

My Dead Feminist Heart

By Marti Abernathey

Published April 15, 2009 | Updated March 31, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/my-dead-feminist-heart_n_654.htm

Abstract

Reading Nexy's blog, I found out about a post over at Feministing and the boycott that's being called by some in the transgender community. The title of the post is "Men in Women's Bathrooms, Is Your State Next?" I don't believe the post itself was bad. The original post author, Miriam, asked in the last [...]

Article

Reading Nexy's blog, I found out about a post over at Feministing and the boycott that's being called by some in the transgender community. The title of the post is "Men in Women's Bathrooms, Is Your State Next?"

I don't believe the post itself was bad. The original post author, Miriam, asked in the last paragraph:

"Here's the thing that always gets me about the bathroom debate: The idea that laws governing a space which by nature is unpoliced, unregulated and fundamentally just an unlocked door with a sign on it gets so much airtime. Why is it that people feel a picture of a stick figure in a dress on a door keeps them safe? What does that say about our larger beliefs about gender?"

This is a very good question to ask. Unfortunately the question asked devolved into transphobic fear and loathing. For example, Gopher said:

"For the record I'm not against transpeople using whichever bathroom. But I don't know how long that awkward stage last until they pass as the opposite gender but its not worth it to change and affect everyones lives and make it available for men to enter womens spaces. Its vulnerable and opens up the door to misogynistic treatment. However if this specifies exclusively transgender people I'm not against it. I just don't want people who identify as men using womens restrooms."

Hell, I'm not so sure how long that awkward stage lasts. I don't know if I'm personally still in it. What I do know is that I still have a bladder. What I do know is that I've already been cornered and physically harassed in a mens restroom. I know I've been fondled by a man who asked me if "those tits are real". But the fear mongering continues:

"It sucks for transgender people who would just honestly feel more comfortable. Honestly though, even beyond that, it would be downright uncomfortable to know that a guy could be in there just to listen to the girls pee and get off from it. That would happen too, and probably much more frequently."

The sad thing is that for someone that is so afraid of being assaulted or raped can't see (or doesn't

think about) transgender people's safety. These kind of laws have passed in 13 states and many towns with no rise in crime. But Zyfrom explains it plainly:

*"One thing I have to say is noticeably absent from this discussion so far is any contribution from anyone who has identified themselves as a transsexual. well, let's change that right now : *I* am a trans-woman. Many of the comments here have been very cis-privileged, and I just want to caution and remind everyone about that - cisgendered people trying to talk about how transgendered people should behave or what we want - it's not necessarily inherently bigoted or wrong, I don't think the topic should be taboo - but ultimately its about the same as men talking about women, or any other privileged group talking about any other non-privileged group, and it should at LEAST be kept in mind throughout the conversation.*

My biggest complaint about the whole bathroom conversation is that I see it primarily (and almost exclusively) as not only a scare tactic but a distraction. There are no non-discrimination laws for transsexuals at the national level, and very few at any other level. In many places, attacking or even killing someone for being trans does not qualify as a hate crime. Failing to "pass" is all to often fatal. THESE are the issues that I want addressed, an I think most of the trans- community would agree with me.

People, particularly bigots and the FotF types, like to center this conversation around some idea that transsexuals are perverts who get off by peeing in the wrong bathroom, to which opponents often respond that it is not sexual and it can be uncomfortable for a trans person to be in the bathroom reserved for the opposite gender. well, even that, to me, seems secondary. My fear is if I go into a men's bathroom wearing a dress (which I wouldn't do anyway, regardless of the law) isn't that I will feel 'uncomfortable' around a bunch of men (though I would), my primary fear is that some bigot will see me go in and think 'hey, let's round up the guys and some baseball bats and go beat up that tranny later' and that nobody would care if it happened.

Yes. It is uncomfortable to be in the wrong bathroom, but of all the societal ills that plague the trans community right now, it is very low on my list of priorities. It is all to often used to take a conversation about hate crimes and discrimination and turn it into a freak-show about people who have to pee.

And as for the conversation about how well a person 'passes' : THAT is discriminatory on many levels that I think even much of the trans community doesn't realize. The feminist discussion around a woman's appearance tells us that if a woman has broad shoulders and hairy legs, and doesn't feel like conforming to societies standards of beauty, well, you know, good for her. But add in a penis to that equation, and suddenly you are expected to always wear makeup and dresses and hide your cheekbones if you expect anyone to take you seriously. It's so ingrained that many transwomen buy into it without thinking about it that much - but even if she isn't 'passing', even if she isn't in a dress or hasn't shaved her legs (or any other part of her body) a trans woman is STILL a woman. There are very practical safety concerns around passing (which, I assure you, we do NOT need to be reminded of) but 'passing' or 'not passing' does NOT change someone's identity."

What bothers me most is that these are the same kinds of arguments that were going on three years ago. I stopped frequenting these blogs, but it wasn't a boycott. I just don't really dig going into places that I don't feel valued, listened to, or accepted. I don't even know that I'd call myself a feminist anymore. I do believe in equality, but these kind of posts make me feel like online feminism isn't about equality but another hierarchy of power. I don't see things changing by engaging in online

discussions, so I won't boycott. A boycott suggests that I'll go back at some point. I doubt I ever will.

Suggested citation

Marti Abernathey. "My Dead Feminist Heart." TransAdvocate, April 15, 2009.

https://www.transadvocate.com/my-dead-feminist-heart_n_654.htm