

access denied.

Transgender students feel the effect of discrimination and threats of violence, but the situation hasn't improved

Robert Brown, Editor-in-Chief

Oppression. Harassment. Violence.

THREE IN TEN
TRANS PEOPLE WERE FIRED
FROM THEIR JOB

54 PERCENT
OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE HAVE
BEEN VERBALLY HARASSED

ONE IN TEN
TRANS STUDENTS WERE
SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

2015 UNITED STATES TRANSGENDER SURVEY, NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY

Harper, a non-binary student, shares that they and many trans students are not free from bullying. “I feel safe from violence, but not from harassment,” Harper said. Harper was provided anonymity to help to reduce the risk of being outed and further harassment and curb threats of possible violence. “[What makes me feel uncomfortable is] people using slurs to each other jokingly. . . especially the f slur. . . almost treating the [trans] community as a joke,” they said. Harper even said that they heard people claim to be transgender in various social groups. Harper heard slurs and jokes that negatively portrayed trans students in their morning classes.

“I don't feel like it's purpose-

ful hatred, but more like kids just don't understand what they're saying is not O.K. and hurtful. . . you can't laugh about someone's identity and who they are,” Harper added.

Oppression. Harassment. Violence. These words are familiar to many trans students, who are at heightened risk for discrimination, hatred, violence and emotional distress, including depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts and tendencies. With same-sex marriage permitted in July 2015 in a landmark Supreme Court decision, gay rights prevailed in the United States. However, Trans rights still lacked behind in victories that others cherished. States across the country have introduced legislation dubbed “bathroom bills,” designed to require transgender students and transgender adults that use public restrooms to use the restrooms that correspond to their sex at birth, with sex referring to the genitals and

chromosomes of the person. These bills also strip anti-discrimination laws and ordinances that prohibit discrimination in the workplace, at businesses and in public areas for all LGBTQ+ people. Here at Fondy, the grey areas, including the actual policy on bathrooms and locker rooms, have become overwhelming.

Elliott, a non-binary student that does not use pronouns and is also provided anonymity, feels as if students don't realize that a lack of open-minded thinking hurt trans individuals.

“It's a lot of ignorance that makes me feel the most uncomfortable,” Elliott said. “People have ideas that are really binary.”

Quinn Salas, a binary trans student that identifies as a woman,

“YOU CAN'T LAUGH ABOUT SOMEONE'S IDENTITY AND WHO THEY ARE.”

said she doesn't necessarily feel the most comfortable or safe at the school.

"Personally, I do not feel safe at the school mainly due to outside-of-school social media interactions with students at the school and conversations that aren't very supportive of trans folks," she said. ". . . walking down the halls, something could happen to me."

She, out of fear, has stayed home from school to avoid possible harassment.

"Recently, my attendance was really bad, because I had really bad anxiety about coming [to school]," she said. "It's starting to feel a little more comfortable, but I still don't feel really safe here yet."

Harper, Elliott and Quinn, in their experiences, have heard and seen trans insults throughout the high school that may go unpunished.

The anti-discrimination policy of the Fond du Lac School District protects students from discrimination, but falls short from including gender expression and gender identity, with gender identity being someone's sense of being versus gender expression being how one conveys that identity. These two additions, advocates say, are crucial in stopping harassment of trans students, mainly due to the language that is already there. Stating that the school district refrains from discriminating from race, ethnicity or sexual orientation means that the lack of language stating that freedom of gender identity and gender expression is neither acceptable or unacceptable leaves the void of legal discrimination that can happen on the school district's watch. Even though anti-bullying policies deter bullying in a general sense, teachers or staff members may ask a student to change or to refrain from certain actions that may pertain to gender expression, such as wearing a skirt, wearing makeup, among other things.

Board of Education President Mark Jurgella said in an interview with the Cardinal Columns that the board is cautious in taking steps.

