

GCU Students' Attitudes Toward All-Gender Restrooms

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to analyze Georgian Court University (GCU) students' attitudes toward all-gender restrooms. One hundred forty-two students completed a measure of comfort with all-gender restrooms, the Genderism and Transphobia Scale, and a demographic measure. We found that GCU students were more comfortable with the proposed installation of single-user all-gender restrooms than with multi-user all-gender restrooms. Transphobia predicted less comfort with all-gender restrooms, but neither gender nor religion predicted comfort. GCU students were generally comfortable with and in favor of single-user all-gender restrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Many transgender individuals have negative experiences connected with use of public restrooms, and this can lead transgender and nonbinary individuals to engage in harmful behaviors such as restricting fluid intake in order to avoid having to use public restrooms, where they feel unwelcome and unsafe. Experiences of discrimination can also predict mental health symptoms including depression and suicide attempts (e.g., Herman, 2013; Price-Feeney et al., 2021).

One way to reduce negative experiences with restrooms is to increase access to all-gender restrooms. The purpose of the present study was to investigate student attitudes toward all-gender restrooms. All-gender restrooms can have two types: single-user restrooms and multi-user restrooms. We investigated predictors of attitudes toward both types of restrooms, including transphobia, religion, and gender. Previous research has shown that transphobia and religious fundamentalism both predict support of "bathroom bills" that require transgender and gender nonconforming individuals to use restrooms that correspond to their sex assigned at birth (Parent & Silva, 2018). It has also been demonstrated that men are more concerned than women with the idea of all-gender restrooms (e.g., Stones, 2017).

HYPOTHESES

H1: We expect the participants to be more comfortable with, more likely to use, and more in favor of a single-user all-gender restroom than a multi-user all-gender restroom

H2: We expect people who are higher in transphobia to be more uncomfortable using, less likely to use, and more opposed to all-gender restrooms.

H3: We expect individuals who identify a religion to be less comfortable using, less likely to use, and more opposed to all-gender restrooms.

H4: We expect women to be less comfortable using, less likely to use, and more opposed to multi-user all-gender restrooms than men.

METHOD

Participants

Of the 142 undergraduate participants, the majority (48, 33.8%) of the participants were psychology majors; 12 (8.5%) were criminal justice majors; 12 (8.5%) were education majors, and the other 63 participants were other majors representing less than 8% in any particular major. Seven participants did not indicate major. The majority were 18-22 years of age. Ages ranged from 18-39 years. ($M = 21.01$, $SD = 3.05$). Six participants did not report age.

The majority (88; 62%) of the participants were Christian: Catholic; 20 (14.1%) were Christian Protestant; 12 (8.5%) of participants were Atheist; 6 (4.2%) of participants were Agnostic, and 2 (1.4%) were Jewish, while 6 participants (4.2%) reported other religion.

The majority (84; 59.2%) of the participants were White; 20 (14.1%) were African American/Black; 14 (9.9%) were Hispanic/Latinx; 5 (3.5%) were Asian, 2 were Native American/American Indian, 1 (0.7%) was Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1 (0.7%) reported Other ethnicity/race, while 10 participants (7.0%) did not indicate any race/ethnicity.

The majority (77.5%) of the participants indicated that their gender identity was female; 23 (16.2%) were male; 1 (0.7%) was genderqueer; 1 (0.7%) indicated "Additional Category"; and 5 (3.5%) did not identify a gender identity. Most of the participants were cisgender, with 113 (79.6) listing their sex assigned at birth as female; 24 (16.9%) as male, and 5 not indicating sex assigned at birth.

Procedure & Instruments

Participants for our study were recruited by email and were asked to fill out an online questionnaire through Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com>). Participants were given the description of what the study is about and what is expected from them. They were informed that the purpose of the study is to measure GCU students' attitudes about all-gender bathrooms. Also, they were informed that they are able to terminate the participation at any point, and that in such case none of the data would be included in the study.

At the beginning of the survey, two scenarios were presented. In scenario 1, students were asked to rate their level of comfort if GCU was to construct a single-occupant all-gender restroom in every building on campus. Such a restroom is a small room including a door with a lock, a toilet, and a sink with a mirror, where only one person can use the room at a time. Existing men's and women's restrooms would stay in their current locations.

In scenario 2, GCU would convert half of both men's and women's restrooms into multi-user all-gender restrooms. Urinals would be removed and replaced with toilets in stalls with doors, and any person, regardless of gender, could use the new restrooms, and multiple people could be in the restroom at the same time. The toilets would be all in stalls, but the area for washing hands would be open. For both scenarios, the same three questions were asked. The questions asked measured how comfortable the students would be using a single-occupant/multi-user all-gender restroom, how likely they were to use it instead of going for a gender-specific restroom, and finally, if they think that incorporating such restrooms would be a good initiative on GCU campus.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants completed the Revised Genderism and Transphobia Scale (GTS; Tebbe et al., 2014). The range of scores was from 22 to 154, with higher scores indicating greater levels of prejudice against transgender people.

