

Stick to your gender role or urine trouble

A HISTORY OF BATHROOMS AT LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

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WGS 340: SEXUALITY STUDIES

Bathrooms are supposed to be one of the most private spaces in a person's life. What goes on inside a bathroom is not supposed to be discussed outside of it-- especially not at the dinner table. Yet bathrooms and restrooms (bathrooms without bathing facilities) dominate much of American cultural discourse, and Lafayette's campus is no exception. Foucault argued that repression was not silence. Rather, repression produces discourse on a forbidden or taboo subject that ultimately enforces power structures (1984, p. 27). "Bathroom talk" certainly fits this repressive hypothesis, especially as more universities begin to implement gender-inclusive bathrooms on their campuses (Bellware, 2014; Dao, 2018; Gravereaux, 2018; Micheli, 2018). Even though bathrooms are supposed to be private spaces, college campuses spend a lot of time deliberating on bathroom policy, newspapers write about them, and politicians debate about them (Seidman, 2018). Lafayette College has produced discourse about bathrooms, most notably when it has renovated its facilities for different women and other populations. This paper will examine discursive structures produced about bathrooms -- focusing on the administration's discussion and regulation of bathrooms -- as well as discourse produced within bathrooms -- through social rituals, graffiti, and other actions. It is organized chronologically, beginning with Lafayette as an all-male campus to today, when the institution is beginning to recognize and absorb new gender identities.

1826-1970: Masculinity in an All-Male Environment

Lafayette was an all-male institution for 144 years until it became coeducational in 1970. The entire college was constructed to accommodate its white, male, and (predominantly) Christian population. Very little is known about the role of bathrooms prior to 1940 because there are no archival records, including in *The Lafayette*, the student newspaper founded in 1870.

It is possible that discourses did not emerge at this time because facilities were designed for all-male usage. The campus' homogeneity meant there was little to discuss. However, it is also possible that key organizations on campus had not yet developed. Lafayette was a very small college until the 1920s, at which point the school enrolled 1000 students; its population then doubled in the 1940s ("The Lafayette Story," n.d.). Throughout this period, Greek Life became the primary social mode of organization on campus with twenty-two fraternities by 1940 ("Appendix XIII", n.d.). The emergence of discourse about bathrooms in the 1940s provides insight into how Greek Life and other bastions of masculinity socially constructed manhood in the mid-twentieth century.

Prior to coeducation, the bathroom was a place for male bonding activities that enforced men's agency and social dominance. For example, bathrooms were the site of fraternity hazing, pranks on rival football teams, and even the founding of the Roosevelt-for-President club (Gutkin, 1960; Margulis, 1964; "Pledges Pay Price," 1941; "Roosevelt Club", 1940). Thus, in bathrooms, men gained access to political and social power. Fraternities were the primary organizations for male social life; their rules and hazing processes informed how students were supposed to perform masculinity. Many fraternities defined acceptable masculinity as white and Christian, which kept some students from joining ("Part II", n.d.). Even after fraternities were forced to eliminate discriminatory clauses in 1969, most fraternities remained unofficially closed to black men (Stromber, 2018b). The men who did not pledge a Greek organization found themselves barred from campus life and political organizations (McCluskey Stromber, n.d.). The newspaper contains at least some records of fraternity rituals that occurred in residence hall bathrooms, perhaps because of the alleged privacy they offered, especially from administrators who may not have approved. Bathrooms were spaces where the powerful maintained their power

and where other men voluntarily participated in these processes. As Foucault argues, power is diffuse and not merely oppressive; in order for these bathroom rituals to have meaning, other men had to willfully enter into relationships and define themselves as masculine (1984, p. 65). Pledges in the 1950s, for example, chose to participate in the affiliation process, even if it meant scrubbing a bathroom clean with a toothbrush (Gutkin, 1960, p. 6). Those who did not participate were not merely ostracized. They served as a foil for the “real” men on campus.

