Gender, Class and Bodily Functions in the Urban Past: a Preliminary Historical Geography of Toronto’s Public Lavatories

Richard Anderson

Geography Department, York University,
4700 Keele Street, Downsview Ontario,
Canada M3J 1P3

ABSTRACT

There has been a significant amount of interest in the sexual geography of the Victorian and Edwardian city. This paper contributes to the subject by exploring the scatological aspects of the urban past. It draws most of its data from the city of Toronto, Canada. The story of Toronto’s public lavatories provides us with a useful means of examining some of the practical measures taken to engineer the body-politics of public space. The evidence confirms that women faced much more systematic restrictions than men on their freedom of movement and physical comfort. While the public lavatory had an emancipating effect on women, it did not have the same effect on men.
INTRODUCTION

Cultural geographers have been investigating some peculiar places recently. To the growing literature on asylums, prisons, orphanages and cricket pitches this paper contributes something about public lavatories. For those who grumble about the "new cultural geography", it may look like yet another paper on a "strange" cultural space, but along with my colleagues I am concerned to find something of wider significance in my arcane subject matter. Like the asylum or the workhouse, the public lavatory surely holds its own inherent interest, but more importantly it reveals something about the wider culture in which it occurs. A minor urban structure, which played only a walk-on part in the street improvement opera, public lavatories embodied cultural phenomena which are much wider in their significance. Their spaces were penetrated by a variety of discourses: about privacy, about dirt, about decency, about gender, about class and about the nature of public space. This rather incomplete list at least suggests the breadth of possibilities.

Public Lavatories and Victorian Sanitary Reform

For some Victorian sanitary reformers the public lavatory represented hygienic progress and public comfort. It was a fountain of health, an ivory cellar,1 a temple of convenience, and a comfort station for the weary traveller. With siphonic closets and shiny white tiles, sanitary plumbers glazed a trail across the Victorian world, helping reshape its sanitary environment. Lavatories were only a small part of the general culture of Victorian sanitation, but they were public structures, constructed in public space, and intimately connected with the changing nature of the Victorian city. They spread globally along with the urban system in which they were found and by the 1920s were widespread in Europe and North America.2 George Jennings, who was among the Victorian world's foremost

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sanitary plumbers, could boast by 1895 that thirty-six British towns and cities had been improved with his public conveniences. Thirty railway companies in Britain, one in the USA and others in Buenos Aires, Cape Town and Mexico pampered their customers with his appliances. On the streets of Paris, Berlin, Florence and Sulina his company's urinals received the libations of a grateful public, as they did in Madrid, Frankfurt, Hong Kong and Sydney NSW.³

While representing progress, lavatories also implemented various contemporary notions about urban body politics. The urinary behaviour of working class men, for example, was something which Victorian and Edwardian officials tried to control, while the equivalent needs of women were usually ignored. Through the construction of public lavatories therefore, civic officials hoped to bring a corporeal as well as a sanitary order to public space.

It was only a small part of a much wider programme of social-cum sanitary engineering. The public hygiene and bathing movement in turn-of-the-century America, for example, has been linked to the general project of contemporary middle-class social reform.⁴ Cleanliness, Marilyn Williams has argued, became a prominent middle-class virtue in Victorian America, and served to draw an increasing distinction between those who could afford to keep clean and those who constituted "the great unwashed". The public bath house or lavatory allowed the reformers to ameliorate the social stigma of dirt by enabling the poor to keep themselves clean. Accordingly reformers built a substantial number of municipal and charitable bath houses, steam laundries, swimming pools, and public bathing stations, which were usually located in the most congested immigrant neighbourhoods. Many believed, apparently, that teaching bathing habits to poor immigrants would help them to become Americans. Of course, stigmatising the poor as

"unwashed" also served to maintain the sense of social distance, and sanitised racial or class prejudices with an aura of medical respectability.

As gendered and classed spaces, designed to accommodate some pretty fundamental human needs, the study of public lavatories and bathing facilities enables us to glimpse some of the hidden culture of the urban past. They allow us to sense some of the different layers of meaning with which Victorians and Edwardians regarded their bodies. Something of similar scope might be attempted with the analysis of the domestic bathroom, but public facilities at least allows us to follow the story in public space. Despite their small size and modest significance, public lavatories have a lot to tell us about their cultural context.

