

When most students use the bathroom, their decision is automatic – either enter the men’s stalls or the women’s stalls. For some, this decision isn’t as binary. As a transgender male, Tyler prefers not to use public, gendered bathrooms, forcing him to wait until he gets home.

“I am not at all comfortable going into the women’s restroom, yet I am afraid that guys will look at me weird or even hurt me if they think I’m just a freak in the ‘wrong’ bathroom,” he said.

Tyler represents a population of students who identify as transgender but lack proper bathroom accommodations in all buildings on campus. Currently UT has 42 bathrooms labeled “gender neutral,” “unisex” or “all gender restroom” among more than 200 campus buildings. In order to remedy this issue, The University of Texas at Austin’s Student Government joined a growing number of universities to propose and pass two bills with the goal of making bathrooms more accessible.

Members of UTSG wrote Assembly Resolution 6 which proposed changing the signs on bathrooms from “gender neutral,” “unisex,” or “all gender restroom” to say “gender inclusive.” The second bill Assembly Resolution 7, will incorporate gender inclusive bathrooms in all buildings on campus.

Ashley Choi, UTSG representative helped introduce the two proposals during a student government meeting in September. For Choi, increasing the amount of transgender accessible bathrooms holds a special significance. When Choi was touring UT for the first time before attending, her family accompanied her. Choi’s brother who is transgender had a hard time finding gender inclusive bathrooms that he could use. Choi partly joined Student Government to ensure change within campus and promote a more inclusive culture for all genders.

While the UTSG legislation will not make any definite impact within the upcoming year, transgender students can access other helpful LGBT resources on campus. According to Choi, the University’s Gender and Sexuality Center provides an app for students called Inclusive U that allows users to locate gender neutral bathrooms on campus.

“I hope one day in the near future, all students, faculty and staff do not have to rely on an app to find and locate a bathroom that they have to use for safety and comfort,” Choi said in an interview.

An estimated 1.4 million adults in the United States identify as transgender, and transforming bathrooms into safe spaces for students has become a trend across campuses nationwide. Along with creating LGBT friendly bathrooms on university campuses, states have also taken initiative to do the same.

About 14 states passed policies to ensure safety and equality for transgender individuals, according to the Transgender Law Center. Specifically, states such as California, Vermont, Washington, Oregon, and Colorado are ranked top five recommended places for transgender people to live in, reported Refinery29. Although a growing number of states continue to pass laws that protect transgender individuals, places like Texas regularly reject all such proposals.

For example, earlier this year President Barack Obama issued a directive to all public schools in the United States allowing transgender individuals to use the bathroom in correlation with the

gender they identify with, according to The New York Times. Texas blocked this order arguing that they would not support Obama's transgender bathroom rights initiative, reported Esquire.

Overall Texas is ranked 27 out of 50 and under a "very bad" rating for places the transgender community is recommended to live in, reported Refinery29. They added that as a state without LGBT anti-discrimination laws, transgender individuals potentially risk a greater chance of harm since they are not protected under federal law.

The controversy over transgender bathroom legislation brought this issue into the spotlight, according to UT anthropology sophomore David Aguirre. As a member of the LGBT community, Aguirre says he appreciates the increasing awareness but hopes the stigma of what is considered "normal" is taken away forever.

Assigning individuals to certain bathrooms "makes it uncomfortable for both the trans person, and the other people in the bathroom thus resulting in the large amounts of hate crimes we see today," Aguirre added.

Transphobic hate crime are greater now than ever before, reported HRC. This year over 21 deaths were reported within the transgender community, an equivalent to the total number of deaths in 2015, according to the Daily Beast.

To help prevent issues, UT provides the Gender and Sexuality Center, a resource for those seeking comfort, security or information regarding the LGBT community. Centers like these also potentially lower the chances of hate crimes if individuals have more options thus helping to decrease the urge to commit suicide, reported NCBI. For some, single-stalled bathrooms on campus are not preferred, but the only way to ensure their safety and privacy.

For UT geological science junior and transgender male Tyler Cadena, using the men's bathroom affirms his identity and humanity, he said. But for a lot of transgender youth and adults, "feeling safe in a public bathroom is a feeling rarely felt," Cadena added.

The terminology around gender and sexuality is constantly shifting. Many terms can be used to describe an individual's gender, but the language is tricky, reported The New York Times. The language used to speak about an LGBT member varies depending on the individual and their preferences. Rhetoric professor Jesi Egan explained that "gender inclusive" is an overall preferred term rather than terms such as "gender neutral" or "unisex."

"The term (gender inclusive) acknowledges that there are multiple genders, and that gender does have a profound effect on our everyday lives," Egan said.

The term "gender neutral" however, prevents society from recognizing and addressing that some groups of people are more vulnerable to violence and discrimination than other groups, she added.

In gender inclusive bathrooms, a transgender individual does not have to worry about "passing" as the gender they identify with. Cadena explained that "passing" in order to use the bathroom that aligns with an individual's gender can be "totally fine or total anxiety." According to The New York Times, an individual could either risk a bladder infection if they hold it in, or suffer

harm if they do not. For Tyler, it is much easier if he waits until he gets home to use the bathroom. A place he feels comfortable and safe in.

“For many trans people across the country, using the bathroom that affirms their gender, and feeling safe doing so, is validating and gratifying,” Cadena said. It is a step toward “progression and equality,” he added.