

The Shrine of Cleanliness: Advertising the Modern Bathroom, 1905 to 1935

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This study examines the innovations in bathrooms, consumer culture, and advertising based on powerful emotional appeals over a thirty-year period, from 1905 to 1935. The effect of the recognition of bathing as necessary to healthfulness formed the basis of advertising messages for the modern bathroom. As cleanliness rituals became more elaborate, bathrooms transformed from converted closets to showplaces of style. The ever-changing bathroom styles illustrated three characteristics of fashion and popular culture: (1) deeper societal trends, (2) interplay between producers and consumers, and (3) fashion-oriented merchandising.

Arguably, the images that bathroom fixture manufacturers employed through the years have reflected American culture even as it has influenced the images in turn. In 1915, advertisements for the "modern" bathroom abounded. Ads consistently pictured simple, utilitarian bathrooms with three standard enamel fixtures: the sink, tub, and toilet. Ten years later, in 1925, bathrooms were still advertised, but the represented space had become a showplace of style and a popular fashion statement. "From a mere utility, the modern bathroom has developed into a spacious shrine of cleanliness and health," Crane bathroom fixtures heralded in one advertisement (1925).

The advertising images are perhaps more revealing of the change. Before World War I, the bathrooms featured immaculately white fixtures, tiled floors, and walls. Stripped of allegedly microbe-laden furnishings, bathroom interiors were practical and sanitary. All of these images of germ-free white space contrasted with images revolving around indulgent lifestyles employed ten years later. To show the possibilities of bathroom beauty, one 1925 Crane bathroom ad depicted tiled floor and plaster walls with borders of Spanish majolica in primrose, brown, and green. Even more exotic interiors appeared featuring Satara marble slabs brought from Africa and design inspired by Italian art, among other elegant bathrooms. Standard designers "envisioned bathroom fixtures comparable in grace of line and proportion to the finest furniture—baths of sculptural-like quality, lavatories with the charm of dressing tables—fittings wrought in designs of rare distinction" (Standard 1928). Americans had moved beyond the question of whether "to have or not to have" a modern

bathroom, wrote the magazine *The House Beautiful*. "Now the questions are 'how many' and 'how fine'" (Oct 1925, p. 422).

Something happened between the mid-1910s and the mid-1920s. It is both accurate and misleading to claim that advertising was the proximal cause of these visible changes. Other revolutionary movements were already well under way. Following World War I, the economy began a period of rising prosperity as factory assembly lines multiplied, the stock market soared, and industrial production skyrocketed. Higher wages, the availability of credit, and more leisure time also prodded the economy. People's newly acquired affluence provided mass marketers with a ready-made and growing consumer base. This newly affluent population represented a new breed of consumer who no longer made the basic necessities at home because everything from soap to dresses came premade and prepackaged. Large food, drug, and apparel chain stores provided new places to shop and offered consumers a cornucopia of products and services, and automobiles transported families to stores and shops, as well as to various events and other new diversions.

Americans had long used individuals' consumption choices and physical appearance to help them make judgments about their social identity.¹ As subordinate groups attempted to adopt the status symbols of the middle class and climb up the ladder of social mobility,² many also impersonated them by adopting new consumer rituals. Personal cleanliness had become an essential requirement for acceptance into the middle and upper classes. Even children were thought to be instantly improved with a good scrub and a change of clothes. Dirty hands, greasy clothes, and a smelly body would never do. In addition to considering a person's grooming habits, one made inferences about personality based on clothing, home decorating choices, leisure activities, cars, and so on.

The transformation of the indoor bathroom from a mere utility to a shrine of cleanliness and health marked a sea of change in American life, not only in rituals of personal cleanliness, but in conceptions about the body, about inhabited space, and about social groups. As cleanliness rituals became more elaborate, specialized places devoted to the care of the body were created, and domestic interiors became more complex. Advertising both

reflected and shaped consumer attitudes toward cleanliness, particularly as people motivated by high standards of self-presentation strived to pattern their behavior on the perceived expectations of society.

The modern bathroom also appeared near the end of a major transition in American marketing, advertising, and society. Many historians have described the forty or so years on either side of the beginning of the twentieth century as a period of major change, a new stage of economic development. During this time, the United States completed the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, while modern systems of business organization, production, and distribution transformed industry itself. Countless new products—some of them packaged versions of goods people had used for centuries, like soap; others completely new, like indoor bathrooms—may be understood as material representations of that shift and its effect on American life. Thus, this paper examines the innovations in bathrooms, consumer culture, and the development of advertising that appeared during the early twentieth century. Using representative samples of advertisements and trade catalogues, innovations in bathrooms, consumer culture, and advertising are discussed.

BACKGROUND

Well into the nineteenth century, bathing was almost as rare as clothes washing. Even the washing of the hands, face, or body with soap was a relatively new concept, and not until the middle of the nineteenth century did domestic manuals begin to advocate the practice. Bathing, as American people know it today, barely existed. An occasional quick rinse in cold or warm water from the waist up followed by a brisk rub with a towel sufficed to keep one clean; but there was seldom mention of soap in the literature of advice. Doctors had stigmatized bathtubs as carriers of disease when filled with warm water (Wilkie 1986, p.651).

