



**No Longer “Women Only”: How “Gender Identity Ideology”  
Has Changed Women’s Shelters**

Women’s Declaration International USA

June 2024

# No Longer “Women Only”: How “Gender Identity Ideology” Has Changed Women’s Shelters

By Nancy Dockter

## Abstract

The belief that some men can be women has eliminated most if not all single-sex spaces, and women’s domestic violence shelters are no exception. A WDI USA volunteer made calls to 23 such shelters to understand the extent to which males claiming to be women are being housed in these shelters along with the women, when and why the shelters’ policy on admitting such men changed, whether the shelter receives HUD funding, how applicants are screened, and the effects of this policy on the women and girls housed there. Of the 23 shelters she contacted, 19 allow males to share some living spaces within the shelter with women, all of which seem to have bought into “gender identity” ideology, and all of which seemed convinced that the risks to the female residents are minimal. The safety of female shelter residents must be prioritized over the feelings of men claiming to be women. WDI USA will continue to research this issue and push back against the harm that “gender identity” ideology causes to these vulnerable women.

## Introduction

In 1974, the first known domestic violence shelter in the United States was opened in Minneapolis. Today, more than 3,000 shelters exist in the United States – in every state, in metro areas and small towns. Today, most shelters serve not only women, but also male survivors of domestic violence.

In recent years, gender identity ideology – the belief that one is the opposite sex simply by claiming that is so – has had cataclysmic impacts on our society to the detriment of women and girls. Female-only spaces which had long existed in order to protect the safety, privacy, and dignity of women and girls are now vulnerable to the intrusion of males. These spaces include spas, locker rooms, restrooms, and prisons.

Awareness of the consequential harms, physically and psychologically, of gender identity ideology is slowly seeping into public awareness. Independent news organizations, most of all Reduxx, have exposed the horrors of letting males into women’s prisons, changing rooms, restrooms, and shelters. Several rapes in Canadian shelters, by males claiming a “female identity,” are examples of the risk associated with admitting males into shelters. However, resisting adoption of such a policy comes with severe consequences. When Canada’s oldest shelter, Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter, decided not to accept males claiming to be women, the organization was stripped of its public funding.

Relevant background to shelter policy and practice in the U.S. is federal law that requires all public housing which receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to admit males claiming a female identity. Further, the law mandates that these males be housed with women. This is required to ensure that the males do not experience stigma or other troubling emotion.

This report summarizes the findings of an investigation into the housing of males claiming to be female at U.S. domestic violence shelters. The study was undertaken at the request of the WDI board.

The guiding document of the organization Women's Declaration International, as well as of its U.S. chapter, WDI USA, is the Declaration on Women's Sex-Based Rights. Article 8 of the Declaration, on the elimination of violence against women, stipulates that rape crisis and domestic shelters must be single-sex in order to prevent of violence towards women. The vast majority, 79%, of violent incidents are committed by males<sup>1</sup>. This reality underscores the need to segregate males from females in shelter spaces.

## **Aims of the Research**

The purpose of the project was to better understand:

1. **Extent of the problem** – the extent to which men claiming a woman or girl identity are housed with women and girls in domestic violence shelters in the United States.
2. **Shared spaces** – what spaces within a shelter are shared by the women and men claiming a female identity, including sleeping quarters, restrooms, showers, hallways, dining areas, and other common rooms.
3. **Reasons for the inclusion of males** – various likely determinative factors: the federal requirement that shelters receiving HUD funding not segregate “transgender” individuals from other shelter residents, state law, ideology of shelter administrators and boards, and pressure from trans-activists.
4. **The vetting process** – how applicants are screened to determine whether or not a male was actually a victim of domestic violence – whether that was a pretense in order to gain access to the shelter.
5. **The impacts** – how the female shelter residents are affected by the presence of males claiming a female identity – in regard to the women's safety and psychological well being.
6. **Viewpoint of female shelter personnel** – how shelter staff feel about inclusion of males.

---

<sup>1</sup> Criminal Victimization, 2020 – Supplemental Statistical Tables Rachel E. Morgan, Ph.D., and Alexandra Thompson, BJS Statisticians. February 2022.

## **Methodology**

Calling and emailing are the data collection methods available for learning about shelters across the United States. I first reached out to [DomesticShelters.org](http://DomesticShelters.org), an online service that links domestic violence victims to shelters in the U.S. and Canada. Because the organization does not publicize its phone number, I wrote an email to two of its key staff identifying myself as a researcher and detailing all my questions. When that was ignored, I tried calling several shelters. Again, I identified myself as a researcher and asked to speak with the director. Those efforts were also ignored. At that point, I realized that I needed another strategy.