"We want to make sure that the de-

isions above us have been made and are in place and are going to stay in place. . . so we don't have to change it again," Jurgella said. When asked about whether or not he was referring to the "bathroom bill" legislation making the rounds in other states, like Senate Bill 582 that was introduced in Wisconsin in 2015, he confirmed that he was and went on to say things are in flux at the state and federal levels. "I have not been made aware

of anyone in imminent danger at this point, so I think we have the ability to make this decision as a group when the new school year comes," he said.

"It takes about a month and a half [to change a policy]," Superintendent Dr. James Sebert said.

"It starts with a workshop, a first read and a second read," he said. Sebert added that the policy currently in place could be 29 years old, having been dramatically amended in 1988.

The Board of Education will hold its annual meetings to revisit all policies of the Fond du Lac School District after the school year has concluded. It is unclear if the board will consider changing the policy if the state and federal governments are still indecisive on the topic.

When asked, Harper responded with a simple and stern "yes" regarding whether or not trans students felt at risk at the school. The feeling of the board being out of touch with the students resonates with trans students all too well. ■ ■

In the case of the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act, or House Bill 2 in North Carolina, proponents of the bill cited crime reports that were used as evidence to justify the passing of the bill. The cases involved sexual predators wearing feminine clothing to "break existing laws," as NPR reported in May of last year.

Through legal battles at the state and federal levels, including a two-way lawsuit between the Department of Justice and the government of North Carolina, the long process of repealing the bill started in North Carolina with the Democrat Gov. of the state at the helm. On March 7, news came that

Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the Department of Justice will consider dropping the lawsuit against House Bill 2, clearing the preliminary injunction the Justice Department had on the bill.

The Alabama Privacy Act, commonly referred to as Senate Bill 1 or SB1, although permits mixed-gender bathrooms, requires an attendant to be present to "answer questions" and "prevent criminal conduct" in the bathroom. The eight-page bill is unclear whether the attendant is on-duty at all times or whether the attendant is directly in the bathroom or directly outside.

In 2015, the Wisconsin legislature held hearings regarding the so-called "bathroom bill," but when confronted by resistance, it was supposedly amended to include the school's choice to offer gender-neutral bathrooms. Senate Bill 582 was read for the first time, but the joint resolution failed and the bill was not up for vote in the legislature. For some, gender-neutral bathrooms may not benefit them.

As Quinn identifies as a woman, she would not feel as comfortable using a gender-neutral bathroom as she would feel the most comfortable using the women's bathroom.

