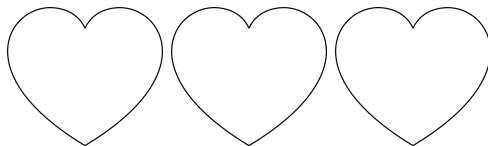




2023-24 Survey of Valley Library Gender-Inclusive Multi-User Restrooms

*On the Intersections of
Social Structure, Personal Identity, and Collective Healing*



Collected, analyzed, written, and reported by
Zane Yinger, ASOSU Queer Student Advocacy Coordinator

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INTRODUCTION

Before 2020 the restrooms of the OSU Valley Library were designated as either Mens' or Women's. Since the pandemic, however, these spaces have been transitioned to be All User facilities. During the Fall of 2023, I set out to collect student opinions on these desegregated restrooms.

As a 23-year-old non-binary person using they/them pronouns, I have a lot of difficulty navigating the world. From airport security to intramural athletics, my body is not supported by existing social structures. In fact, my body is often perceived as a threat by these systems. I have a personal interest and passion for creating resources that support diverse identities. This project is a result of my efforts to move toward inclusive infrastructure.

The following document is an account of this investigation. The information I've gathered through survey and conversation will be presented below alongside personal narrative. I believe that communication through numbers alone, free from story and responsibility, leads to extractive, abusive, and harmful action. Our world is more than a statistic.

Similarly, I do not believe in removing our personhood from our work. Humans are complicated. Our stories bleed into everything we do. Pretending that our products are devoid of story, and that our science is untouched by personal experience, perpetuates violence against humans, non-humans, and the earth. I will not cut myself up any longer.

We exist in context. Not a vacuum.

This is a step towards embodiment.

A RESTROOM STORY

The summer night air is warm and flirtatious. My feet clatter on the pavement in stride with my peers. I'm in a foreign city, looking around at all the signs and tall buildings. One of our group is a local; we follow them like ducklings after their mother.

The bar is full of fun shapes and colors. We find a cozy booth and chat over drinks. Someone suggests celebratory shots. We have a full day of activity tomorrow, but one drink can't hurt. Right? The tequila flows fast and soon enough we're dancing fanatically in a loud and crowded club down the street.

I peel off from our circle; I need to pee. I walk down the sticky hallway, the music fading behind me. I approach the two doors and pause aside the trail of women lining the wall.

I'm faced with the unrelenting question: which one?

Do I choose the Men's room and risk harassment and confusion? I know the look all too well when a man walks in and immediately turns around thinking he's misread the signage. He might return, sometimes not, but his eyes will stay at the floor, too uncomfortable to look at me. My long hair and colorful clothes don't belong here.

Or do I choose the Women's room and feel like an invader? I'll keep my head down while I wash my hands so no one can see my stubble. A woman might watch me smooth my shirt, and even compliment my outfit. I'll respond with my too-deep voice, and she'll smile back. She is too polite to show her discomfort. My body doesn't belong here.

I'm pulled back into the red glow of the hall as a group brushes past me. I'm drunk, as is every other person here. I realize it doesn't matter so I make the utilitarian choice: Men's room. As I head for the door a hand grabs at mine. It's attached to a stylish and smiling girl. "Where do you think you're going?" she says. The rest of the line watches and starts chirping in too. It's a chorus of "you're too pretty for the Men's room," and "don't go that way, it's boring," or "come with us, it's more fun." I protest and say I really have to urinate, but they refuse and shout "oh shut up and hold your piss like the rest of us! It's not about going to the bathroom, it's about being one of the girls!"

I let them lead me inside and we have to squeeze in wherever we can in the small room. Every surface is covered in writing, doodles, and stickers. I admire the modern cave paintings, laughing to myself at the messages: "He's just a stupid boy," "You are powerful," "You go girl!" I have an easy vantage of the art as I stand well above the others in the cramped room. A roll of toilet paper interrupts my viewing. As it turns out, the stalls are lacking paper, so a single roll is being passed back and forth. I help facilitate the crucial transfer over the stall walls with my long-reaching arms.

Those of us waiting for an open toilet begin to cluster in a social rotation. The girls hang loosely on each other with smiles on their faces, grins hanging just as loose. It's easy for their intoxicated hearts to celebrate each other. I think we must be in a committed 5-way marriage given all the vows and I-love-you's just exchanged.