Being part of the body politics of the late Victorian and Edwardian city, the public lavatory was also part of the cultural geography of globalising modernity. Like the fashionable promenade, the Department Store, or the glazed exhibition building, the lavatory involved cultural transfers of taste and ideas, as well as form and fixtures. In the emergent urban landscapes of bourgeois modernity, in cities as far flung as Paris or Buenos Aires, the public lavatory was an obvious component of the new corporeal culture.

We might explore this topic, as much of the existing literature seems to do, by examining the major metropolitan centres of London, Paris or New York. But we are dealing with a global phenomenon, so it also makes sense to look toward the periphery.

In the interests of understanding this as a global phenomenon, this paper will examine the example of Toronto, Canada, but it is I hope more than "just a case study". While Toronto doesn't seem to be a particularly significant city for the construction of masculinity, femininity or social class, it does provide a demonstration of some key ideas. In this fairly ordinary Victorian city (with a few qualifications) we have a representative of many other urban areas sharing its cultural régime. It therefore offers us a chance make
some general comments on the corporeal politics of the Victorian and Edwardian city, even if its substance is somewhat localized and specific.

Gender and bodily functions in the Victorian city

According to the prevailing sense of sexual order, unescorted middle-class women are supposed to have been discouraged from roaming the commercial districts of mid-Victorian cities. This was masculine space, the heartland of the cash economy, and respectable women were thought to "belong" in the family homes of the residential suburbs. While urban life never corresponded exactly to its prevailing sexual ideology, and women never completely conformed, mid-Victorian culture discouraged them from being at large on city streets. It is now widely accepted that one can talk of a sexual order for urban space, even if there is doubt about the extent to which people actually complied.

One of the reasonably significant changes in the sexual geography of the Victorian city, at least according to some observers, was the development of the department store. Fashionable shopping was no novelty, but there was something about the new department stores which began to transform the female experience of urban space. In these landscapes of consumerism, wealthier women could circulate unescorted and without loss of respectability. Through her role as fashionable consumer, and serving her family, the late-Victorian middle-class woman could find a degree of freedom to roam city streets.

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There has been a fair amount written about the way that shopping modified women's access to downtown space. Granted there were limitations (working class women, for example, could not afford to be frequent or fashionable customers, and propriety limited the orbit of respectable women to the fashionable shopping streets) but these courts of commodities quickly became cardinal points in middle-class consumption habits, and were designed to appeal to female customers. Not only did the department store create a retailing environment around the middle-class "lady", but it also offered her the only presentable women's lavatories she was likely to find in the Victorian city.

Department store promoters, such as Toronto's Timothy Eaton, recognized that middle-class women faced certain unspeakable difficulties when shopping downtown in the 1880s. They would arrive "covered with dust" and "begrimed with smoke" and unable to get cleaned up without spending money at a restaurant or hotel.\(^8\) Eager to enhance his trade, Eaton had (by 1886) provided his enormous store with what he called the "Ladies Gallery and Waiting Room",\(^9\) offering a "clean toilet room, with towels and soap ". Here you could "wash as often as you please" and "wait as long as you like".\(^10\) By the 1890s Eaton's and its arch-rival, Simpson's,\(^11\) were setting a high standard of service, in which "Toronto ladies" would be offered "all modern conveniences".\(^12\) Similar facilities graced the other large department stores of the period, such as Montreal's Colonial House,\(^13\) or New York's Bloomingdales, and by the 1920s had spread down the urban hierarchy to

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\(^8\)EATON, T. & Cº. (1886) *Fall-winter catalogue 1886-7*, (T. Eaton, Toronto) p. 5; BASSETT, J. M. (1975) *Timothy Eaton* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, Markham) p. 51.


\(^10\)EATON, 1886, p. 2; BASSETT, 1975, p. 51.


