Toilet psychology
Nick Haslam argues that psychologists should stop averting their eyes from the bathroom

Excretion is a universal part of the human experience, but it is veiled in taboo. From the very first toilet in the vein of other taboos, such as sex and death, but they have largely ignored elimination. Nevertheless, it led to a rich assortment of intense emotions, mental disorders, personality traits, social attitudes and linguistic practices. From psychoanalysis to neurogastroenterology, and from bathroom graffiti to shameful feticshe, psychologists believe that the toilet offers surprising insights into mind-body connections, culture and gender.

What accounts for the neglect of excretion in psychology; the decline in taboo. Psychologists have torn from the bathroom. Banish-toilets-Pat Saggu, Macmillan.

A recent study suggested that psychologists should stop averting their eyes from the bathroom. Banish-toilets-Pat Saggu, Macmillan.

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Tuk, M.A., Trampe, D., & Warlop, L. 

stockpiled his excrement for several days 

facing a third conviction under California’s 

American football. 

the USA, finding anal themes to be rife in 

flatulent music (i.e. wind and brass) and 
exemplified by a supposed cultural 

especially in Germany and the USA. 

themes’ (Ljung, 2011, p.135). Anal-themed 

swearing find scatological expressions to 

no accident, as cross-cultural studies of 

expression

arsehole’. The preference for excremental 

of Gilles de la Tourette’s original cases 

are the most common. The first reported 

manner of obscenities or indelicate 
expressions may be involved – one 

excrement-focused than women’s, as 

less likely to be offended by it. Their toilet 

grain tends to be more libidinous, hostile 

and excrement-focused than women’s, as 

well as being briefer and less 

conversational (Green, 2003). Evidently 

the bathroom is a space that is bound up 

with masculinity, femininity and the social 
codes that we assign them. 

A common thread running through 

these differences is that women’s excretion 
is neglected as an unappreciated and 
suppressed than men’s. The incompatibility 
of femininity and excretion is nicely 

expressed in Jonathan Swift’s poem ‘The 

lady’s dressing room’, in which a suitor 
sneaks into his beloved room only to 

find evidence of her dirty corporeality, 

including sweaty garments, beslimed 
towels and encrusted cups. Upon 
discovering her chamber-pot he slinks 
away in horror, lamenting ‘Oh! Celia, 
Celia, Celia skirts!’ The same sentiment 
is expressed less poetically by an American 

undergraduate: ‘women are supposed to be non-poopers’ (Weinberg & Williams, 2003, p.327). Despite our enlightened 

modern attitudes to gender equality, 

women are still judged more severely for 

violating the cultural norms of unmentionability 
than men. In one study (Goldenberg & 

Roberts, 2007), 92% of women and 61% of 

men were classified as experimenter who 

excused herself to use the bathroom 

than one who excused herself 

to do any paperwork: no such difference 

was found for a male experimenter. 

Findings such as these reveal the 

neglected and underappreciated topic 

that might seem, at first blush, to be 

merely obscure. Puerile or not, excretion is one of the 

most neglected and underappreciated topics in psychology that Paul Rozin (2007) refers to as a ‘hole’ in the field. Rozin 

dug out for special attention the ‘hole 

a psychology of bodily orifices that has 

been largely abandoned following the 

partial eclipse of psychosocial. Our 

disciplinary may not be ready for the 

Journal of Toilet Psychology, but perhaps it’s time to start 

filling the hole.