

Understanding Personal Hygiene Artifacts as Indicators of Identity from the Joint Courts Complex Project Tucson, Arizona

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Personal hygiene as exhibited in household material culture at the turn of the 20th century demonstrates a general increase in awareness regarding health and sanitation. To what extent to which people maintained a sense of cleanliness can be readily seen in such artifacts as combs, toothbrushes, and douches/irrigators, but the ways these artifacts defined an individual through the practice of hygiene has rarely been explored. This paper interprets artifacts of a private nature and suggests how they can be applied to definitions of identity, using hygiene products collected from early 20th-century privy contexts in one urban neighborhood. Differences in gender/sex as well as other identity markers such as ethnicity, status, and class are explored.

At the turn of the 20th century, personal hygiene was on the fast track, being integrated into all spectrums of American society, that is urban and rural, wealthy and poor, and citizens and immigrants. Personal hygiene is the act of cleansing and grooming oneself for the benefit of health. Objects such as combs, razors, toothbrushes, and douches/irrigators aid the act of personal hygiene. Small finds like hygiene artifacts often do not get extensive research due to financial and/or time constraints. When interpreting the material culture recovered from sites, archaeologists have a tendency to focus on display goods such as tableware and jewelry rather than non-display goods like hygiene items. Yet research (e.g., Deagan 2002; Deetz 1996; Smith 1999, 2007; White and Beaudry 2009) has shown the incredible potential for understanding past people through “small things” and non-display goods. Of particular importance is their use in identity studies. As a category of material culture and personal artifacts, hygiene artifacts carry great promise in exploring individual lives, especially gender and/or sex, ethnicity, status, and class. Even more significant is the glimpse

that these non-display goods provide into private behaviors, ultimately leading to an individual or group’s hidden identity. This article is a study of hygiene artifacts recovered from an ethnically and economically mixed early 20th-century urban neighborhood as part of the Joint Courts Complex Archaeological Data Recovery Project in Tucson, Arizona, and how they can correlate to concepts of identity. Data presented here incorporate the identification and quantity of recovered hygiene artifacts, what contexts they came from, and the trends observed. It also includes a review of two current discussions about identity, “reflexive” and emulation versus rejection. Integrating the aforementioned theoretical and empirical elements, the article finishes by addressing how all of this relates to the residents of the early 20th-century neighborhood.

BACKGROUND

In 2006, Statistical Research, Inc., in association with Pima County, Arizona, ran excavations (known as the Joint Courts Complex Project) at

a multi-component site that had prehistoric, cemetery, and post-cemetery aspects in Tucson. The post-cemetery component, which is the focus of this paper, included a residential and commercial occupation. It is from the residential period, dating from the 1890s to the 1940s, from which the material culture examined here came. Thirty-nine features were analyzed including trash pits, trash deposits, stairwells, privy pits, cesspits, and basements.

In 1880, the arrival of the railroad changed the landscape of Tucson and brought with it goods that were once difficult to obtain and good probably never available previously. Of particular importance were the mass-produced goods that would lead to increased availability and diversity of consumer goods and the development of mail-order merchandising. Many hygiene products at the turn of the 20th century were accessible through mail-order catalogs such as Sears, and Roebuck Co. and Butler's Brothers. The railroad also introduced progressive ideas that promoted public sanitation and personal cleanliness. Publicly, urban governments were organizing to set up the infrastructure of clean water, sewerage lines, and indoor plumbing. In turn, the latter two promoted personal hygiene and provided safer, cleaner spaces

for the disposal of bodily waste and washing and grooming.

DATA

A total of 303 whole and fragmented hygiene artifacts were recovered from post-cemetery contexts at the Joint Courts Complex project area (Table 1). Hygiene artifacts are broken down into two categories: grooming and cleanliness. Artifacts designated as grooming consist of plastic, rubber and bone dressing combs and hair brushes, as well as metal straight and safety razors. Combs in this collection are called "dressing combs", a term used in early 20th-century Sears, and Roebuck catalogs to differentiate combs that are run through hair and those worn in the hair. Cleanliness objects are made up of bone toothbrushes and plastic, rubber, metal, and glass douche-related products such as tubing, fountain syringes, and hardware for bags. Cosmetic and beauty-related artifacts are not included in this discussion. While they certainly are considered part of the grooming category, the focus of this article is primarily on those objects representative of cleanliness.