\(^12\)SANTINK, 1990, p. 98.
most smaller cities. The department store "ladies' room" became a key point in the female shopping experience. It was a scarce resource, often overtaxed and primarily intended to serve paying customers. In contrast to the fashionable retail areas, in the markets and places where working women shopped, there were few women's lavatory facilities of any kind. It was a familiar picture, in which women experienced city streets with less freedom than men and routinely were subjected to greater discomfort. The sexual order of urban space had a scatological dimension.

In constrast, men were subject to much less constraint. For the Victorian male urination was an almost semi-public act. The city acknowledged male bodily needs when it provided urinals, and without facilities, Victorian men simply urinated in a convenient place. Despite prohibitory bylaws it was an open secret that males fouled the gutter. In 1908, noted one Toronto official with disgust, men were even defiling the lawns of City Hall. For Havelock Ellis and other writers who knew the Victorian city first-hand, the "sight of men and boys urinating" was routine to the urban experience. Men were expected to be furtive and discreet, but officials understood that they would urinate al fresco with comparative frequency. The street was a little too public but men had fewer inhibitions in its shadowy margins. Women, on the other hand, were not understood to follow their example. Some women no-doubt did relieve themselves in the gutter, as Victorian pornography acknowledged, but a civic officialdom which could blushingly admit the outdoor urination of males seems to have no idea that women would do the

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14 TCM 1908 appendix c: 208.
16 TCM 1908 Appendix C: 208.
same thing. Without lavatories Toronto males "violated decency", "created nuisances" or even "exposed themselves", while females merely "suffered discomfort" or "painful embarrassment". It is difficult to escape the impression that officials expected women to somehow put up with the discomfort of a full bladder.

Urination was an intensely private act for a Victorian woman. In the era before indoor plumbing it focused on the chamber pot in the bedroom, and with the advent of the plumbed bathroom, it remained discreet. The typical Victorian woman, it seems, even avoided the backyard privvy, encumbered with her awkward clothing and aware of watchful neighbours. Before Toronto's hotels were able to offer plumbing, it was the men who would head for the common privvy in the yard, while the women reached for the thunder mug.

Female excretion was a particularly discreet matter amongst the bourgeoisie, for whom female delicacy was a mid-Victorian idée fixe. Politeness required women to beat a chaste retreat from vulgarity, as a British sanitary plumber noted. "Ladies", he said, would often be alarmed by the very sight of a flush toilet at a household exhibition. Rather than examine the display they would "blush and turn away". Yet excretion held few real secrets for Victorian women, who generally emptied the family chamber pots.

The late-Victorian middle-class developed the habit of retiring to a bathroom to answer the call of nature. Indoor plumbing allowed them to maintain their preference for

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discreet convenience while ornate and luxurious sanitary fittings helped to disguise their embarrassing purpose. Privacy, discretion, and clean, plumbed, facilities were vital elements in their repertoire. These considerations were uppermost when the private sector began to address the lavatory needs of the middle-class woman. She was offered a combination of polite seclusion and considerable luxury, and male proprietors often went to great lengths to disguise the facilities as something else. In fashionable hotels, ladies were directed to the "retiring room" or "ladies' parlour", where they might "re recuperate" or "wash". The retiring room became a sumptuously appointed boudoir of ablution, in which females "withdrew" to "powder their noses". In its most luxurious examples, the Victorian and Edwardian "ladies' room" was a place of soothing euphemism, where ladies "re recuperated" in decadent seclusion surrounded by marble, brass, mahogany and mirrors.

By contrast men's lavatories tended to emphasise practicality, and those at railway stations were designed to accommodate large numbers of men in a hurry. Finding the "gents" was seldom difficult, but the "ladies" were usually better hidden. They were usually smaller and laid out to so that their comings and goings could not be observed by male passengers and staff.

At the end of the Victorian period, it is fairly evident that a series of cultural practices had emerged for addressing the needs of men and women in public places. These in turn were founded upon certain attitudes towards male and female bodies. It would be wrong to assume, however, that these attitudes were static, and by about 1900

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20LAMBERTON, 1979, p. 10.
there were signs of significant change. Women had few lavatories in Toronto's municipal space before 1900, but when they did materialise, (in the Edwardian era) they would emphasise equality. The cult of female delicacy had weakened and, unlike the opulent "retiring rooms" of the department store or grand railway station, Toronto's new women's lavatories were quite basic in their decoration, although they were still well equipped. Instead of offering opulent luxury and seclusion, Edwardian authorities simply offered female versions of the adjacent male facilities.

