

Transparency

High school is hard enough running late to the same class everyday, petty gossip in the lunchroom and that Algebra quiz you forgot to study for, but for some just the thought of choosing which restroom to go in is the most difficult and insecure part of the day. The SIPA Staff reveals the untold stories of students who struggle with their own identities. What some of us take for granted everyday is a daily conflict in student's lives. We want to know where we should go from here.

Illuminating the issue of transgenders and the debate of shared facilities

Erin Slowey and Bhavani Srinivas
co-writing editors

For most people, when nature calls, their biggest challenge is finding the nearest bathroom, picking the cleanest stall, and unzipping their pants in time. But for transgender individuals, new anxiety enters the picture.

Which restroom should they choose?
Will they be harassed for who they are?
Is it even worth the fear and risk to go to the bathroom at all?
Why can't they feel safe like everyone else?
"Transgender" encompasses every gender identity that differs from traditional standards of masculine and feminine. It is the

umbrella term that catches all, those who have fully transitioned from one gender to another, gender-fluid individuals, and everything in between, regardless of sexual orientation.

Should transgender individuals be separated into specialized facilities? Should they be free to use the bathroom of their choice?

Transgender people are discriminated against, with tensions bubbling over with the issue of which restroom transgender individuals should use. Legislative changes have been called for across the country, in such states as North Carolina, South Dakota, Maine, Texas, and more.

Strong support systems can eliminate the severity of these issues on transgender lives. Wando High School sophomore Alessia Boland said her own experience with a transgender friend has shown her the need for compassion in handling the issues of sharing space.

"If they identify as the same gender [they were born with], if they identify as a female, you can't say, 'no you're not a female', can't say, 'you can't use this facility.' It's like segregation," Boland said. "People are still conflicted. People are still on the topic of segregation, like black and white people. People think that men and women have separate bathrooms. They should be in other separate areas. I don't think [be-

ing] transgender is different from that."

With a friend born a male that identifies as a female, Boland accompanies her friend for support to the women's restroom.

When people bar transgender individuals from using a certain restroom, they discriminating based on who the transgender person is. It's likening such attitudes to the segregation of races, Boland said.

The issue extends beyond the matter of public restrooms.

Who should transgender students room with in college dorms or on fields trips, like Southern Interscholastic Press Association?

If Lancaster County public information director and teacher David Knight, was handling a situation with a transgender student himself, he said that decisions would have to involve parents, as well as students, coming together and accommodating.

This outcome could translate to society as a whole, Knight, with open dialogue leading to inclusive progress.

"I would certainly talk to his or her parents before we came out and I would ask them [what they want to do] and then I would have to also talk to the parents of other students who would be potentially sharing the same room," Knight said. "You're going to be sleeping in the same bed, so I would have to make sure every parent involved

would be okay with that outcome."

Similar situations have already been handled at SIPA.

"When a transgender student expressed interest in SIPA Summer Camp several years ago," SIPA Executive Director Leslie Dennis said.

The student was accepted despite the fact that awareness of trans issues was not at the point it is now. The student's gender identification was not disclosed to the rest of the campgoers, according to Dennis.

"I was approached by his [the transgender student's] mother. She called and informed me of the situation and the staff was so welcoming to the student," Dennis said, "Nobody else at the summer knew, and he came every year. It was never a big deal because his journalism family was [there] for him."

However, Knight said many have serious concerns about sharing facilities with transgender individuals.

Some believe people who are not transgender will take advantage of the opportunity to sneak into bathrooms. Although Knight said he does not agree with such views, he said many already consider transgender people perverts, and they think it would not be much of a leap for a transgender person to descend into pedophilia. In some ways, laws reflect this fact, he said.

"A parent might argue, if it [sexual assault by transgender individual] happens once, if it happens to my child, then it happens too much," Knight said, "and you've seen them make laws over one thing [isolated occurrence]. Is there any scientific proof that people who are transgender are more likely to be pedophiles than somebody who isn't? I don't think there is."

There are highly publicized incidents that complicate the matter.

Several men have committed lewd acts in recent years, including Jason Pomares, who filmed extensively in a women's restroom, and Norwood Smith Burnes, who exposed himself to children at a Walmart.

Society must decide if it will make these exceptions to the rule its focus.

The issue of how to treat transgender individuals is also controversial in law enforcement.

Marriott employee Deandre Lamar said in his own experience on the Irmo, SC police force, he would have had a female officer pat down transgender individuals, just to be safe.

"Besides working at the Marriott I also worked at a jailhouse," Lamar said. "It was a very different environment. In one situation, we knew that a woman's driver's license displayed that she was male by birth but when she identifies as a female and claims that she has gotten all the procedures to be a female. It is scary because you don't know what to do."