From then on, I decided to call shelter hotlines, rather than shelter administrators so I could hide my reasons for calling if necessary. I either said that I was calling for a friend who might need to go to a shelter and was strongly opposed to being housed with males, or I simply began asking questions without explaining who I was or why I was calling. I felt that deception was ethically acceptable because I could not obtain the data by other means; that the data was in the public interest; and that any harm (possible distress to the hotline worker and myself) caused by this method was minimal and certainly less than the harm caused by the concern being investigated (males in what should be female-only housing).

With this kind of research, adhering to a tightly structured script is not possible. Instead, the best approach is to have ready a line of questions pertaining to the research aims, which can be adapted as a conversation evolves.

I also made a point of not coming across, in tone of voice or word choice, as professional or academic, but instead a little distraught, blunt, and off-kilter. With this approach, the hotline workers (HWs) were generally cooperative, at least up to a point. They tended to end the conversation before I had the chance to ask all the questions. All HWs were female.

## **Line of Questions**

*Opening:*

“Is this shelter for women?”

“Is it just for women?”

“I mean, all women.” “Any women?”

*If the HW asks why I am calling, I either ignore the question or say I am calling for a friend.*

*If the HW says: “We don’t discriminate,” ask:*

“What do you mean, discriminate? Discriminate against whom?”

“Can trans-women stay there?”

“How often do you have a trans-woman stay there?”

*Likely the HW will say yes. I will try to find out details about the housing:*

“You mean, the trans-women and real women stay in the same place?”

“Do they use the same bathrooms?”

“What about showers or where they sleep?”

“How is that going?”

“How do the real women feel about it? What about their children?”

“What have the women said?”

“Has this changed things at the shelter? How?”

*To find out about the vetting process:*

“How do you know if an applicant is really a domestic violence victim?”

“What about men who just say they are trans to get into the shelter? How do you know they are really domestic violence victims?”

“How do you make sure they are not a threat to the women and kids?”

*To find out about shelter worker attitudes and reasons for the policy:*

“How do you feel about this?”

“Why does the shelter let men in?”

“Is it the law? I heard something about shelters having to do this. Why? What law?”

“I heard that if a shelter takes money from the government, you have to let men in. Is that true for your shelter?”

“How long has this been your policy? What changed?”

Because I was unable to cover all the questions in most calls, data are scant for some of the aims. Also, it only occurred to me well into the interviews that I should also ask the following question of those shelters that do house males claiming a female identity:

“I understand that all domestic violence victims deserve a safe space to go, but why doesn't your shelter house those men claiming to be women in an entirely separate unit? Why are they in the female unit?”

The answers were quite revealing, and I wished I had included it in the original script.

I used the [domesticshelters.org](http://domesticshelters.org) to find names and phone numbers of shelters. I made 24 calls – 23 to shelters and one to a resource center that refers callers to emergency housing. Most of the 23 actual shelters surveyed were in metropolitan areas, but a few were in smaller cities:

Birmingham Alabama

Little Rock Arkansas

Denver Colorado  
Wilmington Delaware  
Jacksonville Florida  
Conyers Georgia  
Boise Idaho  
Chicago Illinois  
Evanston Illinois  
Lexington Kentucky  
New Orleans Louisiana  
Baltimore Maryland  
Port Huron Michigan  
Detroit Michigan  
St. Louis Missouri  
Omaha Nebraska (2)  
Newark New Jersey  
Asheville North Carolina  
Norman Oklahoma  
Harrisburg Pennsylvania  
Nashville Tennessee  
Dallas Texas  
Vancouver Washington

## Findings

The number of shelters surveyed was small, and the selection of shelters was not random: I was more curious about shelters in larger cities. In one instance, I intentionally called a shelter with a name that suggested it was truly female-only, because I wanted to be sure that they were included in the survey. My sense is that the findings are fairly representative of shelters nationally because I got similar responses call after call, with only a few notable exceptions.

**Extent of the problem.** Of the 23 shelters contacted, 19 permit males to share some living spaces within the shelter with women. Of those 19 shelters, one requires a man to have had his genitalia removed to stay there. Of the other 18 shelters that allow males, a few also admit men who identify as men. In those cases, the men are housed in a unit entirely separate from women and girls. However, men claiming to be women are in every case housed in the female units.

The other findings summarized below refer to those 18 shelters. The five shelters that do not house males are discussed in a separate section.

Typical response:

“What about men who claim to be women?”

“You mean transwomen? Yes, we have those.”

“But those are not women.”

“If they identify as women, we consider them women.”

**Shared spaces.** All common areas – kitchens, dining, living rooms, and hallways – are open to the men. At most shelters, sleeping quarters consist of private single-occupancy rooms with a private bath. One shelter had suites of two sleeping rooms adjoined by a shared bath. No shelter had multi-person showers. Three shelters had sleeping quarters shared by two or more people, in which a woman could have a man claiming a female identity as a roommate.