In addition to the small minority of men unaffiliated with Greek Life, women -- and femininity, more broadly -- helped to define masculinity at Lafayette in the twentieth century. Even though there were no women enrolled as students, both real women off-campus and fictional women in print served to enforce men’s roles as heterosexual agents. For example, in 1958, in a satirical edition of the *Lafayette* entitled *The Laughingyet*, a student wrote an article, “Lafayette to Go Coed Second Semester; All-Male Tradition Lasts Only 132 Years” (1958, p. 3). In this article, riddled with jokes about men’s responsibilities to please women, the author wrote, “Flush Gordon, prominent Easton plumbing contractor and bathroom expert, has ordered many miles of pipe, and tons of various bathroom fixtures. Said he, ‘I’m glad we weren’t overstocked with urinals.’” This article highlights male and female sex differences through the use of bathroom imagery. The idea of a biological, sexual binary provides the basis for a gender binary that enforces specific roles regarding gender and sexuality (Chase, 1998). Therefore, the fictional Flush Gordon is promoting and stabilizing this binary.

Urinals come up again in a different (non satirical) article that discusses the trouble of dating on Lafayette’s campus. According to the article’s male sources, women felt uncomfortable using a men’s room because it contained urinals and had crude writing on the walls (Shedwick, 1970). The women themselves disputed the latter point. However, the

assumption that girls need to be convinced to use a bathroom with a urinal in it, or that they might be offended by bathroom graffiti, says more about Lafayette men's perceptions of femininity than it does about the women they dated. In the eyes of *The Lafayette*, to be feminine was to be delicate. And to be a man at Lafayette meant that you dated women and, importantly, brought them back to one's dorm. This article's discussion of "bathroom troubles" demonstrates that men's sexual pursuit of women was a norm at the college. It also demonstrates the ways in which bathrooms have been designed to fit biological male needs and not women's needs. While this makes some logical sense on an all-male campus, men would not have had the same problems using a toilet in an all-girls dormitory at Smith College, for example. When institutions are structured around maleness, it enforces the patriarchal hierarchy. It assumes that cisgender male bodies are normal, that facilities should be structured around them, and that the institution should provide them resources. The lack of facilities available for female use would become a problem for the first generation of women students on campus.

1970-1999: Coeducation

The *Laughingyet*'s prediction became a reality only twelve years later when Lafayette enrolled the first class of women in 1970. Considering the school's long history of single-gender education, Lafayette had to significantly renovate its facilities to accommodate the first class of 146 women. The initial class all lived in New Dorm, now known as Ruef Hall. Somewhat bewilderingly, the administration decided to install communal bathtubs in the residence hall because, according to a graduate from the class of 1974, they "thought women like to take baths" (Lucy, 2002). While there are no records of why the male administration thought that women would desire to take baths in a dorm, it likely has to do with traditional feminine gender roles.

Baths, after all, are a luxurious time during which women can primp-- shave their legs, exfoliate, or otherwise make themselves amenable to the male gaze. The college provided a physical space -- the tub -- where women could do an extremely feminine form of labor. The thought that bathtubs would be a necessity for women indicates that Lafayette College was invested in maintaining women's appearances and, therefore, their roles as sexual objects. This act also marked women as "other" since men did not need to engage in such behaviors. Men could simply focus on being students.

Bathtubs were not the only addition to women's facilities on Lafayette's campus. An angry letter-to-the-editor in 1977 reveals tensions concerning restrooms in academic buildings. In particular, the author addressed funds spent on renovations in Olin Hall. The author expressed outrage that the administration had switched the locations of the men's and women's rooms, spending significant amounts of money to do so, all so that the women's room could fit a large couch (Hollander, 1977a, p. 03). In a follow-up to his own letter-to-the-editor, Hollander writes that the president, Dr. Bergethon, said "that a state law required a couch in at least one women's lounge per building, or something like that" (1977b). No evidence of such a state ordinance can be found, though others have questioned the purpose of couches in women's restrooms. An official from a different college speculated that couches "were likely included to provide a comfortable space where women could socialize, rest or spend time in between their classes" (Buehler, 2016). A *Lafayette* student writer in the 1980s also wrote, "[W]omen's rooms are geared to socializing. Bathroom activities are secondary" (Konoplisky, 1983, p. 04). Restrooms provided a private space for women in a primarily male institution; it is therefore possible that the couches were a source of empowerment. It was the one place where women could interact with each other without male interference. However, the assumption behind couch's necessity

was that women, as emotional creatures, were more gregarious, as well as weaker than men-- hence the need to lie down between classes. Including them in bathrooms encouraged gender differences that uphold the gender binary.

