

The Patriot-News

EDITORIALS

WASH-UP TIME

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This is news that women are more hygienic than men?

The Associated Press reported this week that "Men are dirtier than women." No, The Patriot-News didn't stop the presses, but it did publish the story on page A10.

This is not exactly a revelation. It's genetic. And just about anyone who ever went through childhood -- there are those who act as if they skipped that experience -- remembers that boys fairly love to get dirty and girls are inclined to say "yuck." That may be considered a borderline sexist comment these days, but parents are invited to conduct their own see-who- can-get-the dirtiest tests anytime they want.

We hope they won't adopt the supposedly scientific investigation techniques favored by the American Society of Microbiology to confirm what everyone already knew about the comparative hygienic practices of men and women. The study observed 6,336 individuals in four different restrooms around the country to see how many washed their hands before leaving.

The good news is that most people did -- 83 percent, in fact, more than four out of five. But women were more likely to wash than men, with 90 percent of women performing the single easiest step one can take to stay healthy, while only 75 percent of men did.

As if you really needed to know, the study found that people were most hygienic in San Francisco and least in Atlanta. And New York had the biggest gender disparity: 92 percent of women washed, compared to only 64 percent of men.

You might have guessed by now that these "no-kidding" bits of information came during National Clean Hands Week, which concludes today with inspirational messages from the Soap and Detergent Association.

And you might have been wondering exactly how these restroom observations were made. According to Harris Interactive, an Internet market research firm, "Observers discreetly watched and recorded whether or not adults using public restrooms washed their hands. Observers were instructed to groom themselves (comb their hair, put on make-up, etc.) while observing and to rotate bathrooms every hour or so to avoid



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counting repeat users more than once. Observers were also instructed to wash their hands no more than 10 percent of the time."

So beware of people fiddling in front of the mirror in rest rooms and counting to themselves, maybe on their fingers.

And, of course, the larger question is how far these ostensibly scientific investigations are going to go with their restroom research. We come down firmly on the side of privacy.

But don't be surprised to read around the time of [National Underwear Day](#) (observed on Aug. 13 this year, we kid you not) a story about a study that seeks to answer one of the burning questions of our time: [Boxers](#) or [briefs](#)?