



EDITORIAL

BY CHRISTOPHER D. CUTTONE

I went to Lilith Fair...

And all I got was this lousy rash. Why bathroom equality should be a top priority

When I first moved to the Pacific Northwest, I was impressed by the prevalence of unisex bathrooms. Here in Portland, I've found places with more than one unisex bathroom side by side, suggesting that the forced sharing is intentional.

What are the benefits of unisex bathrooms and why would a business owner choose to have two mixed-gender facilities rather than one of each? Well, first there's the urine. I've been a man all my life, and I've been publicly gay long enough to know the way men behave in places women don't go. Two of the top three most disgusting bathrooms I've ever had the misfortune to visit were in gay bars, and nine of the top 10 most disgusting bathrooms I've seen were exclusively male. Despite the millions of years of evolution that went into designing the flexible hose men use to expel liquid waste, it's apparently rather difficult to aim accurately. Unless the bathroom is unisex, that is.

While I whole-heartedly support the theory and practice of unisex bathrooms, I am frankly amazed when I see a woman who dares to use the men's room. It's not the transgression of social norms that leaves me non-plussed, though; it's the unimaginable courage and/or desperation I sense behind her willingness to enter such a disgusting, stench-filled place. Even I don't want to go in there sometimes!

There is, of course, the hover method. But is it fair that women are forced to urinate in an awkward position while men are provided with facilities uniquely suited to their body's form and function? Is it acceptable that a few Portland gay bars I could name don't even have a women's bathroom? And is it reasonable that so many public accommodations sup-

ply twice as many options for men (including urinals and toilets) as for women (who have only toilets, and not, as one might suppose, twice as many toilets as in the men's room)?

I was recently at the first day of the Lilith Fair tour, which took place in Portland's Civic Stadium. Although some men's rooms had been turned temporarily into women's rooms, and in mockery of the feeble assembly of port-a-potties, it didn't take long for the crowd of women to figure out there were plenty of unoccupied toilets in the men's room. I thought it was pretty cool to see men and women sharing the same bathroom, and during one trip I said so.

Later, once the lines of women waiting for the men's room had grown long too, I had the singular privilege of seeing a girl pee into a urinal. I applauded and I thanked her for her courage. Not only did she have to touch her skin to piss-splattered porcelain—aye, there's the rash—she had to deal with a few macho buttheads who couldn't see the larger social significance of her action: She was fed up with a culture that doesn't place as much importance on her need to relieve her bladder as on men's analagous need. Why the hell should she have had to wait 45 minutes to cop a squat while men didn't have to wait at all?

It's not uncommon for women to take a little longer in the restroom than men do on an average trip, but that's not why the women's bathroom always has a line. The point remains that there is not a level playing field. If women need more time, there should be more facilities per capita for them, because there will never be true gender equality until women can pee at will, without waiting, without straining not to touch anything, and with a feeling that their needs are equally valued by our culture.

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