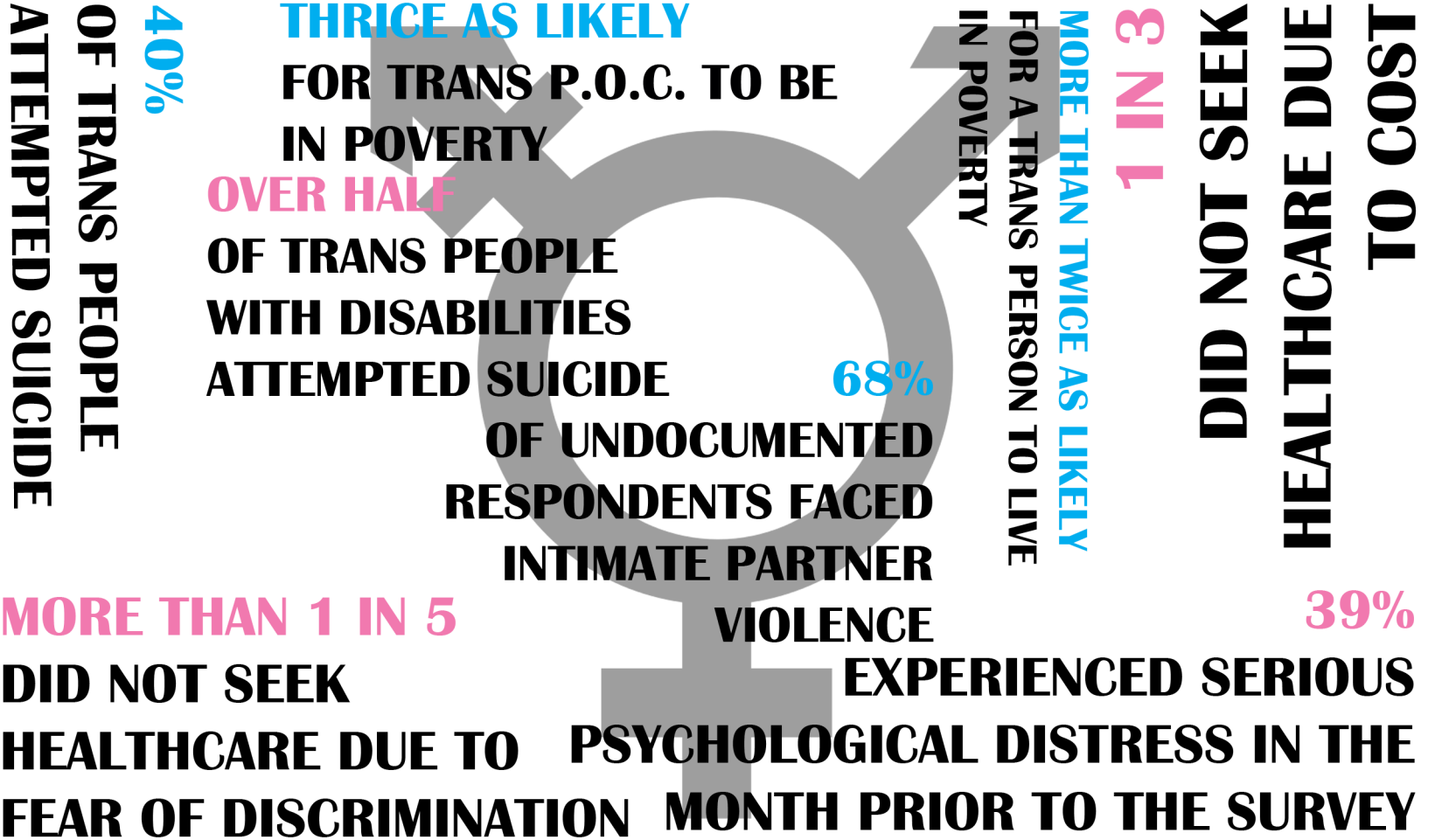
"It can definitely be beneficial, but not very beneficial to me," Salas said, noting that she doesn't feel comfortable in the men's bathroom either.

"It is frowned upon [when I use the women's bathroom]. They [the administration] say 'Hey, you know not to do that,'" Salas said.

When asked about the failure of amending the school district's policy on discrimination and the possible passage of a "bathroom bill" in Wisconsin, she said that a "fierce resistance" would be necessary to make trans voices heard.

On the contrary, Harper and Elliott are non-binary, so neither one would feel comfortable in the existing bathrooms. Currently, the only "unisex", or mixed-gender bathrooms, are in the nurse's office inside the Main Office at the high school, in addition to the staff bathrooms. But, this presents an issue, as cisgender students have 14 bathrooms, one men's and one women's in each pod upstairs and downstairs, one men's and one women's in the Commons, one men's and one women's in the Music Department and one men's in the men's locker room and one women's in the women's locker room, making it difficult for trans students to walk

WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT DECISIONS ABOVE US HAVE BEEN MADE AND ARE IN PLACE AND ARE GOING TO STAY IN PLACE. . . SO WE DON'T HAVE TO CHANGE IT AGAIN



2015 UNITED STATES TRANSGENDER SURVEY, WITH MORE THAN 29,000 RESPONDENTS

all the way down to the Main Office, use the bathroom and walk to their classes in five minutes. It may feel embarrassing for a trans student to do so much work just to relieve themselves. That is why the some students wait until the end of the school day to use the restroom. Staff can easily deny trans students access to the staff bathrooms, as there is no current policy for accommodation for these students. ■ ■

In addition to bathroom hardships, many of the “bathroom bills” state changing rooms are to be used by a single sex, as Senate Bill 582 explains, poses the question of where would trans students change if they are uncomfortable with the facilities in place or they are required to use a facility they do not feel fits their identity. As to all controversial topics, there is pushback from all sides.

