

THE NORTH CAROLINA "BATHROOM BILL"

Thursday

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The December 23rd issue of the USA Today was just delivered today, courtesy of a (insert adjective here, i.e., "incompetent," "inept," "slow," "uncaring," etc.) prison mailroom. In it, there were a number of readers' comments regarding the now infamous North Carolina "Bathroom Bill." About 51% of the readers polled believe that transgenders, people who identify with a gender other than the one they were born with, should be able to use the bathroom which corresponds to the gender in which they currently identify, while 46% believe that current gender identity is immaterial, that people should be forced to use the bathroom which corresponds to the gender they were born with. (Not sure what the missing 3% believes in, as it wasn't listed.) While not a transgender myself, being an inmate is very similar to being ruled by a homophobic tyrant, so I have a bird's eye view of many of the issues currently plaguing the transgender community, albeit in a prison setting. At the end of the day, and because of my status as an outside observer, I can see both the gains, and losses, that we, as a society, have made in the struggle for all to be equal.

After asking people to stop calling "North Carolina's bill on gender the 'bathroom bill[.]'" USA Today reader Bob Munson argued that a "transgender man could use a closed stall in a men's bathroom. **No problem there.** A transgender woman has only closed stalls in the women's bathroom. **No problem there.**" (Emphasis added.) While he went on to point out that problems existed for more public areas, such as "changing rooms of health clubs, schools and swimming pools where privacy is often minimal or non-existent[.]" his argument completely failed to take into account **why** transgenders want to use a bathroom which doesn't correspond to their birth gender in the first place. For them, it's not just a visual reminder of how they're still living in the wrong body, it's also an opportunity for them to be harassed by people who see what appears to be a member of the incorrect sex entering or exiting the bathroom. People can be cruel, homophobic people men who perceive a threat to their masculinity even more so, so while a stall with the cheapest lock imaginable might offer some measure of privacy, for a transgender using what they perceive to be the wrong bathroom, it's a major problem indeed.

We hear arguments about how North Carolina, and perhaps the rest of the country, needs laws like this to "protect[] my 5-year old daughter from running into a creepy old man in the bathroom because he 'feels like a woman that day'[.]" (KT Dause, USA Today reader), but KT Dause's point fails to take into account that we're not talking about someone who "feels like a woman that day[.]" we're talking about someone with a condition which has **already** been identified, and treated, by professionals, that condition being, as I understand it, "gender dysphoria." People with gender dysphoria don't shed and don their sexual identities at will. These are people who believe, truly believe, that they're a woman stuck in a man's body, or a man stuck in a woman's body, and who go to **extreme** measures to change this. These are people who are undergoing serious medical and mental health procedures designed not just to verify their seriousness and level of commitment, but also to ~~perform~~ perform one of the most major physical, emotional and mental health changes imaginable. Creating and implementing a bill like North Carolina's Bathroom Bill only serves to foster discrimination, and worse, to cloak it with the appearance of legality, and therefore, morality.

Of course, it could be worse. North Carolina could be treating transgenders like they do in prison. Here, transgender male/females (people who were born as a male, but believe themselves to be female), are forced to submit to strip searches, sometimes multiple times per day, and not just in front of male officers, but in front of several, sometimes dozens, of male inmates. As if this wasn't bad enough, if a male/female transgender inmate in here needs to use the bathroom while participating in a recreational activity, (s)he's forced to do so **in front of everyone else**, by which I mean using a toilet placed in such a way that not only can everyone see them, but one which doesn't have any sort of privacy walls whatsoever. As a man who's comfortable with being a man, even I wouldn't dream of whipping it out and taking a leak in front of everyone, so I couldn't even imagine how traumatizing it would be for a transgender male/female to be forced to drop her pants and squat on a toilet while everyone could see them. Being forced to shower in front of everyone is bad enough, but that takes humiliation to a whole new level.

USA Today reader RamblinManNC says that "[t]he fact that anyone thinks it's OK for a male to use a female bathroom or locker room is absurd." Semantics aside, RamblinManNC obviously isn't very familiar with the sports world. If he were, then he'd know how ironic his statement is, as women frequently enter the men's locker room to conduct their interviews, an area in which the male athletes are often in a state of complete undress, showering, changing, using the bathroom, etc. In fact, many interviews were conducted while the athlete was standing there, completely naked, albeit the camera never panned low enough to show you this.

Regardless of how you feel about the law, at the end of the day, a transgender man who identifies himself as being a female poses no more of a threat to a woman or her daughter than anyone else. If anything, (s)he poses even less of a threat. If you ask me, the real reason behind the Bathroom Bill is homophobia. Sadly, whatever the reason, the law only serves to promote a legalized discrimination. For every step we take forward, it seems that we also take two steps backward.

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