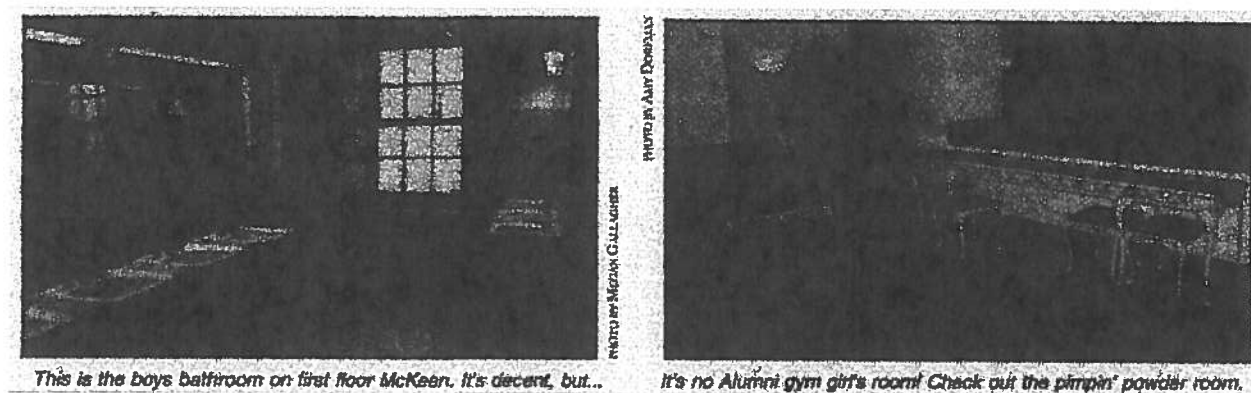


Figure 1. Comparison of men's and women's rooms at Lafayette College (Gallagher & Dorseaux, 1998).

Meanwhile, Lafayette's administration in the 1970s did not consider what women actually needed in bathroom facilities, such as sufficient toilet paper. As Kenneth Ross '72 reflected, women's bathrooms would "use much more toilet paper, but [did] not get serviced as frequently as the men's bathrooms, and so they [would] run out of toilet paper constantly" (2002). The divide between what women needed and what the administration *thought* they needed shows how institutions absorb and perpetuate social scripts. In this instance, the institution absorbed patriarchal norms. Even after admitting female students, the facilities department considered cisgender male bodies to be the default, thereby making women "the other." Additionally, there were not enough women's restrooms in academic buildings. According to a member of the Class of 1973, "There wasn't a lot of bathroom facilities which is something that women probably need more of than men" ("We Were Pioneers," 2003). This

problem persisted into the twenty-first century when renovations began on the Acopian Engineering Center. At the time, women had a bathroom only “on every other floor” (Trautner, 2001, p. 01). Clearly, the institution had not expected many women to pursue engineering, a hard science and stereotypically male field. Women may have gained access to Lafayette College and its myriad resources, but the gendered assumptions that had initially barred them from entry remained in place. In fact, the bathroom situation in the 1970s demonstrates that the gender binary was only enforced.

The gender binary upholds heterosexuality, which was compulsory for the first class of Lafayette women. As Professor Armstrong said, “Gender is a platform for straightness” (2018b). While women had an independent space on Lafayette’s campus (dorms) for the first time that allowed them to be sexual agents, and not merely dates, they still fulfilled heteronormative gender roles. Women merely utilized the existing social script and brought home male dates, leading to “bathroom troubles” of their own. In order to maintain gender segregation in the New Dorm bathrooms, women devised their own system. According to Christine Hanson Adams-Kaufman, “we worked out a system of putting flip tags on the bathrooms of ‘man inside’” (2002). On one hand, this enforced heterosexuality by assuming that all men and women who enter a shared bathroom would be attracted to each other and therefore need privacy or warning. On the other, it enabled women to navigate an institution that did not encourage their sexuality--men were not technically allowed in women’s dorm. The restriction on male visitors and the bathroom signage system relied on a version of femininity and feminine virtue that must be protected from masculinity (Adams-Kaufman, 2002).

