



WRITING

The Fight for Civil Rights in the Bathroom

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TYPE

Narrative
Persuasive

Can you imagine being picked on or verbally or physically abused in the bathroom? Can you imagine going to the opposite one because the law forced you to? This is a reality for many people in America.

Recently there has been a lot of talk about the transgender community. Last May, North Carolina passed a bill that requires people to use the bathroom that matches the sex on their birth certificate. South Carolina tried to pass similar legislation but failed.

In Los Angeles, a student told the Highland Park School District that they felt uncomfortable about using the bathroom. They would often “hold it” all day just to avoid going to the bathroom. Traditionally there are two bathrooms; boys and girls. In Highland Park, this was the case. But there is a growing transgender/bisexual/gender-neutral population. Many people now feel comfortable enough to come out. The student requested to have gender-neutral bathrooms or some other form of integration. The transgender community and its allies rushed to support the student, and on May 23rd, 2016, an expanded transgender rights policy for the district went up for a vote. The expanded policy was approved.

Last May, President Obama addressed the United States, saying that the Department of Education must allow students to use the bathroom and locker room of their choice, and must have some transgender bathrooms available. Schools are also required to change the gender on school records when asked by a parent or guardian. In North Carolina, people said that people might use the bathrooms as “homosexual hangouts” that pose a threat to gender-binary people, or people who identify as male or female.

Around when you get into your teens, you start to realize your identity. This is why middle schools and high schools around America now face a big issue: how are they going to make all genders feel comfortable doing their business?

Now some schools are trying to find solutions to help make transgender or gender-neutral people feel more comfortable. In SFUSD they have already started integrating. They have taken down the binary signs in some schools or are building completely new bathrooms in others. At my school, Aptos Middle School, transgender, queer, or questioning people and their families consult with staff to get permission to use staff single-stall

bathrooms.

There is a real danger for LGBTQ people in bathroom. Especially when you are young, you are still judging how the world perceives you, and this makes you vulnerable. “The safety of young people is determined by what bathroom they choose and where, and how the other people using the bathrooms will react to them,” Said Nicole Giannone, who works at Ali Forney Center, a place in New York where young LGBTQ people can be housed and supported when they are experiencing difficulties. “Because of where I work, I see and witness everyday what young transgender people go through when they are homeless. When you don’t have somewhere to live or that you can only access at night to sleep because it is a shelter, that means you are looking for a public bathroom often.”

Many people of the LGBTQ community also feel that the legislation in North Carolina and South Carolina is another form of oppression. Giannone, who is gender-neutral and prefers the pronoun they, believes that the government is proposing laws that invite the idea that transgender or gender-neutral people are just “faking it” or it’s just “dressing up.” “I think that it is outrageous that the government can make decisions about where people can use the bathroom,” they said. “If you step back and really think about what that means, it seems like there is possibly endless power to oppress people in so many different ways.”

Bathroom integration is an important step to end LGBTQ oppression. It’s funny that this small choice most of us have made every day has made such a big change.

“You know when you really have to pee and there is a line? How many times do we think, ‘Whatever, I am just going to go use the other bathroom because I am about to pee my pants,’” Giannone said. “When that happens, sometimes people are like, ‘What are you doing here?’ But mostly, people look out for each other and they’ll say ‘coast is clear’ or ‘no sweat, there is a stall with a door.’”

I think people should be more accepting. This is a small part of our lives. We need to start looking for change. This will be a long battle, and some say with such a small outcome. But for LGBTQ people, this is a big change. For binary people, only a small part of the bathroom experience will change to make a whole community of gender-nonconforming people feel comfortable. “As long as people are unwelcoming, transphobic, and defining gender identity by our sexual anatomy, we will have a long way to full integration,” Giannone said.