BuzzFeed reported in August 2016 that a cisgender student in Pennsylvania claimed that she was being discriminated

against due to the Obama administration guidelines to allow trans students use restrooms and locker rooms they felt most comfortable with using.

“I am a woman, and I identify as a woman, and you can’t make me change in front of someone who I don’t identify with, who is physically male,” student Sigourney Doyle said at a meeting. She is referring to transgender students that were born as a man that identify as a woman changing in the women’s locker room, which makes her feel uncomfortable. She then started sitting out of her gym class, citing her discontent with the policy.

“I also feel nothing against transgenders [sic],” Doyle said. “I know some and I don’t have anything wrong with them. I would just not like their rights to overrule my own. We are equals. They are not better and I am not better,” she said.

In an open letter to state legislatures

across the country, various organizations like the National Education Association (NEA), the American Academy for Pediatrics, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) denounced the legislation, conveying their displeasure with the bills across the country.

“Transgender kids are already at heightened risk for violence, bullying and harassment, and these bills exacerbate those risks by creating a hostile environment in one of the places they should feel the safest and most supported. In addition, students who would be affected by these bills are among our most vulnerable to experiencing depression and engaging in self harm, including suicide.”

All three Fondy students encourage activism and coming together to show that the transgender community’s voice is loud and trans allies are by their side.



DURING REPORTING ON TRANSGENDER DISCRIMINATION, MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT TWEETED REGARDING THE ISSUE, ADDRESSING “INCLUSIVENESS” AND THE REASONING BEHIND IN ACCOMMODATING TO GENDER-NEUTRAL STUDENTS AND OTHER TRANS INDIVIDUALS THROUGHOUT THE STUDENT BODY.

“THESE BILLS EXACERBATE THOSE RISKS BY CREATING A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT IN ONE OF THE PLACES THEY SHOULD FEEL THE SAFEST AND MOST SUPPORTED.



IN ADDITION TO MADISON, OSHKOSH WEST, A SCHOOL WITHIN THE FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION AND WITH MULTIPLE CLUB PARTNERSHIPS WITH FOND DU LAC, HAS GENDER-NEUTRAL BATHROOMS TO MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT SAFE AND AS PASSIVE AS POSSIBLE.

“STAFF CAN EASILY DENY TRANS STUDENTS ACCESS TO THE STAFF BATHROOMS, AS THERE IS NO CURRENT POLICY FOR ACCOMMODATION[S]. . .

HUMAN FUNCTIONS DO NOT EQUAL A PRIVILEGE

Everyone uses the bathroom, so mind your own business and keep your nose in your stall

THE ALABAMA PRIVACY ACT STATES that mixed gender bathrooms must be monitored by a person to ensure the bathroom is used “appropriately” and they must answer any questions asked. Session Law 2016-3 House Bill 2 in North Carolina requires single-sex bathrooms and for each person to use the bathroom that aligns with their biological sex. Senate Bill 6 in Texas is in the process of going through Texas’s legislative system, which is almost identical to North Carolina’s bills. All of these have been dubbed “bathroom bills.”

Most of the conversations surrounding transgender rights have eventually led to the one thing everyone has their minds on-- bathrooms. The idea of different genitalia occupying the same bathroom (NOT in the same stall) is repulsive to some, but in reality, it isn’t any of their business who is using what bathroom.

People are confusing the definition of “transgender” and “rapists.” Transgender people don’t identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, and therefore, if someone tells you they are a trans woman, she is a woman, and vice versa. Therefore, it only makes sense that they should use the bathroom with which they identify, not to rape people. Women go in the women’s bathroom, and men go in the men’s bathroom.

People are not defined by what’s between their legs.

Gender, in essence, is a social construct that we’ve built around genitalia. Genitalia do not (or, at least, should not) define how a person acts and interacts with others. Biological females and biological males to act in a feminine

and masculine manner, respectively, but this simply isn’t how society works. Tomboys and feminine guys are a prime example of this socially acceptable way of breaking the gender construct, as both categories are expected to grow out of it with age. It only makes sense for people to not conform to a social construct, as not everyone fits perfectly into “good” and “bad” categories when judging their personality and actions.

