Are you MENSTRUATING today?
Menstrual Activism: Decolonizing Patriarchal Knowledge of Women's Menstruation

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Literature Overview

Understanding the Menstruating Body
- Much negative folklore contributes to the construction of the menstruating body as taboo, dirty, "leaky" and "viscous" and needing to be managed. (4,6)
- Women and girls often use slang, euphemisms, omission, and circumlocution to speak about menstruation in order to manage the "communication taboo" and the shame surrounding menses. (7)
- PMS has become the explanation for "hysteria" or otherwise "outspoken woman of modern times." (8)
- Constructing the menstruating body as unclean and dirty with the language of "feminine hygiene" helps companies like Tampax and Kotex market their products to women. (9)

Managing Women's Bodies
- The rapid expansion of menstrual repression products like Seasonal, Lybrel and Depo-Provera construct the non-menstruating body the ideal. (11)
- Women and girls lack knowledge about menstruation and ovulation, and rarely receive exposure to alternative products. (2)

Activism
- "Menstrual health activism is rooted in the women's health movement of the 1970s and 1980s, which challenged the male-dominated medical establishment and empowered women to take control of their bodies and their health." - Chris Bobel (1)
- Activists have used multiple tactics: raising awareness, alternative menstrual products, challenging negative attitudes, fighting medicalization, and alternative menstrual products and were encouraged to educate another person about the intervention that they had encountered.

Celebrating the Power of the Cunt

In light of this information presented to us in an undergraduate course on Psychology of Gender, we were challenged to do some activism of our own.

Method
- We staged an on campus, public intervention, spreading our knowledge about the dangers of mainstream menstrual products through the use of flyers, posters, and pictures of alternative menstrual products.
- We approached students passing by to inquire their thoughts (positive or negative) towards the usage and potential dangers of mainstream products in addition to giving information about alternative products.
- Participants were asked if they (or their partner) would use alternative menstrual products.
- Participants gave final feedback or reactions to the intervention, then were given a flyer detailing the R.E.D.S.C.A.M acronym, and alternative menstrual products and were encouraged to educate another person about the intervention that they had encountered.

Discussion
- Women curious about the intervention more often came up to us without being solicited by group members, and more often talked about their own menstrual cycles and products that they currently used and expressed openness to the idea of talking about menstruating bodies and the practice of using alternative menstrual products.
- Men who had female partners, or close relationships with their mothers or sisters were more receptive to a discussion about menstruation in general, particularly in sharing knowledge with their partners, mothers and sisters about the dangers of mainstream products and possible usage of alternative products.
- Half of the population we encountered on campus rejected any portion of the intervention. Many younger females and older males were not only unresponsive, but visibly hostile towards our behaviors and the content of the intervention.
- The campus police were notified that we were staging an intervention surrounding ideas about menstruation, and were no more than 20 feet outside the vicinity of our intervention for the hour and a half that it was staged on campus.

Call to Action

In order for women to experience healthier and safer menstrual cycles we must come together and educate each other on the missing information in the media regarding alternative menstrual products. Without a strong positive dialogue and a rejection of negative connotations surrounding menstruation, women (and men) will continue to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable with their menstruating bodies.

What Can You Do?...
- Create a positive dialogue surrounding menstruation!
- Deconstruct the "shameful period" narrative in the media and replace it with factual and beneficial conversation. Make menstruation a comfortable and common topic to discuss for not only you, but others as well.
- Disperse pamphlets and flyers in local public restrooms to increase awareness of the natural products that are available.
- STOP using mainstream products and START using alternative menstrual products (Diva Cup, Glad Rags, SoftCup, Lunapads, etc.)
- Question why stores do not sell alternative products and DEMAND that more options are made available in local and national stores.
- Spread awareness of menstruation by educating both women and men about the dangers and disadvantages of mainstream menstrual products.
- Advocate for sex during menstruation! Deconstruct the idea that menstruation prohibits sexual pleasure and enjoyment!
- Promote early awareness of the options we have for menstrual hygiene by reaching out and educating adolescent girls and young women.
- Support stores that sell natural menstrual products
- Share the information you learned today with all of the women in your life!
- “Out” yourself as menstruating more often and make an intervention when you encounter hostility!

Want to get more involved?? Talk to us about more resources for menstrual activism!

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4. Bobel, Chris. 2011. The media's construction of menstruation in menstrual product commercials demonstrates societies' taboos about menstruation and further propagates the need for concealment and falsities about what actually happens during menstruation. (4,10,8)
9. Lybrel, Kotex market their products to women as taboo, dirty, "leaky" and "viscous" and need to be managed. (4,6)