The room spins and soon I'm squatting on the dirty toilet and letting my bladder breathe. The momentary space is enjoyable. I come out, handing off the roll to the next in line, and I'm back

in the arms of my lovers. I'm regaled again with kindness. I wash my hands and look in the scratched glass of the mirror while being affirmed from all directions! They tell me I am beautiful. They tell me I belong here. And I trust them.

I think, "This is community."

MY DREAM

My dream for the world is that all bodies are held as beautiful, complete, and valuable. A dream in which we treat the body as sacred. Because none of us would be here without the offerings of our bodies. They have been cared for and passed down through generations to us. These bodies are the gifts of our ancestors. And such generosity is to be met with honor and gratitude. Our bodies are deserving of kindness, safety, respect, nourishment, and love.

Restrooms exist for the expression of our bodies. We use them to relieve and refresh ourselves. They provide physical and emotional services in daily life. How we design a restroom is directly related to how we design relationships to our bodies.

So how do we bring such clarity into the world? How do we promote embodiment of the physical and emotional being? How do we meet people where they're at and give them the tools they need to be in relationship with their bodies?

I've come to understand that culture shapes concrete and concrete shapes culture. Our systems, laws, buildings, and infrastructures inform our cultural and social behavior. If we want to see cultural changes in the world, we must first change our foundations. But of course, such changes often come at the hands of social uproar and protest.

This institution has an opportunity to act ahead of the curve.

In February of this year, a 16-year-old non-binary high school student, Nex Benedict, was murdered by their peers in a restroom. This act of violence was instigated by the state policy of Oklahoma, encouraging citizen policing of marginalized identities.

As transphobia rises across the nation, there will be queer diasporas towards the coasts. OSU will be receiving more queer students looking for safety and comfort. Recent polling across the nation is revealing a steady increase in open identification of queerness. Gallup states nearly 30% of Gen Z is openly reporting as queer. And that number is only expected to go up!

We need these resources now. It is a matter of life and death.

And while I speak of queerness, because this is what I know, this work extends beyond one identity. All people use restrooms. It is a concern relevant to every bodied being.

Let queerness be a spark to inspire. How can we rebuild our society to be better for everyone?

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Public restrooms have a long history as places of social justice and activism for gender equality.

Prior to the 1850s, Europeans needing to use the loo would do so outside on the streets or in the woods. But in 1851, the outhouse was moved indoors with the invention of a flushing toilet lavatory. While the invention gained popularity and indoor plumbing became more widespread, these spaces were designated for men only.

Women could only travel as far as their bladders would allow. This prevented them from participating in the public sphere, for work or leisure, and confined most women to the domain of the home. As women began to pursue public life more strongly, restrooms were a central focus for feminist movements.

So strongly was the dominant culture against women having public restrooms that men would repeatedly hit women's restrooms with their cars to claim they were taking up space and becoming traffic hazards! This kind of ridiculous logic is present today in anti-trans rhetorics.

It is important to understand that gender-segregated restrooms grew out of feminist movements for equality. Segregated public restrooms today are a result of providing women with the resources they need to be successful in the world.

The desegregation of restrooms may seem, upon initial glance, to be a reversal of hard-earned historic feminist victories, but is actually a continuation and evolution in the fight for equality.

While women are present in popular culture today, they still face high amounts of gender-based violence. As this survey reveals, many women are afraid of being assaulted by men.

The desegregation of restrooms is an effort to amend such terror. No one should feel unsafe in their body. This fear will be healed by bringing people closer, not driving them further apart.

Similarly, queer people must be brought into the public sphere too. Keeping queer people separate only perpetuates patterns of gendered abuse and violence for all people.

METHODOLOGY

The wisdom contained within this document has been gathered through many sources.

This work has been primarily informed by:

- a) my personal experience
- b) dialogue with local community
- c) surveys of student and institutional opinion

Informants include campus staff and students, public safety, business owners, building managers, the Corvallis public school district, and more.

I did my best to include all of these sources in this document, but not everything made it into this report.

GRAPHICAL DATA

The following charts use numbers collected from the Fall 2023 survey of the Valley Library restrooms. These spaces were identified as GIMU (Gender-Inclusive Multi-User) restrooms.

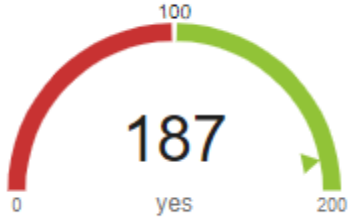
The following survey questions and responses refer to GIMU restrooms on campus.

The charts lack descriptions and interpretations, but I hope that the visuals are clear enough that the primary conclusion can be easily drawn from the graphics.

