

Fear of a Crimson Planet: Information on Radical Menstruation

Prepared as part of the Cultural Revitalization Project

The information herein has been researched extensively, using respected resources. We believe that menstruators should be in charge of our own health, and learning about our bodies is a vital step towards wellness; however, medical questions that may arise should be directed toward an actual physician.

This material has been prepared with the intention that readers copy and distribute it. There is no copyright on this, but we ask that credit be given when material is used or cited.

Table of Contents

Glossary...	2-3
Not all Women Menstruate...	4
Radical Menstruation...	5
Fear of a Crimson Planet...	6-7
Corporate Menstrual Devices...	8-9
Menstrual Activism Overview...	10
Alternative Menstrual Products...	10-14
Nothing	
Organic Pads and Tampons	
Menstrual Panties	
Washable Cloth Pads	
Menstrual Cup	
Natural Sea Sponge	
Sample Letters...	15-17
Sample Petition...	18
Creative Actions...	19-20
Menstruator Wellness...	21-22
Resources...	23-24
Economic Comparison Chart...	25
Environmental Comparison Chart...	25
Contact Information...	26

GLOSSARY

Here are some terms that may be used throughout the packet. The glossary is intentionally placed at the beginning of the document so that the reader can become acquainted with terms before delving in.

Absorbent refers to how well an item can soak up liquid.

Amenorrhea is the absence of the menstrual period.

Chlorine a poisonous gaseous chemical element

Corporate pertaining to a large company or business. One connotation of this term is that such a business is interested in money and not the needs, desires, or concerns (health, environmental, ethical) of its customers.

Cunt the female genitals. It is also the title of a book by Inga Muscio that is about reclaiming the word and our bodies.

Dioxin a poisonous compound produced as a byproduct of some manufacturing processes. It is highly carcinogenic.

Dysmenorrhea is the medical term for painful menstrual periods.

Endometriosis a painful condition that results when endometrium grows somewhere besides the uterine lining.

Gender an obsolete socially-constructed phenomenon. Sex describes the type of reproductive organs one is born with. Gender attributes certain behaviors and expectations to the sex. Throughout this document, *women* and *menstruators* will be used synonymously even though not everyone who menstruates is a woman, and not all women menstruate.

Genetically Modified (GM) an organism containing genetic material that has been artificially altered. Genetic material experiences natural mutations, but GM organisms have been tampered with.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) an official organization that determines the safety of food and drugs. Tampons and pads are *not* inspected by the FDA for safety or contents.

Menarche the first menstrual cycle a person experiences.

Menopause the time when a person's menstrual period gradually stops.

Menses is another word for menstruation.

Menstruation discharge of uterine lining approx. every twenty-eight days.

Menstruator is a person who menstruates. This term is used to be inclusive of all genders who experience menstrual periods, but may or may not identify as women.

Misogyny hatred of women.

Organic produced without use of artificial chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

Patriarchy a society in which men hold all the power, overtly or covertly.

Perimenopause is the transitional phase before menopause.

Rayon synthetic fiber used in corporate tampons and pads.

Shame feeling of embarrassment or distress arising from one's awareness that one has done something wrong or foolish. Menstruators too often have a feeling of shame about menstruation, despite how natural the process is.

Tampon a plug of soft material placed in the vagina to absorb menstrual fluid. Typically made from rayon or cotton.

Toxic Shock Syndrome a potentially life-threatening illness that is linked to super-absorbent tampons.

Wellness refers to not simply alleviating pain, but constantly taking care of oneself.

NOT ALL WOMEN MENSTRUATE

Most women will menstruate at some point in their lives, but to state that “all women bleed” is inaccurate for several reasons.

Menstruation is not bleeding. There is no open wound. Menstruation is the shedding of uterine lining when the egg is not fertilized during that cycle. Menstrual fluid is not entirely composed of blood either.

Women might not menstruate because:

- They have not yet entered puberty (amenorrhea)
- They have gone through menopause
- They do not have enough body fat due to an eating disorder
- They are anemic
- Their method of birth control has eliminated or reduced their menstrual cycle.
- They have recently switched to a vegan or vegetarian diet, but do not eat well (noodles and bread do not make a balanced meal).
- They are pregnant
- They are nursing
- They have had a hysterectomy
- They have a lot of stress—death of a loved one, job loss, etc.
- They have drastically changed their sleeping patterns
- They are over-exercising
- They are traveling
- They lack or have non-functioning fallopian tubes, ovaries, vaginas, etc.

Men might menstruate because:

- They were born with female reproductive organs, and have chosen to not have those parts removed or operated on.

Gender is a social construct. Someone can be born with male chromosomes, but live as a woman. Someone can be born with female chromosomes and identify as a man. Some people believe that gender is obsolete, inconclusive, erroneous, and arbitrary. Those who are born intersex may have a gender assigned to them.

