

Gender, Sexuality and Identity

Challenges and Experiences - Video 3

Andrew S:

It's just the worst. Bathrooms especially. Because if there's like a handicap or family bathroom I will absolutely use that one first because I don't want to get beat up. Like I have friends who have been hospitalized just for using the bathroom.

Hershel Russell:

Bathrooms are such a nuisance. For anyone who is seen as gender-ambiguous, anytime you're in a public space you have this awful choice. The culture in men's bathrooms and the culture in women's bathrooms are quite different. Women look at each other; they look at each other in the mirror. They feel pretty free to tell you if they think you don't belong there, to call security. So if you look gender-ambiguous and you go to a women's bathroom the chances are extremely high that you will be harassed. Maybe only glares, but the chances are extremely high you will be made to feel really unwelcome. On the other hand, if you go into a men's bathroom, men look at each other much less; they tend to look at the floor. But the risk of assault and of sexual assault in men's bathrooms is very real, particularly for people who are seen as 'effeminate men'. Those are the people who are getting harmed in bathrooms here and now. So if you look gender-ambiguous and you go to a men's bathroom you'll face a lower but real risk of sexual assault. This is every time you want to go to the bathroom - at work, at school, when you've gone to the movies, when you've gone - you know, when you're walking around downtown, at the mall - every place you're outside.

So I really ask people to think about if this was your reality every time you had this simple, physical need, I want you to think about the impact on anxiety. I want you to think about the impact on shame; it's humiliating. I want you to think about the impact on depression. So bathrooms create so many problems for us, and almost every time I'm working with someone who's in the process of coming out as trans, the big issue at work is the bathroom. You know, this is such simple stuff for us to take care of. It doesn't require new architecture; it requires little pieces of plastic that say 'gender-neutral bathroom' or 'all genders welcome' or I've seen one wonderful little plastic thing that had a space creature on it, and a couple of

animals on it, and men, women, people in wheelchairs - a lovely range. Everybody welcome. It's just a piece of plastic; it's all we need.