

Inclusive gender signs connected to positive attitudes toward trans, nonbinary people

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Something as simple as seeing all-gender signs in public places, like restrooms, was linked to adolescents' acceptance of transgender and nonbinary people, a new study has found.

In one of the first studies of its kind, researchers conducted an online experiment with a nationally representative sample of 319 [adolescents](#) aged 12 to 17, testing how gendered signs displayed on public facilities affected participants' subsequent attitudes toward [gender](#).

The results showed strong evidence that adolescents exposed to all-gender signage in a virtual [school setting](#) were more likely to understand gender as existing beyond a male-female binary, compared to peers exposed to gender-segregated signage.

"In essence, the study showed that gender-segregation in physical spaces primes adolescents to think of gender in a binary manner, while gender-inclusive spaces tend to lead them to have a more nuanced understanding," said Traci Gillig, an assistant professor at Washington State University's Murrow College of Communication and lead researcher on the study published in the *International Journal of Communication*.

Gillig, along with colleagues from University of Amsterdam and University of Arizona, employed a virtual narrative technique that exposed youth to different forms of gendered signage for restrooms and locker-rooms through interactive storytelling.

One group was guided through a virtual day in a school setting that included rooms and facilities, such as restrooms and locker rooms, marked "men" and "women" with the traditional stick figure and stick-figure-in-dress symbols. The second group went through the same virtual day except with facilities that were marked "all gender" without any gendered symbols.

After the virtual experience, the participants responded to a series of questions about how they viewed gender. The adolescents who had been exposed to the all-gender signage were more likely to perceive genders other than male and female as valid.

Additionally, youth exposed to all-gender facilities in their [everyday lives](#) reported being more comfortable with using such facilities and tended to be more accepting of transgender and nonbinary people.

The team has conducted further research on the effects of gendered facilities signage on adults within an office setting. Those examinations focused on how such signage influences people's attitudes toward transgender and nonbinary individuals as well as their views on related social policies.

More information: Cues Signaling Gender Segregation and Gender Inclusion in Public Spaces Affect Adolescents' Binary Conceptualization of Gender and Attitudes Toward Transgender and Nonbinary People, *International Journal of Communication* (2023).

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