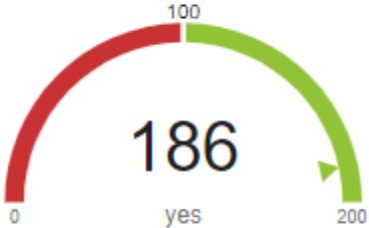
A light analysis is provided further in the document.

OPINION OF GIMU RESTROOMS

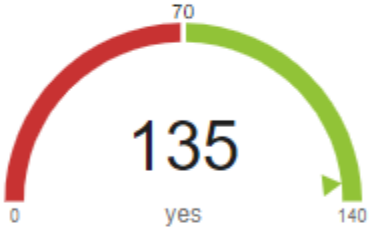
GIMU restrooms are helpful for our campus community and culture



GIMU restrooms are important to have across campus



I want more restrooms across campus converted into GIMU spaces



I want student fees to go toward supporting GIMU restrooms



GIMU RESTROOM EXPERIENCE

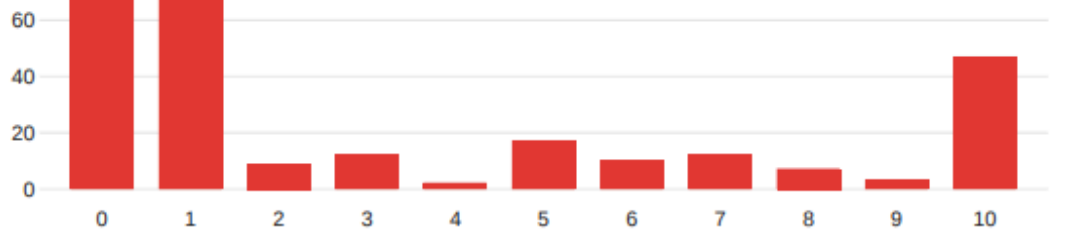
I feel comfortable using them



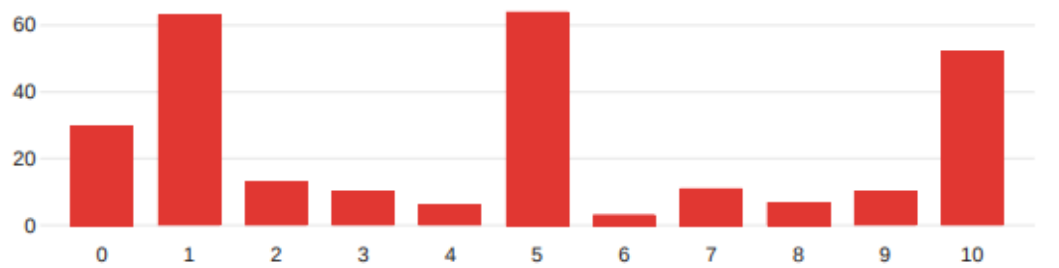
