

The MENSTRUAL issue



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Editor's Note

Eve Kaplan and Alex Wexler

Dear Readers,

Hello from your newest editors! Though this isn't the first issue we've produced, this is the first chance we've had to introduce ourselves, and to introduce a new issue. To start, my name's Alex Wexler, I'm a senior at Oakwood School in North Hollywood California, and I've been a writer for GirlTalk since grade ten, and I was the social media manager last year. And my name is Eve Kaplan, I'm a ninth grader at Cate School in Carpinteria California. I've been writing for GirlTalk since grade seven and was a managing editor in chief last year.

We're ecstatic to introduce the menstrual issue as this issue hits home for many women and menstruators. If you ask anyone who gets their period, we can almost guarantee that they'll have stories of sneaking tampons into the bathroom, being told they weren't allowed to go to the bathroom, of staining their underwear or pants while on their period. Periods have long been associated with embarrassment and shame, but with this issue, we hope to normalize discussions around periods. The issue of menstruation falls hand in hand with issues of race, income inequality, global poverty, and the discussion warrants conversation about the government's attempts to control women's bodies and tax us for having periods. Each article in this issue dives into the nuances of each of these topics and explores the ways in which periods are viewed by society and how period experiences differ across various spectrums.

Since we are now in November and have been GirlTalk's editors since June, we would love to share some of the developments we've made to the magazine or will be making in the near future. We have implemented GirlTalk as a club at Cate School, added more staff editors, and have started following a more consistent publishing schedule in which we publish within the first week of every second month. In the coming weeks we plan to open a submittable, sponsor Instagram posts, plan more events and more. Although GirlTalk has been a functioning magazine since 2017, during our year as editors, we want the magazine to focus on growth. Growth through growing our number of staff writers and artists but especially growing our number of readers. We want the voices and art of each member of GirlTalk to be seen by as many people as possible in order to continue amplifying the voices of females who have so much to say.

The Male Reaction to Menstruation

Maya Maestas

Most people that menstruate whom I know have had a bad experience with men's reactions to this very natural process. We are taught, purposeful or not, to be ashamed of our periods and the way our bodies function. Most of us have our first anatomy class separated by gender, with boys in one room and girls in the other. This often furthers the divide between men and women talking about normal occurrences that happen to all of us. I believe that if we change the way we educate both men and women about periods, then we will be able to change the conversation around menstruation.

When you think of a man or person that doesn't have a period talking about a period, is the first thing you think of positive or negative? When asking around, I've found that most people think of jokes like "She just has her time of the month, that's why she's acting like this" and other jokes about mood swings. Mood swings seem to be the first thing people think of when it comes to the typical experience with menstruation, but lately I've seen a new wave of people talking about period cramps on the app TikTok. Period cramps are caused by the contracting of the uterus.

On my Instagram, I took a poll and asked people to share their experiences with negative and positive male reactions to periods. I got an overwhelming response with people eager to share their experiences. Most

centered around jokes being made, that you can hear anywhere, mostly starting in middle school. In my mind, it's clear that this reaction is rooted in our education.

According to nannocare.com, a company that makes organic period



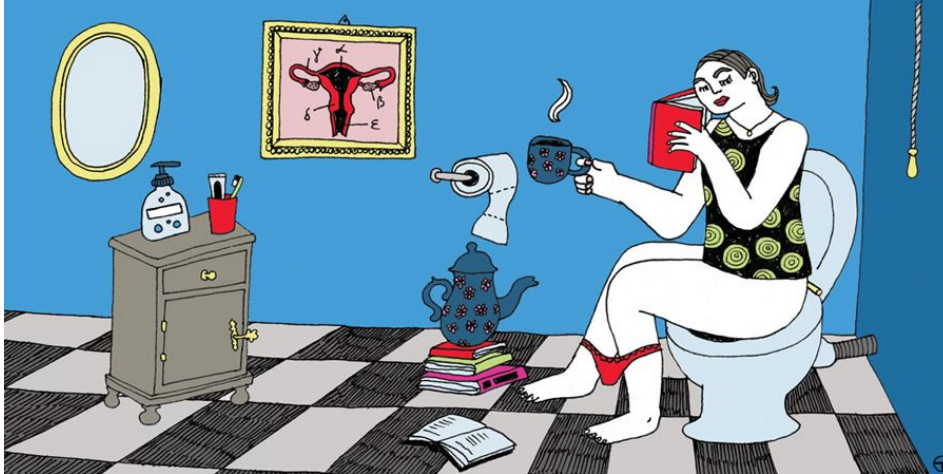
products, "Many men that I talked to never got a real education about menstruation. They may have been told what it biologically was in health class, but a lot of real questions go unanswered, and unasked (due to embarrassment)." (Luckow). I read this and agreed. I've met a lot of men that don't understand what a period even is, and why we have them. I believe that due to a lack of education around the topic, people make uncomfortable or offensive jokes in an attempt to comprehend what they don't understand. My question is, why don't we start asking questions, and why have we been conditioned to hide this very natural part of life?