From Outhouse to In-House

For many nineteenth-century Americans, "going to the bathroom" still involved going outside for the lack of facilities inside the house. But instead of going to the nearest tree, hole, or river, people now made a trip outdoors to the privy, often called an "outhouse" or "necessary." Although technology for indoor toilets, or "water closets," was known and occasionally used, many sanitarians considered outside privies more hygienic than water closets, because indoor facilities generated sewer gas and foul odors and caused disease.

The outhouse was a small structure with no inside walls, insulation, or decoration. There was only a seat with a bench that had a hole in it, and the whole building was positioned over a shallow pit in the ground. Wooden ones could be easily moved to another location, and their pits filled in and planted over. Privies in the rear of the backyard

were standard even in the large and expensive New York houses until the mid-nineteenth century. The units in crowded town lots were cleaned out periodically, much like the modern septic tank, and the failure to do so often resulted in a fine (Hill, p.3). In the rural South, a crescent moon sawed into a privy door became the sign of the "ladies' room." Luna, the crescent-shaped figure, was an ancient symbol of womankind. A sun pattern sometimes indicated the "men's room." As only a fraction of the people could read or write, these symbols were necessary. Other people claimed that the sun and moon motifs primarily served as a source of ventilation and light in the windowless rooms. In the North, however, these cutouts were not often seen because even the smallest crack would admit a freezing blanket of snow (Booth, 26). The lack of indoor plumbing and running water remained a perplexing problem for many Americans, especially in the crowded urban cities.

Advances in plumbing technology enabled large cities to develop both water supply and sanitary disposal systems, which made keeping clean easier. As personal cleanliness rituals became more elaborate, domestic space also became specialized, with different spaces or rooms assigned to various functions. For Americans, the indoor bathroom emerged as a status symbol for those few who could afford to install one—but it was only a room to bathe in. The toilet, or water closet, was in a separate room, if it was in the house at all. During bad weather and at night, families continued to use chamber pots in the house; otherwise, a privy in the backyard served as the main toilet. Most personal cleanliness rituals were performed in the bedroom. The *Householder* magazine advised women that "no matter how humble your room may be, there are eight things it should contain: a mirror, washstand, soap, towel, comb, hairbrush, nail brush, and toothbrush" (Jan 1874, p.2). A pitcher and basin usually accompanied these items. Upon these minor details of the toilette depended, in a great degree, the health as well as the appearance of the individual.

When portable tubs eventually began appearing in fashionable American households, the ritual of bathing grew more frequent. For that occasion, domestic guides recommended using a large piece of oilcloth, which could be laid upon the floor of an ordinary dressing room or bedroom. Upon this was placed a basin or a tub of wood, zinc, or painted tin. Consequently, bathing done in a portable tub took place in the warmest room in the house and generally in front of a source of heat. In the working man's home, this would be the kitchen; in the rich person's home, it would be the bedroom. Before hot and cold running water was supplied to homes, it had to be pumped and carried to its place of use. It was quite a backbreaking chore to carry ten to twenty gallons of water to the stove to be heated and then transfer the warmed water to the tub. Finally, the bath water had to be discarded, bucket by bucket, by tossing it out the back door.

Water heaters were introduced in the 1870s, although the early models were often explosively dangerous devices. They heated the water with gasoline, oil, or natural gas, requiring from minutes to hours to heat the water sufficiently for bathing. In some models, the water was heated before it filled the tub by being run through pipes heated by fire. Other models heated the water after it filled the tub through burners placed under the unit to warm the water. Portable folding bathtubs also came on the market. These operated the same as a folding bed; being placed on casters, so they could be closed up and stored in any room. Other popular bathing apparatus included portable shower chambers; some even made a pretty piece of furniture. When a bather pulled a cord or worked a pump with a foot pedal, the water would come down in a shower.

By the turn of the century, however, people could select from three types of built-in tubs with single taps for hot and cold running water. The best medium-priced tub was elliptical shaped and made of porcelain-covered iron with a wooden rim around the top, which served as a seat. Also in the medium price range was the painted, enameled cast-iron tub with ball-and-claw feet or, less commonly, with paw feet. Solid porcelain tubs were also advertised, but their curved top edges were thought to be slippery and unsafe, unlike the wood-rimmed edges of the iron tubs.

In 1892 the Pittsburgh-based firm Standard Manufacturing's trade catalogue offered such a porcelain-covered iron tub, called the "Celebrated Rolled Rim Bath," that met the "approval of the most critical sanitarians"; prices ranged from \$61 to \$73. The new model offered the strength of iron, as well as the purity of the porcelain. "A bath in a china dish headlined one 1892 ad. "Can you imagine anything in the way of a bath that would be more inviting than a china dish the size of a bath tub filled with clear, sparkling water?" Standard (later known as Standard Sanitary Mfg.) also offered more luxurious tubs finished in ivory-white porcelain and decorated with beautiful floral embellishments, such as the "Madeline Pattern" that cost \$163, nearly three times the amount of their undecorated, rolled-rim models (Standard, p.5, 17).

Large manufacturers offered a variety of designs to reach both the high and low ends of the market. For example, J. L. Mott Iron Works offered a choice of nine suggested bathroom sets in their 1898 trade catalog, including many plans that consolidated the tub, sink, and toilet in one room. The plans included everything from bath, lavatory, shelf, and mirrors to water closets. Prices for the fixtures ranged from around \$220 for the standard porcelain "Bath Room" to \$1200 for the "Renaissance Design," fittings and installation not included. The deluxe models featured a combination bath and shower with a rubber curtain, hip bath, fixtures embossed with white and gold decorations, marble basins, and beveled plate glass mirrors (Mott 1898).