The new, somewhat egalitarian, arrangements for women's lavatories reflected the constant municipal concern for cost-effectiveness, but they also marked the emergence of modified attitudes towards bodily functions in general and women's bodies in particular. Male officials increasingly accepted women's presence in the streets, and therefore provided them with public lavatories. Even so, the city continued to place the priority on men's needs. Despite the "feminine" spaces of the department store, and the female presence in downtown crowds, males were still assumed to dominate the public on Victorian and Edwardian city streets, especially downtown.

Public lavatories in Toronto's past

Before the 1880s, Toronto was essentially a walking city, small enough to allow circulation on foot, and with only a rudimentary transit system. Downtown was its commercial heart, the locus of its exchange economy. It was a landscape of production and, in the understanding of the time, a largely masculine space, where men had business

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or worked for a wage. As the downtown core of a walking city, it was also at the heart of its pedestrian crowding and movement patterns.

The workplaces in this commercial space offered lavatories to their largely male work-force. The water closet appeared in during the building cycle of the 1850s while the pit privy remained standard in the less prestigious structures, but although there were grades of sanitary accommodation just as there were grades of buildings, the men with fixed work-places were fairly well accommodated. A problem began to develop however as the city increased the size of its outdoor workforce. By 1861 there were 2800\textsuperscript{23} teamsters, expressmen, construction labourers, dockers and other outdoor workers. With little access to a fixed workplace they might use privies at working-men's taverns and similar places, but substantial numbers must have faced necessity in a convenient back lane.

The greatest amount of \textit{al fresco} urination happened in the lanes and yards closest to the areas of high pedestrian density. In mid-Victorian Toronto this meant that the areas off King Street and around the markets were particularly vulnerable. Men had access to a remarkable amount of secluded "back space" even in the commercial heart of the city (see Figure 1), and there were many yards, lanes, vacant lots or abandoned buildings where a man could empty his bladder.

It was largely in attempt to curb the male \textit{al fresco} nuisance, that Toronto began to experiment with public urinals. It followed a decade in which the population had doubled and was associated with an 1858 proposal to renovate the cattle market.\textsuperscript{24} Markets were at the heart of the city's crowding and movement patterns, places where drovers, farmers,
and traders gathered in large numbers. The City Engineer erected urinals at both of Toronto's markets in 1860. These were, he said, the places where facilities were "most needed", but they were also municipal properties, over which the city had enough autonomy to thwart objectors.

The new urinals received steady use, but Toronto men continued to use the gutter as a latrine, and police continued to arrest offenders for "indecent exposure". Most arrests happened in spring or late summer (see Figure 2), when population enlarged with migrant labourers, but the police deliberately arrested very few of the culprits. They knew all the popular urinating places, but were reluctant to press charges recommending instead that the city build more urinals. Through lack of interest, few were built and men continued to foul the street. In March 1888, for example, Bankers Gzowski and Buchan complained about a lane on King Street East, which was constantly "befouled" by the public (see Figure 1). This adjoined one of the most fashionable business streets, where Toronto's élite used to promenade on summer afternoons, but it was also next to a cab stand. The health officer agreed that this conspicuous place was a regular haunt of the bladder-weary, but felt unable to stop the activity. It was, after all, a popular spot for the purpose. Similar "evils", he noted, existed elsewhere in the city's core. Along the waterfront, dock workers were in the habit of relieving themselves into the hulks of

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23 *Canada Census* 1861: Occupations.
24 *TCM* May 3, 1858 #174.
25 The references to "indecent exposure" indicate that most offenses involved urination, not sexual misconduct.
26 *TCM* 1872 appendix 132: 243; *TCM* 1873 appendix 18 board of health report #2.
27 BASSETT, 1975, p. 25.
abandoned and waterlogged vessels, the old tug *W. T. Robb* being a favorite.\(^{29}\) The inhabitants of suburban Parkdale had apparently found a similar use for a back lane near Queen Street and Brockton Road, in the heart of the village.\(^{30}\) He explained that "Until a sufficient number of public urinals are placed in different parts of the city, such nuisances may be expected to continue".\(^{31}\)

