **I Got Revenge**

For three weeks after Halloween, I had the incident on my mind. At first my brothers were trying to get me to let them beat the boys up. But I thought that would not make the situation better. It would probably just wild up the problem more.

Finally I decided that I’d show them I wouldn’t stand for it anymore and I began to fight—with my pen. I wrote them gruesome letters with fake blood (ketchup) smeared on to let them know I was going to get them back and that I’d get the last laugh. Ha!

Usually, when the guys harassed me, I would say, “F--- you,” and “Go straight to hell, because I’m going to be me and there will be no changes until I feel that my life needs a change.” And I would get revenge. I would make fun of them trying to talk to girls and getting turned down. Sometimes we’d end up fighting.

5. **Never Any Peace**

When we fought, often my brothers or my female friends would be there to help me—some of my female friends were known for beating guys down. And once I even whacked a guy with a plank. While I was fighting, I’d think blood and more blood, because of the traumatic experiences I’d been through. I wanted so much revenge on the boys who created trouble for me. Because of the fights, the cops were always at my house.

Q. What would you do in this situation? What do you think Jeremiyah should do?

Real Men

Even though it made me feel better for a short while to get revenge, I felt as if I was never going to succeed in having peace of mind. And after the fights were all over, I wouldn't feel much better. Often I felt as if I'd never belonged, and that no one would ever socialize with me because I was gay. I thought the world was so against me and that no one cared.

6. Props From Friends

Still, there were people around who helped me and supported me, like my brothers and my friends. Looking back, I can see how much of a difference they made, even when times were at their hardest.

When I was living in my old neighborhood, my best friend was Lauryne. Beauty was her name, and we would go to the movies, the mall, or just hang in the park and talk about everything, from boys and love to clothes, shoes, and jewelry.

Despite all the hassles I went through, the people who supported me made me feel that I didn't have to change myself for anyone.

Sometimes we would cut school for days at a time, but we always got good grades in everything we did except for physical education, in which we had to beg for good grades, because we never showed up.

Like a lot of my other girl friends, Lauryne didn't really care that I was gay. As a matter of fact, she praised me for

having the nerve to be able to come out at an early age to my parents and siblings and not really worry what they were going to think of me. She said things like, "You're brave," "You're courageous," and that she was lucky to have a friend like me.

It made me feel wonderful to know I had friends who honestly cared about me. It made me strong and gave me courage to be even more open about my sexuality, and to encourage other kids to come into the light and pay the price. It made me believe

Q. Do you think Jeremiyah is brave? Why or why not?

How Do We Define Ourselves?

there would always be people to support me.

7. **My Grandma Taught Me the Golden Rule**

Another person who really helped me survive everything was my grandma, who raised me. From my grandma I learned strength, courage, patience, love, compassion, and to treat all people the same. My grandma taught me to learn new things from people who try to reach out and teach you. She taught me the golden rule: Do unto others as you want others to do unto you.

My grandma was born in 1919. She grew up on a farm and was born in a time when blacks weren't accepted and women weren't allowed to vote. She saw so much—the Great Depression, both World Wars, prohibition, segregation, lynchings, the civil rights movement. She would tell me about the marches, about the violence, and how once when she was in Jackson, Mississippi, she saw two boys who'd been hung from a tree.

She told me, "My dear, you haven't seen the harshness life can give you."

Sometimes people who have lived through hard times grow closed and mean and bigoted against people who are different from them. But my grandma had a strong sense of herself, and that made her open-minded to the different things in life. She always said, "People must know themselves before they try to learn from another person," and that's exactly what she did.

My grandma had a strong sense of herself, and that made her open-minded.

Q. What does it mean to have a strong sense of yourself? Does Jeremiah?

8. **'Don't Let No One Turn You Around'**

As for my grandmother trying to change me, like so many other people in the world have seemed to want to, it never happened. Instead, she encouraged me to do what I thought was right and what would make me happy. My grandma often told me that she'd always love me no matter who I was.

Real Men

Three months after I came into foster care, when I was no longer living with my grandma because she was ill, I received a call from my aunt saying my grandma wanted to speak to me. When she got on the phone, she said, "I love you dear, and don't let no one turn you around." Then she hung up the phone because she had gotten short-winded. Shortly after that conversation, she died. I love her dearly and I miss her.

I now live in a group home in a different part of the city. As for the boys in my neighborhood, they no longer bother me, because I don't go around there very often. When I do think back on things, sometimes I can laugh, but other times I'm still angry that those nobodies had so much control over my life.

Still, I think I have come to be OK being myself every day. Despite all the hassles I went through, the people who supported me made me feel that I didn't have to change myself for anyone. I know that my life would only get harder trying to change for other people's satisfaction. I know that I just need to satisfy myself.

Jeremiyah was 17 when he wrote this story.

Q. Is Jeremiyah right—do you only need to satisfy yourself?



Explore the Ideas

Activity: It's a Different World group work, role play (15 min)

Break the group into four small groups. Explain that they are each going to create a role play based on the scenario you read. Tell them that, for the purposes of this role play, they are all living in a neighborhood where the majority of boys play golf. Other sports are considered lame, *especially* basketball.

Read the following scenario out loud:

A group of boys are walking down the street, headed to their daily golf game. A boy walks past them bouncing a basketball, which they find ridiculous. The leader of the group starts mimicking the ball player and making fun of him while the other guys laugh. However, the "diplomat" of the group, who also can't stand basketball, doesn't want to intimidate someone just because he likes to play ball.

Ask each group to develop a short skit of two minutes or less to address what happens next. Each skit must have the following characters:

- the ball player,
- the golf players who are bullying him, and
- one "diplomat" among the golfers who doesn't want to participate in the harassment.

In the skit, they must show how they think the ballplayer should react to the bullying, and how the diplomat can help to resolve or stop his friends from making fun of him.

Give the groups 5-10 minutes to prepare, then ask each group to act out their skits for the class. Tell the audience to pay close attention to the *positive* or *negative* choices each character makes.

Break It Down (5 min)

- Of all the ways each group came up with for the ball-playing boy to deal with being teased, which response was most effective? Why?

- What are the benefits of caving in to bullying or peer pressure? What are the costs? [If any of the groups had the ballplayer "give in," by pretending he doesn't really like basketball, use this as an example.]

- What are some ways to draw strength or get support when you're being pressured to change? [If students don't volunteer these answers, elicit things like: focusing on long-term goals; finding other people to be around who are supportive; etc.]

- Next, review the strategies the groups acted out for the "diplomat" who wanted to stop his friends from teasing the ballplayer. Did any groups find a way for the diplomat to be effective? What was it? Why did it work?

- What are the benefits of intervening when your friends are bullying someone? What are the costs? Is it worth it?

Closing Question (5 min)

Ask each participant to respond to this question:

Who's the better man, Jeremiyah or the boys who bullied him? Why?