Sleeping quarters at a Birmingham, Alabama, shelter consists of a large room, with 36 beds, shared by men and women

At three other shelters, two or three people may share a room.

“No space in the shelter is gender specific; every space is communal,” the HW for a Norman, Oklahoma, shelter explained.

As for men claiming to be women, she said: “That just depends. A lot of time, we don’t know. We can’t verify. We go by how a person identifies.”

When asked why they don’t put the men identifying as women in an entirely different section of the shelter, she said that the size and design of the shelter made that impossible.

At a Denver shelter, “there is no guarantee that she [my imaginary woman friend] would not be sharing a room with someone of a different gender identity -- including male, non-binary or transgender,” the HW said.

I said, to be sure that I heard her correctly, “So, she might be sharing sleeping quarters with a male?”

“Yes, there is a chance,” she said.

In fewer than five interviews, I asked why males claiming to be female aren’t simply housed in a separate unit for men rather than with women. In every instance, the preference of the male was the deciding factor.

“Because they are uncomfortable in the men’s building,” an Omaha shelter HW said. “They don’t want to be harassed by the men.”

A shelter in Dallas gives the man the option of staying in the women’s unit or going to a shelter that is strictly LGBT – wherever he feels “most comfortable.”

**Reasons for the inclusion of males.** In almost all interviews, the HW was quick to state, “We don’t discriminate.” I couldn’t tell if that was out of fear of repercussion or a sincere statement of principle. When I asked why providing emergency shelter to male victims of violence meant that the women had to share shelter space with male strangers, the HW ignored my question. Typical non-answers:

“We don’t discriminate against anyone on the basis of sexual orientation or gender.”

“Yes, this is community living. We don’t keep them separate. They aren’t animals.”

“The shelter is for female-identified survivors.”

“Domestic violence does not discriminate, so we don’t either.”

“We have to see what the person prefers. It depends on room availability. We want them to be comfortable.”

In the few instances in which I asked if federal funding influenced the shelter’s policy, my question was ignored.

When I asked how long the policy had been in place, responses varied:

“We’ve always accepted all walks of life.”

“Since we opened in 1971.”

“A couple of years. It is the law, statewide. If you discriminate, you could get fired.”

“There is not going to be any place that has a ban on trans, legally they can’t.”

**The vetting process.** For a woman in a women’s shelter, being housed with men creates stress and compromises safety, regardless of any individual man’s actual proclivity to do harm. It is therefore bad practice in all cases. Given that a predator is a person who has honed skills that enable him to gain entrance into where he does not belong, the vetting process should be quite rigorous.

I started by saying something like: “These days, men are getting into women’s spaces where they don’t belong and are causing problems. How does the shelter make sure this doesn’t happen – that the man isn’t just saying he was a victim in order to get into the shelter?”

No shelter admitted to ever having a problem. A few described security measures: a checklist of criteria, cameras, strict rules, a resident handbook, zero tolerance for violence. One mentioned security on site; another does background checks. But more often, the shelters described a process that relied on subjective judgment and trust in what the applicant told them. Typical responses were:

“We just talk with them to assess their situation.”

“We take the victim’s word. We’ve never had a problem.”

“We have not had that issue. We don’t discriminate. Men get beat up too.”



“I can’t tell you anything about that [the screening process]. If you say you are, then we believe you. No background checks. If you lie, you lie.”

“We don’t ask for proof. If they match up to our criteria, they will receive our services.”

“So far, I have never heard of a problem. Everyone here is an abuse victim.”

**The impacts on women.** It is fair to say, that a woman who seeks emergency shelter has fled a situation in which she likely experienced rape, other forms of physical violence, and emotional trauma. She may be flat broke, without a car or job, with few belongings, and is uncertain about her future. She likely considers herself lucky that the shelter had room for her. She may be terrified about being thrown out of the shelter with no place to go. She may have children with her, whom she must consider. Although she found the courage to escape her abuser, she may have a history of acquiescing to abusive treatment. How a woman in a shelter responds to harassment, sexual advances, or rape will be determined by these possibilities.

When calling the hotlines, I simply asked, “Given that most women at a shelter have experienced violence by a male, don’t you think it would be hard for them to be around males including those who claim to be women?”

Typical responses:

“That is understandable, but we take certain precautions.” When asked what those precautions are, the HW said, “Everybody is different. They don’t have a problem with it.”

“On intake, if she objects, she is told she is not a good fit for our shelter and is referred to a couple of shelters who only take women.” [the closest was over an hour away.]

“This is a shelter, number 1. We don’t discriminate based on gender.”

“I can’t answer that [how women feel] because everyone has their own feelings.”

“Whenever there is a male coming into the unit, we let the other women know, since they have come from an abusive situation, and we don’t want them caught off guard.”

“I guess some get uneasy at first, but then they realize they [males claiming to be women] are in the same situation they are in.”

“That is confidential. All I can say is, we don’t discriminate.”