**The impact of the streetcar**

The impetus to create a more ambitious network of street lavatories coincided with the growing impact of the streetcar system and the changes it brought to pedestrian traffic. By the later 1880s Toronto was no longer quite the "walking city" it had been when the first urinals were constructed. Five million passengers a year were riding the streetcars in 1883, and by 1890 the total had swollen to more than 16 million. Although the system's growth was uneven and subject to political quarrels, it was electrified in the mid 1890s and gradually extended over the expanding city. In 1900 almost 50 million passengers used the streetcar and rapid growth continued for many years (see Figure 3).

The streetcar had several effects on pedestrian flux. It tended to further the separation of work and residence but it also created suburban crowding points where routes intersected or where large numbers of commuters waited for their cars. Crowds of male pedestrians, passengers and crew caused "sanitary nuisances" as they sought relief near major transfer points and terminal loops. Despite their rising numbers, female passengers were not thought to constitute a problem. The authorities still assumed that

\(^{29}\) *TARLBH* 1888: 31.  
\(^{30}\) *PBOH* 1883: 186.  
\(^{31}\) *TARLBH* 1888: 26.
the travelling public was overwhelmingly male and concluded that the city needed a network of men's lavatories at suitable points in the streetcar system (Figure 3).

The most elaborate element of the emerging scheme was an underground men's lavatory on the west side of Toronto Street, in the city's commercial core (Figure 1). It was a good place to serve downtown and was close to several major streetcar lines. The underground idea came from British municipal practice which the city engineer, Edward Keating, evidently admired. As a measure of enthusiasm he claimed it would be the "first underground lavatory constructed on this side of the Atlantic". However, the facility's greatest novelty lay in its mere presence. Public lavatories were not part of the routine of the street, especially not such in such prestigious locations, and significant local opposition soon emerged. The city interrupted construction to obtain special powers from the Province.

To appease the discontented neighbours, the lavatory was shifted to the head of Toronto Street and by the end of 1896 it was finished. It was reached by a set of stairs screened in that most aesthetic of materials, corrugated steel. It boasted closets, urinals and wash-basins, together with enameled signs, marble work and ornamental iron. An attendant (a former waiter) would rent towels and soap to users, and also operated the facility's shoe shine equipment. In conformity with both the needs of traffic and the *beaux arts* aesthetic, the lavatory was placed under the middle of the thoroughfare, which emphasised the symmetry and order of the street, but made it gloomy and badly ventilated. Aromas escaped via a pipe set into the curious tower. However, the facility was well used.
from its opening in 1896, with approximately 3000 male "visitors" a week. The temple of convenience had at last arrived in Toronto.

_A network of street lavatories_

This elaborate facility raised the art of municipal plumbing to a new and higher plane but to deal with the broadly spread problem of male *al fresco* urination, the city tried the cheaper expedient of street-corner urinals. From the 1860s onwards, chief constables, aldermen and civic officials had been urging the City to provide a network of "public conveniences" on the streets but, after more than thirty years, little had happened. The decisive change came in the mid 1890s when well-organized groups of male outdoor workers began to apply the pressure. The street railway men were the most significant advocates, and backed by the Toronto Labour Council, they successfully petitioned the City in 1895.\(^{35}\) The duties of these respectable workers constantly separated them from lavatory facilities, but they requested a network of urinals for public use as well as for their own. Shortly afterwards crude wooden urinals appeared at several points on the streetcar system but the public, rather than the streetcar workers, proved to be the heaviest users. The facilities were overburdened and poorly maintained, but demonstrated the need for a network of lavatories.\(^{36}\)

The most pressing need was for a facility at suburban Yonge and Cottingham, where the streetcar system intersected with the CPR. It was, said the Works Committee in 1904, "urgent that immediate relief should be given to this locality".\(^{37}\) Instead of a cheap

\(^{35}\) _TCM_ September 23, 1895 #677, #703.

