

John

A short play by John Moore



CHARACTERS:

JOAN, a graduate student, early to mid 20s

BETTY: her roommate, early to mid 20s

THE PLAY begins in a college apartment with JOAN rehearsing her Power Point demonstration with roommate BETTY as her audience. JOAN is finishing the lecture portion of her graduate anthropology dissertation presentation on ... the cultural behavior of men in public bathrooms.

PRODUCTION NOTE: When the time comes, JOAN will “turn on” her video to be projected onto a big screen. But the fun part in staging this play is that what happens in the videos she describes is acted out by a series of live male actors. While the script refers to about 20 MEN who enter and exit at various times, it might be funnier if staged with as few as four recurring male actors. Whether this is a full staging or a staged reading, it’s important that the guys be incorporated into the performance, as that’s where most of the comedy comes from.

JOAN: ... And that concludes the lecture portion of my graduate cultural anthropology dissertation on the behavior habits of human males in public bathrooms. Any questions before we move on to the video presentation?

(She sees a hand. BETTY sits before her on a couch, eating popcorn). Yes, Ms. Collins?

BETTY: I’m your roommate. Call me Betty.

JOAN: No, I have to do this just like in class, Betty. So ... Yes, Ms. Collins?

BETTY: Um, yeah: Don’t you think it’s funny that you’re named Joan and I’m named Collins?

JOAN: That again, Betty? For crying out loud ...

BETTY: Sorry, OK, so, Joan ...

JOAN: Call me Ms. Buckley!

BETTY: Yeah, now that’s just bizarre...

JOAN: Do you have a question?

BETTY: Yeah, sorry. So what does spying on men while they are draining their wankies have to do with cultural anthropology?

JOAN: Betty!

BETTY: What? You told me to ask that question! You said you know someone is going to ask that question!

JOAN: No one in my graduate class is going to say “draining their wankies!”

BETTY: OK, sorry ... “fiddling their faddles?”

JOAN: Will you be serious?!

BETTY: OK, OK ... (Haughtily) ... Yes, Msssss. Buckley, I find your choice of subject matter most peculiar given that most anthropology dissertations concentrate on the primal behavior of primates such as gorillas or apes, not human males.

JOAN: And you don't see the connection?

BETTY: Sadly, I can't see much of anything in your videotape. I told you to hide that webcam in the other wall. That way we might see the angle of the dangle.

JOAN: Betty!

BETTY: What? I want to see!

JOAN: The answer to your question, Ms. Collins, is that a fundamental function of cultural anthropology is to study any largely unknown primitive form of animal behavior. Hollywood's legions of primarily male screenwriters have long obsessed over what takes place among women in America's powder rooms. “Sex and the City,” for example...

BETTY: “Can't spare a square!”

JOAN: From “Seinfeld,” exactly. But precious little film or scientific study has been committed to documenting the behavior patterns of men with their pants down.

BETTY: Except for George Michael!

JOAN: Well, yes he's-

BETTY: And Pee-Wee Herman!

JOAN: Sadly that's true, too-

BETTY: Not to mention -

JOAN: Betty, stop it! Now on to the video portion of my presentation...

BETTY: Oh, goody!

(JOAN hits her clicker, and three life-size cutout cardboard latrines drop from the ceiling on wires hung center stage. The action we now will be seeing is that of live actors performing within the video she is showing to her class. We will see these actors entering and exiting this videotaped men's room, acting out whatever JOAN is describing. The cardboard cutouts will cleverly obscure the men's midsections, allowing the audience to see their faces, but not any private parts.

Running along a 90-degree angle on one side the urinals is an implied sink next to the exit door. Along the other side there are two “No. 2” stalls men will dodge into.)

JOAN: You see, by covertly observing the actions of these men ...

BETTY: (Coughing) Webcam ...

JOAN: Betty! ...

BETTY: What? Did you have their consent?

JOAN: You know I didn't.

BETTY: If this were “The Real World,” you'd at least have to blur their faces.

JOAN: Well, I don't have a face-blurrer!

BETTY: Not to mention their...

JOAN: Don't say it!

BETTY: Just tell them the truth: That this project was a great excuse for you to get a good look at that hot guy you like who works for your dad!

JOAN: I'm not going to tell them that.

BETTY: The truth will set you free!

JOAN: Thanks, Dr. King.

BETTY: I have a dream, and it starts that one guy on tape number 42 ...

JOAN: Do you really think I could get into trouble?

BETTY: Heck no, these guys all work for your dad. Who's going to press charges?

JOAN: I suppose so. Still, you make it all sound so ... so ... untoward.

