Let's Talk About Periods; Everything I Wish Someone Told Me About Periods

Abstract

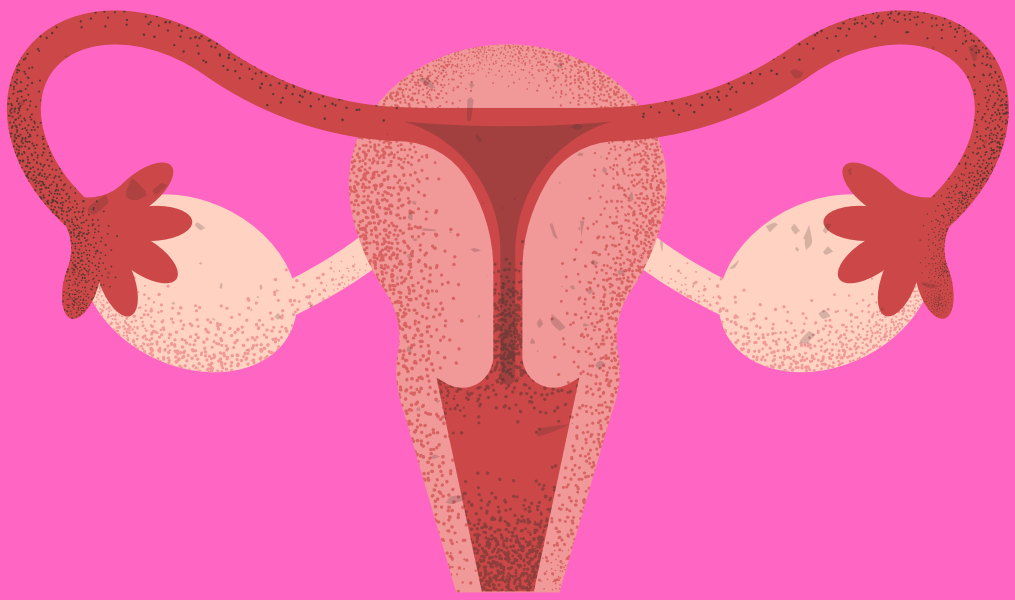
"Let's talk about Periods; Everything I Wish Someone Told Me About Periods" is a zine that tackles modern day sustainability issues surrounding periods and discusses menstrual history for a wide audience. It contrasts western attitudes towards periods with indigenous ones; while western society often views menstruation as taboo or dirty, many native nations view menstruation as sacred or powerful. Western menstrual history and modern day period products show clear signs of these attitudes: European women spent centuries incapable of participating in society while menstruating and many modern period products are dangerous to women's health. In response, this zine provides information about sustainable period products like menstrual cups. The zine also empowers readers to promote safe and accessable period products by combating period poverty in both local communities and worldwide.

Key Words

History, women's history, indigenous history, native nations, sustainability, menstruation, periods, menstrual products, menstrual history, period poverty, zines, american history, sustainability action

Abstract

LET'S TALK ABOUT PERIODS



THINGS I WISH SOMEONE TOLD ME ABOUT PERIODS, A ZINE BY BELLA CREMO

WESTERN ATTITUDES

- WESTERN SOCIETY (CULTURES ORIGINATING FROM EUROPE) IS BUILT ON A PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE THAT SUBJUGATES AND DEVALUES WOMEN.
- MENSTRUATION CONTINUES TO BE A 'TABOO' TOPIC, EVEN THOUGH 50% THE WORLD HAS PERIODS!
- AND TERMS LIKE "FEMININE HYGIENE" OR "SANITARY PAD" IMPLY THAT PERIODS ARE DIRTY WHEN THERE IS NOTHING UNSANITARY ABOUT IT!
- IT WAS EVEN ILLEGAL ADVERTISE PERIOD PRODUCTS ON TV AND RADIO UNTIL 1972!
- AND, THE FIRST STUDY ON THE ABSORBENCY OF TAMPONS USING REAL BLOOD WAS DONE IN 2023! IT WASN'T EVEN MENSTRUAL BLOOD, WHICH IS DIFFERENT!

