



The Oxford University LGBTQ+ Society recommends this document as an example speech to argue for gender neutral toilets in college.

You can adapt it to improve relevance to your specific community.

If you would like any help with this, or introducing other motions, please don't hesitate to get in contact with the LGBTQ+ Society or Campaign.

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## **Speech in Proposition of the motion to implement Gender Neutral Toilets**

Today this JCR will debate and vote on a motion that will change the signage of the Somerville toilets from “men” and “women” to “gender neutral toilets with cubicles” and “gender neutral toilets with cubicles and urinals”.

Using the toilet is something that everybody does, that everybody needs to do.

The right to be able to use the toilet is something that most of us take for granted. The gender segregation of bathrooms seems right because it is what we have done for our whole lives.

But this system is problematic, not just because it does not account for trans and nonbinary people but because it is actively harmful to them.

One case of a trans person reporting violent abuse in a toilet is too many. But for many trans people this has become something that they have had to, and will continuously have to deal with in their lives.

I am aware that many of you believe that this motion will be damaging for women in this college because it removes the option of a womens toilet being used as a safe space for women. But it is important to remember that a space is not a safe space for women if it is not a safe space for all women. And a space that excludes men will by extension make that space a hostile environment for trans people and a space in which trans people will experience abuse.

I also have a statement from a former officer of this JCR on this issue:

“As a former Somerville JCR Disability Officer and consent workshop facilitator who inhabited these roles during the national scandal surrounding sexual assault and harassment at Somerville, I am incredibly passionate about and take seriously the safety and dignity of women, particularly women survivors of assault who may have disabilities related to their experiences of assault. I have previously contributed to reform and action in Somerville and it’s JCR intended to prevent assault and provide women with safety and dignity.

With this in mind, I unreservedly support this motion for gender neutral toilets in Somerville. The concerns of some women regarding the loss of women-only or cis men exclusionary toilets as a safe space for cis women, though entirely valid, speak more to the failure of the College as official body and community to adequately prevent heterosexual sexual assault and harassment, and to support women and survivors on campus, than to the need for such bathrooms.

There are other recourses for these women and survivors that could perhaps be better advertised - such as an extensive welfare support network, other gender segregated bathrooms on campus and additional security at bops. There are also other recourses that could be implemented, such as the ‘Ask Angela’ policy practiced by bars and venues across the country and endorsed by police. Trans students have a need for and right to access to bathrooms, and, without gender neutral toilets, they have have no alternative recourses.

Further, the continuing problem of heterosexual assault and harassment on campus demonstrates that the bathrooms are not effective as a preventative measure. It also ignores the problem of non heteronormative sexual assault and harassment. As a former member I of course have no right to vote on this motion, but I hope my perspective based on my aforementioned experiences is of value to discussion of this motion.”

An anonymous testimony from a trans student states that: “The reason “it might lead to harassment” is toxic because the price they are willing to pay is our /definite/ harassment. I don’t know any trans people who are visibly trans who haven’t been verbally or physically abused in a toilet.”

The proposed solution that the non-binary and trans students can be expected to use the disabled toilet in the downstairs area of Vaughan and in FAH during the bops is problematic, I also have a statement from the former officer specifically on this issue.

“Aside from being practically inconvenient for both groups to ask trans-presenting and non-binary students to use disabled bathrooms, it is also offensive and disrespectful to the trans community. There is a long and ongoing history of pathologising LGBTQ+ identities (and other marked identities such as race, class...) in dominant scientific and social discourse in Western and particularly British culture with the specific agenda of invalidating such identities and asserting unmarked identities as superior.

Mislabeling LGBTQ+ identities as medical impairment and/or mental illness is done with the specific intent to frame it as something deviant, damaging, unwanted and in need of treatment or cure. Mislabeling it as illness, particularly, denies it as an integral part of identity: it is the extreme of the ‘just a phase’ narrative, suggesting it is something that not

just 'can', but 'should', be 'cured'. It has been consistently used as a justification for forcibly assimilating or excluding LGBTQ+ people from society.

By asking trans people to use disabled bathrooms instead of the default bathrooms, the college offends its trans population by becoming complicit in this narrative. It also offends disabled students by misusing 'disabled' as an umbrella term for marked or 'deviant' identity, and disabled spaces as places to relegate those it refuses to fully integrate into its definition of 'normal society'."

There are trans people in college, these people need to be able to use a toilet. Everyone deserves to be able to use the bathroom without experiencing abuse, vicious attacks. So in order to do what is right for all students of this college, I believe it is imperative that the members of this JCR vote for this motion!