BETTY: I think the word is actually "un-legal."

JOAN: Well, what else was I supposed to do?

BETTY: You could have done it right here in our apartment building. What I would pay to see Chad –

JOAN: Here, Betty? Have you ever crawled the vents in this dump?

BETTY: Um, actually no. ... Am to now take it take it that you have?

JOAN (ignoring her): So anyway ... let's begin. Now, by observing the actions of these men -- in the completely legal name of anthropological science! -- many women in this class may be surprised to learn that, at least according to my exhaustive research, that apparently no man has ever actually spoken to another man while both are standing next to one another at public urinals. Observe...

(As she says this, MAN A and MAN B enter the bathroom, babbling on about something insignificant. As they take position at the urinals, however, their voices abruptly and completely cut off).

BETTY: Wow. Is that some sort of a rule? Like Fight Club?

JOAN: (Producing a red-dot pointer). Now in this next video exhibit, you will notice the man I am pointing to now (MAN C enters and moves directly to Urinal 1)...

BETTY: Joan?

JOAN: Yes?

BETTY: Why does that man have a Q-Tip in his ear?

JOAN: Oh, I met this guy at daddy's Christmas party. Well, you see, this bit was recorded first thing in the morning. He's single, and he lives alone.

BETTY: Oh. How sad.

JOAN: Actually, you'll also notice that as he stands at the urinal, he will use one hand for, well, you know, and with the other he will automatically and instinctively reach for the back of his shirt (MAN C does so).

BETTY: Why is he doing that?

JOAN: He's feeling for the label to make sure he didn't put his shirt on inside out before leaving the house.

BETTY: Poor baby doesn't have anyone to check for him!

JOAN: You'll also notice that when this man finishes his business, he passes the sink and moves directly for the door (MAN C exits).

BETTY: Eww! He didn't wash his hands!

JOAN: Exactly. Next, you'll see two new men enter (MAN D, followed a few seconds later by MAN E). Now, if we move ahead (whenever JOAN hits fast forward, the actors hurry into double-time) ... you'll notice that when the first man finishes his business, he goes directly to the sink, washes his hands and leaves (MAN D does).

BETTY: Well, thank goodness.

JOAN: But the second man, now alone in the bathroom, finishes his business, bypasses the sink ... and quickly leaves (MAN E does so).

BETTY: Hey! What's up with that?

JOAN: That discovery, my friend, is a real scientific breakthrough. You see, we recorded and studied more than 100 samples of this behavioral pattern, and we can now conclusively state for the first time that ... no man will ever wash his hands in a restroom after doing his business, unless ...

BETTY: ... I got it! Unless another man is in the bathroom with him!

JOAN: Exactly!

BETTY: Men don't care about keeping their hands clean! They only wash their hands if there's someone else there who might think he's gross for not washing his hands!

JOAN: In 100 percent of cases.

BETTY: Ugh, men!

JOAN: Now in this example, I would like you to turn

your attention to this man (she points her red-dot pointer to MAN F, who walks into the bathroom and approaches the row of three urinals. He gravitates toward the center urinal, then hesitates.)

BETTY: Wait, what was that?

JOAN: What?

BETTY: That little moment of hesitation?

JOAN: That showed this man's instinctive impulse is to use the center urinal, but he stops himself. Now look as he glances around and under the stalls. Only after he is assured that he is the only man in the bathroom does he feel comfortable using the center urinal. Now, I am going to fast forward (MAN F zips up and exits at double-time).

BETTY: Hah! Didn't wash his hands!

JOAN (takes finger off button to resume normal speed): Now look as these two men enter, one after the other (MAN G and H). The first man is keenly aware of the second man behind him. (MAN G anxiously and obviously notes the man behind him over his shoulder).

BETTY: He looks like he's being stalked for prey!

JOAN: Notice how the first man goes directly to the urinal on the far left.

BETTY: He's claiming it.

JOAN: Marking his territory!

BETTY: And what a sanitary method for doing so! You don't see that out in the wild.

JOAN: Now see how the second man immediately goes to the urinal on the far right.

BETTY: It's as if the urinal in the middle does not exist.

JOAN: In our research...

BETTY: (coughs out) Voyeurism ...

JOAN: In our research! ... (JOAN again fast-forwards, so an assortment of men in ties enter, stand at urinals, exit stalls, etc. until she stops) ... we found that in 67 video-taped examples where two men entered the bathroom to urinate at the same time, the middle urinal was used only once.

BETTY: What happened there?

