

Psychological, Social and Cultural Analysis Concerning the Formation and Use of Public Sanitary Facilities

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ABSTRACT

Organization, appearance and methods of use of public sanitary facilities depend on many psychological, social and cultural aspects taking into account various user behaviors associated with the treatment and perception of their body, a different attitude towards personal hygiene, gender, privacy, modesty and the socio-economic status. These factors determine the specific needs and requirements which are defining quality and ways of use of public sanitary facilities. Most of the social reactions to public sanitary facilities concern their quality, physical condition and level of cleanliness and maintenance. These most common negative reactions result from not only aesthetic experience of user, but refer to their feelings about territoriality and privacy. In addition, the general social attitude towards public facilities, often unconscious, is much more negative than attitude towards private bathroom or towards a general idea of the bathroom. Similarly, most of human feelings about the body, gender, physiological needs, hygiene and privacy become stronger and more exaggerated in the context of "publicness" that causes the inevitable violation of the territorial and loss of privacy, which are increasing public apprehensions. Physiological needs appear to be more common in the public context, but also most of the difficulties and psychological problems are associated precisely with them. Apart from hotels, the majority of people, with the exception of certain cultures, has little experience in the use of public bathing facilities. For this reason, the analysis will focus on public toilets.

Keywords: Public Health, Public Hygiene, Hygienic Practices, Toilet Practices, Public Sanitary Facilities, Public Bathrooms Design, Public Toilet, Public Restroom, Psychology in the Bathroom, Social and Cultural Aspects of Public Bathrooms Formation

INTRODUCTION

Excluding the hotel bathrooms and baths in some factories, great majority of the population, except for some cultures with a deep-rooted traditions of bathing, such as the Scandinavians and the Japanese, has little experience in the use of public bathing facilities. For this reason, analysis of the psychological, social and cultural aspects of the formation and using public hygienic and sanitary facilities will be focused mainly on the use of public toilets.

Activities related to the meeting of physiological needs connected with excretion, such as defecation and urination, appear to be quite common in the public context and causing most of the difficulties and psychological problems. In addition to having broad social and cultural implications, they are psychologically important in a number of ways.

The analysis will focus on the social reactions relating to public sanitary facilities and social attitude toward the

physiological needs and excretion processes. The considerations will concern the notion of “publicness” as a key element causing the public reception of sanitary facilities and problem of violations of territoriality and privacy of users. This paper will also discuss the concept of “privacy” treated as an opportunity to isolate the individual from the environment and the concept of “privacy” as a guarantee of isolation environment from the individual and its actions.

SOCIAL REACTIONS RELATED TO PUBLIC HYGIENIC-SANITARY FACILITIES

Social attitude to public toilets and most of the social reactions related to public sanitary facilities and devices concern their technical and aesthetic quality, physical condition, level of cleanliness and maintenance and hygienic and sanitary conditions. These most common negative reactions result from not only aesthetic feelings and concern for health and hygiene of user, but to a large extent refer to their sense of territoriality and privacy (Kira, 1976).

In addition, the usual social attitude towards public sanitary facilities and devices, often unconscious, is much more negative than attitude towards private bathroom or toward a general idea of the bathroom and hygiene. Similarly, most of human feelings about the body, gender, physiological needs connected with excretion such as defecation and urination, health, hygiene and also privacy and intimacy become stronger and more exaggerated in the context of “publicness”. “Publicness” causes the inevitable violation of the territorial and loss of privacy and thereby increases social fear and anxiety (Kira, 1976).

Social reactions are also associated with bathroom equipment, materials and fittings. Negative emotions of some people are caused by these elements of equipment installed in the home bathroom that are commonly used in public toilets (Kira, 1976). These could be, for example, urinals, which suggest a men's public toilet. Washbasins and toilet bowls made of stainless steel, which are usually installed in the public bathrooms due to the high resistance of the material are other examples. Open-front toilet seats and seats in dark color, for example black seats, commonly used in public facilities because of the ease of maintaining their cleanliness and aesthetic appearance can provoke similar associations. Similarly, home toilet or toilet seat without cover is unacceptable for many people. Electronic taps running on a photocell, which are characteristic for public toilets due to the possibility of a hygienic use, are another examples. It's easy to guess that the reason for such reactions are not practical motives, but social and psychological, and sometimes even cultural, reasons. To further emphasize their strong impact on social reactions, it is worth mentioning that, until recently, many people, especially the elderly, were opposed to the installation of showers in the home bathrooms, because they were associated with public baths.

SOCIAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS AND EXCRETION PROCESSES

The formation and use of public sanitary facilities must also be considered in the context of social observance of physiological needs connected with excretion such as urination and defecation.

While our own processes of excretion and their products may seem "unpleasant", ones coming from others are generally perceived much more negatively. In this case, it is also related to the degree of the strangeness and difference of stranger person and social differences. In this sense, the level of cleanliness and maintenance of the public sanitary equipment becomes a critical and decisive factor in the social reactions, because it is a crucial determinant of the degree of territoriality and privacy violations. The privacy or sense of having own territory is based on a sense of possession, of ownership. Therefore stay in relatively well maintained and clean public bathroom, while no one is using, provides the ideal opportunity of the privacy simulation in the bathroom or a sense of ownership in relation to the bathroom. However, this impression may be rapidly destroyed along with the observation of physical signs left by their predecessors. In this case, the negation of the fact that someone has violated "our", although only temporary, territory, it seems impossible. On this basis, it can be concluded that the higher the degree of cleanliness of public facilities, the less obvious evidence that they are actually shared with others, simultaneously or consecutively. Less evidences and a higher level of hygiene causes fewer negative social

reactions and apprehensions. Complaining about the level of cleanliness in a public toilet is in fact the most common symptom of many individual objections and complaints resulting from the disturbance of aesthetics, a sense of aversion or disgust, a sense of violation of territoriality and privacy (Kira, 1976).

The territoriality and privacy violations are so strongly felt mainly due to the fact that the physiological needs connected with processes of excretion such as urination and defecation, are taboo in a social context. Despite their importance, they are something that people rarely want to think about. Talking about them, and even admitting to them is not common. People try to put the greatest possible physical and psychological distance between themselves and their waste. Although defecation and urination are universal parts of the human experience most people tend to keep them quiet, hidden and deeply private (Haslam, 2012). Such behavior probably results from the fact that these processes remind us of our animality, primordiality and primitiveness.

Anxiety is only one of several intense emotions that processes of excretion and its products evoke, along with disgust and shame. Shame and disgust are also intimately linked to people's concerns about their bodies, and in particular about the violation of norms connected with the body's cleanliness and hygiene. Disgust is felt in response to unpleasant objects, such as bodily products, and is also a response to particular kinds of unpleasant behavior committed by others. Both emotions are evoked in the context of excretion processes: disgust by contact with the body's products and shame by failure to eliminate them in the proper way or in the proper place. These two emotions do not refer only to the body, but are also closely related to each other. Someone feels ashamed when others are disgusted with him and feels disgusted with somebody when he behaves shamefully (Haslam, 2012).

In addition to numerous social implications, processes of excretion are psychologically important in a number of ways. Ideas, images and language associated with them provided additional evidence of their psychological importance. These processes and their products convey a rich assortment of psychological meanings. Words referring to them and the responsible parts of our anatomy are crucial elements of slang, swearing and verbal abuse. These elements are common ingredients of jokes and different forms of humor. Wide popularity of these meanings confirms the specificity of human interest in this topic (Haslam, 2012).

THE PUBLIC CHARACTER OF HYGIENIC AND SANITARY FACILITIES AND VIOLATIONS OF TERRITORIALITY AND PRIVACY

The concept of "publicness" refers to several factors that affect the public character of bathrooms: the degree of foreignness, strangeness and difference of other users from oneself, the degree and extent of usage of a facility and devices and most important, the level of cleanliness and maintenance, technical and aesthetic quality and sanitary conditions of the equipment, which most affects the social emotions. This factor most strongly influences the social emotions, first of all apprehensions and concerns regarding territoriality and privacy. On the one hand, the problems concerning the strangeness and difference of users result from the anxiety associated with the presence of the unfamiliar person and considered in categories of ordinary fear and violating the privacy, on the other hand these problems refer to the social role and status. The degree of violation of privacy is specified on the basis of the relationship between users. In the public context these are not obvious, clearly defined family relationships that occur in the home, but incidental configurations of conjectures and free observations, based largely on the perceived social differences between users (Kira, 1976).