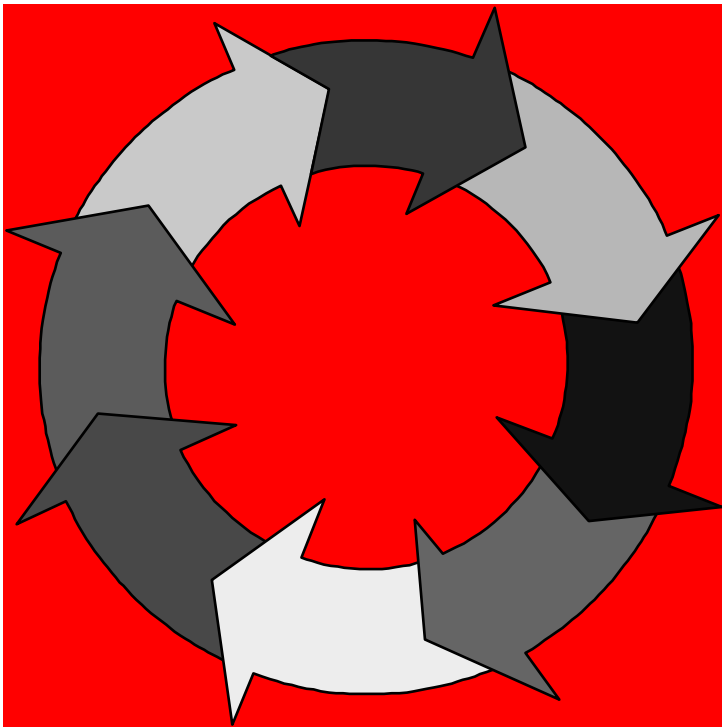
For the sake of simplicity and coherence, female pronouns and references will be used throughout, as it applies to the majority of those who menstruate, but at the same time, it is acknowledged that not all who menstruate are women, and not all women menstruate.

RADICAL MENSTRUATION

This is a call for menstrual activism. The term *radical* refers to the root of a thing. Political radicals strive to get to the root of a problem, and create change from that point. The term *radical menstruation* means that the root of the problem with menstruation is not the period itself, but the rotten, shameful attitudes, greed, and miseducation that is abundant in American society.

Changing the way that menstruation (and women) is perceived in this society requires patient, participation, and persistence. Continual critique of those perpetrating misogyny must be developed, and at the same time, we must continuously spread the message that menstruation is a healthy and natural biological function.

There are a few other sources existing on paper and the internet that evangelically deal with this topic. Some of what you find here may overlap, and some may be different. The final resource section exists to prove that this material is not fabricated, but is also included so that readers can explore as many other portals of information as possible. All authors have unique voices and special interests which allow them to approach particular subjects well, while other areas may be overlooked. If there is a gap in the communal well of knowledge, it is up to you to fill it.



How our 21st century American society perceives and handles menstruation is complex, and this packet is meant as an overview, rather than as an exhaustive resource. The following issues are interconnected: shame, greed, racism, transphobia, heterosexism, fear, misogyny, ignorance, sexism, egotism, parasitic corporate values, hatred, and resistance to change. To change the ~~system~~ way we deal with menstruation in the United States, we need to address all of these issues. An individual is not expected to take on a kind of crusade, but an individual can do something.

Consciousness raising is no less important than action, as the latter cannot happen without the former. An individual should decide what her comfort level, resources, and schedule allows, and work with that. Understand that change is absolutely possible!

Culture of Shame, Misogyny, and Opportunistic Marketing

Silent tampon and pad wrappers are new to the market, and are the most concrete evidence one can provide to show how shame, greed, misogyny, and bad prioritizing all work together in 21st-century America. There is no cure for breast cancer, cervical cancer, HIV, or herpes, but marketing teams at corporations have decided that investing in developing a product that allows women to hide their periods is a sound decision. Most women will menstruate at some point in their lives; however, the message being sent by the “sanitary product” companies is that it is okay to die from breast cancer, but by all means, the woman in the adjacent public bathroom stall must not know that you are changing your tampon or pad. These companies know that women are raised to be ashamed of their periods, and know that fear-based marketing is effective.

Many of us are taught to hide our new menstrual products. Used menstrual products, we are told, must be hidden way at the bottom of the trashcan, preferably wrapped in a huge wad of toilet paper.

Girls are taught that the worst kind of shame is to have the dark red menstrual fluid soak through. We are made to be ashamed of the very substance that the fetus requires in utero, and yet women are socialized to be mothers. We are socialized to be nurturing, though women who seek to nurture themselves by investigating their bodily functions are considered odd. Women are socialized to be sexy, but are sold products (tampons) that absorb the vaginal secretions that allow for comfortable vaginal penetration.

Magazines with a teenage demographic reinforce this culture of shame, misogyny, and opportunistic marketing. There are pages devoted to teen readers sharing their embarrassing experiences. It is not uncommon to find a tampon or pad advertisement on the page following a young girl’s story about how her menstrual fluids soaked through her pants on a first date. The message being sent to teen girls is clear: You can avoid the humiliation of having your period by consuming [insert brand here] tampons or pads.

