

## Gender and Sex in School

*Rolling Stone*<sup>1</sup> recently featured an article detailing the life and experience of Coy Mathis, a transgender child growing up in Colorado. When Coy was born, everyone thought he was a boy. By the time he was a toddler, Coy exhibited a love of pink, and insisted on wearing dresses and pinning up his hair. At first, his parents thought this was just a phase. As time went on, however, it became clear that Coy's preferences were deeper and more permanent: Coy wondered when he would get his "girl parts" and refused to leave the house wearing boy's clothing. Eventually Coy's parents realized that despite his anatomy, Coy saw himself as a girl. Coy's parents struggled to find a way to adjust to this reality: how would they tell Coy's teacher? Which bathroom would Coy use at school? With the help of psychologists, lawyers, and school administrators, the Mathis family worked out a feasible strategy: Coy would go to school as a girl.

When Coy began second grade, however, school officials decided that Coy must use the boys' bathroom despite Coy's preference to use the girls' bathroom. Under a new Colorado non-discrimination law, the Mathis family sued the school system and won. The Mathis family and their supporters see Coy's journey, and the journeys of other transgender students, as part of a larger LGBT rights movement.

Some argue, however, that accommodating Coy may impinge on the rights of others. They express concern for girls who may feel uncomfortable seeing Coy in the girl's bathroom. However, Coy's supporters liken this to the discomfort white women may have felt sharing a bathroom with African- American women during the Civil Rights era.

### Study Questions:

1. Should public recognition of a person's gender be determined by anatomy or personal identity?
2. Which bathroom(s) should a transgender student be allowed to use?
3. Do school officials have a moral obligation to seek a practical solution to the bathroom problem, such as a third bathroom for transgender persons, or more privacy in existing bathrooms? How might the costs of such solutions be balanced against other considerations?

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/about-a-girl-coy-mathis-fight-to-change-change-gender-20131028>