I feel safe using them



I avoid using them

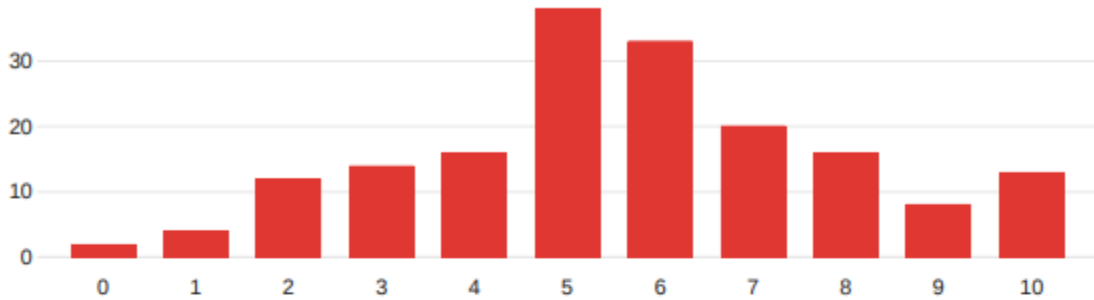


I prefer using them

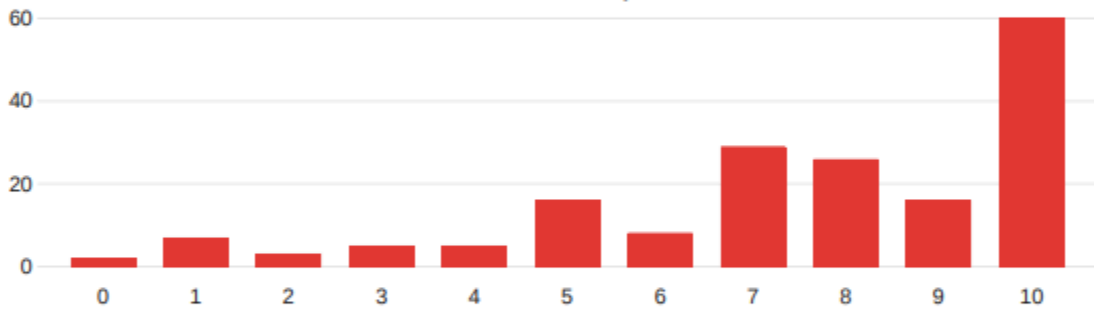


OPINION OF INSTITUTION

OSU is currently able meet the needs of queer students



Future students will need and want more queer infrastructure



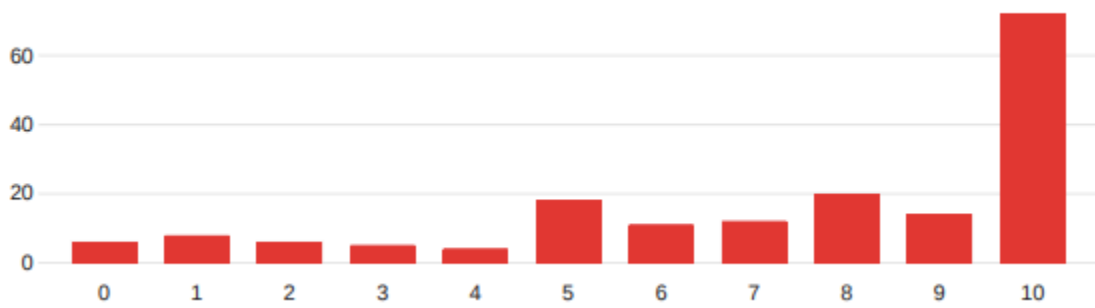
As the political climate develops, it is critical for OSU to have established queer support systems



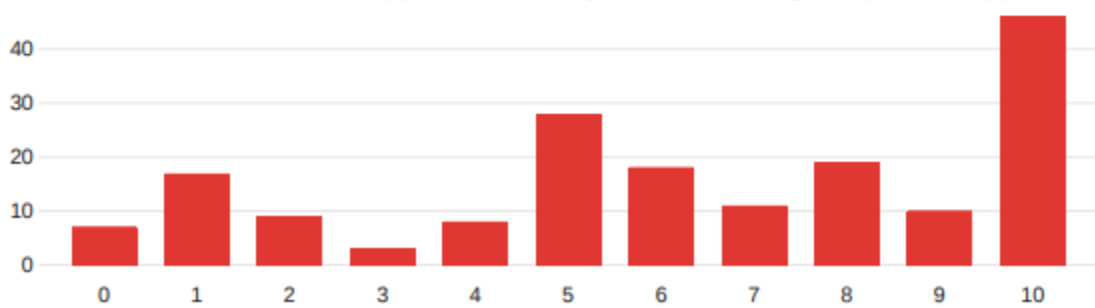
OSU has a responsibility to act as a national leader for queer support