“I don’t know the opinions of the women, but everyone seems to get along. I am assuming that it is great.”

“They are fine with it. We don’t judge, and they don’t judge.”

**Viewpoint of female shelter personnel.** In nearly all instances, the HWs seemed to have bought into the unreality of gender self ID and – so the logic goes – were staunchly defensive of housing these males in with females. They denied women are ever harmed by the policy or at risk. If they had any misgivings, they were not

obvious.

Only a couple said that they disagreed with this policy, but felt powerless to change it.

In the few instances when I pushed back against their assumptions, I got firm resistance. For example,

I asked, “How do the women feel about that, being around males?”

“But they are not men.”

“There are only two sexes, you know that, right?” A man can’t turn into a woman.”

“That is not even a conversation I am going to have.”

**The shelters that say “No!” to “gender identity” ideology.** It was comforting and inspiring to find five shelters who do not accept males claiming to be women. The shelters are located in Little Rock, Ark., Chicago, Baltimore, Boise, Idaho, and Memphis, Tenn.:

The Little Rock shelter is somewhat of a middle ground. Rather than allowing full self-ID, it only accepts males who have undergone complete castration. No males have stayed at the shelter in at least a year. It is not dependent on federal funding.

The Chicago shelter is women-only and has no male staff. The HW said that they do not rely on HUD funding, and the shelter funders are fine with the shelter not housing males claiming to be female. Furthermore, the building design makes it impossible to separate males completely from women and children, and that “they [the women] would not feel comfortable” with that, the HW said. They refer men claiming to be women to two LGBT shelters.

The Boise shelter HW simply said that the shelter doesn’t house males at all and that the reason was that “we don’t have accommodations for males other than children under age 18.” She did not respond to my question about whether federal funding was a factor in the policy.

The Baltimore shelter is for Muslim women and their children, but generally boys older than eight are not accepted. By that age, a boy may have been too strongly influenced by the example of his mother’s abuser. He is then a “weak link,” posing a risk to his mother and others in the shelter, said the HW, who is also the shelter director. “I am not being discriminatory, but am doing ‘due diligence’ relative to my target population,” she said. The shelter is not dependent on HUD funding. “This makes it possible for me to do what I do – serve women,” she said. (See the Call Notes for more from this interesting conversation.)

The Memphis shelter does not house men claiming a female identity. “No, they will be housed at a hotel we pay for,” the HW said.

I told her that I am interested in learning about shelters and asked if she could tell me why they had that policy. She said, “Most of the women, their abusers are males, and we don’t want them to be triggered, so we don’t allow males in the shelter.”

I told her that I so much appreciated the fact that they provide a safe space for women, where they will not feel psychologically uncomfortable or threatened. She said, “That’s the goal.”

## **Conclusion**

Gender self ID has seeped into every modern institution. Domestic violence shelters are no different, so perhaps what this study found comes as no surprise.

Nonetheless, anytime women staunchly defend the ideology of gender self ID and discount the harms done to women, it is a jarring reminder of how deeply this belief has soaked into the American psyche.

All victims of domestic violence deserve access to emergency housing, regardless of what a person’s sex is or a belief that he or she has turned into the opposite sex.

The fact that this service is now widely available to males as well as females should be seen as a positive step forward within our society. But that this has been done in a way that puts women’s physical and psychological wellbeing in jeopardy is unacceptable. My research strongly suggests that this is what has been implemented, in a rather cavalier fashion, at most U.S. domestic violence shelters, where women are expected to share space with male strangers – in some cases, even sleeping quarters.

The powerful influence of the trans lobby has shaped public sentiment and public policy, to the point that it is now a federal mandate that a domestic violence shelter cannot receive HUD funding unless males claiming to be female are fully integrated into a shelter’s population. This rule was put in place despite massive public comment opposing it. The widespread belief that gender self ID is legitimate provides an easy way for shelter boards and administrators to justify a policy that on the face of it is obviously thoughtless and unfair to women.

A historical perspective on evolving shelter policies over the years – far beyond the scope of this project – might reveal the effects of public acceptance of gender self ID and the HUD funding mandate on the housing of males claiming to be female within shared shelter spaces.

Only a couple of HWs interviewed admitted that women might not like the policy, and none saw any harm in it. Just how much any or all of the HWs believed what they

said is impossible to know from this study. Nonetheless, their words were telling. People on all levels within an organization are expected to reinforce a particular set of beliefs about that organization and its goodness. This is done by what members tell one another and themselves, as well as people encountered outside the organization. The HWs did their part.

The safety of females staying in shelters must be prioritized over the preferences and feelings of males who claim to be women. This necessitates maintenance of entirely separate spaces for male victims of violence, regardless of how any male seeking shelter “identifies.” Unfortunately, only a few of the shelters surveyed have not lost sight of that reality.