In the 1980s, a look at bathrooms reveal how Lafayette femininity was constructed by men from the surrounding area. Throughout this decade, Lafayette experienced several male

trespassers in women's dorms, many of whom fled or hid in the dormitory bathrooms. According to Hugh Harris, the director of Security and Safety at the time, the first male intruder was "partly a harmless trespasser, and partly a peeping Tom" (Nelson, 1983, p. 01). Women in New Dorm did not get to comment on whether they agreed that a "peeping Tom" was harmless, but this man clearly saw the bathroom as a place to gain nonconsensual sexual access. Students called on the College had to respond but similar incidents occurred throughout the 1983 academic year (McCourt, 1983, p. 03; Schwager, 1983, p. 01). While these occurrences represented serious security concerns that Lafayette had to address for its female students, the discourse surrounding these incidents only reinforced notions of femininity, virtue, and fragility. Meanwhile, these news stories presented men as sexual threats to women though the articles did not question the men's impetus for these actions. Even as the College was attacked for its perceived lack of a response, the student newspaper did not levy the same criticism at the men themselves. Men as sexual aggressors appeared natural.

Despite Lafayette College's system of compulsory heterosexuality, the school first considered coeducational residence halls in the 1980s. The Committee on Alternate Living Options (CALO) first proposed a coeducational dormitory in 1982 ("Calo Report", 1982). While this was a notable change, it did not ultimately challenge the gender binary. This coeducational living space rested on heteronormative assumptions; it required men and women to be separated by room, even if they lived on the same floor. Bathrooms were a primary consideration throughout this process. In determining which residence halls could be coeducational, CALO looked at the location of bathrooms within dorms to ensure both gender segregation and access. The report recommended South Hall over another dormitory because it had "two bathrooms on one floor" as opposed to other dormitories that would require one gender to seek a bathroom on a

different floor ("Calo Report", 1982). Even though coeducational housing promotes the idea that men and women can live together, the separation of bathrooms suggests that gender divisions were still upheld. The underlying assumption was that the majority of students were heterosexual and thus sharing a bathroom -- where their peers might be in a state of undress -- would lead to sexual tension. A student in the late 1980s wrote about how uncomfortable it would be "walking down the presumably all-female hall in a towel and encountering a member of the opposite sex as you turn the corner. Not pleasant, except in the most rare of instances" (Kudless, 1987, p. 05). Not only does this solidify heterosexuality's primacy; it also depicts men, once again, as sexual aggressors. On the subject of mixed gender bathrooms, a male student said,

Using a bathroom does cause problems, though. I think wearing towels is preferable to robes, especially if you tie them in knots. Sometimes you are attracted to someone of the opposite sex, and that can cause problems. However, when you see the woman in the morning, you really get turned off. It's like confronting Medusa or something (Puskas, 1991, p. 08).

Coeducational bathrooms were viewed as sites of uncontrollable heterosexual impulses, which further enforced women's object status. Moreover, mixed gender bathrooms pulled back the curtain on women's gender performance. They were no longer achieving the goal of effortless perfection; beauty was something that they had to work towards (Women's Initiative Report, 2003). Furthermore, this important component of femininity could not be seen as natural and therefore challenged naturalized conceptions of gender performance. This explains the above

student's strong negative reaction to seeing women in the morning. That experience threatened gender roles themselves.

By 1985, Ruef Hall -- previously the women's dormitory -- housed both men and women (Barthold, 1983, p. 01). At this point in the college's history, there was a general acceptance of coeducational living, but a Board of Trustees mandate required the presence of single-sex residence halls on campus (Barthold, 1983, p. 01). Furthermore, the "number of coeducational dorms [was] limited by the number of facilities with two bathrooms on each floor" (Barthold, 1983, p. 01). Therefore, even as the school moved away from its previous gender segregation model, spaces that enforced traditional masculinity and femininity persisted. In turn, the separate bathrooms symbolized a sexual division between men and women that served to strengthen heterosexuality.

