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Myth #3: Letting trans people use the bathroom or locker room matching their gender identity is dangerous

By German Lopez | @germanlopez | german.lopez@vox.com | Updated Nov 14, 2018, 4:09pm EST

Part of **Transgender people: 10 common myths**

Transgender people generally prefer using the bathroom or locker room that matches their gender identity, not the one that corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth. But conservative critics argue that this could expose others to sexual voyeurism and

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assault in bathrooms or locker rooms — even though there’s no evidence to support this claim.

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee **perpetuated** this myth at a 2015 convention, stating, “Now I wish that someone told me that when I was in high school that I could have felt like a woman when it came time to take showers in PE. I’m pretty sure that I would have found my feminine side and said, ‘Coach, I think I’d rather shower with the girls today.’”

But as Media Matters **pointed out**, experts from 12 states that protect trans rights have thoroughly refuted this talking point. In the US, there’s not a single reported instance of this kind of voyeurism occurring in states with legal protections for trans people.

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What right-wing groups say will happen if states implement laws to protect transgender people from discrimination:

Laws would be “abused” and “exploited” by sexual predators.

- Pacific Justice Institute

“Sexual predators” would have “legitimized access” to women’s restrooms.

- Peter Sprigg, Family Research Council

Laws would allow “sexual predators to gain easier access to their targets.”

- Texas Values

What experts from states with laws on the books say:



“Beyond specious” to say laws will lead to sexual assault.

Toni Troop, spokeswoman for Jane Doe Inc.



Sexual assaults stemming from law “not even remotely” a problem.

John Elder, Minneapolis police spokesman



No problems since passage of 2011 law.

Las Vegas Police Department



Opponents of protections are trying to “create fear.”

Alexa Priddy, director at Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault



“Has not resulted in increase[d] sexual assault”

William Hoshijo, executive director of Hawaii Civil Rights Commission



“Zero allegations” of bathroom sexual assault.

Charlie Burr, spokesman for Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries



“Not aware” of any problems from a 2001 law.

Karen Richards, Vermont Human Rights Commission



No increase in sex crimes due to 2001 law.

Michael D. Evora, executive director of Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights



“No factual basis” for sexual assault fears.

Amy Snierson, executive director of Maine Human Rights Commission



“Unaware of any sexual assault as the result of the CT gender identity or expression law.”

Jim O'Neill, spokesman for the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights in Opportunities

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In another investigation, Media Matters also **found** that 17 school districts around the country with protections for trans people, which collectively cover more than 600,000 students, had no problems with harassment in bathrooms or locker rooms after implementing their policies.

Conservatives usually counter that there are examples of men sneaking into women’s bathrooms to attack women. But as **PolitiFact reported**, none of the examples cited in the US happened after a city or state passed a nondiscrimination law or otherwise let trans people use the bathroom or locker

room for their gender identity. Instead, these seem to be examples of men doing awful things regardless of the law — which has, unfortunately, happened since the beginning of civilization.

One example is a case in Toronto, Canada, which now has a nondiscrimination law, in which a man disguised himself as a woman and attacked women in shelters. But the attacks **happened months before** Ontario (Toronto's province) protected trans people in a nondiscrimination law. So the law couldn't have been the cause.

While the issue is now being used primarily against trans people, historically bathroom fears have been **regularly deployed** against civil rights causes. It was used against black people to **justify segregation** — by invoking fears that black men would attack white women in bathrooms. And it was **used** to stop the Equal Rights Amendment, which tried to establish legal equality between men and women, because opponents claimed it would lead to the abolition of bathrooms for different genders, potentially putting women in danger.

Some people are also, frankly, just bothered by the idea that someone in the same bathroom or locker room won't share the

same genitalia as them.

This gets to the heart of the issue: Bathrooms are places where really private things happen, and that makes people feel vulnerable in all sorts of ways. “People are afraid because they’re exposed,” Kathryn Anthony, author of ***Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession***, **told the Guardian**. “There’s a vulnerability we feel in public restrooms we don’t feel in other places.”

But a lot of things happen in public bathrooms that people aren’t comfortable with — and people have managed to deal with it to accommodate others’ rights and needs.

So if it’s not harming anyone, perhaps it’s best, LGBTQ advocates **argue**, to let trans people use the facility for their gender identity without making them feel ostracized and discriminated against. (Discrimination is a huge contributor to **gender dysphoria**, a medical condition that some trans people experience that can cause depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation.)

But conservative lawmakers have latched on to the insecurity over bathrooms to propagate myths about the power of discriminatory laws to stop horrible attacks in

bathrooms and protect people’s privacy. And although these are plainly myths with no evidence behind them, they’ve been used in attempts to perpetuate discrimination since the Jim Crow era.

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Transgender people: 10 common myths

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Myth #2: Sexual orientation is linked to gender identity

Myth #4: Transitioning is as simple as one surgery

Myth #5: All trans people medically transition

Myth #6: Transgender-inclusive health care is expensive

Myth #7: Children aren't old enough to know their gender identity

Myth #8: Transgender people are mentally ill

Myth #9: Transgender people make up a third gender

Myth #10: Drag queens and kings are transgender

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