Why are gender neutral bathrooms important when creating a safe space for gender minorities?

Gender neutral bathrooms are a way to create a safer campus environment for trans* and gender nonconforming students, staff, faculty and community members at PCC. They are also a way for PCC to show trans* and gender nonconforming people that our community values their presence and cares about their health and safety.

For trans* and gender nonconforming individuals, gender segregated bathrooms can be spaces where they are met with intimidation, harassment, run-ins with security, and/or violence. These occurrences happen when people using the restroom police the gender of others based on binary assumptions and expectations of who men and women are and what they look like. This policing can effect trans* individuals, but also cisgender individuals (those who are not trans*) who present or express their gender in ways that are not culturally normative. This phenomenon is commonly referred to in gender minority communities as "The Bathroom Problem," and is an experience that most trans* and gender nonconforming people have encountered, often repeatedly, in their lives.

Gender segregated bathrooms threaten the safety of many trans* and gender nonconforming individuals. In addition to being a safety concern, this bathroom configuration can lead to health concerns. When one does not have a bathroom option that they feel comfortable and/or safe accessing, they may choose to not use the bathroom. Depending on how a person goes about avoiding the bathroom, whether it be by not eating or drinking all day or by holding it, doing so can cause serious health problems.

Gender neutral restrooms are safer for trans* and gender nonconforming people and not any less safe for others (See "Common Arguments" below). When a bathroom is gender neutral, a person who does not identify within the binary as a man or woman does not have to choose a bathroom that does not align with their gender identity. When a bathroom is gender neutral, trans* and gender nonconforming people do not stand out in ways that can make them vulnerable to intimidation, harassment or attack. When a bathroom is gender neutral, "who counts" and "who is allowed" is expanded to include everyone, which lessens the likelihood of exclusionary gender policing in the bathroom. Finally, when a trans* or gender nonconforming person sees a gender neutral bathroom when they access a PCC campus, especially if PCC is explicit about the ways in which they serve gender minority populations, the bathroom will act as a sign of PCC's commitment to serving and supporting a diverse student body and PCC community.
Common Arguments and Frequently Asked Questions

1. **argument:** gender neutral bathrooms are unsafe for women and children
   - **rebuttal:** this argument assumes that the safety of cisgender women and children is more important than the safety of trans* and gender nonconforming people
   - allowing people to use the bathroom that works best for their gender identity does not compromise the safety of women or children. Trans* and gender nonconforming people should not be assumed to be predators or dangerous. Also, a sign on a gender segregated bathroom does not keep actual violent or dangerous people (of any gender) out of the restroom.
   - while gender segregated bathrooms do not actually insure safety for cis women or children, they do actually compromise the safety of trans* and gender nonconforming people

2. **argument:** gender neutral bathrooms are a special privilege for transgender or gender nonconforming people. Spaces should not be required to go out of their way or spend money on creating a space for such a small population
   - **rebuttal:** going to the bathroom is not a privilege, but a right. Many trans* and gender nonconforming people will avoid using the bathroom if not given a safe or anxiety-free option. Not using the bathroom when one needs to can cause severe health problems such as dehydration, malnutrition, or a UTI depending on how one deals with not having a bathroom option.
   - gender neutral bathrooms do not only increase bathroom accessibility and safety for trans* and gender nonconforming individuals. Gender neutral bathrooms also increase access for guardians who accompany a child of another gender to the bathroom, thus increasing the safety of that child. Gender neutral bathrooms also increase access for attendants who assist people of another gender in the restroom, thus increasing the safety of the person who necessitates assistance in the bathroom.

3. **argument:** If only gender segregated bathroom options exist, which bathroom should we let transgender people use? What if they do not present in a gender normative way?
   - **rebuttal:** trans* folks should not be told which restroom they should use. Trans* folks should be allowed to use the restroom that they believe is most fitting, comfortable or useful for them. For binary trans* folks, this would most likely be the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity. For genderqueer or gender nonconforming folks, this decision may depend on several personal factors.
   - There are no rules about how feminine or masculine one needs to be to access the restroom. This is called “gender policing” the rules of the gender binary. Almost no one (trans, queer, or cis) conforms perfectly to gender norms all of
the time, thus the gender binary is restrictive for all. Policing gender in or outside of the bathroom can lead to discrimination and violence.

4. **argument:** men are messier and stinkier than women, so women shouldn’t be forced to share a bathroom with them
   - **rebuttal:** men are not inherently or naturally messier than women. Often women’s restrooms can get messy. If this is an observed comparison between bathrooms in a given place, maybe making the bathrooms gender neutral will encourage a culture of cleanliness.
   - most people use gender neutral bathrooms at home or in others’ homes without questions of messiness. The ease at which restrooms are shared with all genders in the home indicates that people could do so successfully in public.

5. **argument:** gender neutral bathrooms will make cisgender people (often communicated as “real,” “natural,” “regular,” or “normal” women/men) uncomfortable. Also, sharing the bathroom with the “opposite” sex will be embarrassing.
   - **rebuttal:** Comfort should not take precedence over safety.
   - Folks may feel uncomfortable with a change in a rule that did not negatively effect them personally, but most likely only at first.
   - avoiding embarrassment should not be more important than creating safety.
   - the preferences of the majority should not be prioritized over the needs of a minority

6. **argument:** I understand that gender neutral bathrooms increase safety and health of trans* and gender nonconforming people, but we just don’t have the money or space to build more bathrooms. I also don’t have the power to change the bathrooms we have into gender neutral options.
   - **rebuttal:** Multi-stall gender neutral bathrooms actually take up the same amount or even less space as gender segregated restrooms. They are simply a single room instead of two separate rooms assigned to women and men. They are also more cost efficient because you need fewer of them, you can convert pre-existing bathrooms with only slight changes, and if you choose to take the urinals out, you will have less maintenance cost as urinals are known to clog and break down at a faster rate than toilets.
   - If you cannot build new bathrooms or change some of the existing bathrooms to gender neutral, you can institute a broad nondiscrimination policy and post it in the bathroom that encourages a culture of respect where people do not police gender in the restroom. The policy should state the right for anyone who uses the restroom to do so and do so safely.