

Alternatives

Unfortunately, gender-neutral bathrooms can sometimes be unfeasible, due to resistance from community members or restrictive building codes.

Gendered bathrooms can benefit from clearly posted statements that welcome people into whichever bathroom they feel most comfortable in. These statements can also welcome caregivers and children who are accompanying a parent or guardian. These statements should set a clear expectation that harassment and gender policing are not permitted within the bathroom. Unfortunately, people with non-binary gender identities are still excluded by such a system.

Libraries without gender-neutral bathrooms can also compile a list of gender-neutral bathrooms in the area, and provide this information to patrons in a pamphlet or website.

Publicity

Once you have designated gender-neutral bathrooms, it is helpful to publicize that information. This can include usual library channels, such as emails, memos, press releases, library websites, social media, or campus newspapers.

It can also be valuable to announce your bathrooms outside traditional library channels. Inform local transgender or LGBTQ groups that your library includes gender-neutral bathrooms. You may also choose to add it to a directory of gender-neutral bathrooms, such as Refuge Restrooms (Widmer, 2014). Advertising your bathrooms in this way will help to convey that your library is committed to serving patrons of all gender identities.

Controversy

Many people in this society are not yet used to the idea of gender-neutral bathrooms outside the home. They may express concerns about the safety or discomfort within gender-neutral bathrooms.

It is important to address these concerns in a respectful, professional way. Many of these concerns stem from a lack of knowledge about transgender and gender-variant people, so it can be valuable to provide some education to the complainant. Challenge the assumption that transgender people are more dangerous or violent than cisgender people. Explain that transgender and gender-variant people can face discomfort, harassment, and even physical violence when entering gendered bathrooms. Make sure that the complainant knows that gender-neutral bathrooms are important in keeping transgender library patrons and staff safe.

Portland Community College provides an excellent list of rebuttals to common arguments against gender-neutral bathrooms. (Portland Community College, n.d.)

References

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Gender-neutral Bathrooms in Libraries

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Introduction

Gender-neutral bathrooms are bathrooms that any-body can use, regardless of their sex, gender, or perceived gender. Gender-neutral bathrooms are also sometimes referred to as “all gender bathrooms.”

These bathrooms can benefit several different groups of people:

- Transgender and gender non-conforming people
- Parents whose children are a different gender than they are
- People with caregivers or personal attendants who are a different gender than they are

Gender-neutral facilities are particularly beneficial for transgender and gender non-conforming people, who often experience harassment and even physical violence in gendered bathroom facilities.

Re-designating bathrooms

Providing gender-neutral bathrooms to library patrons and staff typically does not require complex facilities work. Often, it can be as simple as replacing a sign.

Single stall bathrooms

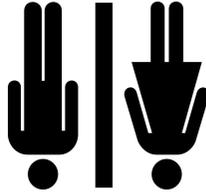
Re-designating single stall bathrooms rarely attracts much controversy. In fact, some jurisdictions require that single-stall bathrooms be open to people of all genders (*Safe bathrooms DC*, 2014). Once your library has decided to designate such a bathroom as gender-neutral, you merely need to replace its sign and educate your staff and volunteers about the change.

Multiple stall bathrooms

While the process for re-designating a multiple stall bathroom is no different than re-designating a single stall bathroom, it can be a more controversial change. Be prepared to provide education to staff, volunteers, and patrons. It can also be helpful to support this change with a policy that includes a rationale for gender-neutral bathrooms.

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Creating clear signage



Traditional “unisex” bathroom signs can confuse library patrons and exclude people with non-binary gender identities.

Library patrons may not be familiar with the concept of gender-neutral bathrooms, so you should make a special effort to create clear, meaningful signage. Patrons searching for bathrooms are often in a hurry, so signage should not be overly complex or verbose.

Rather than depicting stick-figure people, some signs instead depict the facilities available within a particular gender-neutral bathroom. For example, a sign might show a toilet, a diaper changing table, and a wheelchair to convey that the bathroom meets ADA requirements, rather than showing what genders are permitted within the bathroom.

Countless ideas for gender-neutral bathroom signs can be found on tumblr (Tumblr, n.d.) and elsewhere online, or by contacting other libraries who provide gender-neutral bathrooms.

Facilities changes

Building or renovating library spaces is an ideal time to add new gender-neutral facilities. However, check your local building codes first. Many jurisdictions' codes require a certain number of bathrooms to be gender-specific. A gender-neutral bathroom sign from the Unitarian Universalist Association (Unitarian Universalist Association, 2013).

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Creating policies

Institutions should make a clear commitment to providing gender-neutral bathrooms in their policies. These policies can be adopted at a library level, or across a whole library system, campus, school, government, or organization.

However, sometimes policy creation can be a long, involved process. If there is a clear need for gender-neutral bathrooms in your library, it may be more beneficial to first concentrate on re-designating a bathroom. A policy should include:

- A rationale for designating bathrooms as gender-neutral. It can be helpful to reference your institution's statement on inclusion, non-discrimination, or diversity here.
- A clear expectation of how many bathrooms will be designated as gender-neutral.
- A commitment to building gender-neutral bathrooms in future construction projects, if current numbers of gender-neutral bathrooms are insufficient.

Policy creation can provide opportunities for dialogue around the issue of gender-neutral bathrooms. Take advantage of these opportunities by providing well-facilitated sessions where patrons, staff, and volunteers can learn about the importance of providing safe bathroom access to people of all genders. If they have concerns, try to create constructive dialogue around their misgivings.

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