Overall, there is an obvious need for change and reform when it comes to menstrual education and tolerance in men AND women alike. If we improve the education on these topics then maybe we will be able to improve the conversation that surrounds them. People should be

able to feel comfortable asking for period products or asking for help when it comes to these things without feeling shameful or embarrassed.

Global Period Statistics

Eve Kaplan



From symptoms to supplies every female is affected differently by menstruation. Globally, thousands of females are affected through a lack of period resources. In Ethiopia, Samoa and Loas one in five girls didn't use any suitable menstrual products during their

period. In Niger, Burkina and Faso, that number is one in seven. Half of the girls in Niger lack a private place to change and wash during their periods. The Indian ministry of health reported only 12% of menstaraters in India have access to sanitary products, leaving the other 88% to use unsafe materials like rags and sawdust as an alternative. The lack of sanitation and supplies leads to physical and immediate risks like reproductive and urinary tract infections, according to UNICEF.

While in the United States it is normalized to go on throughout your day not acknowledging or telling anyone you are menstruating, other countries have different cultural expectations. More than half of the women in Bangladesh and more than two-thirds in Nepal say they don't participate in their normal activities while menstruating. In Chad and the Central African Republic one in three said they couldn't participate in said activities.

In Nepal, half of the women from the poorest communities say they eat in a separate place during their periods. One in seven are forced to stay in mud huts or cowsheds while menstruating. The practice of banishing menstruators to huts away from communities is known as chaupadi. It was banned in Nepal but still practiced in many mostly poor or rural communities. Still, even in Nepal's richer communities 30% of women eat in separate places while menstruating and almost all women within Nepal stay away from religious practices during their period.

Menstruation can affect females' education because they aren't able to attend school due to this lack of supplies. In the last year, 15% of girls in Burkina Faso, 20% in Ivory Coast and 23% in Nigeria missed school due to their period. Females who don't receive education are more likely

to enter child marriages, get pregnant at a younger age, become malnourished, experience domestic violence and more.

Globally, many women are forced to choose between groceries or menstrual supplies. The high cost of menstrual supplies is due to the tampon tax. The tampon tax places a sales tax on tampons whereas other essential health punches like condoms and toilet paper are usually tax exempt. Some items less essential than tampons, like golf club memberships are even considered tax-exempt. Although ending the tampon tax would not make period products accessible to all, it is a first step.

Calm Down- It's Just a Period

By Sophie Saxl

During my life as a girl who menstruates, I've spent my fair share of time on the popular period app, Flo- specifically it's secret chats section. Reading the perspectives of other menstruators can be extremely interesting and even comical. Everyone on that app honestly gives such good advice. My friends have even gotten "famous" on Flo period chats based on crazy stories about just being a teenager. I have read the experiences of trans and non-binary people with intense dysphoria caused by periods, or of menstruators with families who act crazy around the subject



of periods. It's all been so insightful to me. However, one thing I've noticed is interesting to compare with my own life is everyone's stories of (cis) men and their reactions to periods.