32 VOGUE

INDIGENOUS ATTITUDES

- BEFORE COLONIALIZATION, THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF DISTINCT NATIONS LIVING IN THE AMERICAS.
- INDIGENOUS ANTHROPOLOGIST KIM ANDERSON SAID, "MANY INDIGENOUS CULTURES HAD DISTINCT ROLES FOR MEN AND WOMEN WITH AN UNDERSTANDING THAT BOTH SETS OF RESPONSIBILITIES WERE NECESSARY FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND NATION".
- THIS IS SOMETIMES UNDERSTOOD AS GENDER PARITY, OR THE BELIEF IN TWO DISTINCT YET BALANCED GENDERS
- MANY INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES HAD MENSTRUAL HUTS, OR SEPARATE LIVING SPACES FOR PEOPLE ON THEIR PERIODS BECAUSE THEY SAW,

"Menstruation as the sacred manifestation of a woman's power"

WOMEN ON THE YANKTON SIOUX/IHANKTONWAN OYATE RESERVATION IN SOUTH DAKOTA SET UP A TEPEE FOR YOUNG GIRLS CELEBRATING THEIR FIRST PERIOD

SOME INDIGENOUS MENSTRUAL PRACTICES

IN CALIFORNIA, NATIVE NATIONS LIKE THE HUPA, YUROK, AND KUROK HAD PUBLIC COMING-OF-AGE CEREMONIES FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN WHICH THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY DANCED AND SUNG IN CELEBRATION OF A GIRL'S FIRST PERIOD. MENSTRUATORS ALSO HAD A DESIGNATED PLACE TO BATHE, CREATING A 'LUCKY SPOT' ALSO USED BY MEN WHEN THEY NEEDED POWER.

THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST PLATEAU WAS HOME TO NATIVE NATIONS LIKE THE NEZ PERCE, YAKAMA, THOMPSON, LILOOET, AND OKANAGAN. WOMEN IN THESE CULTURES BUILT HUTS FOR MENSTRUATION, CHILDBIRTH, AND PUBERTY CEREMONIES. THERE, OLDER WOMEN PASSED ON LORE AND WISDOM ABOUT SEX, PERIODS, AND WOMANHOOD TO THE NEXT GENERATION.

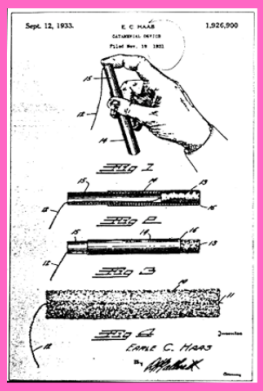
MANY NATIVE NATIONS IN THE NORTHEAST, LIKE THE LAKOTA AND ANISHINAABEK, AS WELL AS NATIONS IN THE SOUTHWEST, LIKE THE APACHE AND NAVAJO, HAD PUBERTY CEREMONIES BECAUSE PUBESCENT GIRLS WERE THOUGHT TO CARRY MEDICINE. BY CELEBRATING A GIRL'S FIRST PERIOD, THESE NATIONS WERE 'HONORING SACRED REGENERATIVE POWERS THAT SUPPORT LIFE'. APACHE PEOPLE EVEN CONSIDERED THIS CELEBRATION TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE YEAR

AMERICAN MENSTRUAL HISTORY

Westerners used home-made cloth pad diapers to deal with menstrual blood for thousands of years.

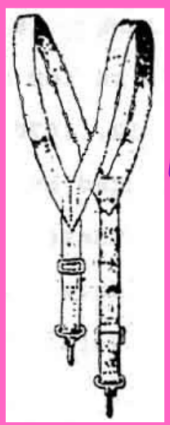
Most cloth diapers were made with scrap fabric and were washed and reused. Or, they bled right into their clothes!