Towards the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to give their demographic information (including age, major, gender identity, sex assigned at birth, race/ethnicity, religion and frequency of attending religious services). At the very end, participants were given the option to indicate whether they want to request extra credit in one of their psychology classes as a compensation for participation.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the ratings of comfort, likelihood of use, and approval of policy for the single-user and multi-user scenarios are presented in Table 1. GTS scores ranged from 22 (the lowest possible score) to 112 ($M = 41.4$, $SD = 19.517$).

Single-User vs. Multi-User Comfort, Usage, & Policy Approval (Hypothesis 1)

We conducted a series of paired-samples t tests comparing responses to the single-user scenario to responses to the multi-user scenario. All three measures (comfort, likelihood of use, and approval of policy) showed significantly higher scores for the multi-user scenario, indicating less comfort, less likelihood of use, and less approval of the policy in the multi-user scenario. See Table 1 for the results of the tests.

Table 1: Paired-Samples t -tests Comparing Responses to Single-User vs. Multi-User All-Gender Restrooms

Measure	Scenario	M	SD	t	p	d
Comfort	Multi	2.54	1.02	10.68	<.001	1.09
	Single	1.63	0.81			
Usage	Multi	2.51	1.06	8.45	<.001	0.89
	Single	1.83	0.90			
Policy	Multi	3.06	1.22	10.13	<.001	1.04
	Single	2.08	1.03			

Note. df for all tests = 141. All measures are scored so that higher scores indicate greater discomfort/disapproval.

Correlation of Transphobia with Comfort, Usage, & Policy (Hypothesis 2)

Pearson correlations were computed between score on the GTS and the measures of comfort, usage, and policy approval for single-user and multi-user scenarios. All six correlations were significant and in the expected direction, indicating that higher transphobia predicts less comfort with using all-gender restrooms, less likelihood of using all-gender restrooms, and less approval of a proposed plan to construct all-gender restrooms on GCU campus. See Table 2 for the correlations.

Table 2: Correlations Between GTS Score & Comfort, Usage, and Policy

Scenario	Comfort	Usage	Policy
Single	$r = .390$	$r = .347$	$r = .578$
Multi	$r = .357$	$r = .346$	$r = .372$

Note. N for all tests = 141. All correlations are statistically significant, $p < .001$

Relationship of Religion to Comfort, Usage, & Policy Approval (Hypothesis 3)

Participants were coded as religious ($n = 113$) if they identified a religious denomination and as nonreligious ($n = 20$) if they identified as atheist, agnostic, or indicated "none" for the religion question. Independent-samples t -tests compared religious to nonreligious participants for the measures of comfort, usage, and policy approval for both single-user and multi-user scenarios. Counter to expectations, there were no significant differences between religious and nonreligious participants' comfort, usage, or policy approval.

Relationship of Gender to Comfort, Usage, & Policy Approval (Hypothesis 4)

Independent-samples t -tests compared men to women for the measures of comfort, usage, and policy approval for both single-user and multi-user scenarios. Counter to expectations, there were no significant differences between men's and women's comfort, usage, or policy approval.

DISCUSSION

Our results showed that people were more comfortable with single-user all-gender restrooms than with multi-user all-gender restrooms. We found that transphobia predicted comfort with using all-gender restrooms, with higher transphobia predicting lower comfort. We found no statistically significant relationship between religion and comfort with all-gender restrooms. We found no statistically significant difference between women's comfort with all-gender restrooms versus men's comfort.

The comfort measure was on a scale from 1 to 4, with 4 being "extremely uncomfortable." The average participant rated single-user restrooms with a mean of 1.63, indicating that they were somewhat comfortable with single-user all-gender restrooms. The mean for multi-user restrooms was 2.54, indicating just very slightly uncomfortable.

Similarly, the 1-4 point usage measure indicated that participants were somewhat likely to use a single-user all-gender restroom, but the usage measure was right at the neutral point for multi-user restrooms.

The policy measure was on a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating that the participant thought GCU should definitely create all-gender restrooms and 5 indicating that GCU should definitely not. The neutral point was 3. For single-user restrooms, participants responded with a mean of 2.08, indicating that they felt that GCU should probably make single-user restrooms available across campus. For multi-user restrooms, participants responded with a mean of 3.06, just slightly on the negative side of neutral.

Unsurprisingly, participants who scored higher on the GTS were more uncomfortable using all-gender restrooms, less likely to use them, and more opposed to instituting a policy of all-gender restrooms being installed on GCU campus. This result was found for both single-user and multi-user restrooms.

There was no statistically significant difference between individuals who identified a religion and those who identified no religion. This was surprising, because previous studies have found that religious fundamentalism predicts transphobia. But our study did not really measure fundamentalism. Future research could use a more robust measure. We found no gender difference in our study; we have no explanation for this.

Overall, this study suggests that GCU students are comfortable with the installation of single-user all-gender restrooms, and that they would support the adoption of such a policy.

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AUTHOR NOTE

We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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