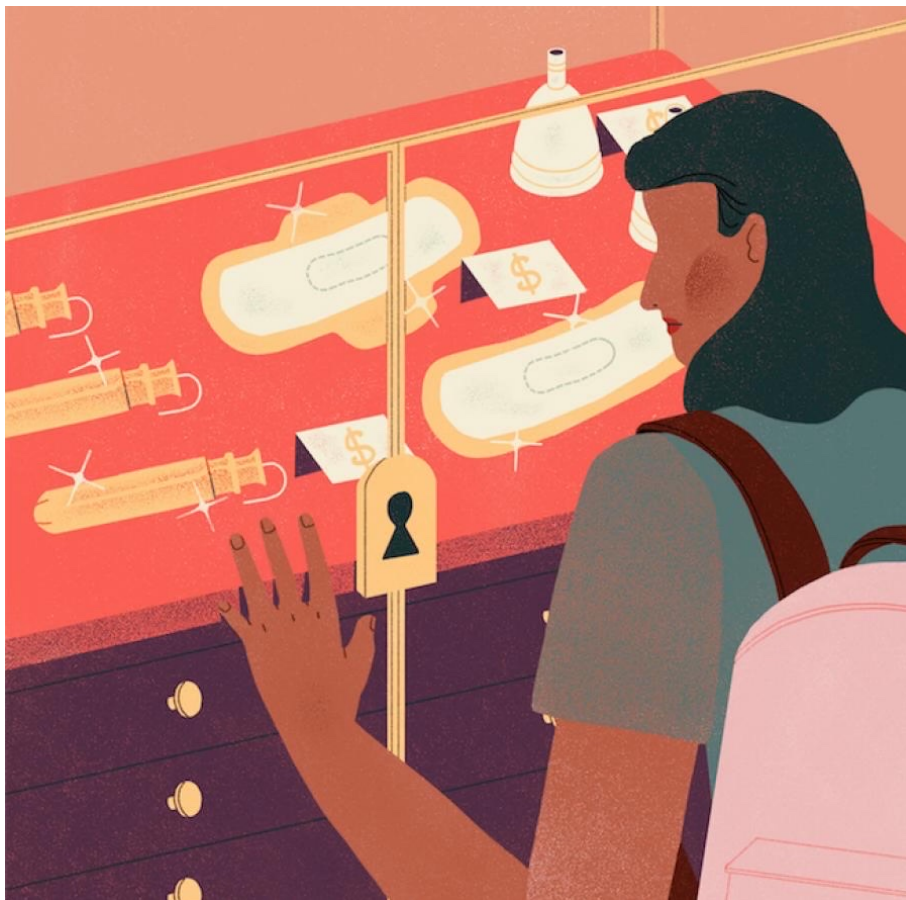
Everyone has their stories. For me, it is when boys at school stare with such wonder and shock at a tampon sticking out of my pocket. Or boys at camp who see my friends with pads in their bags and genuinely asking "What is that?" Or even male teachers with superiority complexes after telling a story of how he let a girl go

to the nurse's office for cramps once. Don't get me wrong, not all men are weird about menstruation. Male friends and teachers have been nice about the whole subject and inconvenience of periods. It's just the overall bewilderment that comes to so many guys when they see signs our periods.

Our standards often become so low and bare that many menstruators dream of men pampering us on our periods. This is something that you can see everywhere, like on TikTok stories, TV shows, and especially the Flo chats.

“My boyfriend bought me chocolate and a teddy bear when I was on my period!”, or “He was so nice when I got blood on my sheets and offered to bring me breakfast in bed!” While these are thoughtful gestures, I feel like it’s been established that this is every menstrators’ dream- it’s not. The idea of a guy treating me like some kind of sick person or a doll is not appealing to me. If someone has more severe conditions, or even just wants to feel loved and cared for, it’s all totally valid. I understand how it could be to some people, but to me it feels condescending. Maybe it’s the internalized idea that “fighting like a girl” is the most powerful thing, or the phrase “anything you can do I can do bleeding” on pins and t-shirts. Something about that idea irks me. I would rather have a guy keep period supplies at his house just in case, make occasional jokes about it, or listen when I need to vent. I don’t want a whole ordeal, nor having it treated like a disease, and I can only assume that that doesn’t just go for me.