By urging ordinary American people to imitate the lifestyles of the elite by buying bathtubs and creating specialized places for bathing, sanitary fixture

manufacturers further validated personal cleanliness for a broad range of people. The Mott trade catalog also noted this trend. "Only a few years ago the Bath Room was a secondary consideration in laying out the plans for the house, and it was generally relegated to some part or space that could not be utilized for any other purpose. Today, it is almost the first thing to be considered in laying out the plans, for not only palatial residences, but even for dwellings of very modest pretensions" (1898, inside cover).

The Horror of the Body

Paradoxically, Americans responded to these changes in the development of the bathroom in different ways. Certainly an indoor bathroom was far more convenient than a trip outdoors to the privy. But the thought of going to the bathroom inside the home also evoked embarrassment. Nineteenth-century Americans considered it a shameful secret to be seen entering or leaving the smallest room in the house, the water closet, while their company anguished over the flushing noise of a plug being pulled, trumpeting the purpose of their absent companion.

The need to wipe oneself clean upon relieving oneself compounded the embarrassment and shame. Until toilet paper was invented, rural Americans solved the cleaning-up problem with a form of a scraper like the corncob, a box of which would be on hand in a well-appointed privy. It was customary for town dwellers to grab a rag. With increased availability of manufactured paper, people cut up old paper bags, dress patterns, newspapers, envelopes, catalogs, and other uncoated scrap paper. People then threaded the sheets with string and hung them on a nail in the privy. When toilet paper came on the market in the 1880s, manufacturers employed very aggressive and persistent efforts to convince Americans not only that the product was cheap enough to throw away, but that it should be publicly sold. Since nineteenth-century American society considered frank talk of certain bodily functions in polite company inappropriate, mentioning the "unmentionable" was taboo.

Today, the lavatory taboo still runs strong. Among Americans, it still is customary to excuse oneself to the "restroom," "lavatory," or the "facilities." Men leave for the "men's room" and women excuse themselves to the "ladies room" or "powder room"; it is considered bad manners to plainly say, "excuse me, but I have to use the toilet." Or people will turn on the faucet, so that the sound of running water covers up or hides, and even denies one of the body's most natural functions — eliminating bodily wastes. Indeed, taboos centering on the horror of the body linger on in the twenty-first century.

Taboos against mentioning things related to natural bodily functions appear to be peculiarly Puritan in origin, found principally in Britain and the United States, what Carl B. Holmberg in *Sexualities and Popular Culture* identifies as a "shame culture" that begins "in hiding nudity and perpetuating that concealment" (1998, p.156-8). In the nineteenth-century shame culture, for example, bodily

appearance, behavior, and certain discourse were carefully tabooed and managed in the form of "horror of the body" taboos. During this arch-conservative period, prudery became a mark of refinement because Americans considered that their most natural functions and most natural needs — nudity, sex, and eliminating wastes — evoked widespread disgust, shame, or even horror. Certainly, personal cleanliness rituals that involved washing the body were replete with fears, since nakedness was synonymous with sin.

Emerging from the Puritan shame culture, nineteenth-century Americans proved keen on not mentioning the unmentionable; thus the restrictive social conventions resulted in a proliferation of euphemisms. Americans used the substitutes "limb" for leg, "white meat" for chicken breast, "lavatory" for the water closet, and "necessary" for the privy, among other euphemisms. Mores also dictated that a proper person pretend that most bodily functions did not exist; the "right" thing to do was be silent on these matters in polite company. Thus, we inherited shame culture. But the code by which American society came to define hygiene and appearance was not of law; it was a matter of good and bad manners, another artificial social construction. This, then, was the scene into which early American marketers set out to promote the modern bathroom.

THE MODERN BATHROOM

Through collective efforts individuals, citizen groups, government agencies, and industries revamped, reformed, or otherwise sought to improve virtually every aspect of American society during the Progressive Era (1901 to 1916). Sanitarians instructed a nation bent on progress that filth bred chaos and barbarism, while cleanliness ensured order and advancement. Large-scale public health efforts together with the efforts of private industry promoted the virtue of cleanliness, inherently linking the practice with the progress of the nation and of the world. Certainly popularizing cleanliness may have been in the spirit of moral uplift and the Progressive Era; but it also tied in with the spirit of American enterprise, the profit motive and conspicuous consumption.

Having a "modern" indoor bathroom separated the middle class from the lower classes in the early twentieth-century. As personal cleanliness rituals became more complex, so did the interiors of bathrooms, from wall coverings to fixtures to accessories. Advice about the well-appointed bathroom proliferated, providing evidence of the growing importance of the bathroom to middle-class Americans. As Mary Wood Allen proclaimed in the 1905 book *What a Young Women Ought to Know*, "Bathing appliances are marks of civilization, and the bathroom is becoming a necessity (1905, p. 80-81).