In addition to discussions about coeducational living facilities, discourse around the social purposes of the bathroom provide key insights into Lafayette's perceptions of masculinity and femininity. A *Lafayette* article on the night of a 1980s formal dance included the line, "Twenty girls at a time go to the bathroom to 'freshen up' and return half an hour later with juicy gossip to share with their date..." (Smith, 1983, p. 05). The women's restroom was viewed critically as a place to focus on appearances (a distinctly feminine form of labor) and to gossip, a term which is derisive of female bonding. In this view, women do not have meaningful discussions with friends. Instead, gossip implies something frivolous and without value. This, combined with the emphasis on women's appearances, paints women as shallow, while also enforcing women's roles as objects of male desire. They were not freshening up for themselves, after all, but for their male date. Again, this demonstrates the ways in which power is diffuse, not

merely prohibitive (Foucault, 1984, p. 65). Women engaged willfully in this gender performance of idealized femininity in order to gain social stature.

Sexuality also made its way into the bathrooms through capitalism-- or, more specifically, through condom sales. A letter from 1991 contains a report of condom sales in residence hall bathrooms by a company called Inside-Out, Inc. The sales were largely unsuccessful because resident advisors offered a free condom distribution program (Strauss, 1991). Despite the lack of success, the bathroom was once again constructed as a sexual site. Men bought the bulk of the few condoms that sold, perhaps because men were considered responsible for providing condoms. They may have purchased more condoms because, in patriarchy, men are supposed to pursue women. Norah Vincent details this process in her chapter on dating in *Self-Made Man* in which actively seeking out female partners is a key (heterosexual) male social process (2006). Whether or not these condoms were used, these bathroom sales encouraged this process of male pursuit.

The bathroom was also a site where racial and ethnic components of gender were enforced. While white men were the top of Lafayette's campus hierarchy, black men did not have access to this patriarchal power. One African-American student recounted a time when a white, male student vomited in front of the dorm urinals, saying "I went to him, and I said, 'Would you please clean up your vomit from the bathroom?' He said, 'You black bastard you go and clean it up yourself'" ("We Were Pioneers," 2003). This white man expected a black man to do degrading labor for him. Black men were supposed to be subservient to white men, according to racist and patriarchal standards, and this white student used the bathroom as a place to exert his dominance. This hierarchy has historical and economic roots. As hooks wrote about black Americans after the end of slavery, "Black men and women who wanted to conform to gender

role norms found that this was nearly impossible in a white racist economy that wanted to continue its exploitation of black labor (1992, p. 92). Whether or not the African American student wanted to gain access to this patriarchal power is not divulged in this excerpt, and it is very possible he subscribed to alternate forms of masculinity. This instance reveals the ways in which gender and race were policed at Lafayette College in the 1970s.

2000-Present: New Identities

Racial and ethnic power dynamics continued to play out in bathrooms throughout the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2000, a swastika was drawn on “the first floor south men’s bathroom mirror in Skillman library” (Office of Public Safety, 2000). Then in 2008, hate speech was “found spray painted on a bathroom stall in Ruef Hall” (Miller, 2008). Ethnic intimidation in bathrooms escalated throughout the 2010-2011 academic year, beginning when an “ethnic slur demonstrating religious bias” was found “in the basement men’s room of the Simon Center” in October 2010; there were four more incidents following this in which racial slurs and swastikas were found in college bathrooms (Ethnic Intimidation Log, 2011). Another swastika was found in a Ruef bathroom in 2012 (Public Safety, 2012). In each instance, the graffiti was found in men’s rooms.

Lafayette was an entirely white institution for 100 years and only reached a “critical mass” of black students in 1969 (Stromber, 2018a; Stromber, 2018c). Even today, black students make up only five percent of Lafayette’s student body, though this is a significant increase from years past (“Campus Demographics”, 2015). Additionally, there were few Jewish students on campus well into the 1960s, though Jewish students now make up roughly ten to twelve percent of the student population (“FAQ- Hillel Society,” n.d.; Weiner, 2018). Consequently,

Lafayette's standard for masculinity has reflected the American mythical ideal. The institution was designed for and continues to value white, Christian men with socioeconomic status. It thus makes some sense that these instances of "ethnic intimidation" occurred once there were significant numbers of non-white and non-Christian students on campus. The primacy of a particular kind of masculinity was threatened by their presence-- hence why the graffiti was solely in men's restrooms. The hateful bathroom graffiti provided a way for men who fit the hegemonic norm to reassert their dominance. It also produced discourse on campus about racism and ethnic discrimination. While these issues are certainly important, the discourse served to remind students of color and non-Christian students that they did not fit Lafayette's patriarchal ideal. It contributed to definitions of masculinity that exclude people of color and ethnic minorities.

