



September 2021

To Our Boulders Community:

Happy October! This comment response will address feedback we've received in the month of September and a couple from early October.

As a reminder, comments can be submitted anytime to our [three online comment boxes](#), and to our two physical comment boxes (one in each location). We do our best to respond as frequently as possible in a public forum, and for urgent or easy-to-take-care-of matters, we often fix things on the fly. While we don't address every comment in our public responses, we do try to get the gist of all the comments represented, either through combining comments or addressing a concept more generally. If you have a question about how your comment was (or wasn't) responded to, or the response process in general, feel free to email community@bouldersgym.com.

We can't thank you enough for contributing to improvement at Boulders. We really appreciate the comments, especially the ones which spark thoughtful internal conversations and engagement with our community. We're happy and privileged to serve each and every one of you.

Sincerely,

Boulders Climbing Gym

General Feedback:

Comment: *The bike rack outside the downtown location is often crowded. Can more racks be installed near the front door?*

Response: The bike rack outside is owned by the city of Madison and it's tricky for us to add additional space, but we agree that more spots are needed, certainly. We've sent this over to our facilities manager, and if it's within our ability we will likely get another- we're glad that so many of you like to come to the gym under people-power! There's also a large amount of additional bike parking in the ramp below the gym.

Comment: *The climbing is always fun, however, I wish there were more autobelays because you lose a lot of walls to climb*

Response: We're glad you've enjoyed your time climbing and are finding good use in the auto-belays! These are very expensive systems, and lots of folks prefer top-rope as it allows you to climb a route in pieces (since you can stay up and try again after falling). For those reasons you likely won't see a huge influx in auto belays, but we are slowly adding more as we are able. In the meantime, if you'd like to learn to belay check out our [classes page](#) on our website, and feel free to email community@bouldersgym.com if you need sliding-scale pricing.

Comment: *More prints of bird shirt, please! :)*

Response: We're so glad you liked the bird shirt print, we were fans too! Because we have limited

inventory and back-stock availability, we tend to keep these specialty shirts to small, “limited edition” type runs. We know that this cuts down on folks’ ability to get their fix of Boulders swag, and we’re working on getting some simpler Boulders merch that will be more widely available. For these specialty prints, though, make sure you snag them when you can and keep an eye out for old prints (such as the bird shirt) to be given away as prizes or fundraiser incentives.

Comment: *Permanently mounted hangboards away from the kids/team training*

Response: We have permanently mounted hangboards downtown, but unfortunately the training room is the spot that makes the most sense to have hangboards on the east side. Over there, the hangboards are removable so that folks can access the bars of the cage and have more flexibility in their training, and the kiddos are there because it would be way more annoying to have them doing warmups in the middle of the climbing floor. We know that kids’ programming has been a point of contention occasionally and we hope that you can join us in finding patience and compassion for our youngest community members. There is a sign on the training room door making folks aware of the time that kids are likely to be using that space, and we can provide more clarification regarding their schedule upon request.

Comment: *The blue mats in the training room need a good cleaning. We pre-cleaned ours and the paper towel was black/grey, Thanks!!*

Response: Good looking out! We sent this over to the desk staff and will make sure to increase our regular wipe-downs of those mats. We’re also getting a few new ones soon, which should help with the overall use that each one gets in a day. We can also take this as an opportunity to remind folks to **please wipe down your mats** after you use them! Desk staff are unfortunately not able to get back to the training room between every single person’s workout, so we really need some community involvement in this. Thanks!

Comment: *Keep on being great!! Thank you for the laughs!*

Response: Aww stop, YOU’RE great! (Or we bet so, at least, this comment was anonymous)

Comment: *Awesome job lately, everyone!*

Response: Thanks for noticing the awesome work our staff does! We’re very proud too.

Big Picture Feedback*

**This is a new segment of feedback we are going to dig into as a community. Here we will address one or more issues that came up during this feedback period that feel core to the construction of community, who we are as a business, and how we would like to engage with each other moving forward. Please feel free to email community@bouldersgym.com if you have any questions, or if you would like to engage in further discussion regarding any of our Big Picture Feedback comments or responses. We think this works best as a dialogue and would love your input.*

Issue: We received several comments regarding the change in signage to our downtown bathrooms. We had several

people who identified themselves as femme+ folks that felt uncomfortable changing, showering, or using the bathroom in a space that might be shared with cis men in particular. While some comments cited known fallacies about all-gender bathrooms, others urged us to be conscious of our member base and to make trauma-informed decisions regarding safe-space creation. We are going to address here some general feedback and then go into some issues in detail, specifically regarding our most recent switch to a femme+ and all-gender bathroom. Then, we will address feedback we received on the new (and hopefully final) bathroom set up.

General Response: We were anticipating some reactions to this change, and we appreciate everyone who took time to comment, email, and engage with this issue. We know that it is a hot-button politically and that it may be an uncomfortable conversation for some.

We had many (many) long and difficult conversations within our team prior to this switch and tried to consider all angles. We totally agree with you that we do not live in a completely just or sex-blind world, nor one in which sexual assault is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, we also don't live in a world that provides equitable access to gendered spaces for all of our community members. Specifically, we know that our trans and nonbinary community members are by far the most vulnerable to assault, harassment, and exclusion.

We were stuck in a tricky position. We would love to have all private, single-stall bathrooms, and we will make that a priority in future buildings. However, our downtown gym currently has two multi-stall bathrooms, and re-building them entirely is simply not in the cards for us financially right now. So, we had a dilemma: either leave the bathrooms as gendered, which makes our nonbinary community members still fit themselves into one-or-the-other gendered choices, or change them to all-gendered bathrooms and make some (primarily cis-gender) folks uncomfortable.