JOAN: Well, see for yourself ... (The "live tape" returns to normal speed. Now MAN I is alone at the urinal on the far left until MAN J comes in -- only this guy immediately and eagerly and approaches the middle urinal. MAN J is obviously using this opportunity to check out MAN I, who looks completely awkward. MAN J gives MAN I a big smile ... he's impressed with what he sees. MAN I cringes.)

BETTY: Well, that I didn't see that one coming.

JOAN: Neither did the man on the left.

BETTY: Wow. That man totally objectified that poor guy!

JOAN: This leads me to one of our most fascinating discoveries about the competitive nature of men...

BETTY: Regarding ...

JOAN: Just how competitive men can be in the bathroom.

BETTY: Why should a bathroom be any different?

JOAN: Two examples: In the first, watch as two enter and immediately claim their turf (MAN K and L).

BETTY: They leave the center urinal empty, of course. No objectifying going on with these guys!

JOAN: Now from this distance, these two men feel comfortable exchanging an occasional polite head nod (MAN K and L do so).

BETTY: OK, so?

JOAN: Now I am going to fast forward ... (The "live tape" fast forwards, but nothing much happens. Every few seconds, MAN K and L look over to each other, smile and nod politely as they both continue to go on about their business).

BETTY: Why is no one leaving?

JOAN: Because, Betty. They may be smiling ... but these two men have entered new and antagonistic territory.

BETTY: They are going to be rude to one another? In such a compromising position?

JOAN: No, they have started ... a peeing contest!

BETTY: I thought that was just an expression!

JOAN: No, Betty, it's a phenomenon! Neither man wants to zip up and walk away first, because that would defer the honor of the longer urination to the other.

BETTY: That's a point of pride?

JOAN: Oh, these two are good. They're in it for the long haul.

BETTY: Are you still fast-forwarding?

JOAN: Oh, yes.

BETTY: How much tape has gone by?

JOAN: About 23 minutes worth.

BETTY: How does it end?

JOAN: I don't know. I ran out of tape that day. (She hits stop, the men freeze. As JOAN loads another tape, MAN K and L disappear).

BETTY: Wow, it never would have occurred to me that two men could fight for bragging rights over whose bladder can hold more liquid poison than the other. I mean, certain other issues of size, I can somewhat understand

JOAN: Funny you should mention size, Betty, because that leads directly to the next exhibit. This one explores the rare circumstance of what happens when three men converge at once and are forced to use all three of the available urinals at the same time.

BETTY: I bet some men would rather have their bladders explode than use the middle urinal!

JOAN: You might think so, Betty, but men can be resourceful. Observe here as two men (MAN M and N) enter and take their positions.

BETTY: Each on the outside. Men! In the end, they really are so predictable.

JOAN: Now watch as a third man enters.

(MAN O enters reaching for his belt, starting to unclasp it before he even gets to the urinal. When he sees two other men present, he practically doubles over, he is so perplexed by what he sees).

BETTY: He looks like he just lost his grandmother.

JOAN: But look! Rather than just take the center urinal, this man dodges into the toilet stall to pee in private (MAN O does so, locking the door behind him).

BETTY: There can be only one explanation for that move.

JOAN: Yes, I'm afraid it's true.

BETTY: That guy must have a candy cigarette for a penis.

JOAN: Poor boy. Being revealed in that way around his co-workers is too big a humiliation to risk.

BETTY: Especially with the holiday party season coming up.

JOAN: Exactly.

BETTY: Who knew that peripheral vision can do so much damage to a man's psyche?

JOAN: It makes you feel kind of sad for him, doesn't it?

BETTY: You know all this could be avoided if they would just build dividers between those urinals. You know ... to cut down on the looky-loos.

JOAN: But then this wouldn't be nearly as fun. Now look as the next guy enters (MAN P). He's big, burly, manly man, clearly with no issues of poor self-esteem.

BETTY: He's whipping it out like he's the Elephant Man.

JOAN: Well, he is! (PAUSE. BETTY glares.) ... What, I edited it out!

BETTY: Look at that smug, self-satisfied look on his face!

JOAN: Ah but notice the response from the two men on each side, now that their comparative manlihoods have been called into question.

BETTY: Hey, wait a minute. What are those guys on the ends doing?

JOAN: If you look carefully, they are ... adjusting.

BETTY: I'll say, hey look: they're going ... two-fisted!

JOAN: Exactly!

BETTY: What's that all about?

JOAN: It's to create the illusion that they have much more to ... hold onto ... down there ... than they did just a few seconds before!

BETTY: They're trying to screw with the Elephant Man's peripheral vision!

JOAN: More like compensate. Think of it as penile enhancement – without the surgery.

BETTY: Who knew men were more insecure when it comes to public displays of urination than with public displays of affection?