Table 1. Total Hygiene Artifact Counts.

Hygiene Artifact Counts	Count	MNI	Percentage
<i>Grooming</i>			
Dressing combs/brushes	41	-	14%
Razors	12	-	4%
Hygienic Beauty/Cosmetic	55	-	18%
<i>Cleanliness</i>			
Toothbrush-related products	8	-	3%
Toothbrushes	21	-	7%
Douche-related tubing/hardware ¹	155	166	54.79%
(Douche) fountain syringe nozzles	11	-	-
Total	303	166	100%

¹ The MNI and percentage of douche-related tubing/hardware includes the (douche) fountain syringe nozzle count.

Grooming items were primarily recovered from cesspit and privy pit contexts. Dressing combs and brushes predominately came from privies of middle stratigraphic layers. One privy in particular, Feature 650, yielded the bulk of the dressing combs and brushes. At least four households can be considered contributors to its trash between the privy use dates of 1900 and 1924. The property associated with the privy was a rental and its known occupants were part of lower economic classes and included a Euroamerican carpenter, a grocer, a Hispanic carpenter, and a general laborer of unknown ethnicity.

The majority of razors observed was the safety kind and mostly came from cesspits in lower stratigraphic layers. This suggests that early male residents were more likely to have used these razors than later residents. A cesspit designated Feature 3042 produced the majority of the razors in the collection. This pit was connected to another, Feature 3040, by a tunnel. Cesspit 3040 is known to have drained into Cesspit 3042, which was a significantly deeper feature. Some of the occupants that contributed to Cesspit 3040's trash are considered to have also added to Cesspit 3042's trash. Three Euroamerican households made up of middle to high income levels, such as a railway conductor for Southern Pacific who also was a proprietor to a men's club or drinking establishment, and a rancher turned politician, are linked to the trash in this pit.

Cleanliness items also largely came from cesspit contexts. Toothbrushes were found mainly in Cesspit 3042, the feature that held many of the razors discussed above, and carries the same class and ethnic trends; those of Euroamerican men and women of middle to high economic ranking. Toothbrushes were observed mostly in lower stratigraphic layers, indicating earlier residents were likely using these more than the later occupants.

As would be expected, douche-related items

were primarily recovered from the cess- and privy pits at the site. Douching would typically have taken place in an outhouse where privacy was most required to perform such a task. However, these items were also observed in unexpected features like stairwells and a basement. Their presence in such features suggests that privy and cesspit features were razed and dumped into basements after abandonment or that miscellaneous trash on or near the surface was deposited into basements when the land was leveled. It appears most of the douche-related items were recovered from upper stratigraphic layers, indicating that later residents were more likely to have used them than earlier occupants. Cesspit 3040 contributed over half of the douche-related items from the project area. This cesspit was used by occupants from 1891 to 1937. During the time that the cesspit was in use, over 10 households occupied at separate times can be linked to the trash found in that feature. Known residents include Euroamerican and Mexican-American men and women with varying levels of income. Known occupants using this cesspit included a prominent wealthy gambler and saloon-keeper turned restaurateur, a bank employee, a Southern Pacific Railroad switchman, a cashier, a clerk, a truck driver, a boarding house manager, and a former Tucson mayor. While the list of residents is mostly men, who could have used the urethral and/or anal douches, it is assumed that their female family members also used some of the douching artifacts (Figures 1-3).

DISCUSSION

The residential period of the neighborhood (1890s-1940s) was a time of heightened personal hygiene and housekeeping. In Western society, the concept of being clean was not adopted or really made available to all classes until the early 20th century (Hoy 1985). It no longer was a

luxury or upper-class indulgence. At a time when indoor plumbing was not yet widely available to all, many if not most Americans practiced personal hygiene in one way or another, whether it was the act of bathing, brushing teeth, combing hair, shaving, or douching.