IN THE 1870S, MENSTRUAL PADS HELD IN PLACE WITH SUSPENDERS WERE MASS-PRODUCED AND ADVIRTISED. LOOKS COMFORTABLE, RIGHT?



IN 1933, BUSINESSWOMAN GERTRUDE TENDRICH FOUNDED TAMPAX AND BOUGHT A PATENT FOR THE MODERN TAMPON, WITH COMPRESSED COTTON, A STRING AND A TUBE-IN-TUBE APPLICATOR. STARTING TO LOOK FAMILIAR?

IN 1831, FRENCH PHYSICIAN CHARLES NÉGRIER DISCOVERED THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MENSTRUATION TO OVULATION; BEFORE THIS, MOST BELIEVED MENSTRUATION RELEASED 'BAD BLOOD'.



NURSES SERVING IN WWI DISCOVERED MEDICAL TAMPONS, 'TAMPED' INTO BODY CAVITIES TO PREVENT BLEEDING. DESPITE CONCERNS THAT TAMPONS WOULD BREAK THE HYMEN OR PROVOKE MASTURBATION, PAPER COMPANY KIMBERLY-CLARK BEGAN ADVERTISING TAMPONS UNDER THE NAME 'KOTEX' IN 1920.

IN 1969, 'STAYFREE' ADHESIVE PADS WERE INTRODUCED, ELIMINATING THE NEED FOR GARTER BELTS, SAFETY PINS, HOOKS, AND CLIPS TO HOLD PADS IN PLACE.

ISSUES WITH PERIOD PRODUCTS

- IN 2024, HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANALYZED 30 TAMPONS FROM 14 TOP BRANDS, FINDING ALL CONTAINED TOXINS LIKE ARSENIC, COBALT, COPPER, IRON, MERCURY, NICKEL, LEAD, AND ZINC.

- ORGANIC TAMPONS WERE WERE FOUND TO CONTAIN LOWER LEVELS OF LEAD, BUT HAD HIGHER LEVELS OF ARSENIC COMPARED TO REGULAR TAMPONS
- ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NEWS ALSO FOUND THAT 48% OF PADS, 22% OF TAMPONS, AND 65% OF PERIOD UNDERWEAR HAVE PFAS OR 'FOREVER CHEMICALS'.
- BOTH PFAS AND HEAVY METALS ARE LINKED TO A RANGE OF HEALTH EFFECTS, INCLUDING CANCER.
- BESIDES HEALTH CONCERNS, BILLIONS OF DISPOSABLE TAMPONS AND PADS END UP IN OUR WASTE STREAM EACH YEAR.
- AND THE PRODUCTION OF PLASTIC FOR THESE PRODUCTS CONTRIBUTES TO CLIMATE CHANGE
- TO MITIGATE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS, TRY USING TAMPONS WITH CARDBOARD APPLICATORS OR NO APPLICATOR AT ALL.

SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES

- THANKFULLY, THERE ARE OTHER SUSTAINABLE PERIOD PRODUCTS!

- IN 2021, THE UN FOUND THAT MENSTRUAL CUPS HAVE THE LOWEST ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT COMPARED TO OTHER PERIOD PRODUCTS.
- THAT'S BECAUSE YOU CAN REUSE THEM FOR YEARS BY RINSING AFTER EACH USE AND BOILING THEM IN WATER FOR 5 MINUTES OCCASIONALLY.
- NON-TOXIC SILICONE MENSTRUAL CUPS CATCH PERIOD BLOOD RATHER THAN ABSORBING IT, SO THERE'S NO BLEACHING/ ABSORBENCY CHEMICALS.

- OR, MANAGE YOUR PERIOD LIKE OUR ANCESTORS WITH REUSABLE PERIOD UNDERWEAR AND PADS! TO CARE FOR THEM, RINSE IN WATER, WASH IN COLD WATER, AND HANG DRY
- TO AVOID PFAS, MAKE ONE YOURSELF OR BUY FROM ETSY!
- THESE PRODUCTS MAY HAVE HIGH UPFRONT COSTS, BUT CAN SAVE MONEY IN THE LONG RUN!