In the 2010s, the United States has seen an explosion of transgender and nonbinary gender identities. Lafayette College has begun to absorb them and, in doing so, will define them. For example, different groups and committees are actively working to establish all-gender bathrooms on campus. The established norm of gender segregated bathrooms is based on the gender binary. In this system, bathrooms serve as gatekeepers; individuals declare their gender identity every time they push open the door to use the facilities (Spade, 2000). At a certain level, there is a kind of pleasure in this declarative process and in carving out women-only or male-only spaces. To paraphrase Foucault, power dictates that individuals are happier when they know who they are within the discursive field (Armstrong, 2018a; Foucault, 1984, p. 44). Of course, individuals who identify as transgender or nonbinary do not have a space that reflects their experiences or allows them to engage in this declarative process.

As gender identities have multiplied, so have the number of mechanisms of control that surround those identities. Just some of the decision-makers who oversee the implementation of all-gender bathrooms include: the Office of Residence Life; the Office of Intercultural Development; the Facilities Operations Department; the Office of Accessibility Services; ALMA Architecture; the Diversity committee; the Equity, Transformation, and Accountability Board; and Student Government (Collins, 2018; Kelly, 2018; Shaman, 2015; Yencha, 2018). In order to implement all-gender bathrooms in residence halls, the Office of Residence Life had to do an inventory of bathrooms in each hall; if bathrooms were single use, this would make it easier to change their designation to all-gender. They began by putting up all-gender signs that said “All Use” in Keefe Hall but those had to be taken down because they did not meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards (Yencha, 2018). The process to transform the institution in an ultimately small way (alternate signs) has thus been slow, largely due to the numerous control mechanisms that police gender on campus. As of May 2018, Lafayette College has approximately fifty “gender-neutral” bathrooms (Collins, 2018). The vast majority of its bathrooms and restrooms remain gender segregated.



Figure 2. A sign outside a gender-neutral restroom in the Oechsle Center for Global Education (Cox, 2018).

The recognition of nonbinary identities is a fairly new development and it is hard to predict how the school will respond in the future. Transgender identities destabilize traditional, binary notions of gender and sexuality (Serano, 2007). The standard all-gender sign -- once it is formally approved -- could continue that destabilizing process, or it could enforce the gender binary. Current signs (see Figure 2) literally depict the binary and strengthen the notion of a two gender system, which in turn upholds heterosexuality. Ideally, the school will opt for signs that better reflect gender fluidity and, fortunately, other options already exist ("All Gender Inclusive Symbol Accessible Bathroom Sign," n.d.). The school has much else to consider in its implementation of all-gender bathrooms. Sarah Yench, the Assistant Director of Residence Life For Housing Operations, discussed the significant renovations that will have to occur in various dormitories. For example, they might remove some urinals, or install curtains to create privacy between the toilets and the showers (Yench, 2018). These changes are on a larger scale than signs-- it is likely that they will not be fully implemented any time soon, especially given all of the departments and offices that have a say in the decision-making process.

Conclusion

Bathrooms provide key insights into the development of gender and sexuality at Lafayette College. Throughout the school's history, bathrooms were the site of important male rituals that dictated access to political and social structures, such as fraternities. When women enrolled in the college in 1970, the college had to adapt its facilities to accommodate women.

These renovations included couches and bathtubs that symbolically declared women's value and their role as sexual objects. Relatedly, gender segregation of bathrooms promoted compulsory heterosexuality. When students of color made up a critical mass of Lafayette students, white men responded through hateful graffiti in restrooms. This produced discourse that further situated students of color and non-Christian students as "other" and helped reassert white men's dominance. Now the college is implementing a plan to create more all-gender bathrooms on campus as the institution absorbs nonbinary identities. There are multiple mechanisms of control that oversee this endeavor and the standards that are adopted can either destabilize or enforce the gender and sexual binary. As the college transforms its facilities, it should look to the past to better understand how discursive structures within and around bathrooms organize gender and sexuality on campus.

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