The most offensive example of our uneducated society is right in the realm of public education. Sex education leaves much to be desired, but to the surprise of some, so does education about puberty. The informational packets (menstrual kits) that accompany dry lectures given by typically uncomfortable educators are not informational at all. In fact, these packets are entirely biased and promotional as those who supply the packets, free of charge, to the schools are specific pad and tampon corporations. Wonder why alternative menstrual products are still a mystery to most women? Combine corporate education of our kids with the general taboo about menstruation, and you have your answer. It is not in the best (read: financial) interest of the three major sanitary product corporations to provide information about reusable

menstrual products, so, they either pretend these items do not exist, or refer to them as antiquated items that nobody uses anymore unless she lives in a third world country.

Why do the schools allow for this to happen? If you look at a chart showing how tax money is distributed in the United States, you can see that education is not the priority. What money schools do have is used on building repairs and textbooks. Usually, the health educator is also a gym teacher. Usually, their budget will be spent on equipment for the gym. Neutral, unbiased informational packets generally cost money, or the makers do not/can not advertise as much as corporations can.

A corporation is willing to give free “informational packets” (advertisement) to schools across the country because they are trolling for future customers. Brand loyalty must be achieved in the young, which is why sneaker and soda companies direct their campaigns at children and adolescents. It has been shown that the brand of an item that a person has been exposed to and purchases first is the one that the person will likely continue to buy throughout her lifetime. With this understood, it is no wonder why these companies can give away a few free pads or tampons to young girls. We hear stories about how despicable drug dealers give potential customers a free joint, line of coke, or injection of heroin. They do this to get their client hooked and coming back. Similarly, women who menstruate will be in need of an absorbent product for several decades. Chances are good that if Brand X was the one they used at menarche, it will continue to be their brand.

The whole discussion of shame and misogyny is a sort of chicken-versus-egg idea. It is hard to tell where shame originally came from, but it constantly grows and feeds.

Children who attend parochial schools are still taught that menstruation is the Curse of Eve. Some cultures believe that menstruation is mysterious and powerful. Others view it as an ailment. Menstruation is not understood. Women are continually accused of having PMS whenever they behave assertively or show emotion. While *Premenstrual Syndrome* is a real condition that affects *some* women (moodiness, water retention, headaches, exhaustion), it has been hijacked and used as a term to describe uppity women. Girls who do not know better keep this myth alive by blaming any outburst on PMS, whether or not they are about to begin their menstrual cycles. Menstruation, we are taught, is a topic not to discuss. There are even women who, when they read about menstruation as a positive and not shameful experience, decide that what they have just read is disgusting or obscene. This mindblowing shame and misogyny is what I refer to as *Fear of a Crimson Planet* (apologies to Public Enemy).

CORPORATE MENSTRUAL DEVICES

By naming the offensive corporations, we would be giving them free advertising space. A corporate menstrual device is the product you can find in any chain supermarket or department store. You can find it by looking for the thick bags and boxes that are covered with euphemisms. These devices are advertised on television and in magazines, and are sometimes accompanied by a mock demonstration of absorbency using a thin blue liquid to represent what is actually a reddish-brown substance that tends to be viscous. Corporate menstrual devices are bleached white, and are usually individually wrapped.

CORPORATE TAMPONS

These tampons are advertised as products that make it possible for women to be free during their menstrual periods. They fail to acknowledge that one can ride a bike or horse, go swimming, and wear tight clothing while using nothing or reusable items to absorb their flow.

Tampons are used once and then discarded. They are non-flushable. Some brands claim to be flushable, but none really are. The average woman tosses 240 tampons (plus applicators, wrappers, and several boxes) every year. Additionally, many women use pantyliners as a backup to their tampons, creating even more waste that sits in the landfill.

Tampons are expensive! The average tampon user will spend around \$900 (plus taxes) on these disposable items over two decades. This does not include the cost for calling a plumber when a woman flushes tampons and causes the toilet to stop working.

Corporate tampons are detrimental to the environment. Over twenty years, a typical tampon user may toss 4,800 non-biodegradable rayon plugs. The mass manufacturing of tampons and pads causes pollution during the production process.

Tampon use has been connected to Toxic Shock Syndrome, a rare but sometimes fatal infection. Tampons absorb vaginal secretions, and this combined with the harsh rayon make for a prime environment for infection. Tampons can worsen menstrual cramps. Not every person can use a tampon, as they can be uncomfortable, painful, or cause irritation. The FDA does not regulate tampons or pads.

CORPORATE PADS

Though less evil than tampons because they are worn externally, pads are just as wasteful.

Corporate pads are readily available, but are disposed of after one use. If the adhesive gets wet or sticks to itself, the pads do not adhere to the panties.

Pads are less expensive than tampons, though the cost for a one-time-use item is outrageous.