Even other menstruating friends have been weird to me about periods. I’m not private about the fact that I get periods. I don’t really complain about cramps or run around school talking about the uterine lining being shed from my body. But I don’t stuff tampons deep into my pockets either, and I won’t shy away from holding one as I walk down the hallway to the bathroom. Just last year I got into a small argument with a classmate of mine about this. She laughed seeing the bright blue and yellow tampax wrapper sticking out of my pocket, but asked me why I always



needed to show off my period to everyone. I was disappointed and frustrated to hear this from a fellow menstruator, and it’s not because I was on my period. This classmate was likely told that periods were shameful or dirty when growing up, and I knew she wasn’t trying to hurt my feelings. But being a human with a period is not something I need to hide. It’s a normal part of life, and I hope that more menstruators can realize this as well. Yet it struck me how internalized misogyny affects us all, to the point where we

degrade our own bodies and their functions. The goal is just for periods to be normalized fully. No ultra-confusion, no judgement, no babying for those who don’t want it.

Eliminate Period Poverty: Take Their Feet off Our Necks

By Sophene Avedissian

“I was paid in cash and it was a real struggle. I ended up being hospitalized with exhaustion twice after collapsing in public and lost two dress sizes while working. My daily diet consisted of just one bottle of Lucozade and one tray of \$1 chips. To be rather crude and honest, it came to the point where I used makeshift tampons and towels out of loo roll. My card got declined when I was buying the cheapest tampons in the store.” These are the words of Elle Rudd, a woman who used to struggle to afford period products. Unfortunately, Rudd’s story is not unique. According to a nonprofit organization working towards ending period poverty, Days for Girls, 500 million girls and women experience period poverty globally. Period poverty is defined as not being able to purchase menstrual care products such as pads, tampons, and menstrual cups, according to Days for Girls, a non-profit organization working towards turning periods into pathways. Period poverty must be eradicated, as it is a major hindrance to gender equality. Inadequate access to menstrual care products prevents girls from attending school and women from attending work, which expands the already growing gender gap. According to BBC News in 2019, it is estimated that 1 in 10 girls in Africa will miss school when they have their periods. When this happens, girls and women are potentially missing crucial opportunities that could greatly alter their future. Likewise, period poverty is a wide wall that women in the workforce are



challenged with. A 2019 Reuters survey of low-income women found that more than 1 in 5 women struggle to afford period products every month. In order for women to reach the other side of the wall, period poverty needs to be combated. On the other side of the wall is the freedom to pursue all ambitions, on the other side of the wall is menstrual equity, and on the other side of the wall is equality.

There are numerous laws in place that exacerbate period poverty, one of the most infamous being the tampon tax, the sales tax placed on menstrual care products. In 2018, InStyle Magazine estimated that with the tampon tax reaching 7% in some states, the average menstruator will spend \$100 to \$225 in taxes on tampons in their lifetime. The tampon tax is a hurdle in a track and field competition. Additionally, the tampon tax treats period products like

luxuries. In some states, a sugary Snickers bar is tax-free, but an essential product like a tampon or pad is not. What if this was you? What if you had no way of affording period products? The tampon tax contributes heavily to period poverty and must be removed to achieve menstrual equity.

Those who try to undermine period poverty's severity frequently state that period poverty only occurs in certain areas of the world. More specifically, many people believe that period poverty is only a prominent and perpetual problem in developing countries. However, Global Citizen in 2019 states, "In the US, nearly 20% of girls have missed school because they could not afford period products. Period poverty does not discriminate.

Until period poverty is tackled, women will continue to be in the same uncomfortable position as Elle Rudd. I have known people who have experienced period poverty, and I have heard the same phrase repeatedly: "I feel disgusting." Period poverty is not only a problem that affects menstruators physically, but it also impacts them mentally. Everyone should be able to keep their integrity and dignity. When tampons and pads are considered human rights and not luxuries, our world will take a big step closer to achieving gender equality. When people realize that period poverty is a universal issue, our world will take a big step closer to achieving gender equality. When period poverty is eliminated, the brethren will take their feet off our necks.

Resources:

Note: Previously published in Teen Ink.



Trans Menstruation

Maggie Albrecht (they/them)

Transgender and non-binary folks need to be included in the menstrual conversation. Although only people with uteri can experience the cycle of menstruation, where a uterine lining is released from the body as blood from the vagina if conception does not occur, not all menstruators identify as female. Many transgender men and non-binary people will experience periods alongside their cisgender female counterparts. Additionally, not all women menstruate, either due to being a

transgender woman, or a cisgender woman who _____.