Attitudes of users towards public hygienic-sanitary facilities are also determined based on the frequency of use of objects and specific relation between the object and the user. On this basis, taking into account the above factors, the hotel bathroom can rather be considered as private. In particular, if the hotel is regularly visited by a particular guest, inhabited room with bathroom can be literally and psychologically perceived by him as a temporary private place, temporary home. In such a situation factors associated with sanitary conditions, degree of cleanliness, technical quality and condition of devices are limited, while factors connected with the common simultaneous use and the lack of the privacy are almost completely eliminated. Continuing, attitude of users towards hygienic-sanitary objects at the permanent place of work, or at regularly visited restaurant and cafe, seems to be quite neutral because of feeling of familiarity with the majority of persons using them. However extending the range causes that the social attitude starts to change. Although the attitude towards toilet objects at favorite bar, or at the well-known shopping mall, is quite indifferent, it takes a negative expression at the rarely visited institutions, which is associated with the experience of anxiety and increased concentration. These emotions result from a sense of membership to a particular

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social group and are the strongest in the case of the use of objects that are regarded as the most public and widely available, such as toilets at railway stations, airports, sports stadiums, or sanitary facilities located at rest stops of international highways. Using hygienic-sanitary devices in such places is most often preceded by a reflection about "who used them before". The apprehensions and objections are usually justified by the actual evidence of the presence of other people in a particular place, but to a large extent they arise from religious, ethnic and racial differences and certain prejudices against "the strangers". Looking back it can be observed that organization of public hygienic-sanitary facilities separately for different races and individually for persons from the underclass was the result of such attitude in extreme situations (Kira, 1976).

Violation of territoriality and privacy are relevant to the sense of possession, of ownership, which conceals a lot of social needs and requirements related to privacy. Territorial violations can be visual, auditory, olfactory, even tactile, as well as physical, such as in the case of the phenomenon of "warm seat". Many people feel uncomfortable using the still warm seat and knowing that "warmth" was left by the previous user. The seat may be kept perfectly clean, but discomfort and abashment or even anxiety nevertheless occurs. Such situation is common in the case of use of toilet seats. And it's not just about a warmth of someone's body, but a warmth of the strange naked body, which further emphasizes the degree of shared use and intrusion into our privacy and intimacy. Few people feel comfortable in case of such large range of sharing (Kira, 1976). Using the toilet in a squatting position rather than in a sitting, as is common in a large part of the world can be an effective solution to this problem. In the Far East and across the Muslim World Western-style toilets are considered dirty and not acceptable because a seat there is shared by strangers. Squatting position is seen as more hygienic and also healthier and more comfortable with the anatomical point of view (Gershenson and Penner, 2009).

Considering social behaviors with regard to hygiene, processes of excretion and privacy, it is possible to notice that the public awareness in relation to the easiness of the intrusion into someone's privacy is limited. Such intrusion may occur in case of ostentatious observing someone's actions, or sometimes as a result of accidental "exposure" or "denudation". Mutual ignorance regarding these processes, despite the individual knowledge of the needs associated with them, seems to be widespread (Kira, 1976).

THE CONCEPT OF "PRIVACY" AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ISOLATE THE INDIVIDUAL FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

Social reactions associated with the use of public hygienic and sanitary facilities refer to desire of the assurance of privacy for oneself and isolation oneself from others. These needs result from modesty and individual requirements for intimacy and privacy. Providing "privacy for" the individual and its actions is the first important issue. This is a range of requirements regarding privacy including guarantee of assurance to avoid being seen, heard, or even elimination of the possibility of someone's awareness of our actions. Guarantee of privacy providing the possibility of isolating the individual from other people and their activities is an additional problem. These two forms of privacy can operate independently of each other. Providing one does not guarantee the fulfillment of the other (Kira, 1976).

From a practical point of view, privacy as isolation from others seems to be effectively ensured by the implementation of solutions in the form of reserved hygienic and sanitary facilities, with exclusive use and limited access, where selected users are protected from the presence of other people. Regardless of validity of arguments in favor of the arrangement of exclusive bathrooms, even in order to save time by some people (an example could be the bathroom organized for the leadership in large corporations), the fact is that the social status as an aspect of privacy is extremely important. It is commonly known that human physiological needs are universal and all people are equal before the imperious demands of nature irrespective of their position and function. However, not all agree with this opinion. Tendency that "the high - ranking person" has more right to privacy is quite common in some cases. On this basis, exclusive bathroom are organized in some places (Kira, 1976).