It would be wise for OSU to invest in queer support systems immediately

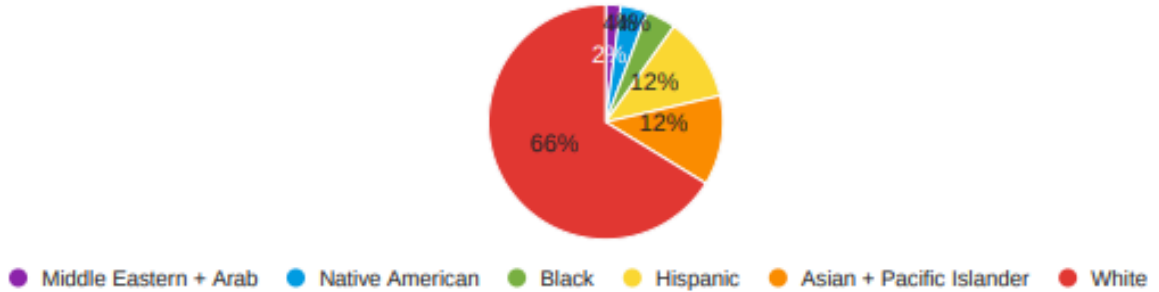


OSU will miss economic opportunities by not investing in queer support

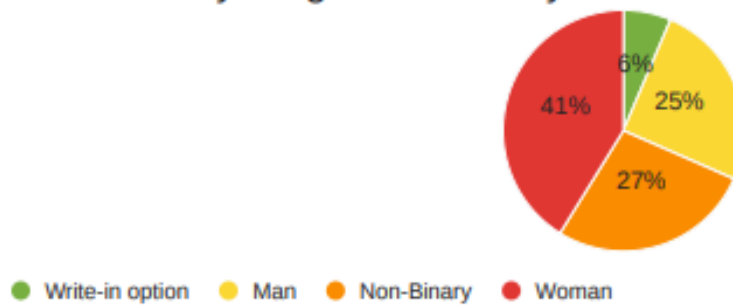


RESPONSE DEMOGRAPHICS

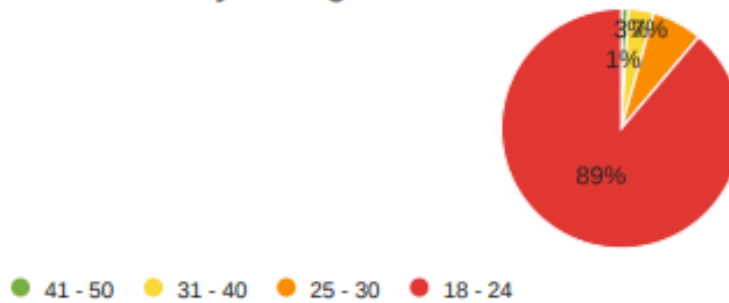
Tell us about your racial + ethnic identity



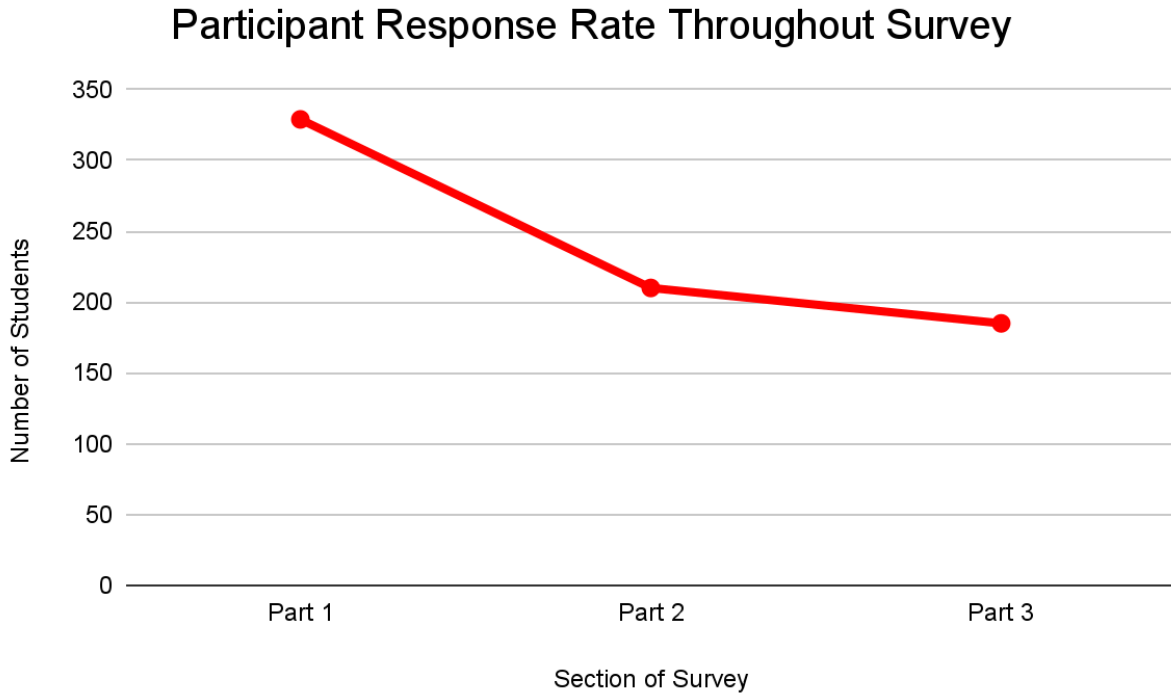
Tell us about your gender identity



Tell us about your age



RESPONSE RATE



NARRATIVE DATA

The following opinions were collected from the Fall 2023 survey of the Valley Library restrooms. These spaces were identified as GIMU (Gender-Inclusive Multi-User) restrooms.