Women's pages in newspapers, columns in popular magazines, Sunday magazine inserts, advertisements, and elaborate point-of-sale presentations offered outlets for

promoting the latest bathroom fixtures, tiles, and wall coverings. In particular, home-decorating advice spurred demand by showing consumers the possibilities of bathroom interiors and urging them to install a complete line of facilities. As bathroom interiors became more important, experts urged women to put decorating money earmarked for the bathroom into nonabsorbent wall surfaces like tiles, rather than any other coverings, since they were practical and sanitary. By this time, glazed ceramic tiles were available in white, buff, and gray, as well as the more expensive tints of roseate sunsets, pearl, and gold. If the expense of fully tiled walls was too great, partially tiling the walls was a viable compromise; paint was the other recommended wall treatment. Wallpaper was to be avoided in the bathroom unless varnished since it was too absorbent; wood paneling was also not recommended because it could harbor the prolific "water bug" or roach (Green 105, Candee 156). Homeowners also had an increasing array of plumbing fixtures to choose from, but all were uniformly white.

Bathrooms Become Big Business

By World War I, the production of bathroom fixtures had become a big business. Names like Mott Iron Works, Standard Sanitary Manufacturing (later American Standard), Crane, and Kohler had become household words synonymous with bathtubs, sinks, toilets, and other bathroom fixtures. The growing importance of bathroom interiors was evident in the trade catalogs of two national manufacturers over two decades, Standard and Kohler.

A Pittsburgh supplier of bathroom fixtures, Standard issued the first edition in a series of catalogs in contained almost twice as many pages, filled with illustrated plans for bathroom, kitchen, and laundry interiors. Fixtures for a complete bathroom, including bath, lavatory, and toilet, could be had for \$69.75 (Standard 1906, design number P38, p. 40). But this sales pitch maintained that a bathroom was not complete without some style of shower, retailing for \$25 to \$500. To sell more luxurious fixtures, Standard also began to promote the bath-a-day habit. "Beauty depends more upon health than anything else, and one of the best methods of gaining and retaining perfect health is to bathe, and bathe often, once a day always, but twice is much better" (Standard 1906, p. 40).

At the same time, bathtubs evolved from modest portable affairs to built-in models, forming a permanent part of the bathroom interior. Kohler introduced the one-piece, built-in bath in 1911; its production was considered almost revolutionary in the industry at the time. Previously, built-in baths were cast in two separate sections, the tub proper and the apron or exposed side, which were fitted together by the plumber when installed. The one-piece tub eliminated all crevices, joints, and seams, but its strongest selling point was that the design was more sanitary and attractive. Advertisements told the story of Kohler's innovation and touted the distinctive features of its one-

piece enameled bathtubs, lavatories, and sinks, emphasizing the "hygienic value" of the design and that the smooth, white surface was "easily and quickly cleaned" (Kohler 1915, p. 7-8). By World War I, the Kohler Company filled a 214-page catalog with descriptions and illustrations of its plumbing products, offering five models of roll-rim tubs, built-in baths, enameled iron toilets, lavatories, and other fixtures. More important, the built-in tub design opened the door to the evolution of the bathtub, as Americans know it today.

It Pays to Modernize the Bathroom

Having successfully promoted bathroom equipment as a tie-in to building new houses, the plumbingware industry found a new market in improving old houses, encouraging consumers to modernize their bathroom facilities. There was plenty of new housing construction to occupy the plumbing supply trade until 1917, but many people found it beyond their means to build a new home with modern facilities after World War I. The advertising trade journal *Printers' Ink* observed that there was still plenty of business in repair work. "When a man builds he buys bathrooms things, the house and fixtures grow old together, but it rarely went so far as to include the purchase of completely new fixtures, unless a house was being completely remodeled or modernized" (11 April 1918, p. 17). Thus, the slowdown in building encouraged some plumbingware firms to identify previously "unrecognized" needs and to show Americans how to fulfill their desires.

Thomas Maddock Sons Company of Trenton, New Jersey, was one such firm. Maddock reasoned that there were over six million private homes in America in which the bathroom fixtures were antiquated, ugly, and simply unhygienic. Why shouldn't the company turn its selling efforts toward modernizing those homes? Using the slogan "New bathrooms for old," Maddock launched a campaign to counteract a widespread impression that modern bathroom fixtures were very expensive by explaining that modernizing cost much less than most people realized. According to *Printers Ink*, a handsome illustrated booklet, entitled "Bathroom Individuality," gave costs for seven complete bathrooms (11 April 1918, p. 17).

Maddock also ran a series of local newspaper ads that appeared with the imprint of the local plumbing jobber, aiming at both the homeowner and the hotelier. For homeowners, one ad depicted a housewife down on her knees scrubbing beside an old-fashioned tub with this telling headline: "How long are you going to keep your wife at this - trying to keep the bathroom clean." Another depicted a housewife showing a visitor her new bathroom with an air of pride: "You remember how it used to look." Other copy emphasized that a good bathroom helped to rent a house quicker. In the same vein, an ad targeted to hoteliers made an economic appeal, warning that a competitor may be getting their lost business with new

bathroom facilities (*Printer's Ink* 1918, p.17-20). The message was simple: It paid to modernize the bathroom.

To obtain more business, plumbers continued to push for the two-bath home throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Among the numerous advantages, they argued that one bathroom for every two bedrooms would smooth out family difficulties and add to the social accomplishments of the house. Plumbing dealers offered to show people how a model bathroom could be installed in a space as small as five feet by six feet, no larger than a good-sized closet, claiming that this investment would bring enduring satisfaction. One 1923 Kohler ad put it this way: An additional bathroom often spells the difference between easy, gracious hospitality and embarrassed, apologetic hospitality. And when no guests are present, it adds immeasurably to the comfort and convenience of every member of the family" (1923).