\(^{36}\) _TCER_ 1903: 87.

\(^{37}\) _TCM_ 1904 appendix c: 1019.
urinal, Council insisted on a fully serviced men's lavatory "as a public convenience of that kind at that point is absolutely necessary for the sake of health and decency."\textsuperscript{38} A well-equipped surface lavatory\textsuperscript{39} opened on February 11, 1906, in what proved to be the start of an ambitious construction programme that would last until the 1920s.

Perhaps for the first time, these "conveniences" seemed appropriate subjects for photography and were displayed in civic reports. To indicate their scale and function, shadowy male figures were shown emerging, fumbling with their buttons. Faced with such positive publicity, (and flushed with pride?) officials groped for appropriate language to describe their functions and clientele. The men who used them were variously described as "visitors" or "those in attendance" as though it was a church or a monument.

Aesthetics were almost as important as good plumbing in the subterranean wonders of the new civic lavatory. They were out of sight, yet prominently sited. They were discreet yet obvious. A place of gender mystery, they were utilitarian and yet munificent. The City Engineer found it easy to persuade the Works Committee to abandon more parsimonious plans\textsuperscript{40} and instead construct "first class" lavatories costing more than twice as much.\textsuperscript{41} The new structures were duly photographed and appeared in the City Engineer's annual reports in all their \textit{beaux arts} glory.\textsuperscript{42}

By the middle of the Edwardian period, the city of Toronto had found a successful formula for addressing men's bodily needs. Downtown and in the suburbs it was installing the symbolic capital of the fully serviced lavatory. Instead of urinating in the back spaces

\textsuperscript{38} TCM September 26, 1904 #668.
\textsuperscript{39} TCM April 25, 1905 #339.
\textsuperscript{40} TCM 1905 appendix c: 121.
\textsuperscript{41} TCM 1905 appendix c: 122.
\textsuperscript{42} TCER 1906: 163; 1908: 18.
and other shadowy margins, men were being encouraged to "attend" the city's smart new public conveniences. Male scatology now had a respectable place in the visual economy of the street.

*Lavatories for women*

Victorian officials provided men with lavatories because, without them, men would foul the gutter, but women seemed much less likely to do so. Women's lavatories appeared to be something of a luxury, a high-quality non-essential service that the city might undertake from municipal pride, or from concern for feminine comfort, but not because women threatened the sanitary order of the street. Women's lavatories might belong in the parks, where women accompanied their families, but on the city's streets (especially in male-dominated downtown) men's facilities seemed more of a priority. Toronto's markets gave men a place to urinate from 1860, but offered nothing for women until the later 1890s. Even though officials recognized "the long-felt need of a WC for the use of females."43

The park system was the only part of the Victorian city's public space which made any real attempt to provide lavatories for women. As settings for family recreation, women were a legitimate part of the park's public, and municipal custodians undertook to provide "conveniences" for both genders. Unlike Montréal44 or Hamilton,45 Toronto generally lacked ornamental squares in its downtown, so that much of its park development had to occur in the suburbs. These suburban parks became important recreation areas for the late-Victorian public, and therefore received much of the effort to improve infrastructure and install "conveniences".

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43 *TCM* 1896 appendix c: 592.
45 LISTER, H. (1913) *Hamilton, Canada, its history, commerce, industries, resources* (np, Hamilton).
The first Toronto parks to provide lavatories were those connected with permanent exhibition space. Even more than the department store, exhibitions made spectacles out of commodities, and tended to attract large, mixed, crowds. Toronto's Horticultural Gardens, located in the fashionable residential district along Jarvis Street, was popular for female promenades, but both it and the Exhibition Park had lavatory accommodation in their exhibition buildings. At first the facilities were rather crude, pit privies being the mainstay of the Exhibition until the 1890s, but by the Edwardian period well-equipped lavatories were available for both sexes. Although large crowds overwhelmed the facilities (especially at the Exhibition) the city made some attempt to accommodate women visitors from the 1850s.