JOAN: Now Betty, we can't finish without briefly addressing the behavior of men inside actual toilet stalls (JOAN hits fast-forward and the four previous men clear the stage at double time. Then the following:)

JOAN: Now look here as two men enter. (MAN Q enters, followed immediately by MAN R. They both close the stall doors behind them, so all we can see is their pants having fallen down around by their feet).

BETTY: Nothing is happening.

JOAN: There is nothing to see. More important, notice that there is nothing to hear!

BETTY: Yeah, OK? ...

JOAN: That's because these two men are what we call on the outside world ... women.

BETTY: Women? How so?

JOAN: They are too self-conscious to go No. 2 with some other man sitting in such proximity.

BETTY: Why not?

JOAN: I can only conclude that it has something to do with not wanting to make "the sound" of a No. 2 -- and then having to look at the other man face to face at the sink afterward. You know, in case things go ... bad?

BETTY: You mean, like, the consequences of not having a high-fiber diet?

JOAN: Exactly.

BETTY: Hah! They are women!

JOAN: See, look, both men are now pulling up their pants and exiting their stalls (MAN Q and R do so simultaneously. Each looks at the other sheepishly). They look so defeated...

BETTY: One extends a hand to the other, as if to say, "After you."

JOAN: Yes, very polite! But did you notice what they didn't do?

BETTY: No, what?

JOAN: Neither one flushed the toilet!

BETTY: Gross!

JOAN: Not necessarily. Because in this instance ... there was nothing to flush!

BETTY: Aha! Because neither one could bring themselves to go!

JOAN: Exactly! (She starts to fast-forward. MAN Q and R exit in double time. When the coast is clear, we see MAN Q re-enter and lock himself in a stall. He soon exits, still in double-time, this time with a big smile on his face – and without washing his hands. JOAN and Betty laugh).

BETTY: This explains so much about why men are train wrecks in their interpersonal relationships outside of the bathroom, too.

JOAN: But Betty, not all men are so shy. For our final exhibit, I want you to watch this man:

(MAN S enters. He's an older, burly man, kind of dirty. He shuffles into the bathroom, walks into the toilet stall and as we see the pants come down, he lets out an exaggerated sigh of relief).

BETTY: Well, isn't he settling in!

(MAN S starts to sing in an Irish accent):

MAN S: Oh, what will we do with the drunken sailor,

What will we do with the drunken sailor,

What will we do with the drunken sailor,

Earl-aye in the morning?

BETTY: Oh yeah, he's making himself right at home!

(MAN S starts to let out all kinds of primal sounds. They're a little bit the sounds of battle, the sounds of torment, the sounds of lovemaking – all at once).

JOAN: Now do you get it, Betty?

BETTY: I do, Joan! I swear watching your anthropology graduate dissertation has been just like watching Animal Planet!

(MAN S resumes his singing, now happily and with great glee):

MAN S: Sling him in the long boat till he's sober,

Keep him there and make 'im bale 'er.

BETTY: Well, it sure sounds like the worst is over for him!

MAN S: Pull out the plug and wet him all over,

Take him and shake him, try an' wake him.

BETTY: OK, so that was cute and all at first, but seriously, does he go on like this for long?

JOAN: (singing stops as she fast-forwards): Apparently there are 23 possible options for what one might do with a drunken sailor. My favorite was No. 9: "Shave his belly with a rusty razor." Now listen to what happens when he finishes ...

(JOAN releases the button and the "live tape" returns to normal speed. MAN S now has his pants pulled up, and we hear him say smugly, behind the still-closed stall door):

MAN N: THAT... Came out of me?!?!

BETTY (laughing): Well, he seems very pleased with himself!

JOAN: No wait, there's more!

(MAN T walks into the bathroom. He heads toward a urinal as MAN S emerges from the stall).

MAN N: Hey sonny boy ... c'mere. You gotta get a load of this!

BETTY: Haha... he said "load."

(MAN T walks over to the stall, looks down, and then heartily pats the old man on the back in congratulation. JOAN hits the stop button and the "live tape" and the

MAN S and T disappear).

BETTY: Wow, Joan, I've learned so much about men today. And yet...

JOAN: And yet...

BETTY: ...In the end, men are such remarkably predictable mysteries.

JOAN: That they are.

BETTY: Because no matter what it is you're talking about ...

JOAN: Whether breasts...

BETTY: Or tallywackers...

JOAN: Or bladders...

BETTY: Or foot-long crappers...

JOAN: Isn't it the truth? For men ...

JOAN and BETTY: It always comes down to size!

END OF PLAY