The reality was that until this time houses with more than one bathroom had been rare indeed. Rather than adding another bathroom, however, Speakman Shower Company suggested that the homeowner put a shower over the tub. "This makes it possible for more persons to use the bathroom—a shower bath requires only a couple of minutes" (Haphazard to Hip, 1996 p.42). Instead of an extra full bath, other plumbers promoted the "powder room," a smaller bathroom with a sink and toilet located in the main living area of the house as opposed to the sleeping area, a feature now common in the American home. Advertising made the point that both family and guests would appreciate this modern convenience. Besides being sociable and comfortable, the powder room also increased the resale value of the home. But this was just the beginning of another revolutionary movement in the evolution of the bathroom.

THE LIBERATION OF THE BATHROOM

Advertising and the fashion system largely fueled the transformation of the bathroom from a prim, utilitarian place to a decorative and indulgent space by associating the functional interior with new symbolic qualities. Crane Company, for example, gave the bathroom a new cultural meaning by associating it with a "shrine of cleanliness." In the process, the bathroom took on a special status, transformed from a sanitary place to a sacred space, a domain of sacred consumption that "set apart" the interior from the normal activities of the rest of the home. The advertised bathroom fixtures, furnishings, and accessories, in turn, imparted their meanings to consumers as they used these facilities to create and express their identities in their daily lives (Peterson 1976, 7-22).

The Hollywood Influence

American tastes and product preferences in bathrooms were not formed in a vacuum. Their choices were driven by the images presented to them in the mass media, their

observations of those around them, and even their desire to live in the fantasy worlds created by admakers. In the 1920s, however, the depiction of opulent bathrooms in motion pictures also represented liberation from nineteenth-century moral restraints as evidenced in the national preoccupation with sheiks, vamps, and sex. An individual could expect to spend six months' salary on the bathroom alone in order to bring it up to Hollywood standards (Turner 1953, p. 213).

In particular, the films of Cecil B. DeMille used bathing and other cleanliness rituals as the perfect opportunity to show partial nudity on the movie screen, supposedly without provoking any sexual associations. Gloria Swanson's bathtub scene in the 1919 film "Male and Female" was perhaps the most memorable thing about the movie, for DeMille not only introduced the bathroom to the screen but also glamorized the bath itself. From then on during the twenties, DeMille's films would come to a halt for a lingering scene in which the heroine, or sometimes the hero, washed in preparation for some event.

Elaborate marble, tile, and chrome characterized DeMille's bathrooms with an occasional bearskin thrown in.⁵ Although these movie bathrooms became a national joke, they also prompted thousands of moviegoers to attempt a similar effect, much to the delight of plumbing suppliers. The glamorization of bathrooms led to new movements in interior decorating, transforming the commonplace room from a merely functional room into the most elaborately adorned room in the house (Essoe and Lee, p.69). When it comes to the creation of a "rococo bathroom, no one can touch DeMille," wrote Arthur Dennison in *The Filmplay Journal* in 1922. "Why some bathroom fixtures company or specialty shop which wants to build up an enormous trade among nouveau-riche has not engaged him [DeMille] as Extraordinary Advisor is beyond our small comprehension" (Ringold and Bodeen, p.207).

Color Transforms Utilitarian Staples

At the same time, color and design breakthroughs for bathroom fixtures, accessories, and furnishings occurred in the mid-1920s. Manufacturers and consumers alike increasingly perceived the bathroom as a style, subject to fashion trends and fads that dramatically altered domestic interiors. The simple white bathroom with its standard, immaculately white enamel sink, tub, and toilet seemed decidedly old-fashioned as bright touches appeared on towels, rugs, shower curtains, window hangings, wall treatments, and floor coverings. In keeping with the trend of the increased use of color in home decoration, bathroom fixtures were also now available in color, creating new possibilities for beauty in the bathroom.⁷

A case in point: the addition of color transformed the plain white bathroom towel from a utilitarian, absorbent piece of cloth for drying the body to a fashion statement. It also translated into profits. When textile manufacturer Cannon Mills of North Carolina introduced a new towel

line in a variety of colors and decorative designs, backing the line with heavy advertising; it charged four times more for the new towels than for plain white ones. Even then Cannon found that consumers would pay for the added value of good looks with the ability to withstand continual laundering.

The Cannon campaign provided several reasons to introduce new towels in the bathroom. People could achieve the effect of bathroom renovation merely by purchasing these fashionable towels. "With Cannon Towels, you can redecorate your bathroom every week," explained one 1927 ad. "First, blue or green, with seagulls, or whales, or dolphins, or lighthouses in the marine manner. Then for a change—rose-colored flamingos or merry orange marmosets, the tropical trend!" (Cannon, 1927). If you have children to consider, Cannon suggested a special color for each child's towels. To sell more towels, Cannon also supported the "bath-a-day" habit, not for reasons of comfort and hygiene, but because it increased the number of towels needed and stimulated sales. One ad made this point: because "the first towel absorbs impurities from the skin, it must never (under any circumstances) be used again before washing" (*Printers' Ink Monthly* 1928, p.86).

In response to the successful Cannon campaign, the textile manufacturer Martex followed with a line of fashion towels designed by famous artists. These Martex towels featured motifs from modern artists famous for their posters and paintings, namely Rene Clark, Erte', and Elizabeth Shippen Green. Advertisements made the point that the fashionable towels "cost no more than quite undistinguished towels" (*Printers' Ink Monthly* 1928, p. 30, 86; *Printers' Ink* 1927, p. 196). Still, many people objected to anything but white in bathroom linen, observed the fashion magazine *Vogue* (New Orders 1927, p. 140).