20 pages of written responses were collected from 330 respondents. Given this large data set, I have consolidated the feedback to highlight the primary voices.

The first consolidation is a curated selection of written responses. These data points outline the primary voices of campus constituents.

The second consolidation is a collection of summaries generated by the AI tool Chat GPT. These summaries provide a more comprehensive look into the many layers of the data provided.

Lastly, a survey in Spring 2024 collected statements from relevant organizations on campus.

SELECTION OF CURATED RESPONSES

“I'm just trying to piss, man. I don't really care about if it's gender-neutral because I'm just trying to piss. Anyone else in there is just trying to piss.”

“People should be able to piss without having to search for the "proper pissing space" for their gender/sex.”

“I care most about convenience and it allows me to use the restroom even when the other is being cleaned.”

“I just want to use the restroom when needed. I am unbiased.”

“Let people use the bathroom. As long as the crap goes in the toilet, what else do we really need to be concerned about here? (Nothing.)”

“They confused me at first, but the more I got used to it the more I realized that bathrooms at large are unnecessarily gendered.”

“I really like the blocking of the stall cracks, I think that should be implemented everywhere.”

“I like that the door gaps are covered! That should be done in all bathrooms regardless of who is using.”

“They are great, my only issue is I am uncomfortable with the urinals being exposed, and not in a stall.”

“I feel slightly uncomfortable with people of the opposite sex walking behind me when I am using a urinal.”

“Single-user gender-neutral bathrooms are always full, so I like the convenience of the multi-user option.”

“I prefer single-user restrooms. Also, my religious beliefs don't align with multi-user multi-gender restrooms.”

“As a victim of sexual abuse, I am NEVER comfortable using the restroom with someone of the opposite sex. I will NEVER use them. They should be re-segregated immediately.”

“Give me my female rights to a bathroom. This is sexual harassment waiting to happen. I wish I could choose 0 on this survey. I’m extremely uncomfortable.”

“The bathroom should be a safe and private space, mixing the genders in a bathroom removes those traits. Seeing a guy in the bathroom as a female makes me uncomfortable so I try to avoid gender-inclusive bathrooms unless it’s an emergency.”

“I feel 100% safe using them as a woman and if they make even one person feel accepted and comfortable then it’s a good thing! Gendered bathrooms still exist, if people feel uncomfortable using the neutral rooms, then they can go to a gendered one.”

“I feel like as a man I may make women using the bathroom uncomfortable, which makes me uncomfortable even though I don’t do anything that would cause discomfort.”

“It feels weird and uncomfortable as a man because I worry about dominating the space of others who may feel threatened to share gender-inclusive restrooms. I worry about making others uncomfortable, which then makes me uncomfortable.”

“There are only two genders therefore there should only be two bathrooms.”

“There are only two genders. Bathrooms should reflect that.”

“There are only two genders. Any idea to the contrary is ridiculous and laughable.”

“Men shouldn't be in a bathroom with women.”

“As a cis-gendered man, it just felt inappropriate to see the opposite sex in a space that I believe should be limited to a single sex.”

“Gender fluidity is a psychological disorder and should not be projected onto others who don't agree with their lifestyles. Men and Women have different needs and should be accommodated as such. If campus cared about women's safety, they would convert these restrooms back to their original intent.”

“I have always felt uncomfortable going into a designated "women's" or "men's" restroom, because I get strange looks from others no matter what I choose. GIMU restrooms have been a lifesaver and make me much more likely to actually use a restroom instead of holding it until I get home, or trying to find a single-user stall.”

“I am intersex so gender-inclusive restrooms are a matter of safety for me.”

“I go out of my way to use these restrooms instead of segregated ones. The more society desegregates gender, the safer the world is for gender-nonconforming people like me.”

“I love that I don't have to feel any discomfort around my choice of bathroom, I don't have to worry about being too manly for the women's room or too girly for the men's!”

“I am transgender and these restrooms help me every day!!! I have a safe place where I don't have to feel scared. If we break the separation between the gendered bathrooms it would be more efficient and safe as we adapt to the changes! Anyone who goes into a bathroom with the intent to harm someone is going to do it regardless of a gender marker outside the bathroom. These bathrooms ARE essential!”

“As a genderqueer individual, I find that the gender-inclusive restrooms make me feel so much more seen and safe than single-gender bathrooms on campus.”

“It's about time OSU puts more money towards accessibility and inclusiveness.”