Apart from the protection of the status and the social role, privacy in the meaning of the possibility of isolating oneself from others, is also associated with a sex segregation. The public bathrooms are perfect laboratories for studying the psychology of gender. In most parts of the world men and women use toilets differently. Different ways of using toilet devices result from their anatomical differences. Men usually stand to urinate whereas women sit. One consequence of this difference in toilet behavior is that men's and women's public bathrooms typically are separate. Other consequence is controversy between men and women over bathroom access and toilet etiquette

(Haslam, 2012). If the men's and women's public bathrooms are of equal size in terms of the floor space, men are likely to have twice the places to urination because they have toilet stalls and extra row of urinals along the wall. Women, for anatomical and biological reasons and because of the way of dress, need more time to use the toilet than men. Women have additional biological reasons for needing public toilets, such as menstruation, increased frequency of urination during pregnancy and higher level of incontinence in old age. Furthermore women are more likely to be accompanied by babies and small children (Molotch and Norén, 2010). Of the above reasons women need the toilet more often and need more space within the toilet stall. Methods of the provision and design of public toilets are being developed to allow equal accessibility for women and men to public sanitary devices. This is related to argument of the campaign against sex discrimination indicating that women should not have to wait longer than men to use restrooms. The result of many disputes in this regard are the changes concerning the required ratios of male and female facilities in building regulations (Haslam, 2012).

However the gender segregation in public toilets is not observed in all cultures. It results from diversities of attitudes towards the personal hygiene analyzed from the global perspective. In some countries the realization of excretion processes in a random place in case of the lack of access to hygienic and sanitary facilities is still common and normal. Such action is not considered a violation of public order, but recognized as legal. Instead, there are cultures in which the requirements of privacy and gender segregation is strictly enforced by social and legal sanctions and realization of excretion processes in random places entails severe penalties (Kira, 1976). Sex segregation is also differently perceived by various cultures with regard to public bathing facilities. Japanese public baths and Scandinavian saunas are examples of institutions that are very liberal in this respect, while the Turkish baths are required to separate the sexes. Cultural attitudes and practices regarding the separation of gender, both in the public toilets and the public baths, undergo numerous modifications under the influence of various factors. A requirement of adaptation of some sanitary facilities to the needs of tourists, for whom the consequences of different thinking in this regard seem to be the most troublesome is one of those factors. Therefore, even in Muslim countries can be found mixed public baths designed mainly for tourists. In some countries where gender segregation in public bathrooms is obligatory, there appear social groups and campaigners (for example feminist), who are fighting for its abolition.

Specified social behaviors can be another effective way to achieve at least partial privacy perceived as isolation of the individual from others. Avoiding watching behaviors of other users and avoiding eye contact are a methods that work in different situations and are willingly used in many cultures. Also a tendency to try to ignore the presence of other people is quite common. People instinctively realize that the subtle mechanisms associated with their behavior ensure their privacy and, interdependently, the privacy of other users (Kira, 1976).

It has been researched and proven that people experience stress when others enter their invisible zone of private space and find these intrusions unpleasant and irritant. Other studies have shown that the proximity of others may interfere with efforts to urinate. Stressed people need more time to begin urinating and urinate for less time. However, it is still unclear whether it relates to characteristic behavior in public toilet or violations of personal space in general. Processes of excretion are generally a private actions that involve hidden body parts and invisible bodily functions and they may generate an especially strong anxiety, irritation and inhibition. Men standing shoulder to shoulder at urinals in public toilets can not only feel threatened because of the invasion of their space and the violation of their privacy, but they can feel the pressure of evaluations and comparisons, and thus embarrassment (Haslam, 2012). Patterns of behavior observed in public toilets show that in case of a large men's bathroom person entering almost always selects first the free urinal, not adjacent to the occupied one. Selection due to its degree of cleanliness occurs in the second place. Only in the situation of the large number of users, the proximity, dictated by the distance between permanently installed devices is tolerated (relative) or acceptable. Violation of this pattern is associated with suspicions and conjectures and becomes a cause for anxiety, and even aggression. The same principle, although to a less extent, concerns the use of wash basins and toilet bowls. Such behavior is probably the most common in sanitary facilities, but a similar pattern is also noticeable in most public places such as trains, buses, or even benches in parks (Kira, 1976).

THE CONCEPT OF “PRIVACY” AS A GUARANTEE OF ISOLATION ENVIRONMENT FROM THE INDIVIDUAL AND ITS ACTIONS

This kind of privacy in the strict sense can be provided by many of the same solutions that are used and work also in the home. These are: discreet location, discreet identification, the use of visual barriers, partitions and other various methods of divisions and separations, the use of masking sound, the use of effective solutions of ventilation and the use of means and ways related to the behavior of users (Kira, 1976). It happens that the above solutions used for the design of public toilets are exaggerated or they are treated too literally, especially as regards the way of providing the discreet location. Location and indication of toilets in some public spaces is maximally masked and concealed. Finding them by the uninitiated passer-by, tourist or visitor, is in such situation practically impossible without instruction. Among the activities related to urban planning and design of public toilets we can find treatments that provide camouflage sanitary facilities such as placing toilets in monuments, sculptures, fountains, locating toilets underground and the use of mirror on external walls of building of toilets, which reflects the surroundings. The activities associated with the specificity of the location of public sanitary facilities are obviously conditioned culturally. In some countries it is possible to observe examples of male urinals that are completely opened and exposed to the public view.