Nevertheless, color transformed utilitarian staples into fashion goods and color-coordinated ensembles, which coaxed people to buy more often and to increase the average size of their purchase. In addition to towels, another popular bathroom ensemble included a color-coordinated large-size rug, a mat, as well as covers for the stool and lid. Bottles of all sizes, shapes, and hues offered to hold such mundane contents as lotion, bath salts, and many others. Other coordinating accessories included drinking tumblers, soap dishes, soap dishes, toothbrush holders, and jars in beautifully shaded colors. Even the bath sponge took on color to add a touch of beauty to any bathroom.

Color Charm Enters the Bathroom

In keeping with the trend of the increased use of color in home decoration, bathroom fixtures were also now available in color, creating new possibilities for beauty in the bathroom. The Pittsburgh firm of Standard Sanitary Manufacturing, later known as American Standard, has been credited with pioneering color in sanitary wares in 1926 (Kohler 1927, p. 3). Standard's first tentative

experiments in colored fixtures offered a palette of sedate, understated pastel tones.

The following year, Kohler announced a line of colored bathroom sets, including the tub, toilet, and lavatory. "A new charm enters the bathroom," declared one 1928 ad. "It is the charm of Color, of color not merely in walls and floor, but in the fixtures themselves – the bath tub, the lavatory, the toilet." The booklet *Color Charm Enters the Bathroom*, told more about the lovely fixtures; it opened with this announcement: "We had color in the bathroom; now we have the *bathroom in color* a complete color ensemble, a new color charm." As with Standard, the Kohler Colorware bathroom fixtures came in five "lovely, permanent shades": Horizon Blue, Spring Green, Autumn Brown, Lavender, and Old Ivory (Kohler 1928, p.2).

How much did this modern bathroom cost? Though Kohler fixtures did cost more than the white ones, the 1929 advertising campaign reassured consumers that "the expense of color is a minor" one compared to the cost of the finished bathroom. Another ad in the series noted that the pictured bath was only "\$16.40 more in color than in white; the lavatory only \$12.30 more (Kohler 1929). Still, another Kohler ad made the point that they had a bathroom for every pocketbook. It featured two different models with this telling headline: "A \$5000 bathroom – and a \$500 one."⁷

In 1928, however, Standard's advertising exemplified the turn of the bathroom from a prudish domain to a fashion statement: "The first coming of beauty to the bathroom," proclaimed one ad. "For forty years we Americans were so engrossed in making the bathroom the ultimate in utility that the beauty was almost forgotten" (Standard 1928). But why shouldn't the bathroom be given as much consideration as other rooms in the home?

Standard designers created new possibilities in bathroom beauty, as evident in the company catalog titled "Color and Style in Bathroom Furnishings and Decoration." Indeed, Standard fixtures came in a variety of dramatic colors that had been selected by "an artist of international standing" in order to "compliment the skin" and to provide a key color for "correct and livable color schemes." The fashionable hues and even the names evoked images of luxurious rooms, indulgent lifestyles, and narcissistic pleasure. The colors included Ming Green, Ionian Black, Tang Red, Royal Copenhagen Blue, Meissen White, Rose du Barry, Claire de Lune Blue, St. Porschaire Brown, Ivoire de Medici, and Orchid of Vincennes. The model bathrooms shown in the catalog were equally dramatic, with full-color reproductions of works by eminent American painters, while the accompanying copy encouraged consumers "to make your bath livable." It also told them that just "a little extra planning and expenditure [would] develop a room of cheer, of beauty, and extra utility" (Standard 1935, p.7). Not to be outdone, the Crane Plumbing catalog "Homes of Comfort" introduced an expanded palette of eighteen colors, of which six were marbled (Crane 1975, p.23). Clearly, the striking colors attested to a revolution in bathroom design.

About this trend in "rainbow bathrooms," the last notes of shining whiteness in the bathroom had been swept away by color, reported *House and Garden* magazine. "As a result, this most intimate recess has been transformed from a room of utilitarian plainness to one of actual beauty and with no sacrifice of sanitary standards." The text continues:

Content with sanitary protection which the bathroom has achieved in recent years, the plainness has been looked upon as a practical necessity and, except perhaps for repeating the color of the shower curtain in the stripe of the bathroom towels, no effort has been made to relieve its shining whiteness or to introduce into it that personal touch which has become so important throughout the home. But all this has changed now; nor is it a question of space and money. Color has inundated the floors, crept up to the wall, and spilled over into the bathtub, and it's now possible to obtain bathroom furniture, fixtures, and accessories in such a wide range of color and style that a room may be created that is both satisfying and practical, as much as an embodiment of the taste and personality of the owner as his own living room (1928, p.750).

Now bathroom furniture, fixtures, and accessories were available in such a wide range of color and style that a room could be created that was both satisfying and practical, "as much as an embodiment of the taste and personality of the owner as his own living room." (Rainbow Bathrooms 1928, p. 750). In the 1930s, however, the range of and design of colored plumbingware would continue to evolve.