While the city's exhibition buildings faced the peculiar challenges of brief periods of overwhelming numbers, other city parks faced problems as they too became popular. Their crowds tended to be smaller and more diffuse but created problems without facilities. Despite their remoteness from the city, both High Park and the Toronto Islands had become very popular places for summer visitors by the 1890s. The sanitary implications of popularity put considerable strain on limited park budgets, while their remoteness from city services made it especially difficult to improve their condition.

High Park's popularity intensified in the 1890s and it often took days to clean up after a public holiday. The Island became popular half a decade earlier, but in both cases officials were forced to accommodate the increasing crowds with pit privies because

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47 *TCM* 1908 appendix c: 210.
49 *TCM* 1896 appendix c: 498.
of the remoteness from sewer services.\textsuperscript{51} Equally limited water service meant that visitors had to wait until the 1890s before the first drinking fountains were available.\textsuperscript{52} Fully serviced masonry lavatories appeared only in the Edwardian period.\textsuperscript{53} Even so, no matter how crude the facilities, officials tried to accommodate both sexes.

Officials were alarmed by the tendency of park visitors to relieve themselves \textit{al fresco},\textsuperscript{54} since it polluted morally as well as physically. Because of the inadequacy of the earth closets and urinals on the Island (whose effluent ran across the beach), entire families were forced to relieve themselves on convenient patches of ground. The popularity of the place in the later 1880s made it unsanitary but also, thought one official, indecent.

The Edwardian period was one of rapid improvement for the park system. New parks were added and old ones renewed in a flurry of pavilions, picnic shelters, fountains, playgrounds and other "conveniences". Drinking fountains began to spout at Bellwoods, Alexandra, High and Queen's Parks\textsuperscript{55} in the 1900s and flush lavatories followed.\textsuperscript{56} Riverdale Park acquired flush lavatories in 1903-4, amid the enormous popularity of its zoo.\textsuperscript{57} Queen's Park added a set of lavatories under the band stand, in 1902, which were "much appreciated by the general public".\textsuperscript{58} Despite the generally primitive arrangements, Victorian parks were among the first public spaces to offer women's lavatories. As primitive as the facilities might be, parks officials recognized quite early that women would be part of their public.

\textsuperscript{52}TCM 1896 appendix c: 500, 502.
\textsuperscript{53}TCM 1896 appendix c: 501.
\textsuperscript{54}PBOH 1883 192-3.
\textsuperscript{55}TCM 1908 appendix c: 210.
\textsuperscript{56}TCM 1903 appendix c: 700.
Street lavatories for women.

On the streets and downtown, in the city's "masculine" landscapes of production, men's lavatories had a higher priority and the development of the women's equivalent was much more delayed. Even so, Edwardian officials would recognize women's discomfort, and began to address their lack of lavatories.

There were groups of Toronto women who campaigned on social and sanitary issues,\(^5^9\) sometimes successfully, but they appear to have been silent on the issue of women's lavatories. Instead, the idea seems to come from the Street Commissioner who, in 1905, announced that he would shortly begin building the first women's facility.\(^6^0\) Long ignored, women were finally provided with their first street lavatory at suburban Yonge and Cottingham in 1908.\(^6^1\) Subsequently most new public lavatories would be built with women's facilities (Figure 3).

Unlike the bourgeois pretension of the department store or grand railway station, the new women's lavatories were constructed as simple female equivalents of the adjacent men's facilities. They had similar fittings, architecture, maintenance and overall quality, although they were often a bit smaller. Striking differences, however, remained in the geography of lavatory provision, with no women's facilities being installed in the downtown core. These high traffic areas of a theoretically masculine landscape offered lavatories for men only, although women's presence was becoming significant. Women

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\(^{57}\) TCM 1903 appendix c: 698; TCM 1905 appendix c: 565.

\(^{58}\) TCM 1902 appendix c: 562.

\(^{59}\) TARLBH 1889: 59, TCM October 3, 1900 #845.

\(^{60}\) TCER 1905: 87.

\(^{61}\) TCER 1908: 18.
could find facilities on some of the major streetcar routes in the midtown and suburbs, but municipal lavatories in the commercial district continued to cater only for men.