“We ABSOLUTELY need more GIMU restrooms on campus. The right to use a restroom that makes one feel comfortable and safe is a right that we, as a community, are severely lacking.”

“I don't know the stats on whether GIMU restrooms are safer, but if they are, I would fully support fees funding them. Anything we can do to make this campus supportive of ALL students is important.”

“As a community, GIMU restrooms are incredibly beneficial, as they break down barriers between students created by the gender binary. These restrooms allow for students to see each other as equals, regardless of sex or gender. They also provide a safer space for trans people, since their gender or sex are less likely to be called into question by strangers while they're just trying to pee in peace.”

“This is a really important step for everyone to feel comfortable and safe using the restroom. I understand that some people may feel more nervous at this adjustment because of real or perceived threat to one's safety or privacy, but this is an important step for a safe environment at school and work. Everyone needs the bathroom. We can all relate on this.”

“I was a student here for 7 years and recently graduated. I wish these restrooms had been present my entire time here.”

AI GENERATED SUMMARIES

Positive Feedback

- Appreciation for fully covered door gaps for privacy.
- Support from transgender individuals who find GIMU restrooms essential for safety.
- Positive comments about crack coverings for stalls and cleanliness.
- Support for the elimination of gendered signage and the creation of inclusive spaces.
- Approval of clear signage indicating the equipment in each restroom.

Neutral / Mixed Feedback

- Some students express a lack of familiarity with GIMU restrooms but don't mind them.
- Concerns about confusion with signage and the potential discomfort caused by urinals.
- Mixed feelings about the removal of gendered signage, with some advocating for clear distinctions.

Negative Feedback

- Concerns about discomfort in shared spaces, especially for cisgender women fearing cisgender men's presence.
- Opposition from those who believe in a binary gender system.
- Resistance from individuals who prefer single-gender restrooms for safety reasons.
- Concerns about potential harassment, cleanliness issues, and discomfort with urinals.

Requests / Recommendations

- Requests for more private stalls and the elimination of urinals or their placement in enclosed spaces.
- Suggestions for better signage and awareness campaigns about GIMU restrooms.
- Calls for maintaining single-gender options alongside gender-inclusive restrooms.
- Advocacy for GIMU restrooms as essential for gender nonconforming individuals.

Safety and Comfort

- Some express discomfort with the lack of privacy, especially in shared spaces.
- Safety concerns about potential harassment, especially for women and non-binary individuals.
- Positive feedback from trans individuals who feel safer in GIMU restrooms.

Mixed Feelings from Different Perspectives

- Non-binary individuals expressing both support for inclusivity and concerns about the use of GIMU restrooms by cisgender individuals.
- Different preferences based on personal experiences, gender identity, and comfort levels.

Concerns about Funding

Some respondents express concerns about allocating student fees towards GIMU restrooms, citing the already high cost of education and questioning the necessity of such expenditures.

Support for Inclusivity

Many respondents, especially those who identify as queer or transgender, express strong support for GIMU restrooms, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and creating safe spaces for individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Preference for Single-User Options

Several respondents mention a preference for single-user gender-neutral bathrooms, citing concerns about privacy, cleanliness, and safety. Some suggest maintaining both gendered and gender-neutral options.

Safety and Comfort

Safety and comfort are recurring themes, with some highlighting the need for GIMU restrooms to provide a safer and more inclusive environment, while others express discomfort or concerns about safety in multi-user spaces.

Practicality and Accessibility

Some respondents mention the practicality of having GIMU restrooms in high-traffic areas, while others express difficulties in finding or accessing existing gender-neutral options on campus.

Differing Perspectives on Gender

Opinions vary on the concept of gender, with some expressing traditional views and others advocating for a more inclusive understanding of gender, emphasizing the need for facilities that accommodate diverse gender identities.

Advocacy for Choices

Some respondents advocate for providing choices, including both GIMU and single-user options, to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of individuals on campus.

Historical Context and Tradition

A few respondents reference historical reasons for sex-segregated bathrooms and express concerns about changing established norms.

Desire for More Information

Some respondents express a lack of information on the topic and suggest a need for more data or community input to make informed decisions.

STATEMENTS FROM CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS

Why are inclusive restrooms important to the mission of your organization?

“It is a guiding principle within ASOSU that ALL students are represented and not forced to assume one identity over another. By promoting gender-neutral restrooms, we are hoping to ensure that ALL members of the student body, as well as faculty and staff, feel comfortable in these spaces that are dedicated to them, such as the SEC.”

