

Men have a wee problem with sitting down on toilets

It may be more hygienic and accurate, but plans to persuade men to sit down to pee challenge our most basic instincts

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Men peeing at a urinal: the end of a longstanding tradition? Photograph: Graeme Robertson for the Guardian

At my primary school, we boys vied for pecking position via the traditional routes of fighting, football and fabricating extravagant fibs, but there was something else. Lined up afore the trough urinal in the toilets, we discovered a crucial test of manhood: the ability to pee skywards. The class weaklings could barely defeat gravity. I was proud to occasionally reach the words "Armitage Shanks" while a few warriors could clear the porcelain and decorate the tiles. And then there was Phillip. Phillip was no ordinary Scots wean. He was a superhero, a god amongst miniature men. Phillip could squirt a volley which would rise a good six feet in the air before arcing with exquisite accuracy out of the open window. It was spectacular – I swear he must have mastered top spin. That is how the boys learned: there is direct route from bladder to masculine prestige, and the girls learned not to loiter by the big bins at playtime.

At this point, I should probably advise male readers to take a seat. Not because I'm about to tell you something shocking, but because if the rest of the world is to follow the lead of Taiwan, we'll soon have to do so several times a day. Stephen Shen, minister at the country's Environmental Protection Administration, has instigated a policy of requesting men in government buildings to sit down to urinate. He hopes the habit will spread through society to create a cleaner, healthier environment. If my female friends are anything to go by, this plan would go down well with the world's women. They talk of hygiene, bad smells and treading barefoot in puddles by night. That *may* sound reasonable but don't be fooled, dudes. It's a grand conspiracy to ensure ultimate victory in the battle to keep toilet seats down.

I'm no biomechanic, but it seems to me that if you were to design a waste water drainage system for a semi-intelligent carbon-based lifeform, you could do little better than an easily-accessed length of flexible hosepipe, complete with directional nozzle, that can be tucked out of harm's way when not needed. And thanks to the miracle of evolution, this gadget protrudes at the precise same place on the human body where we find the zip of our trousers. It is such a miracle that one might be tempted to credit it to the intelligent design of a benevolent creator, were it not for one small design flaw – accuracy. Some women may find this hard to believe, but most of the time men are pretty accurate. Nine times out of 10 we could knock a bee off a bottle top with a single blast. The problem is that from time to time, without warning, our trusty nozzle will develop a glitch that suddenly sends an unexpected stream between the basin and the Beano annual or, on a bad day, splat between the eyes. We can't help it. Blame evolution and its shoddy attention to detail.

So, on one side of this debate we have hygiene, public health and a pleasant living environment. On the other we have ... OK I admit it – nothing. Nada. Zilch. There is not a single argument to be made for standing up to wee except, damn it, it feels right. So perhaps I could suggest a compromise. Men won't wee standing up in the bathroom on condition we are provided with a well-drained tree in the backyard that we can mark as our own. I suspect that, deep down, that's what we really want.