Corporate pads are not biodegradable. The cotton/rayon contents are surrounded in layers of plastic. Then, each pad is wrapped in a plastic pouch. A seemingly random number of these pouches are put into a larger plastic bag.

Pads are not always comfortable. They can shift. The adhesive can pull on hair and skin. In the summer, the pads seem to make for a humid and sticky environment. They can cause irritation.

Pads are safer than tampons because they are worn externally; however, lengthy exposure to chemicals may cause health problems.

MENSTRUAL ACTIVISM

There are several ways to combat this climate of shame and violence. We must fight it on the personal, social, educational, and corporate levels. This is an overview of some ways to make a difference. This packet is not geared specifically towards college students, as we believe that interest in health and social issues continues after one receives a diploma. Tailor your choice of actions to your reality. Search the resource section for more ideas. Weave the personal with the political. If you *are* a college student (or professor or staff member), check out the Tampaction campaign, as they are focused on student activism.

ALTERNATIVE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

Most of these alternatives are “green” items, though a few are not. To be fair, all known menstrual products will be discussed. Any time an object is inserted, there is a minimal risk of either Toxic Shock Syndrome or infection; however, with sustainable alternatives, these risks are incredibly rare, and can be significantly reduced if the user washes her hands with soap and water before inserting a sponge, tampon, menstrual cup, or diaphragm.

NOTHING

It takes a lot of menstrual fluid to ever actually soak through one’s clothes. If you have a light-to-medium flow, this is a viable option. Wear underwear and jeans, and possibly a long shirt. Keep the clothing colors dark.

This method costs nothing if you use the old stained panties that you reserve for wear during your menstrual period anyhow.

If your panties are cotton, they will biodegrade when you eventually send them to the landfill.

It is as comfortable as your underwear is.

If you change your underwear daily, there should not be any health risks.

ORGANIC PADS & TAMPONS

These are worn like the corporate menstrual devices.

In general, the cost is about the same for these as for the corporate devices, though some women have reported that in certain regions, the cost is more than double. Cost is usually determined by supply and demand. If you live in a rural area, the price for a box of organic pads or tampons may be significantly higher.

These are 95% biodegradable. While it is wasteful because you use the items once and then throw them away, they do disintegrate almost entirely when they are sent to the dump. The manufacturing process is better for the environment because the companies are not bleaching the cotton.

These are far more comfortable than the corporate devices, since these are all-cotton, and are not rayon-blends.

The TSS risk is basically nonexistent because the tampons are not made of harsh rayon fibers. You can get Toxic Shock Syndrome from synthetic tampons, but not from organic all-cotton tampons. This does not mean you can leave the tampon in you for days on end. Treat it as you would a “regular” tampon.

MENSTRUAL PANTIES

These are thick panties to be worn on light flow days, or as a backup to tampons. Currently only one company sells these, but you can sew your own.

You wear these as regular underwear and launder the same. Presoak in cold water if you do not want stains.

These are a little pricey, but are a relatively new product, so the cost is bound to come down as more people buy these.

Since these are made of organic cotton, they are biodegradable. If you make your own, please use cotton fabric so that the underwear will disintegrate when you no longer use them.

The company that sells them offers panties in bikini, thong, and brief styles. Choose whichever style is most comfortable for you.

WASHABLE CLOTH PADS

Reusable cotton/flannel pads are attached around your underwear by snaps or velcro. These can be purchased or homemade. A no-sew solution is to safety pin a folded rag or washcloth to your underwear.

As long as you have clean pads at the beginning of your cycle and access to a washing machine, then this is a convenient method. After use, you may wish to presoak pads in cold water. Change water everyday. Launder as usual, avoiding perfumed detergents. If changing pads away from home, place soiled pad in a plastic baggie or other pouch, and launder as usual upon return.

The upfront cost for washable menstrual pads can seem steep, but they work out to be a sound investment. Instead of spending over \$400 in a decade on throwaway pads, you would spend under \$60 on cloth pads. The cost can be even less if you sew your own pads, or simply pin rags to panties.

So long as the cloth pads are made from cotton, they are entirely biodegradable when you finally decide to throw them out. If you buy unbleached cotton pads, the environmental impact is minimal.

Washable pads are comfortable. The material breathes well. Cotton is soft on the skin. There is no adhesive to pull at hair or skin. Reusable pads do not cause chafing like plastic-wrapped corporate pads do. You determine how many liners to use, controlling absorbancy and thickness of the pads.

To make your own washable pads, you can find patterns in zines and pamphlets or online. You should use cotton or flannel/cotton to make these, and might consider using terrycloth as an absorbent insert. You can make pads in a variety of patterns, styles, colors, lengths, widths, and girths. Remember that any substance in direct contact with the skin may result in absorption of its ingredients. It is healthier to choose unbleached, undyed fabrics for making menstrual pads. Wash fabric before first use.

When laundering, it helps to place cloth pads in a lingerie bag so that retrieval from washer and dryer is fast.