Innovations Continue in the 1930s

Although the modern bathroom as we know it today was largely defined by the built-in or recessed combination bath, Standard introduced another innovative fixture in 1934, the Neo-Angle Bath. To promote the look of modernity, Standard placed an image of the new angled bathtub adjacent to a footed tub, the newest style in the 1860s, in the company catalog titled *Planning Your Plumbing Wisely*. From Standard's perspective, the footed model appeared decidedly "Old-fashioned-unsightly—an irritation to the family." In contrast, the same room outfitted with the Neo-Angle Bath seventy years later, in 1934, was "Beautiful—modern—clean—inviting—easy to keep spick and span." The angle shape was but one surprising feature. Although it was only four feet square, Standard claimed that "it had more bathing space than the present known five foot types." Thus, the attractive, modern bathroom now included not only the Neo-Angle Bath but also a "quiet water closet that doesn't embarrass" and a "lavatory with ample space for toilet articles" (Standard 1935, p. 3, 11).

Another unexpected feature was a touchy subject. The introductory full-page ad for the Neo-Angle Bath prominently displayed a nude woman, with one breast partially exposed, seated on one of the convenient room seats while washing her foot. Most appropriate for this ad was the headline "At Last America Gets a New Bath Thrill." The copy continued that the tub was "almost square,

with the tub set diagonally to provide convenient room seats in two opposite corners. It combines every type of bathing in a single one-piece fixture!" This ad may have been the first one in the history of the plumbing supply magazine *Reeves Journal* magazine to show a plumbing fixture actually being used by a person (May 1934). However, the Depression and World War I delayed the spread of the design. Like other Art Deco and Art Moderne furnishings, the Neo-Angle Bath did not achieve popularity until the 1950s, twenty years after its debut.

In addition to color and design, bathroom designers began to emphasize comfort, convenience, and safety. These changes meant that less effort was needed to keep the space spotless. For example, chrome-plated brass fittings with a tarnish-free finish came on the market, replacing nickel, which required frequent attention to maintain its shiny appearance. The combined influence of Bauhaus design and economic necessity also rid the bathroom of the ornamentation of the previous decade, substituting fixtures with clean, sleek lines. The deliberate action by designers to develop these plain fixtures was also motivated by the fact that they were not only easier to clean but also less expensive to manufacture. "It was simply cheaper to make things simpler in appearances," explained Paul Duchshere, a historian of architecture and interiors. "The more surfaces, the more ridges and molding, the more dust and dirt can collect. Americans have really been obsessive about cleaning through their history. They've really led the way in kitchen and bath design because of that" (Austin, 1986).

The emphasis on sleek designs also led to the virtual disappearance of the pedestal sink. Instead of this model, bathroom designers began to favor the drop-in basin, mounted in a continuous plastic laminate or tile countertop, or the ubiquitous vanity, which allowed homeowners to trade pedestal styling for handy storage. The recessed bath-and-shower combination also became a standard design, an important factor as bathrooms shrank from spacious chambers to the size of five-foot-square walk-in closets. New designs also included recesses for the sink and "hidden" water closets, niches for towels, ample shelf space, and built-in medicine cabinets. Colored wall tiles and decoratively patterned linoleum, fanciful shower curtains metal trim, and more extensive use of mirrors added to the look. This break from the sanitized white bathrooms of previous decades encouraged creativity in room plans as well.

CONCLUSION

The ever-changing bathroom styles illustrated three characteristics of fashion and popular culture: (1) deeper societal trends, (2) interplay between producers and consumers, and (3) fashion-oriented merchandising.

Certainly styles are often a reflection of deeper societal trends. For many products, color and design breakthroughs first occurred between 1924 and 1928. Color first showed up on new car models, fountain pens, and cameras; then in

the bedroom and the bathroom; and finally, on kitchen cookware, utensils, appliances, and flooring materials. Thus, consumers could flaunt their prosperity by decorating their homes with fashion-related fixtures and accessories, for which high prices created a high demand and a snob effect. As sales of fashion-oriented products increased, it helped fuel consumer desires by encouraging wider distribution of the items in retail outlets.

Such style changes also reflect the interplay between the deliberation inventions of the producers and the spontaneous actions by consumers. Certainly designers, manufacturers, and merchandisers who could anticipate what consumers wanted succeeded in the marketplace. Tying bathroom fixtures and accessories to ever-changing fashions offered companies a powerful rationale for introducing new products and thus inflating prices. A splash of color or a minor design alteration enormously expanded the range of available products, as well as invigorating sales. With the ensemble concept in mind, manufacturers introduced color schemes into towels, floor coverings, and other bathroom accessories. A new shower curtain, towel, or piece of furniture often made everything else in the bathroom seem out of style. Thus, new styles and colors encouraged new purchases.

This phenomenon of consumption dates back to the late nineteenth century.⁸ Notably, economist Thorstein Veblen wrote about the emergence of a consumer society, referring to people's desire to provide evidence of their ability to afford luxury goods (Veblen 1899). Another early social analyst, George Simmel, first proposed the trickle-down theory to explain the fashion system. That is, dominant styles originated with the upper classes and trickled down to those below. Simmel argued that those people in the dominant groups responded to the attempts of lower classes to impersonate or emulate them by adopting even newer fashions (Simmel 1904). These two processes created a self-perpetuating cycle of change that drove fashion. Thus indoor bathrooms evolved from converted closets to a shrine of cleanliness in the 1920s.

Then again, the iconic connection between bathrooms and shrines represents an even more fundamental point. The transformation of the bathroom embodies changes in the cultural context of ritualization, specifically, rituals of personal cleanliness, and conceptions of the body.

