

# Long Women’s Bathroom Lines Can Be Fixed Easily, Scientists Say



The real reason why women’s restroom lines are so long. (Photo: Getty Images)

It’s pretty much a given that at most public restrooms, the line is going to be longer for the women’s room than the men’s room. Nobody knows exactly why this happens — it just does. But now, [two scientists think they’ve figured it out](#).

According to Kurt Vanhauwegem and Wouter Rogiest, “queueing theorists” (i.e., people who specialize in lines), there are several reasons why the wait is longer for women, and a lot of those reasons are out of the bathroom-goer’s control. The first is that there are fewer toilets for women than for men. Typically, bathrooms are the same size, but men’s rooms have urinals in addition to toilets, which take up less space than stalls. An average bathroom

has 20 to 30 percent more places to pee for men than for women, the researchers discovered.

Second, women just spend more time using the bathroom. It's not that women are loafing — they just have more things to do when they have to go, like opening and closing a stall door, wiping down a toilet seat or laying down a seat cover, and taking off and putting on more clothes. Thanks to all of these practicalities, women spend an average of one minute and 30 seconds in the bathroom compared with men, who can be in and out in a minute.

The third factor comes down to overall activity in the bathroom. When it's not too busy, women can get in and out fairly quickly, the researchers point out, but when a bathroom is packed (for example, right after a concert wraps up), women are stuck with sometimes outrageous wait times.

Vanhaute gem and Rogiest tell Yahoo Beauty that they decided to study this effect because they saw it as an “optimization problem” that they wanted to try to solve from a mathematical point of view. “It is a great setting to show that mathematics can be applied to everyday and socially relevant topics,” they said via email.

The researchers propose unisex toilets to help solve the issue of super-long lines. With a unisex bathroom, “you avoid ‘idle moments,’ in which women are waiting while there are toilets available in the men’s room,” they say. “Therefore, the optimal mixed layout will always give lower waiting times than the optimal layout if you separate men and women.” Moving to unisex bathrooms can reduce waiting times for women in crowded situations from over six minutes to a minute and a half, which is definitely good news for people who have to go. There's also a benefit for transgender people, they point out: Removing gender from the bathroom equation can [make the experience less stressful](#) for transgender men and women.

The concept of having people study lines may seem kind of silly, but queuing theorist Myron Hlynka, a professor at the University of Windsor, who didn't

work on this study, tells Yahoo Beauty that it's actually very important. Queueing theory often suggests new, more efficient ways to move people through a system, which can ultimately save people time and hassle.

Vanhaute gem and Rogiest are hoping that their idea will catch on — and their research even offers up different bathroom layouts for companies to consider. But the researchers say the best bathroom layout is one in which there are twice as many toilet stalls as urinals. Taking this idea even further, the researchers say that “by removing all urinals and opting for an all-cabin layout, the average waiting time for women equals that of men, and also equality toward transgender [people] is realized in full,” they say. If a company isn't into the idea of a unisex bathroom, they might want to consider allowing more space for the ladies' room, with each male toilet matched by two female toilets to cut down on wait times.

Just something to think about, next time you're stuck waiting in line to pee.

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