

Why Have Gender Neutral Restrooms?

When you want to pee what role does your gender identity or expression play in finding a restroom? Most restrooms in public areas are gender-labeled as 'men' or 'women' which many use without really recognizing the privilege afforded to them that a restroom which easily matches their gender exists. For some the experience of finding a restroom isn't so easy. Transgender and gender non-conforming people often have a difficult time finding easy to access, well labeled, and safe restrooms where they won't face verbal or physical violence from users or people in 'authority'.

The fact is that everybody should have access to a safe restroom; it is a basic necessity and a right for anyone. Unfortunately, not only are local law/policies sometimes discriminatory just as big of an issue is public thoughts on who should use a restroom.

Hopefully you can see that WPC (although we have gone through some growing pains in trying to get it right) wants to provide gender neutral restrooms as an understanding of need & as a example of role modeling. Please consider further educating yourself on the need for gender neutral restrooms, how to be a transgender ally in other ways, and also USE THE RESTROOM...

~Ben R. Falter
U of MN Transgender Commission Co-Chair

Some FAQs...

to better understand the need for gender neutral restrooms.

Who would benefit from using a gender-neutral or unisex restroom?

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, gender-variant and queer people may find a unisex restroom safer and more comfortable to use than sex-segregated restrooms. Parent(s) with children of different gender and people with disabilities who have a personal care attendant (PCA) will find that unisex restrooms offer much more convenience and even security.

What makes it unsafe for transgender people to use a standard restroom?

A "standard" restroom is usually sex-segregated and is marked either "Men" or "Women". Transgender people or people who are not easily legible as male or female often experience intimidation, harassment or violence while using this facility. Such intimidation or harassment usually happens because transgender or queer people are perceived to be trespassing on other's sense of 'rightful' space and privacy. This can also and sometimes does lead to complaints to authorities or the police and the subsequent arrest of the transgender person.

Why do we need a separate restroom for transgender people?

We do not need separate restrooms for transgender people. We need restrooms that are safe for a number of various kinds of users regardless of how they identify or present their gender can access restrooms without fear of harassment or violence.

Will this be unsafe for women?

The gendered restroom system as it currently stands does not provide a barrier for those seeking harm to others. Thus, a unisex restroom would pose no greater threat to women. If anything, unisex restrooms that are single-user facilities or single/multi-stall restrooms that give users the option to lock the main door of the space, allows for greater privacy and safety for anyone using the restroom, not just women.

It is important to recognize that sometimes the perception of danger, by women, men, or anybody, is as real to them as actual danger and can make people feel uncomfortable in a restroom.

Won't turning gendered restrooms into unisex restrooms diminish privacy?

No. Many people, including but not limited to, persons with personal assistants, elderly, gay, lesbian, bisexual,, and persons with disabilities often desire to have a more private restroom experience for reasons such as fear/judgment. Many unisex restrooms are able to provide single use accommodations which allow for additional privacy.

What happens when transgender men/women enter a women/men's room currently?

Transgender and gender variant persons using gendered restrooms often experience verbal harassment, as well as physical violence, when entering spaces where they are perceived as not belonging. Such episodes often result in transgender and gender variant persons avoiding using public restrooms altogether, which causes enormous difficulties and barriers in their day-to-day lives. Additionally, not using the restroom when it is physically necessary to do so can cause mild to severe health problems. Unisex restrooms ensure that everyone has access to restrooms that are safe, comfortable spaces that enable people to live happy, healthy lives.

How to be an Ally...

- Show support & use gender neutral restrooms here at WPC. Tell others about the experience.
- When you don't see them in spaces/events... ASK!
- Start conversations on your campus, workplace, place of worship, etc about creating gender-neutral restrooms.
- Confront/Take action against harassment/violence in gendered spaces when you feel you are able to.
- Self-Educate around transgender topics outside of safer restrooms.

Helpful Definitions:

Gender Segregated Restroom-A restroom intended for and labeled/signed for people to identify as 'male' or 'female.'

Gender Neutral Restroom- A restroom which is open to persons of all genders; a restroom not signed/known to be for 'men' or 'women.' Some institutions like to use the phrase *Uni-Sex* for this style of facility.

Restroom – a wonderful term which when not tied to a specific gender allows for almost anyone to have the freedom to pee!

Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from the gender they were assigned at birth or from what is culturally validated. Trans people choose many words to describe themselves and/or their communities, including but not limited to: transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, Two Spirit, FTM (female-to-male), MTF (male-to-female), drag queen or king, cross dresser, gender non-conforming, gender variant, woman, and man.

Transphobia is the fear and hatred of or the discomfort with people who identify or may be perceived to be transgender, respectively. Transphobic reactions often lead to intolerance, bigotry, and violence against anyone not perceived to match gender norms. Transphobia is not homophobia, yet they do have a connection. Stereotypes of the lesbian and gay communities are often based on gender expressions and/or roles within a binary gender system in a monosexual (hetero, gay, lesbian) paradigm (i.e. gay men as effeminate, lesbians as masculine, etc). Since trans identified folks transgress a binary gender system, they may be more susceptible to homophobic actions

NOTE: Gender Neutral Restrooms are not only for transgender or gender-non-conforming people and having them is certainly not the only step you/organizations need to take to make an event/location trans-inclusive.

This information brought to you by the U of MN's Transgender Commission. Visit our site for more resources.
glbta.umn.edu/trans

Understanding... Gender Neutral Restrooms



THE WHITE PRIVILEGE CONFERENCE