MENSTRUAL CUPS

These reusable cups are made from natural gum rubber, latex, or silicone depending upon which brand you buy. They can last around 8-10 years.

To use: Push the sides of the cup together, and insert. To remove it, pinch the bottom of the cup to break the suction. Empty fluids into sink or toilet, wipe or rinse out the menstrual cup, and reinsert. Before first use and at end of cycle, clean menstrual cup thoroughly with gentle soap and hot water.

Because the cup lasts so long, you conveniently will not need to go on emergency menstrual product runs for many years. These cups generally come in two sizes. The cup is more convenient than tampons because the average menstruator needs to empty it only twice every day. The menstrual cup does not absorb vaginal secretions. It collects menstrual fluid. Like tampons, the menstrual cup is not comfortable for every woman. For some, it is a matter of getting the proper size. Some menstruators who are not in touch with their bodies have difficulty using the cup at first because it requires more intimate contact with oneself than tampons or pads do. Fortunately most makers of menstrual cups (and cloth pads) have a full refund available for 60-90 days after purchase if you are unable to use the product or are not satisfied with it.

The upfront cost for a menstrual cup is a hindrance for some, but it works out to be the most economical choice next to using nothing. Menstrual cups average around \$25-35. Again, if the cup does not work out for you, a full refund is possible.

Although it is not clear how well/if menstrual cups are biodegradable, this is one piece of refuse per decade, versus the thousands of pads and tampons you would toss during the same time frame.

As long as the user cleans her cup properly and empties it a few times during the day, these are a safer alternative to tampons. Those who are allergic to latex should obviously avoid menstrual cups made from latex.

Menstrual cups, sea sponges, and cloth pads allow the menstruator to collect her fluids. By soaking used pads and sponges in water, and emptying the cup, one can use menstrual fluids as plant fertilizer.

There is a brand of disposable menstrual cups that are meant to be used once and then thrown away. They can be used for up to twelve hours. These are not particularly environmentally or economically sound choices; however, these could be used as a transition to reusable menstrual cups if you are nervous about making more of an investment before knowing if your body will accept something this shape. The disposable menstrual cups are not exactly the same shape as the reusable ones.

Some women use their diaphragms to collect menstrual fluids. These devices require you to be properly fitted for one by a doctor.

NATURAL SEA SPONGE

The natural sea sponge is harvested from the ocean. Vegans may wish to avoid this option.

To use: Trim sponge to be about the same size as a tampon. Moisten sponge (wring excess water) and insert. Remove, rinse thoroughly, and reinsert. At end of cycle, soak your sponge in a water and vinegar or water and baking soda solution. Rinse the sponge, air dry, and store in a cool, dry place.

Sponges last for up to six months. Like the menstrual cup, they are convenient because you only need one for your entire cycle. A drawback of the sponge is that like tampons, they can leak if one laughs, sneezes, coughs or yells. You can buy a sea sponge at art, beauty supply, or health stores, as well as from a few companies that sell other sustainable menstrual product alternatives.

Sponges are relatively inexpensive, both upfront and in the long run. You only need two or three sponges per year.

Sea sponges are natural and disintegrate completely.

If not cleaned properly, sea sponges can present a health risk, just as tampons left in too long increase one's chances for getting Toxic Shock Syndrome. The TSS risk for sponges is minimal because they are much gentler than tampons, and have not been bleached.

SAMPLE LETTERS

Edit, personalize, and format before printing. The first letter was adapted from one posted on the Tampaction website. All others are original. Adapt language and tone as necessary.

REQUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES

August 1, 2004

Janie Redflow: Store Manager,

We are writing to request that our Overpriced University Bookstore stock sustainable menstrual products. Currently, the only products available at the store are bleached, disposable tampons and pads. Because we care about the environment and the health of the students, faculty, staff, and community members who may shop at the bookstore, we are writing to express our concern about the hazardous menstrual products being sold to us. Tampax, Playtex, and OB, all of which use chlorine dioxide to bleach their pesticide-laden cotton and rayon menstrual products, manufacture the tampons and pads you carry. Rayon is a wood-derived compound. Its use in tampons has been linked to Toxic Shock Syndrome—a potentially fatal ailment—among other serious health problems. Bleached cotton tampons may also contain dioxins, which are a group of highly carcinogenic compounds.

In addition to immediate health problems, disposable tampons and pads generate a tremendous amount of waste that sits in landfills and clogs sewage treatment plants. These disposable products contain plastic which emits a carcinogenic fumes when incinerated. There is evidence that industrial usage of chlorine, including pulp and paper bleaching, produces and releases toxic dioxins that accumulate in the environment, causing serious harm to wildlife. The cotton in disposable, bleached menstrual products is saturated in pesticides that enter the body as well as cause damage to the ecosystems where the cotton is grown in the United States.

There are many alternatives to these conventional but dangerous menstrual products. Some sustainable alternatives are organic tampons and pads, washable cloth pads, natural sea sponges, and reusable menstrual cups. Natural sea sponges and menstrual products made from organic cotton are in the same price range as one-use bleached products.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to let me know what your decision is or to discuss these options further. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Pippi Strongwoman
860.123.4567
pippi@ccsu.edu

REQUEST FOR NON-BIASED EDUCATION

April 15, 2005

Dear Ms. Healthyheart, Physical Education Teacher,

My daughter will be entering sixth grade in the Fall, and I am writing to you because I understand that she will be learning about puberty during a health unit of her gym class.

I am not in the habit of telling anyone, especially teachers, how to do their jobs; however, the sexual education that I received years ago in the public school system was so poor that I feel compelled to do my best to ensure that my daughter along with her classmates will receive accurate and positive information about the changes they will be going through in the next few years. When I was in junior high, I remember watching outdated filmstrips and being handed a packet put together by a large maxipad company. The filmstrip failed to teach us about entire parts of our anatomy! The menstrual kits were more advertisements than informative. It took me years to ever learn that tampons and maxi pads were not the only items that I could use to catch my menstrual blood.

When teaching this unit, please tell the girls that they can use washable cloth pads, natural sea sponges, reusable menstrual cups, and organic tampons and pads also. It is important to me that my daughter is taught that her menstrual period is a natural process. It concerns me when I hear about public schools continuing to hand out advertising supplements to our children. Schools should be about learning—not business. I have enclosed a small list of books and places that discuss menstruation in a positive, objective way. If you could get in touch with me in the next few weeks about this issue, I would appreciate it. Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Junie Uterus (Angelina's mom)
203.123.4567
uterus@endometrium.com

APPRECIATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES

December 25, 2005

Susie Spirit, Megalomart Manager,

I have been shopping at your store for the five years that I have lived in the Greater Boston area, and noticed that a few months ago you began to stock alternative menstrual products in addition to the bleached disposable ones. I am writing to express my appreciation for having several sustainable products to choose from.

The natural sea sponges are completely biodegradable, and the organic pads and tampons that you have added are almost entirely biodegradable as well. Sea sponges and organic tampons are great for those of us who are allergic to the bleached rayon tampons.

By expanding your selection of menstrual products, Megalomart is unique among its competitors. I have informed my friends and family in the area that your store carries environmentally-sound products, and they have expressed interest in doing more of their own shopping at the Roxbury Megalomart.

Sincerely,
Amelia Ovaries
A Satisfied Customer

APPRECIATION FOR OBJECTIVE EDUCATION

October 15, 2005

Ms. Fiona Fitness,

I am writing to thank you for doing such a great job teaching the sixth grade about puberty. Not many people are willing to talk to kids about a potentially awkward topic.

Last Monday when my daughter Olivia came home from school, I asked her about what she learned in health. She showed me the handouts that you had taken time out of your own schedule to make. She told me that you didn't show a movie or filmstrip, but handed out those worksheets and spoke directly to the students. Before she ran off to her room, she said that her class was going to spend an extra day on the unit because there were so many questions about alternative menstrual products and body image type concerns.

Thanks for taking the time and energy to put together a progressive lesson plan. I feel good knowing that my daughter was not instructed to fear menstruation or to be deathly ashamed of it.

Sincerely,
May Belle
860.123.4567

CREATIVE ACTIONS

Activism is not one-size-fits-all. We should examine everything. Question our tactics. Decide which tool we need to fix a specific problem. Tools that work well on liberal campuses may not work as effectively on a private employer. Use your imagination and make adjustments whenever necessary.

COSTUME ACTIONS

Have a person dress as a tampon or maxi pad, and hold a sign describing the effects of those products. The person could stand outside of a supermarket that has not responded to requests for sustainable alternatives. The tampon-impersonator(s) could stand outside of a federal office in Washington in an action demanding that the FDA test these products and list the contents on tampon and pad boxes.

ARTWORK

Some menstruators use their fluids as paint. Make cartoons. Draw. Sculpt a giant uterus out of clay. Make red bracelets or necklaces to wear during your period. Create artwork that gets people talking and thinking.

STICKERING/WHEATPASTING/FLYERING

Design stickers or flyers. This can be perceived as vandalism depending on how you decide to adhere the items:

- stick them to vending machines in public bathrooms
- trash cans in public bathroom stalls
- sanitary product shelves in stores
- on doors in public bathrooms
- on mirrors in public bathrooms
- inside bags. If you work in retail, you can insert an informational flyer into a customer's shopping bag.

PERSONAL

- Use sustainable alternatives
- Ask your doctor to help you view your genitalia, or do this at home with a mirror
- Question your beliefs
- Read anything and everything on this subject, starting with *Cunt* by Inga Muscio.
- Track your menstrual cycle using a lunar calendar. If you do not have a lunar calendar, use a regular one, and circle the first day of the cycle in bright red.
- Take care of yourself—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

TALK AIN'T CHEAP

- Discuss menstruation with your friends. Break the taboo. Talk with your family and coworkers as well. Raising consciousness about menstruation is an important step in changing the way our society perceives and treats menstruators. Hate corporate tampons? Talk with your friends and find out that many of you have this in common.
- There is now a topic for menstruation on Meetup.com. Sign up for free and meet once a month with others in your community. Over a cup of tea, strangers can come together to bounce ideas off each other about menstrual activism.
- Call the manager of a store and talk about making better alternatives available.
- Feeling brazen? Go door-to-door in your neighborhood, apartment building, or dorm, and talk to menstruators about their real options, and then the lack of sustainable alternatives at the nearby store. Get signatures on your petition.

PEN TO PAPER

- Write and sign petitions asking supermarkets, department stores, and campus bookstores and health centers to stock sustainable alternatives. Arrange a boycott if request is not fulfilled.
- Write letters to stores requesting organic pads and tampons, natural sea sponges, and even more expensive reusable menstrual products
- Send letters to stores that *do* carry alternative products. Thank them for their consideration towards women's health and the environment.
- Are you a parent? Student? Concerned member of the community? Write to the local junior high, middle school, and/or high school recommending that they cease with corporate sex education. Let them know of where educators can find unbiased teaching materials.
- Write about radical menstruation, menstrual activism, sustainable alternatives, and menstrual health for your local independent newspaper or the campus paper. If you have a zine, write about it in there. Have a website, blog, or online journal? Use that as a way to spread the word.
- Make or print out factsheets. Hang these around town, school, or your campus. Have them available at the information table at your place of worship (many churches love material that promotes healthy living). Hand them out at live music shows, zine fests, or at social actions.

CRAFTS

- Make your own washable menstrual pads. Get a few friends together and turn this into a party.
- Make menarche kits. Fill a cloth bag with goodies like sea sponges, teas, and organic pads or tampons. Throw in an organic chocolate bar for good measure.
- Make a button or patch that reads "ask me about radical menstruation." Another great way to start conversation.

MENSTRUATOR WELLNESS

Further proof of how useless those sex education classes are is the absence of education on general wellness. Rather than provide an additional disclaimer about how we are not doctors, and how you should consult with your doctor before changing your lifestyle, take a moment and seriously think: Can adopting a healthy lifestyle hurt you? Getting moderate exercise, ample sleep, and a balanced diet...will that harm you? Unless you have a food allergy or a pre-existing condition where exercise is not encouraged by your doctor, then no, improving your habits is not something where you need to consult with a doctor.

EAT

A vegetarian diet is recommended for both health and ethical reasons. To reduce cramps (and other ailments) eliminate or limit intake of: fat, sugar, processed foods, salt, meat, and anything with a lot of caffeine in it. If you are unwilling to give up meat, try to limit yourself to fish. Consume fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and soy products. What you need is iron and calcium. These can be obtained by eating dark green leafy vegetables. It is a myth that one needs to obtain iron from red meat and calcium from milk. There are non-oppressive sources for both minerals.

SLEEP

It is recommended that people get to sleep around the same time everyday. You already know that people fail to get the sleep they need. Eight hours is the average amount of sleep a person needs, but every one is different. Some do fine on six hours. Others take a few naps per day.

DRINK

Drink water, juices, and decaffeinated beverages as much as possible. Avoid beverages that have chemical combinations as ingredients (i.e. soda). Chamomile tea and raspberry leaf teas are especially good for menstrual cramp relief. Green tea is all around good stuff. Alcohol consumption should be kept to an absolute minimum.

RELAX

Learning how to manage stress is important. Break overwhelming tasks down into doable steps. Take walks. Enjoy nature. Take a break from the internet (or at least from email and messageboards) for a few days. Turn off (throw away!) your television. Read books. Exercise in moderation. Learn yoga and meditation. Turn off the telephone for a few hours every day. You cannot and should not strive to eliminate stress from your life. Stress is part of the human condition. Learn how to work with it. Learn the difference between unproductive anxiety and healthy low-level stress.

SELF-RESPECT

A few sentences cannot do justice for the importance of self-respect. If you respect yourself, then you take care of yourself. This means learning how to be assertive (saying what you mean and meaning what you say) and learning how to stop being afraid of labels that come as a result in our patriarchal society. Self-respect means taking yourself out of situations that are uncomfortable or dangerous, or, it can mean learning how to care for yourself in such situations. Self-respect means being able to love the person you see in the mirror. It means working towards balance and moderation. Someone with self-respect understands her worth, and demands she be treated as a worthy being. For many women, gaining self-respect is a hard process because it means battling against and unlearning the lessons we have been taught by society as young girls. This is not an impossible feat. Self-respect is being able to say and believe, "No, I am not a supermodel and it is ridiculous to make external beauty a goal. I am not going to live off of water and lettuce, but have salad, bread, and pasta for dinner. When I shop for a bathing suit, it will not be a quest to find a suit that accents or covers parts of me, but instead will be a search for a bathing suit that is practical for swimming in." Self-respect means caring about what you place in your body, be it tampons, alcohol, toxic substances, or another person's body parts.