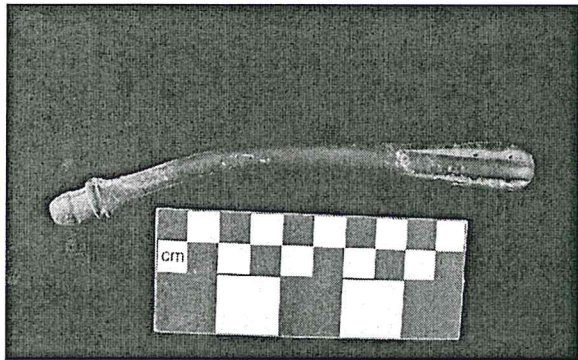


Figure 1. Rubber vaginal (douche) fountain syringe nozzle from Feature 3040.

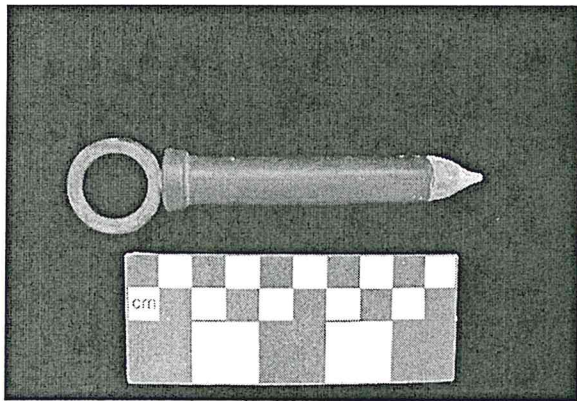


Figure 2. Rubber urethral (douche) fountain syringe nozzle from Feature 3040.

Generations have now come to learn the consequences of being clean. For the sake of survival, one's health is crucial. By the turn of the 20th century, cleanliness had been instilled with such fervor that identification began to take shape among people. The attitude that not only was it important to be clean for the sake of one's

health, but also for pride, respect, virtue, nationalism, and moral superiority, became prevalent. No one publicly supported this more than Edward Bok, Editor of the *Ladies Home Journal* from 1899 to 1919. Bok is quoted as saying:

“The man who makes a point of keeping himself clean, and whose clothes look neat, no matter how moderate of cost they may be, works better, feels better, and is in every sense a better business man than his fellow worker who is disregarding of both his body and dress, or either. He works at a distinct advantage. The external man unquestionably influences the internal man (Hoy 1995:92).”



Figure 3. Rubber rectal (douche) fountain syringe nozzle from Feature 22355.

Taken from psychology textbooks, identity is “an internal process which one defines and integrates various aspects of the self” (Deaux 2000:222-225). Smith (2007:413) explains reflexive identity as “the identity that people project to themselves and that contains elements of self-awareness or self-construction that are not wholly public.” An individual may have many identities that may or may not be expressed pub-

licly. Three identities are recognized in public and private realms: (1) an identity constructed and perceived by self; (2) an identity perceived by self and others; and (3) an identity constructed and perceived by others (Smith 2007:415). Sociologists (e.g., Goffman 1959) have seen people distinguish their public projections of themselves from their private projections of themselves. Public projections are explained as a “role” played by the individual, while private projections are an “identity”, meaning the self constructs a particular role they want to display to others while maintaining a “truer” self within.

Emulation and rejection are also constructed parts of a perceived self. Emulation and rejection can be used to elevate the perception of oneself socially and economically. Social psychologists, archaeologists, and anthropologists have observed that people of lower socioeconomic class emulate higher classes and *vice versa*, while rejection has been seen as a way to control situations like “material conditions” (Bell 2002; Bettie 2000).

Monica Smith (1999, 2007) and other archaeologists have applied material culture research to the concept of reflexive identity and non-display goods. The same has been done for the concept of emulative and resistant behaviors. It is well known that people use objects to create self perceptions and create perceptions observed by others. Hygiene artifacts offer a peek into people’s hidden reflexive identity, that of their perceptions of and how they achieved being clean. The residents of the post-cemetery residential neighborhood in the Joint Courts Complex Project Area used hygiene artifacts, obviously demonstrating a neighborhood concerned about cleanliness. The variety of hygiene items recovered indicates the different ways that hygiene was available in early 20th-century Tucson. While predominately a Euroamerican neighborhood, the presence of other ethnicities like Hispanics and Mexican-Americans, plus the presence of hygiene artifacts throughout the project

area, show that personal hygiene was not culturally-specific. The same can be said for class.