Cultural relativism is also evident with regard to the interior design of public toilets. For this reason, in different societies, we can observe the different requisite degree of isolation (division, separation, concealment or closure) of the hygienic-sanitary internal spaces (for example toilet stalls) ensured by barriers. Partitions that are solid at the total height from floor to ceiling in the form of walls and doors and allow to create separate spaces are required in some countries. In contrast, partial partitions, starting usually about 30 cm above the floor, and ending at a height of about 170 cm, are used in other countries. Similarly, the door lock is a solution that is not applied in certain societies (Kira, 1976).

Specific patterns of the social behavior can also enable effective ensuring the privacy. Required degree of the privacy can be achieved in certain public situations through seemingly paradoxical actions of social groups. Mechanism quite commonly used by women who are in mixed company at parties and events in restaurants and clubs can be an actual example. This is a custom of going to the toilet in the company of female colleagues. Although this action is also connected with other purposes, the interchange of impressions or brief discussion, is quite effective to ensure privacy and it is used by women of different ages and in different situations. The attempt to camouflage the identity of individuals being in need, the impossibility of their identification and the prevention of individual "weight" being someone who has to go to the toilet is the main intention. Women also use a different mechanism, which effectively masks basic activities associated with a trip to the toilet. Coming back with the impeccable hairstyle, makeup and the refreshed aroma, they eliminate the suspicion that the main goal of their trip to the toilet could be something other than aesthetic improvements (Kira, 1976).

Avoiding the use of public toilets is probably the most extreme, although quite commonly used action enabling to ensure the privacy in public situations. But in this case it is not a matter of getting privacy in the literal and feasible sense, but rather a question of motivation associated with the doubts and problems result from design, accessibility and also aesthetic quality and level of cleanliness and maintenance of sanitary facilities. Of course, such self-restraint, more often practiced by women, mean discomfort and adverse health effects (Kira, 1976).

Attempts to achieve a certain kind of privacy are also held through the use of euphemisms describing both appropriate purposes, and actions. They are obscured, masked and minimized by various forms of linguistic delicacy and evasions (Haslam, 2012). These artifices, although usually not completely successful, however, play a very important social function among people who cannot or don't want to use colloquial terms. The use of euphemisms in certain situations, is usually regarded as a harmless game in which most people take part because of social conventions (Kira, 1976).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows that psychological, social and cultural aspects are very important when it comes to the use of public sanitary facilities. For this reason, they should be carefully considered during the process of organizing,

designing and realization public bathrooms and their equipment. These activities should take into account the close connections between physical and psychological well-being of users. The public bathroom is also a place that is intimately bound up with masculinity, femininity and the social and cultural codes and expectations that maintain them (Haslam, 2012).

Ensuring a sense of the privacy required by the users of public bathrooms is particularly important in the social context. The lack of sense of privacy, insufficient privacy, or more accurately, the lack of privacy to the extent required by the specific individual, may result in adverse consequences. The most serious of them - a sense of embarrassment, anxiety, irritation or even anger - usually have an inhibitory effect on the functions related to the processes of excretion. Many people, especially men, experience inconvenient inhibitions about urinating in a public toilet or in other public situations where their private processes of excretion may be observed or heard by others. Some people have difficulty relating to their realization in the presence of family members of the opposite sex, some in the presence of strangers of both sexes, others in unfamiliar surroundings (Kira, 1976). Inhibited urination in public bathrooms may normally be due to private space violation, proximity, fear of being observed and heard, time pressure, sense of modesty or embarrassment. But many people feel strong anxiety at the mere idea of using public sanitary facilities (Haslam, 2012). This type of phobia, difficulty or inability to urinate in certain situations, clinically known as *paruresis*, is troublesome affliction of many people, but it turns out to be a serious social problem. Improved design of public bathrooms and solutions such as: elimination of the urinal in the form of a trough, ensuring greater distances between urinals, the construction of floor-to-ceiling partitions between urinals (Gershenson and Penner, 2009), adequate separation, closure and acoustic insulation of toilet stalls, can have a strong impact on improving the comfort of using public sanitary facilities, and thus can contribute to solving social problems.

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