To break this decision down, we'd like to address some of the issues brought up by these various comments, one by one.

Issue #1: All-gender bathrooms will be an invitation for inappropriate sexual interaction

Response: We believe that bodies are not inherently sexual and that bathroom interactions are perhaps the furthest thing from sexual. Additionally, we know that sexuality exists on a spectrum and that interactions between people with different gender identities or body parts are not inherently more sexual than interactions between those that have the same gender identities or body parts. That being said, we understand that the world we live in has yet to totally de-sexualize bodies or stereotypically heterosexual interaction, and we understand that the possibility of seeing a body part that one has been conditioned to believe is inherently sexual may be uncomfortable.

To help ease this transition, we will be installing locking shower doors in the near future, and remind you in the meantime that a locking bathroom stall is an appropriate place to get changed if the communal space does not feel comfortable to you. We encourage you all to join us in examining the underlying assumptions that spur our discomfort and to challenge the parts of ourselves that uphold outdated understandings of sex and gender.

Issue #2: All-gender bathrooms are a breeding ground for sexual assault

Sexual assault is an awful and unfortunately common occurrence that we would of course love to eradicate. Keeping our community members safe in every way we are able is of course of the utmost importance to us. However, the idea that all-gender bathrooms are less safe than single-gender ones is simply untrue. We

know that the vast majority of sexual assault happens between people who know (and often trust and like) one another. Further, we know that spaces that are designated as all-male (such as fraternities) are also the spaces with the highest rates of sexual assault, not those that are multi-gender. Even if assault did happen in bathrooms (which it statistically doesn't) we know that people of all genders are assaulted, so segregating bathrooms by gender wouldn't help prevent those assaults.

We also know that our trans community members are the most vulnerable to sexual violence and most likely to be the recipients of bigotry and hate, especially in gendered spaces. We made this choice to prioritize the safety and comfort of our nonbinary friends, family members, co-workers, and kids who we know are the least likely to have their comfort prioritized elsewhere and the most likely to experience feelings of otherness.

Issue #3: The old signs were good enough, since they said on them that anyone could use any bathroom.

Response: We believe that the bathroom setup we previously had did not encompass all of our members, employees, or visitors. While there was "inclusive" language included on the signage, the bathrooms were still divided into a binary of options, which forces our nonbinary co-workers, team kids, and climbers to "pick" one or the other. We know that nonbinary and trans folks are at the highest risk for ostracization and we felt it inappropriate to perpetuate this systematic exclusion.

Issue #4: All-gender spaces will be less comfortable and put undue stress on those who have experienced sexual violence

Response: This was by far the trickiest comment we received. All logic aside, we understand that we can't explain away the historical trauma that has been done to folks of all genders, primarily (although not exclusively) by cis men.

It was in response to comments like this that we made the most recent change, switching one bathroom to femme+ while keeping the other all-gender.

We know that this is not a perfect solution, nor do we believe that it is fully indicative of where we would like to be as a culture, but we do believe that it is our best option given our limited bathroom supply and the culture we currently live in.

Feedback regarding the femme+ and all-gender arrangement

***Comment:** Hi! I'd like to submit a comment about the bathroom situation, which I'm sure you've received a lot of feedback about recently. First off, it seems like you're really trying to be as inclusive as possible, which I really appreciate! I felt really uplifted and welcomed when I first noticed the original signs that explicitly said to respect everyone's bathroom choices, and when you switched to two all gender restrooms I was even more excited. The most recent change was confusing, though, and I'd like ask if you'd reconsider. The term "femme" to me suggests an issue of gender expression rather than gender identity, and as a woman who often dresses and presents in a masculine way, worrying about how other people will classify my body, hair, and clothes when I'm choosing a bathroom is exactly what I'm hoping to avoid. I can appreciate that it's a fraught topic for some people's comfort because the bathrooms include showers and changing areas, and I know you're all trying to do your best to be inclusive. But in that case you should probably go back to two separate options. Opting into the "all gender" one if there's a "femme+" option feels like claiming to be "masc+" anyway.*

Side note: If you do stick with at least one all-gender restroom, can you add a covered trash can inside the stall in the one that was once a men's room? It's really helpful for people who menstruate.

Response: We are glad that you are excited about the all-gender restrooms, we are too! We understand that

having one femme+ bathroom and not a masc+ bathroom is a bit confusing, and that it could seem like the all-gender bathroom is essentially a masc+ bathroom by a different name.

Femme+ is an ambiguous definition, as you pointed out, and intentionally so. We wanted to create a space where those that have been traumatized by masculinity, however that might look, could still feel safe and secure. We thought this was especially important given the overwhelming masculinity that is often prevalent in climbing gyms, and at our downtown location in particular.

For those who don't identify themselves as femme+ or just don't feel the need to be in an exclusively femme+ space, the all-gender restroom will be available to all.

Regarding your request for the in-stall trash can: yes! That was on the tick-list from the get-go. Unfortunately, our facilities manager was involved in a severe bike-on-car accident (he is mostly okay, although injured), and so some of our orders have been a bit delayed. We will be on it soon, and see our Instagram for more information on how to support Sean.

Concluding Thoughts:

We know this new combination of bathroom designations is unorthodox but we believe that given our options this minimizes harm and provides safe-space for folks that need it without resorting to outdated binary understandings of gender or sex.

If anyone has further questions or concerns regarding this change, feel free to reach out to community@bouldersgym.com or fill out the anonymous safe space feedback form.

We are immensely proud of and grateful to our community for shouldering bits of the discomfort that comes hand in hand with change so we can work towards our mission: improving the world in which we live, work, and play, one climb at a time.