A lack of literature on the cultural relevance of toothbrushes, dressing combs, hairbrushes, and razors makes it difficult to discuss these personal objects. Christopher Oldstone-Moore presented a paper at the 2010 American Historical Association in San Diego, California on cultural interpretations of shaving, facial hair, and masculinity in 20th-century Britain and the United States is an important contribution. Oldstone-Moore (personal communication 2011) has explained how the connection between hygiene and shaving in Western society was a 20th-century phenomenon due to microbial theory and reporting periodicals began to publish studies of germs deposited by men’s beards and mustaches onto women. Advertisements bolster these interpretations. In reviewing vintage advertisements and catalogs (e.g., Sears, Roebuck, and Co., Butler Brothers), hairbrushes were seen being used by attractive young women with long voluminous and luxurious looking hair or sleeked back into perfectly coifed hairdos. Dapper, clean shaven “ladies men” were often characterized in razor advertisements with eye-catching lines like “Ladies Prefer...” Women and men living in the Tucson neighborhood undoubtedly kept such imagery in mind when making the choice to purchase such goods.

Still a popular practice among women today, douching is an important avenue for guiding historical archaeologists in better understanding past perceptions of cleanliness. Common reasons cited by contemporary American medical literature includes personal hygiene, aesthetics, prevention or treatment of infection, and to cleanse prior to or after sex, and following menstruation (Ferranti 2009; Martino and Vermund 2002; Misra et al. 2006). Specific types of douches (e.g., vaginal, urethral, and rectal) can indicate gender/sex, though it should not be assumed that the presence of any one of these reflects use only by a woman or a man. Availabil-

ity and appearances easily play a role in the purchase of such goods.

Despite the Comstock laws of the 1807s and 1880s prohibiting the discussion and promotion of contraception among patients, their doctors, and in print media, douching was propagated as a prophylactic and for the treatment of venereal disease (Farrell Brodie 1994). Margaret Sanger (1917:6-9), one of the most recognized advocates of women's health, recommended douching right after "the sexual act." In her book *Family Limitations* (Sanger 1917:2), she fervently states:

"Of course, it is troublesome to get up and douche, it is also a nuisance to have to trouble about the date of the menstrual period. It seems inartistic and sordid to insert a pessary or a suppository in anticipation of the sexual act. But it is far more sordid to find yourself several years later burdened down by half a dozen unwanted children, helpless, starved, shoddily clothed, dragging at your skirt, yourself a dragged out shadow of the woman you once were."

In a conversation with my 77-year-old maternal grandmother, she recalls as a young girl seeing a hot water bag complete with fountain syringes hung on a peg on the back of her aunt and uncle's bathroom door. My grandmother admits that she and her mother never cared for douching, but that her mother-in-law "swore up and down by its properties as a contraceptive" (Florine Good, personal communication 2011).

While undoubtedly used historically for contraception and venereal disease, historical archaeologists must be careful in assuming douching behavior is straightforward. Much of the language surrounding douching behavior in 19th

and 20th-century print media centered on its hygienic function. Treatment of leucorrhoea – a whitish, thick vaginal discharge – and various menstruation disorders were commonly cited in such media advertising.

CONCLUSION

Archaeologists often do not have the time or money to research artifacts that are "small finds". This paper has shown that an ethnically and economically mixed neighborhood in early 20th century Tucson, Arizona, took part in hygiene trends popular of the time across America. Toothbrushes, dressing combs, hairbrushes, razors, and douche-related items helped the residents of the neighborhood achieve not just well-being but private reflexive and public identities. Further research recommendations include site comparisons within Tucson, within Arizona, and across the country. Ethnographic and anthropological studies in the practices of American shaving, hair combing, tooth brushing, and douching are also needed, since they are few and hard to find.

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