

<http://somatosphere.net/2015/11/web-roundup-public-intimate-spaces-bathrooms-brains.html>

Web Roundup: Public, Intimate Spaces (Bathrooms & Brains)

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By Sara M Bergstresser

Bounded categories and category-bounded spaces are always of interest. This month, there were salient discussions of two such spaces: the (gendered) public bathroom and the brain.

Bathrooms

Public bathrooms as dichotomously-gendered spaces have been in the news this month. Controversy and legal action have been in the news across the United States, with schools at the forefront of debate ([NY Times](#), [NPR](#)). Bathrooms as an issue of civil rights is not new; the [Notches blog](#) points out that “Jim Crow laws ...mandated, among other things, separate public bathrooms for blacks and whites.”

The public bathroom itself is a curious thing for its stark juxtaposition of the “private” and the public. It can be a (grudging) nod to biological necessity, a relaxing haven, a place to touch up makeup or smoke something, [one of the only places where one can breastfeed in peace](#), a place to talk, or these days, a place to talk on one’s smart phone. One would, in fact, expect a place where defecation is a normal behavior to exist a bit outside of the usual rules for public spaces... almost anything goes, apart from specifically watching others (at least, those who don’t want to be watched). Who can forget reading about the [1976 Middlemist, Knowles & Matter experiment](#) in social psychology class? If you’ve forgotten, this is the one where an member of the research team (probably a graduate student) lurked in the men’s bathroom, watching who used which urinals, and timing their (anxiety-related) delays in urinary onset. This would be [deemed unethical these days](#), because there is an expectation of privacy in this particular public space.

We must find ourselves a private space in which to ponder such things as: [“Why Are Bathrooms Segregated by Sex in the First Place?”](#); [Just what does science know about human bathroom behavior?](#); [What is the history of public bathroom spaces?](#); and, perhaps, [How do bathrooms allow us to better understand the connections between privacy and shame?](#)

With the [myriad door signs](#) now available for purchase, we can revisit the topic of [bathroom semiotics](#) (even if some of the pictures are missing, [nothing is ever truly gone](#) from the internet). And we should also remember that globally, [not everyone has access](#) to safe and sanitary bathroom conditions. For this reason, November 19 was [World Toilet Day](#): “World Toilet Day is about the 2.4 billion people who lack access to improved sanitation.”

Brains

While the parallel to bathrooms may not be at first apparent, the questions of boundaries and allowable actions – with one’s own and with those of others – do seem to hold some possible themes in common.

For example, should it be permissible for a [neuroscientist to self-experiment](#), by paying “a surgeon in Central America \$25,000 to implant electrodes into his brain in order to establish a connection between his motor cortex and a computer”? Next, we will likely turn to the future of [unsupervised mobile and wireless brain computer interfaces](#).

If we want to look more closely at the brains of neuroscientists ([“Meta-Neuroscience”](#)), does this make us brain voyeurs? If so, we should really like these [images of scans of brains of doctors while looking at images of scans](#). This reminds me of the [neuroscientist who discovered that he is a “pro-social psychopath”](#) (also [here](#)). You want to look at his brain some more, now don’t you? [Go ahead](#).

As a final nod to the topic of boundaries and transgressions, “[neuromarketing](#)” as applied to politics is increasingly relevant: “[Neuropolitics, Where Campaigns Try to Read Your Mind](#).” (But no worries, later “[Mexico’s Governing Party Vows to Stop Using Neuromarketing to Study Voters](#)”)

And some more recent news on hacking genes and synthetic biology:

- [The Gene Hackers](#) (Humans 2.0) – The New Yorker
- [The Crispr Quandary](#) (A new gene-editing tool might create an ethical morass — or it might make revising nature seem natural.) – The New York Times
- [Genetically Modified Dogs: Chinese Scientists Use CRISPR to Create Muscly Freaks](#) – Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (GEN)
- [Taming the New Frontiers in Gene Editing](#) – “The Crux” (Discover blogs)

- [Reprogramming Biology](#) – MIT News

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