

# All-gender restroom a great step toward inclusion

Now in its second year, the restroom remains important, although some students abuse the privacy it offers

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Cooper opened up its first and only all-gender restroom in the building in the English circle during last school year. All-gender restrooms help transgender and nonbinary students and staff feel safe and comfortable using a public restroom, and though many states require them in public places, Minnesota does not. Cooper's decision to open a designated all-gender restroom is a step toward having more resources and support available for its transgender students, who may face discrimination at school.

Transphobia is a rampant issue in America and Cooper is no exception to this. Transgender students may be shamed, bullied or even kicked out of the restroom that corresponds with their gender because of people either misgendering them or purely because of transphobia. They may not feel comfortable even if nobody says anything. They may avoid using the restroom that corresponds with their biological sex due to gender dysphoria, shame or fear of bullying.

Students may be misgendered and discriminated against based on whether or not others believe that the student "passes" as the gender with which they identify. This may be due to them just beginning their transition, a lack of resources available that would allow them to transition, or even out of fear of transitioning due to the transphobia of their family, friends or classmates.

Bathroom concerns can apply to nonbinary students as well. Nonbinary students may not feel comfortable using either restroom, and may be shamed out of the restroom due to other students misgendering and discriminat-



Photo by KIRA JOHNSON

The restroom is located in the B2 circle near the EL and English classrooms. ing against them.

All-gender restrooms help these students, and even staff members, to have a restroom in which they can feel comfortable and safe. All-gender restrooms are intended for students who don't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth to use, and though other students may misuse the restroom and target the restroom to shame others, the facility is intended to provide students with a restroom where they will be free from discrimination.

Unfortunately, there are students who misuse this restroom due to the privacy it provides. The all-gender restroom is at the end of a short hallway, and is made up of a single room with a door that, of course, has a lock. Students may misuse it to skip class, use drugs, or engage in sexual activities. This, unfortunately, leads to the students for whom the room is intended not being

able to use it and it may lead to the restroom becoming as trashed as the other restrooms around the school.

I believe this restroom is a necessity for students who don't feel safe in gendered restrooms and it should be treated with more respect. I believe that students who feel safe in the gendered restrooms should avoid using the all-gender restroom if possible. Unfortunately, the exterior door to this restroom at times seems to be locked when it doesn't need to be. When I went in to investigate the restroom and see its condition, I found the external door locked. When it was opened for me, I went in to find a perfectly clean restroom: no trash or dirt on the floor, a clean toilet and sink, paper towels in the dispenser, soap and working batteries in the dispenser, and a functioning sink. I was shocked, considering the state of the other restrooms in the building. Perhaps it was locked for cleaning and

they had forgotten to unlock it, but I was disheartened to find a sign on the inside of the door asking people to keep the door unlocked. It was clear to me that this was not the first time that someone had locked the door when it shouldn't have been locked.

It's unclear who locked the door and why, but it isn't fair to lock the door for students who use that bathroom because it was intended for them. Perhaps it was locked to keep students from misusing it, but that defeats the purpose of having an all-gender restroom in the first place. After all, Cooper only has one in the entire building. I believe that if students are misusing the restroom, students who need it should be able to ask staff to take care of it rather than locking the door for everyone.

I firmly believe that all-gender restrooms are necessary here at Cooper as there are transgender and nonbinary students that attend this school. Even if there was only one of said students, the all-gender restroom would still be necessary. Students deserve to feel safe and should not have to face discrimination based on their gender identity. Students should not feel as if they must avoid using the restroom here at school. They have the right to have a restroom that they feel comfortable using.

My hope is that people will start to show more respect toward transgender and nonbinary students by not misusing the all-gender restroom. I also ask that the external restroom door remains unlocked when it does not need to be closed for cleaning or repairs so that students who need it can use the restroom freely. Students have the right to use the restroom, regardless of what they identify as, and it is crucial that other people respect that.