While periods are a discomfort to almost all who experience them, they can have a unique impact on trans and non-binary folks. All trans folks have different relationships with their

periods, just as all menstruators have different relationships with their periods. But for many transgender and non-binary folks, dysphoria is a major component of their relationship with their body and its functions. Some trans people have expressed that menstruating is not associated with their identity, but purely a bodily function. While for others, it can feel like a disconnection between their body and identity.

When I first got my period in 7th grade, I immediately felt disgusted by the process of my body. I had prayed for years that I wouldn't start until I was at least fifteen, or even not menstruate at all. I would discover that I identified as non-binary about a year and a half later. Periods meant dealing with something that was both irritating and also something that felt like it should not be happening to my body. I asked myself, "Why do I have to cope with this if I don't even need it?" I resented my time of the month and felt detached from my body.

Dysphoria is not something that can be easily abated, but what we can do as individuals is to change our language when talking about a natural bodily process. Instead of saying "women", use "menstruators". Instead of "feminine products", say "period products". That way, we normalize the fact that people with periods are a large, diverse group. Furthermore, period products should reach people of all genders. Only putting period products in women's restrooms cuts off access to them for trans men. As a society, we need to include all identities in the menstrual conversation, and not shut out those who don't identify as female.

Period Poverty

Eleni Bhatai

On average, menstruators spend \$13.25 per month on period products per year. This cost quickly adds up to \$156 per year and \$6,360 spent during their menstruating lifetime. Period products are taxed and treated as luxury items rather than basic public health needs like soap



and toilet paper found in every bathroom. This high price, along with the struggle it takes to obtain the products, makes it difficult for people, especially low-income people, to afford these necessities.

In 2018, 63% of low-income menstruating people said they couldn't afford period products, and 20% said they face this problem every month. Period poverty affects adults and teenage students, with 1/5 teenagers struggling or

unable to pay for sanitary products and 1/4 needing to miss class due to their period. With the menstrual equity movement picking up traction, more schools, prisons, and homeless shelters provide free period products in their bathrooms. Yet, this fight for sex equality is nowhere near over. The "tampon tax" is a luxury tax placed on anyone who menstruates in 34 states. This tax goes against human decency and the 14th amendment by unjustifiably taxing people based on sex.

In order to provide free products in public bathrooms for everyone, Congress would need to pass federal legislation that would provide states with the money necessary to ensure free period products in public bathrooms for all to use. Period poverty is an unacceptable circumstance that is hardly discussed and fought against as much as it should be. By simply acknowledging this reality for those in lower economic classes, the steps needed to solve this problem will make every menstruator's life a little bit easier.

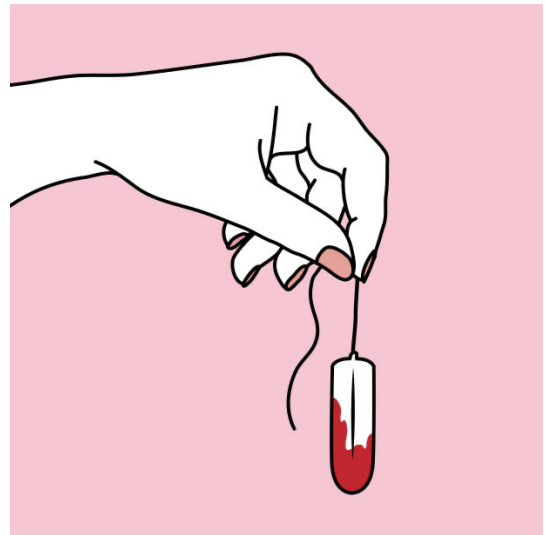
Orange Chewable Advil: A School Week on My Period

Amelia Bluman

I get up in the middle of physics class, needing to use the bathroom, feeling as if my bladder is mocking me. One minute I need to use the restroom, the next I don't. Despite the confusion, I walk into the bathroom, realizing I got my period. Scrambling out of the stall, I glance quickly at the girl washing her hands at the sink, grab a tampon and walk back in, wondering if she noticed. But why would she care anyways and why do I even care? I rush back to

class, whispering to a close friend that I got my period, and she whispers back that our cycles are synced. We celebrate as if we won a grand prize, joking about the full moon and how we dread the upcoming 7 days of bleeding. I continue on with my day, making sure to drink enough water in order to prevent cramps, remembering tips and myths I've heard throughout the years. I struggle through the stress of homework, feeling droplets well up in my eyes while I attempt pre-calculus. A single tear falls onto the graph paper, and I remind myself it's just my period talking, utilizing these monthly visits as not just emotional excuses but validation.

Day two of my period sets in. I sit in English class trying to analyze the ins and outs of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and experience a sudden stabbing feeling in my lower stomach that makes me want to crawl into bed. My mind shuts off as I stare at the white paint chipping on the wall, hoping to escape the pain while worrying that I'm not contributing to the class discussion. I ask to use the restroom and sit on the white porcelain, crossing my fingers that maybe it's just my stomach acting up as it usually does but end up going to the nurse to ask for Advil. The chewable tablets fall onto my palm, while the rest of my body feels disoriented and weak. The





orange flavor lands on my tongue as I wish I knew how to swallow an actual pill. I head back to English, waiting the instructed 20-30 minutes for the aching to subside.

The week drags on, continuing this monotonous cycle of cramps, headaches and the explanations. Whether it be to teachers or to people who don't menstruate, having to tell them that I'm on my period can be uncomfortable due to fear of judgement. Normalizing period discussion is so incredibly important, and I head into every conversation with confidence and self-assurance, despite possible lack of understanding. I tend to reflect back on an experience at the end of last school year when a teacher wouldn't allow me to use the restroom. I began to explain that I was on my period, but he cut me off and let me go as my face burned bright red under my mask. I didn't

feel embarrassed from being on my period, seeing as I'm generally open about it but more so felt generally frustrated that I was even denied to go in the first place. I try to explain to friends who don't menstruate why I might seem "off" emotionally this week and they seem to understand or at least tell me that they do. They tell me that the way I've been acting makes so much sense, yet I wonder why I couldn't just feel these emotions if I wasn't on my period.

Menstruating isn't some taboo, girly, private experience. It can be extremely emotionally and physically draining, especially when I need to have my mind as sharp as possible during class. As soon as my period comes to an end, I feel a sense of accomplishment, as if it doesn't happen every month. It can become all-consuming, and having other menstruators who can empathize with these feelings is beyond helpful. I call the friend who my cycle is synced with, and we congratulate each other for powering through the week. Orange-flavored chewable Advil once a month isn't the worst.

Period Poverty In America

Lily Kramon

As of early 2021, the current homeless population in the United States is estimated to be 552,830, about 223,000 are women. The unsanitary conditions that homeless people face cause lots of challenges when women get their period. Pads and tampons are expensive, and many shelters lack the resources to provide the help needed for women experiencing their period. According to the National Organization For Women Foundation (NOW Foundation), women

spend about 20 dollars on period products per cycle, which adds up to almost 18,000 dollars in her lifetime. Many homeless women don't have 20 dollars every cycle to spend on period products, because they also need to spend that money on food, water, and other important resources. Because of the pricing on menstrual products, many homeless women are forced to make their own pads out of toilet paper or find products from places such as the 99 cent store. Pads and tampons from these types of stores are made with cheap materials, and don't provide the protection needed when a woman experiences her period. A study done by the NOW Foundation showed that when homeless women have to make their own pads, they can be exposed to bacteria that can lead to yeast infections and urinary tract infections. Not only is this a health and sanitation issue, but it can feel embarrassing and uncomfortable when these women are unable to fully clean themselves when on their period. Another issue that arises when homeless women are on their period is that period symptoms can be painful and uncomfortable. Cramps, back pain, and bloating are only some of the possible period symptoms, and they get in the way of your day to day routine. Homeless women who might need to walk long distances or possibly take care of family members cannot complete that work without feeling upset and in pain throughout the day. Medicine such as Advil and Tylenol can help with period symptoms, but they cost money that adds more to spend along with period products and other resources, which might not be possible for homeless women. Many countries around the world are working to make menstrual products free, and politicians and activists in the United States are also working to make that happen. There is work that needs to be done to help stock homeless shelters with enough menstrual products, and make all period products including pain relievers accessible to women experiencing homelessness. Periods are something that every female has to experience, and no matter what their housing status is, they should be able to take care of themselves each cycle.

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