Following this logic, it makes sense to provide bathrooms to people who don’t identify within the social construct. It makes sense to allow people to use the bathroom they want to. But people accuse men of

“TO PUT IT SIMPLY, THE WORLD ISN’T GOING TO END IF YOU SHARE A BATHROOM WITH A TRANSGENDER PERSON.”

acting transgender. They theorize men will enter women’s bathrooms wrongfully and sexually harass and assault women. But rape is rape, regardless of gender and bathroom laws. Nothing is stopping

men now from going into bathrooms to rape. Letting transgender people use the bathroom they want does not legalize rape.

We also have to acknowledge the sexism in these arguments. They aren’t concerned about rape in general, as there isn’t any objection to transgender men, transitioned or not, using the men’s bathroom. We don’t talk about older men raping young boys. This is simply a thinly-veiled way of hiding one’s transphobia.

Although some states have exceptions for gender-neutral bathrooms, this doesn’t completely solve the issue. Yes, some people don’t identify as a girl or a boy (and this has been prevalent throughout history), but this doesn’t solve the problem for people who identify within the binary. This still bars them from using the bathroom they’d like and puts them in danger of outing themselves as transgender by using the gender-neutral bathroom.

“PEOPLE ARE CONFUSING THE DEFINITIONS OF ‘TRANSGENDER’ AND ‘RAPISTS.’”



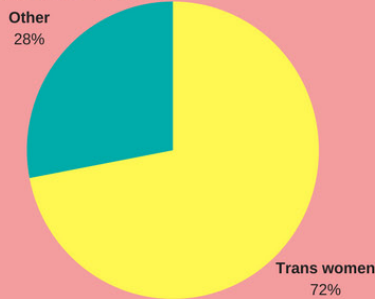
TRANSGENDER STATISTICS

THE REAL FACTS

IN THE U.S.

According to the New York Times, 1.4 million Americans identify as transgender.

Hate Violence
Homicide Victims



...and 7 transgender women of color have been killed since the start of 2017.
-National Coalition of Anti-Violence Program

IN SCHOOLS

54% experienced verbal harrasment

24% were physically attacked

13% were sexually assaulted

Source: 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey

54% of trans students without support attempt suicide

but that number drops to 37% with support

To put it simply, the world isn't going to end if you share a bathroom with a transgender person. Chances are, you probably have and didn't realize it, as most transgender people use stalls and don't share that stall with anyone else.

District and our school board is idling on the topic. They are telling transgender students that they are not welcome here. And to you, President Mark Jurgella, you claim that you see no imminent danger for transgender students when one of our editors identifies as transgender and attempted suicide last year due to the discrimination they faced from peers and teachers. That same editor also refuses to go to the bathroom in the high school due to the fact that they don't feel comfortable going in either bathroom. This means that editor is holding their bladder for 7+ hours a day (and they like to stay hydrated), which is simply unhealthy and putting them at risk for multiple health complications.

Behind closed doors, the Fond du Lac Board of Education is hesitant to take any action to protect transgender students or even acknowledge that there is a substantial problem at all. There are over a dozen transgender students who don't feel comfortable using the bathrooms in the schools. Gender identity and gender expression is still excluded from our anti-discrimination policy after countless attempts to work with the Board of Education to include it. This means that anyone, staff or students included, can legally discriminate against transgender individuals in the Fond du Lac School

President Jurgella, you say that you're waiting for state or federal intervention to avoid having to revise anything, and frankly, you're just being lazy, not efficient. You waiting for legal discrimination on a state or federal level regarding bathrooms does not mean gender identity and gender expression can't be in the anti-discrimination policy now, or even if such a law were to be introduced in Wisconsin. Bathrooms and feeling safe and respected in a classroom are two different things.

We aren't going to stand for it anymore. Many staff members of the Cardinal Columns feel uncomfortable knowing that the Fond du Lac Board of Education is continuing this cycle of discrimination. It's unacceptable, and to truly be proud of our school and school district, we must make it a safe place for everyone.

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