PERIOD POVERTY

- PERIOD POVERTY DESCRIBES HOW MILLIONS OF MENSTRUATORS WORLDWIDE STRUGGLE TO AFFORD/ACCESS MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS OR LACK THE CLEAN WATER AND PRIVACY TO USE THEM.
- IN RESPONSE, MENSTRUATORS USE TOILET PAPER, CLOTH, CARDBOARD, OR EVEN PLASTIC BAGS WHICH CAN LEAD TO URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS AND BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS.
- THIS ISSUE ISN'T FAR AWAY: IN AMERICA THIS YEAR, ONE IN FOUR STUDENTS LEFT OR MISSED SCHOOL BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T HAVE PERIOD PRODUCTS.
- AND, A U BY KOTEX STUDY FOUND THAT PEOPLE OF COLOR, LOW-INCOME, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE MORE AFFECTED BY PERIOD POVERTY.
- MENSTRUATION IS A NECESSARY, NATURAL, HEALTHY, AND COMMON PROCESS. WE ALL DESERVE THE DIGNITY OF A HYGIENIC PERIOD.
- AFTER CENTURIES OF CLOSED DOORS, WE NEED TO KEEP WOMEN, PARTICULARLY WOMEN OF COLOR, HEALTHY AND IN SCHOOL.

SUPPORT

- MANY ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE PROMOTE PERIOD DIGNITY. USE THE QR CODES TO SUPPORT THEM!

- ALLIANCE FOR PERIOD SUPPLIES CONNECTS OVER 140 ORGANIZATIONS DEDICATED TO ENDING PERIOD POVERTY, ORGANIZES POLITICAL ACTION, AND SUPPORTS LOCAL PERIOD PRODUCT DISTRIBUTIONS.

- MY PERSONAL FAVORITE IS THE KWEK SOCIETY, AN INDIGENOUS-RUN NON-PROFIT DEDICATED TO ENDING PERIOD POVERTY IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES.

- HURU INTERNATIONAL SIMILARLY PROVIDES PERIOD PRODUCT TO YOUNG MENSTRUATORS IN AFRICA, THEY ALSO PROVIDE HEALTH EDUCATION, REDUCING STIGMA AROUND PERIODS AND SEX.

- RESISTERHOOD: NEW PALTZ IS A LOCAL GROUP THAT HOLDS ANNUAL 'RED TENT' MENSTRUAL PRODUCT DRIVES FOR FAMILIES OF NEW PALTZ.

THANK YOU!

- THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR READING MY ZINE!
- I'D LOVE TO KNOW WHAT YOU THOUGHT ABOUT IT! PLEASE FILL OUT THE SHORT SURVEY IN THE QR CODE TO THE RIGHT TO LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU LEARNED!
- AND A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO PROFESSOR VARGA, WHO SPARKED MY INTEREST IN SUSTAINABILITY AND BECAME MY FIRST TRUE MENTOR.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? I LOVED

- WE ARE DANCING FOR YOU: NATIVE FEMINISMS AND THE REVITALIZATION OF WOMEN'S COMING-OF-AGE CEREMONIES WRITTEN BY CUTCHA RISLING BALDY
  - HOW AN INDIGENOUS WOMAN BROUGHT BACK TRADITIONAL MENSTRUATION CELEBRATION AND THE IMPACT ON HER DAUGHTER AND TRIBE.
- PERIOD POWER: A MANIFESTO FOR THE MENSTRUAL MOVEMENT WRITTEN BY NADYA OKAMOTO
  - A YOUNG ADULT NOVEL GREAT FOR LEARNING THE BASICS OF MENSTRUAL FEMINISM.
- THE MUSEUM OF MENSTRUATION WEBSITE AND COLLECTION AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY