

Peeing like a lady... and other toilet issues

by [Malin Björk](#)

One of the unavoidable subjects concerning toilets is of course the different signs used for public toilets to direct women bodies and men's bodies into their respective and separate toilets – preferably into the right one. Whereas everyone knows that women do not wear skirts much more often than men (well a little more often maybe...), the toilet signalisation remains overwhelmingly geared towards using the skirt as an imaginary divider of women and men into two distinct categories. While the men's sign clearly has something 'universal' about him (like legs and arms for example), women can often be called into their toilet by a figure without arms, with only one leg sticking out from the skirt, and something that is probably supposed to be a waist, but that more gives the impression that the figure will split in two parts.

Where is my skirt... ?

Rarely one meets toilet signs that break the male/female binary and stereotyping . Decades have pasts with feminist theory and gender bendering – toilet signalisation has remained the same. Except for a few non - attempts, like children with and without braids on a pot. Or one boy child peeing - standing - up - like-a-future-man, and a girl child squatting down with closed eyes.



So how come owners of public places insist on continuing to use the skirt vs. universal Man signalisation for their toilets ? Because they work ? Apparently studies have been done showing that any slight transformation in the signalisation creates uncertainty for the persons seeking the toilet, and inevitably contributes to a slow down in people getting in there and done. If people don't see the skirt vs. universal Man they stop and hesitate. In bigger events where many people are supposed to go to the toilet in a short time, ambiguity in signalisation creates chaos !

So if we want to destabilise and disrupt any bigger event, apparently all we have to do is to distort the toilet signs and make them a bit ambiguous – let's just imagine what a Tall-skirt-person-with-a-high-hat-andwalking- stick figure vs. a Short-non-skirt-with-braids would do to public order ! But in our increasingly securitarian Europe this might be classified as feminist terrorism... ?

The need for a 3 to 5 toilet ratio !

Not surprisingly, almost everyone I have talked to about the toilet subject raises the issue of numbers, or more correctly – of ratio. One has to admit that the waiting in women’s toilets can be a nuisance. Women have periods - it takes time, women apparently feel more responsible to bring their kids to the toilet to avoid any ‘accidents’ - it takes time...and maybe because women do tend to leave a cleaner toilet behind them than men - it takes time. There are several explanations, but the fact is clear – there is always more waiting time in women’s toilets. Which of course leads us to the inevitable solution (and one does not have to be Marie Curie to crack this one !) – there needs to be more toilets for women ! Without basing myself on any studies, I would make a recommendation of a 3 to 5 ratio - 5 women’s toilets for 3 men’s toilets, 8,2 women’s toilets for 5 men’s toilets, etc. Easy. In New York they have done it. It is part of the public construction rules. At least someone said so...

Being in a hurry

If there is high pressure on the toilets meaning that there are many women needing to go, it is common practice and good manners to get ready and unbuttoned before it is your turn, in order to minimize the time it takes for each person. However, should you really be in a hurry (or just fed up with waiting) one option is to try the men’s toilet – although this of course means that you in general would have to accept a less pleasant odour. If there is an outdoors opportunity it is probably the best choice. Other options are of course available – a sink can apparently quite reasonably be identified as an emergency pee-recipient... ?

The problem of passing ...

In the public toilet world, women and men are signalled, and also probably understood, as two very distinct categories. And the level of social control of gender/sex in toilets is quite strong... especially in women’s toilets ? Suspiciousness and even resentment is easily encountered if one does not perform/seem enough like a ‘woman’ in a women’s toilet for example. Going to a public toilet can therefore be seen as an issue of passing - or not. One can ‘pass’ in a women’s toilet if one performs ‘woman’ enough, and similarly in a men’s toilet if one performs ‘man’ well enough. The problem of passing and the resentment sometimes met when breaking the rules because of being in a hurry is obvious enough. But even people with no intention to break the ‘female/male toilet rules’ can find themselves in trouble – that is if they don’t perform good enough ‘woman’, but give raise to doubt among the other toilet users about their gender !

Refining the techniques and new ergonomic solutions

In some public toilets one does not feel like sitting down because the toilets are just too pee-pee dirty ...and so one chooses not to, but instead assumes the squatting position. The potential problem of choosing to half-stand-up-half-sit-down is of course that pee risk to ‘sprutch’ on the toilet seat itself, contributing even further to the pee-pee dirtiness on the seat. A vicious circle...

Peeing like a Lady

Lady P is a new ergonomic toilet specifically designed for women. It is higher than a normal toilet, thinner, and slanted - so that even if you only squat slightly (ski position) you will pee in the cuvet and the sprutch problem is eliminated . It is friendly to the legs, easy to clean, and almost beautiful ! Unfortunately Lady P has so far only been introduced in a few places. In IKEA they used to have them, but these were mysteriously replaced by a toilet with two toilets inside – one for 'mother' and one for 'child' (=smaller version toilet !) . So that there will be no hesitation about whose responsibility it is to bring the kids to the toilet ? People apparently tend to be conservative about their toilet habits, and the marketing of the Lady P splendour seems to be difficult. So in order to make sure not to miss out on peeing like a lady - quickly find your way to Brussels Zaventem airport where they have installed a few of them – welcome to terminal A and the arrivals hall – and experience a new era of women's public toilet use !

Do you have any good toilet stories, reflections on toilet use - or abuse ? Share them with us ! Write to info@scumgrrrls.org