- Associated Students of Oregon State University

“Gender-inclusive restrooms are important to our mission in our organization because they help establish precedence around inclusivity and acceptance. At the Pride Center, we strive for equity and inclusion on all fronts of the gender spectrum and want our students and community to know they are safe and accepted in this space.”

- Pride Center

“Contrary to what it might seem, using a restroom is not a simple, thoughtless action. When we use the restroom, some of us are at our most vulnerable. Restrooms as places are tied with a sense of safety, comfort, and sometimes shame. Inclusive restrooms play a huge role to enhance the sense of comfort and safety, while reducing that aspect of shame which is in direct connection with gender segregation, gender violence, and gender policing. Gender-inclusive restrooms are important for creating a safer, more equal, and body-friendly space.”

- Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

“To promote spaces where all feel welcomed and acknowledged and are free to focus on advancing science and education without inhibitions on facilities.”

- Capital Planning and Development

“To demonstrate gender equity - anyone can use any restroom. People do not have to choose from a binary, since we are all more than binary.”

- Valley Library

“Gender-inclusive restrooms are important to the mission of our organization as this helps QTIBIPOC students feel safer on campus. Therefore, having access to gender-neutral bathrooms can help to reduce the experiences of harassment, discomfort, and lack of safety that some QTIBIPOC students may face/feel when using non-inclusive restrooms.”

- SOL: Multicultural Support Network

*Why are inclusive restrooms important to your constituents?
How would you support your constituents in regard to these spaces?*

“ASOSU has involved students who have many different identities; they have expressed a need for feeling safe and comfortable at OSU. Gender-neutral bathrooms assist in addressing this need. I personally have not heard any safety concerns or fears from the students involved in the Exec branch of ASOSU; instead, they seem enthusiastic and supportive of this idea.”

- Associated Students of Oregon State University

“With the growth of the community, it’s important to also offer material resources for basic bodily functions. It can be hard to feel safe and comfortable on campus in gendered spaces, especially when someone is in a vulnerable position. We provide support to constituents by having a neutral space that provides privacy and security when in a vulnerable position.”

- Pride Center

“Gender-inclusive restrooms are important to our constituents because they are assured of a safe and comfortable space that does not omit or judge anyone based on their bodies/identities. We educate/support our constituents on their use/understanding of the social benefits of these spaces.”

- Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

“Change always requires education, patience, and reaffirmation. This will require major financial and personnel investment to physically remodel existing spaces. We have committed to engaging all operational departments for their feedback and buy-in.”

- Capital Planning and Development

“Once these restrooms become a norm, those scared of change will feel better, I hope. And many of our students are thrilled to have inclusive restrooms.”

- Valley Library

“In our restrooms, there are also material resources that provide learning material on matters of consent, sexual intercourse, how to use contraceptives, menstruation materials, and information, among other resources. We place these resources in the restroom because gender presentation is different for everyone and if they are uncomfortable learning about this stuff or asking questions, this provides them a space to learn a bit in private and hopefully prompts them to reach out to learn more about what they’ve read or how to have these tougher conversations with whoever it is they need to have them with.”

- Pride Center

“Gender Inclusive restrooms are important to our constituents as some of the people we serve feel uncomfortable going into traditionally gendered restrooms. Additionally, the lack of accessibility for many restrooms around campus is something that has been a major barrier to some of our constituents accessing these spaces. Finally, we can spread the word about where these bathrooms are located to better enhance the lives of these students.”

- SOL: Multicultural Support Network

ANALYSIS

The numerical data demonstrates a clear majority in favor of GIMU restrooms. The survey also had a high level of engagement with 63% of respondents electing to give additional feedback for richer data. Campus organizations are clear support of such facilities.

As it applies to public restrooms, there exist major concerns surrounding safety. For queer people, there is fear of not having a space they feel welcome in. For cis-women, the fear surrounds assault from men, while cis-men are afraid of being perceived as predators.

In all cases, respondents can feel uncomfortable with how their bodies are received by others. It's clear that our restrooms and our cultures have plenty of room to be improved for everyone. Let's work towards ensuring the safety, comfort, and inclusion of all people because everyone deserves to use the restroom in peace.

CONCLUSION

The work to desegregate restrooms is complex. But it is vital to our success as a people. Changes to our restrooms can protect our most vulnerable identities and begin the healing process of our culture. This is about more than the individual, this is about relationship to the physical. We cannot care for the body of all the Earth, if we do not first care for the bodies of all people.

It's time to redefine ourselves.

Let our men be more. Let our women feel safe. Let our queer people exist.

Let our bodies be free.