In cultural studies, the term *rituals* refer to special activities that have a number of repeated parts (Nachbar and Lause, 376-377). They are sometimes performed mindlessly, and thus they may be conceived as merely habits with ritual overtones, but when they are purposely performed at preordained moments, like washing hands before a meal or taking a shower in the morning, they are clearly activities that can be conceived as rituals. The study of the bathroom illustrates the full range of ritual elements and practices associated with cleansing of the body, including ritual artifacts, shrines, symbolism, and scripts. Then there is the certain area in the home that is viewed as more ritually indispensable than others -- the bathroom,

arguably a sacred place for lustration rituals, a shrine. The ritual artifacts that accompany bathing rituals include various accessories such as soap dishes, washcloths, bath towels, and candles, and ceremonial garments like the bathrobe. Furthermore, package designs help transform brand-name products into ritual props or icons, by incorporating ritual names, colors, and motifs, like white for purity. These consumer products are often integral to the total experience.

That said, anthropologist Harold Miner made this connection between bathrooms and shrines in the famous essay "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema" (Miner, 1956): While each family has at least one such shrine, the rituals associated with it are not family ceremonies but private and secret. The rites are normally only discussed with Children, and then only during the period when they are being initiated into these mysteries. . . . The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions with which no native believes that he can live without Below the charm box is a small font. Each day every member of the family bows his head before the charm-box, mingles different sorts of holy water in the font, and proceeds with a brief rite of ablation.

Stereotypical ritual scripts guide the use of various artifactual materials, prescribing the artifacts to be used, in what sequence, and by whom. Some scripts may be casual, like a quick morning shower, and allow for spontaneous variation. Other ritual scripts like the evening bath can be a more involved affair, which is the basis for the concept of the modern bathroom as a sanctuary.

Today, the bathroom has become one of the most important rooms in American homes, a luxury center for leisure and relaxation. Every week, the average American adult takes at least seven baths or showers. While getting clean was the main objective for many people, it is significant that nearly half of the cleansings were for "refreshment as well as cleansing," reported one study (Colgate-Palmolive 1993). Some people even take two or three showers a day, often after a gym workout or before a social engagement at night." When people have plenty of time to truly relax, they would prefer a hot soaking bath to a shower revealed a later Bathroom Habits Survey. In addition to hot baths, other favorite bathroom activities among Americans include dressing, applying makeup, reading a newspaper or catalog; and singing; while others enjoy having telephone conversations with the rise of cordless phones. "Americans have unique relationship with their bathroom," says Jeanette Long, American Standard's senior marketing executive. "With today's highly stressful lifestyles, the bathroom has truly become a sanctuary; a place where people can unwind and refresh themselves" (American Standard 1999).

Thus, the transformation of the indoor bathroom from a mere utility to a shrine of cleanliness and eventually a sanctuary reflects an enormous change in American life, not only in rituals of personal cleanliness, but in conceptions

about the body, about inhabited space, and about social groups. As cleanliness rituals became more elaborate, the bathroom has since evolved into a site of conspicuous consumption, providing a specialized place devoted to the care of the body. Today's cleanliness practices and completely new products like indoor bathrooms, then, should not be understood as a natural progression from a prehygienic age to an era of cleanliness based on scientific rationale. Rather the modern bathroom represents a material representation of the phenomenon of consumption as well as advertising and its effect on American life.

NOTES

1. The motivation to consume for the sake of consuming was first discussed by the social analyst Thorstein Veblen at the turn of the twentieth century. Veblen coined the term "conspicuous consumption" to refer to people's desire to provide prominent visible evidence of their ability to afford luxury goods. Veblen criticized the decorative role women were often forced to play as they were bestowed with expensive clothes, pretentious homes, and a life of leisure as a way to advertise the wealth of their husbands (Veblen 1899, p. 45).

2. In 1904, George Simmel first proposed the relationship between product adoption and class structure, one of the most influential approaches to understanding fashion. First, dominant styles originate with the upper classes and trickle down to those below. Those people in the dominant groups are constantly looking below to ensure they are not imitated; they respond by adopting even newer fashions. These two processes create a self-perpetuating cycle of change that drives fashion (Simmel 1904, p.130-55).

3. In mid-nineteenth-century America, commercial toilet tissue was available in the form of pads of medicated paper. Gayetty's Medicated Paper was marketed in 1857 as a "perfectly pure product, good for the "prevention of piles." Mr. Gayetty's name was watermarked on each sheet (Kane, 1950, p. 329).

4. Up until 1920, the leading women's magazines refused advertising of any toilet tissue; it was an unmentionable subject Typical Scott advertisements prior to 1927 suggested the proper thing to say: "don't ask for toilet paper—ask for ScotTissue"; (Scott Paper, Advertisement; Scott Paper Company; and Muir 1982 p. 85-86).

5. Typical movies of the 1920s with opulent bath scenes include "Male and Female," "Dynamite," and "Sign of the Cross." On DeMille, see Essoe and Raymond Lee, 1970; Charles Higham, 1973; and Ringold and Bodeen, 1969.

6. On advertising's emphasis on color and the ensemble, see Marchand, 1985, p.132-140.

7. Advertisements for Kohler Colorware showed ready to install lavatories that cost from \$35 to \$800, bathtubs \$70 to \$500, and toilets \$65 to \$150 (Kohler, 1929).

8. For a discussion of the phenomenon of consumption, see Stearns 1997.

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