RESOURCES

Many of these sources have been used during research for this packet. Remember that nothing is permanent, and unfortunately some of these sources may be out-of-print, closed, or no longer in existence. These are either directly related to menstruation, or deal with gender issues in some way.

BOOKS

Manifesta Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards
Cunt Inga Muscio
The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution Shulamith Firestone
The Feminine Mystique Betty Friedan
The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir
In a Different Voice Carol Gilligan
Sister Outsider Audre Lorde
Fear of Flying Erica Jong
Our Bodies, Ourselves
Sisterhood is Powerful ed. Robin Morgan
The Guerilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art
A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf
The Hip Mama Survival Guide Ariel Gore
The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order ed. Debbie Stoller and Marcelle Karp
The Beauty Myth Naomi Wolf
Girl Power: Young Women Speak Out ed. Hilary Carlip
Reviving Ophelia Mary Pipher
The Awakening Kate Chopin
Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement ed. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon
Bachelor Girl Betty Israel
The Madwoman in the Attic Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar
Beauty Secrets: Woman and the Politics of Appearance ed. Wendy Chapkis
Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English
The Handmaid's Tale Margaret Atwood
A Taste of Power Elaine Brown
Anarchism and Other Essays Emma Goldman
Chicana Feminist Thought ed. Alma M. Garcia
The Frailty Myth Colette Dowling

ZINES

Zines traditionally go out of print before books do. Search through distro catalogs to find zines about menstruation and feminism.

ALTERNATIVE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

There are more makers and distributors of these products than I can list. Search through these websites, and check the links of general menstruator health sites to find more places to shop. Some zine and craft distros sell cloth pads.

www.gladrags.com
www.lunapads.com
www.natracare.com
www.pandorapads.com
www.softcup.com
www.divacup.com

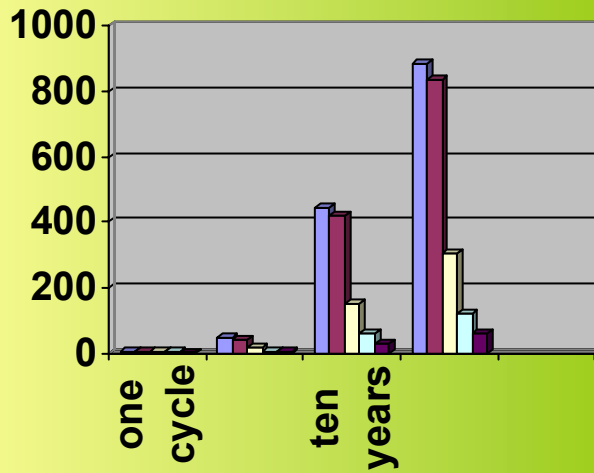
WEBSITES

www.meetup.com
www.mum.org
www.equalrightsamendment.org
www.indymedia.org
www.plannedparenthood.org
www.feminist.org
www.prochoice.org
www.thirdwavefoundation.org
www.hipmama.com
www.wehavebrains.com
www.seac.org/tampons
www.scarleteen.com
www.livejournal.com/community/vaginapagina/
www.now.org
<http://culturalrevitalization.blogspot.com>

SONGS

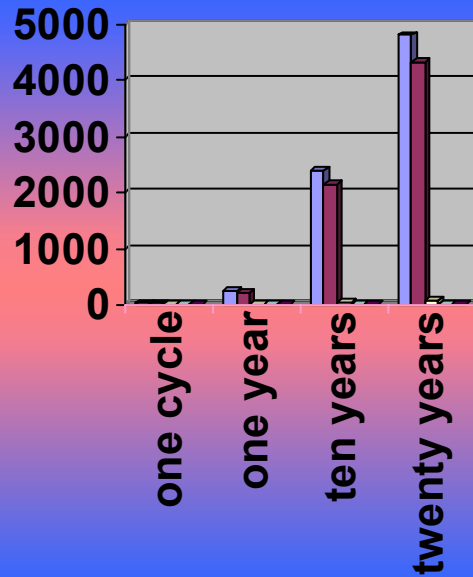
My Red Self by Heavens to Betsy
PMS by Mary J. Blige

Economic Comparison



- disposable tampons
- disposable pads
- natural sea sponge
- washable cloth pads
- reusable menstrual cups

Environmental Comparison of Products



- disposable tampons
- disposable pads
- natural sea sponge
- washable cloth pads
- reusable menstrual cups

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Cultural Revitalization Project is a collective of individuals who are not doctors, but who *are* interested in menstrual health.

Website:

<http://culturalrevitalization.blogspot.com>

Direct questions, comments, requests for speakers, et cetera to:

Kerri Ana

PO Box 26

Manchester CT 06045-0026

Astridiana@riseup.net

Copy and distribute freely!