At the Marriott, policies are accepting due to the diversity of the guests who stay, Bell Captain Keith Buchanan said. "Policies must

progress with the views of society as a whole," Buchanan said. "He predicts that, in the future, the public may lack gender designations of any kind."

"There really isn't any consequence [of being in the opposite sex facilities], we are not stealing anyone's birthright and but we would investigate and then if someone gave the explanation that they are transgender, we go with what they identify with," Buchanan said.

"But as a culture we are all moving in one direction. So it's [policy and societal views] like two legs of a person one will step and then the other will the step," he said. "The best way to eliminate the communication issues between the genders is to begin creating a uniform system open for each of the restrooms you would have more of a closeted stall but if you got rid of designated male-female facilities and instead have a universal facility."

Wando High School Yearbook Advisor Phillip Caston said deeply seated prejudices are at the crux of this conflict.

"We've always had these issues in society, somebody's different and they don't understand why they are different and why they are the way they are," Caston said. "You can usually cure those problems. So I think it's that human nature of you're not like me so I don't like you."

Concerns abound for those on both sides of this issue. Boland said a major problem with how transgender rights are handled is that people avoid the conversation and allow others to persist in ignoring the struggles of transgender people.

Although she said she does not think society will progress to the point that immediately labelling people more precisely will become the norm, Boland said she encourages people to have open discussions with transgender individuals to make sure they always feel safe.

"I feel like you should ask what people want to be or how they want to be treated and even if it is like an awkward thing to ask," Boland said, "in the long run would you want to be calling them something that they are offended with and then find out about. I feel like it shouldn't be them having to tell you of what's wrong with them based off human interaction. It needs to be something that we work for and not something that just happens."

SIPA Vice President and Clarke Central High School senior Kevin Mobely said he thinks that the organization he represents should work to be accepting to transgender individuals. He said he is a Christian, and as such, Mobely said he has a responsibility to love others.

"The Bible does address those things [transgender attitudes, like homosexuality]," Mobely said, "people are looking at that and ignoring the biggest part of the bible, which is loving other people and accepting them. I think that that's hypocritical. I see no problems with somebody identify with being transgender and it has no affect on me and if anything it has an effect on them and how they want to live their lives. So I think we should definitely lean towards the side of acceptance and how other people feel."

Dennis said the current generation of students has grown to accept diversity more than their parents. Their example of empathy and kindness should guide the progress that is needed, she said.

"I find that students are a lot more comfortable than adults give them credit for," Dennis said. "Often when there is a hesitation, it's on the parental part or the teacher's part just to be wary of the situations that may arise or may make people uncomfortable but I feel like students are often more accepting of their peers than them [adults]."

It is clear that some change must be enacted Knight said, but all voices must be considered and accepted. Knight said he believes a more accepting world is in sight within his students' lifetime.

"I'm hopeful they'll settle at a place that's good for everybody."

“I feel like students are often more accepting of their peers than them [adults]”
Leslie Dennis
SIPA Executive Director

Through the years of the lgbt community and the incredible mark they have already made in the past century.

The physician Harry Benjamin published "The Transsexual Phenomenon," that discussed how transgender people could transition medically.

1962

First International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy

1992

Stu Rasmussen was elected mayor of Silverton, Ore., becoming the first openly transgender mayor in America.

2008

Legalization of same-sex marriage in all 50 states.

2016

1952

Christine Jorgensen Becomes First American to Have a Sex Change

1969

Renée Richards, a transgender woman who played professional tennis, was eligible to play at the United States Open as a woman after a Supreme Court ruling.

1993

Minnesota is the first state to extend protection against transgender discrimination.

2009

President Obama nominated the first openly transgender federal appointees. Dylan Orr began as an attorney at the Department of Labor

Into the Spotlight

The real costs of being transgender come at the expense of their wallets, jobs and emotional security.

700,000 estimated people identify as transgender in the United States

\$15,500 is the average cost of gender reassignment surgery

Can be up to \$100,000

41% of transgender people have claimed to making an attempted suicide

19% of transgender people have experienced violence or abuse from a family member

18 states have clear laws protecting those claimed as transgender

26% people have lost their job due to their identity

78% people felt more comfortable at work once they transitioned
compiled from endtransdiscrimination.org

#illgowithyou

This movement was created to give transgender people, and anybody else who has an unsafe surrounding, a buddy to go to the bathroom with. You can identify them with a blue and pink button on their body and they will accompany you to the bathroom no questions asked.

Trans Lifeline: 1 (877) 565-8860