Even in the suburbs the city assumed that men would remain the primary users of public lavatories. The largest one in the city (built at Danforth and Winchester in 1919-20) offered six closets for each gender but male needs were further enhanced by the provision of ten urinals, for which there was no female equivalent. More blatantly, the new facility built at industrial Keele and Dundas in 1910 was intended for men only, although it was shortly extended to include women. Despite the new "lavatories for the convenience of women", the city continued to make greater provision for men. The same general phenomenon affected most of the British cities.

One excuse open to officials was that women were less inclined to use public lavatories, as experience soon showed (see Figure 4). In 1910, for example, almost 800,000 men used Toronto's public lavatories, but only 10,000 women. In 1911 the total was 1.4 million men versus only 20,000 women, still a considerable differential. Much of the male usage came from the major downtown facilities, which had heavy traffic and only served men, but male users massively outweighed females even where facilities existed side by side. The differences cannot be attributed to imbalances in the numbers of closets and urinals, because even quite equitable lavatories still showed wide contrasts. The Yonge and Cottingham operation, for example, (three closets for each gender) accommodated almost 200,000 male "visitors" in 1910, but only 10,000 females. While

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63 GLASGOW, CITY OF, CLEANSING COMMITTEE (1968) 100 years of public cleansing in Glasgow, 1868-1968, (Glasgow Corporation) p. 38.
men had obviously acquired the habit of using a public lavatory, women were still rather
reluctant, although the habit might be forming.

CONCLUSION

By the 1910s it is fairly clear that women's experience of urban space had undergone
subtle change. Middle-class women who did not really "belong" on the streets or
downtown in the mid-Victorian city, were now entering the "masculine" realm of
production and exchange. They were still associated with the suburb and the family, with
consumption rather than with production, but women were being allowed a greater
"presence" in the "productive" parts of the city. The women's lavatory was one official
recognition of the changing geography of sexual difference.

In the male space of Council proceedings, the men of the city continued to speak
much more powerfully than women. Male officials, politicians and petitioners had greater
access to the apparatus of municipal government, and their views were more likely to be
heard. Street lavatories were primarily designed to meet the needs of working class men,
groups of whom had encouraged their creation. Men occupied all sides of the public
debate over building, siting and operating public lavatories. Men advocated lavatories,
objected to them, largely used them, built them and made them necessary. It is not
surprising that men's lavatories entered the agenda as necessities while women's seemed a
luxury.

We can attribute much of the issue to sexual differences of power, but our
understanding needs to be more sophisticated. Men's and women's lavatories certainly
arose within the framework of patriarchal power, but they also had different purposes.
For women it was at least a little emancipating. A lavatory, in theory, allowed women to
be present in public space in greater comfort. Comfort was an important consideration for
men, but it was not the lavatory's primary purpose. Men were already quite at home in urban space, and for them, the lavatory was more convenient than emancipatory.

Except perhaps in the parks, where crowds might overwhelm facilities, there is little evidence that women ever posed a threat to public cleanliness. Men, on the other hand, sprinkled their urine more liberally. Bodily exposure offended urban sensibilities, and the stench of men's urine added to its squalor. The men's lavatory offered a means of controlling this phenomenon, of confining it to the "proper" place.

Despite the Edwardian street lavatory, women continued to find their physical comfort and freedom of movement limited by the gender and geography of lavatory provision. Men, in contrast, had better access to facilities in the areas of high pedestrian density and had greater license to urinate in a quiet lane. The lack of downtown facilities, private and public, therefore impinged far more upon women than it did upon men. The parsimonious nature of municipal provision served more to reinforce than to challenge the pattern. Like its Victorian predecessor, the built-form of the Edwardian city was still arranged to place women's comfort and personal freedom at a disadvantage.
Figure 1

The urinary geography of late-Victorian Toronto: the King-Yonge district.
Figure 2

Arrests for Indecent Exposure in late Victorian Toronto.

Source: Toronto Chief Constable's Annual Reports, 1862-66.

Source: Toronto Chief Constable's Annual Reports.
Figure 3

Expanding streetcar passenger traffic in Toronto.