

BEHAVIOUR

THE GREENER SEX

Richard Asher asks who's more environmentally friendly – boys or girls?

YOUR FIRST THOUGHT? IT WAS GIRLS, WASN'T IT? No shame in that – it's the intuitive reaction. Green goes with clean, and clean goes with... girls. Women are indisputably the toilet-flushers, grime-fighters and dust-busters of our planet. Surely it's a no-brainer; a snug, natural word-association fit?

Girls, pink, sugar, spice, all things nice, kittens, handbags, good smells, cleanliness. Greenliness, surely?

But when we stop and think about it, I'm not sure it'll be a ladies-only affair when, one day, co-hosts St Francis of Assisi and Mother Nature (wowing the paparazzi with another ivy-green hemp cardigan) team up to announce the winners of the Earth category at the Green Universe Awards. (First prize: entry to eco-heaven, including guaranteed daily shifts at the local eternally sustainable lentil farm, run by a benevolent crew of demanding but fair pandas.)

No, I don't think it's that clear cut. There are a few undeniable truths about men and their contribution to environmental evils. It is men who drive big, belchy cars with more than four cylinders. We race them, too! And is it not due to male inadequacy in the Orient that so much of our wildlife gets slaughtered? Bad boys. Bad, thoughtless boys.

Plus, we're not organised enough (and are generally too embarrassed) to take our own bags to the shops. Too many of us live off plastic-encased microwave meals and I guess we lead the way when it comes to gaseous emissions, climate changing or otherwise. Although we do come second to cows... with the possible exception of my Uncle Fred.

A clear victory for oestrogen? Not quite. Once we push open the front door of the female empire – the home – a different picture emerges.

My thesis: what women will label 'disgusting male behaviour' is, in fact, forward thinking and environmentally sensitive. Do we not earn Mother



'DISGUSTING MALE BEHAVIOUR' IS IN FACT FORWARD THINKING

Nature's hearty applause by limiting our appointments with the power-guzzling vacuum cleaner to, say, once every quarter? Are we not paving the energy-efficient way with our traditionally lax approach to regular, hot showers? And how many of us spend half an hour with our electric hair dryer every morning? Last week I met someone who does just that, and if she was a man then plastic surgeons are quickly becoming frighteningly good.

The rules of co-habiting, invariably set by the fairer sex, do few favours to Earth. The insistence on flushing *every time*. The use of loo paper and detergent on what can only be described as an industrial scale. Keeping the lights on while we're out, as my good lady does, so that it can be 'nice' when we walk in late at night. All those very irresponsible car trips down the road, because half a kilometre is simply 'too far to walk'. None of this betrays serious commitment to planet-saving.

There are the vast collections of cosmetics, for which *x* amount of bunny rabbits must die. Open the bathroom cupboard in my house and you may not get it closed again. Where do the containers for all these creams, jellies, sprays and mousses end up? On m'lady's favourite beach, probably.

Let's move on to ornaments. A sweeping generalisation, this, because I know men like their model cars and assorted memorabilia. But my feeling is that women win when it comes to random stuff that sits around the house for mere decoration. Gold can be melted down and wood can burn, so they're okay, but what about that porcelain duck? The Hello Kitty fridge magnet? Or that dancing plastic penguin?

I doubt the real-life birds will be particularly amused by the Taiwanese-crafted caricatures when, one day, they wash up on the coasts of South Georgia in nesting season.

Before indignant readers point it out, I do realise men have their part to play in the whole make-up thing. Women wouldn't use the stuff if it didn't work on us. But the relentless energy consumption arising from cleanliness? It's a fossil-fuel burning bonanza we could do without.

I'm not saying these arguments will work with the missus, by the way. By all means, try saying: 'But honey, if I vacuum the floor I'll be compromising my green principles and destroying the planet.' Please let me know how you get on. Personally, I found the pain took quite some time to dissipate.

With that in mind, I'm going to cop out and call this whole thing a draw. Actually – wait – I forgot about my trump card! And I want to play it so badly that I'll live with the hysterical accusations of misogyny.

Here's the thing: babies. Women have that reproductive instinct thing going on far more than men do. I'll wager they are responsible for far more than half of these births that keep happening. (Yes, I know it takes two, but who's usually behind the decision to 'try'?).

Overpopulation, my friends, is by far the, um, mother of all planet destruction. The world doesn't need any more people to add to its torments and its landfills. No matter if they're boys or girls. **GG**



Richard Asher enjoys revealing inconvenient truths