

# The Periodical: Spring, 2016

## Newsletter of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research

### Editors' Note: Good Month for the Monthly

It is rewarding to see some of the most respected and widely read publications in America joining THE PERIODICAL in acknowledging the importance – even the centrality – of the menstrual cycle in the lives of women as well as the wider society. As reported in President Chris Bobel's column below, this has been a good month for the monthly. In addition to the many positive reports that Chris notes, the *National Review* (April 25, 2016) managed to get involved with an attack on the *Newsweek* cover story that contended that there weren't actually any menstrual taboos that needed to be challenged.

Not only was the coverage noteworthy for its very existence but it was gratifying and appropriate that the SMCR received significant mention in all the pieces (except for *National Review*) including quotes from President Chris Bobel. Of course, the members of the SMCR have long known how important it is to understand the social, medical and cultural significance of menstruation and they have been working to promote that understanding for decades through research, publications, art, activism and teaching in an array of venues. But it's nice to see the mainstream catch up with the work we do, a portion of which is covered in this issue of THE PERIODICAL.

Editors: David Linton and Saniya Lee Ghanoui

### President's Report

Hello Menstrual Champions!

I don't need to tell *you* that right now....menstruation is having its moment! Journalists, social entrepreneurs and seemingly, everyone with a social media account of one kind or another are seeing the significance of menstrual health, rights and politics! Even mainstream organs like *The Huffington Post*, *NPR* and *Cosmopolitan* have noted the shift, variously dubbing 2015 'the year of the period'. This is an exciting time indeed.

If you are following our Facebook feed (and if not, *why not?*) you've read pieces by the *New York Times* [about

access to menstrual care products] [the Guardian](#) [about the ill effects of menstrual taboos] [The Atlantic](#) [about the Museum of Menstruation] [Jezebel](#) [about the “tampon tax”—an issue that is gaining lots of traction in the US, Canada and the UK]. And so much more.

Just this week alone, SMCRers have been interviewed by reporters from the Associated Press, the [\[Menstruation Joins the Economic Conversation\]](#) [New York Times](#), the [Washington Post](#) and [Newsweek](#). Suddenly, challenging menstrual shame, silence and secrecy is newsworthy. It is gratifying to see the groundswell of interest in the issues we in SMCR hold dear—the very stuff of our research, writing, teaching, advocacy and art since 1977! Isn't great that the rest of the world is finally catching up?

So how do we keep this momentum going?

You can start off by reading the newsletter for the details. And take note of the following developments:

- SMCR 2017 Conference Chair Evelina Sterling is busily laying the groundwork for our biennial conference in Atlanta, Georgia in June 2017. Peggy Stubbs has agreed to serve as Program Chair. Watch for details about specific dates and venue soon.
- We hired designer Lauren Towles, founder of “Hack the Flow, [“a design-a-thon against menstrual stigmas”](#) to re-design our website. We are working behind the scenes and plan to roll out Lauren’s fresh new look later this Spring.
- Our blog, edited by Laura Wershler, has been popping with great content. Most recently, and in honor of Endometriosis Awareness Month, our March posts centered on the disease because, as Wershler writes, [“Having endometriosis is much, much more than having bad periods. It is a complex disease that defies easy definition and easy treatment, one about which much misinformation persists.”](#) April will feature PERI/MENOPAUSE. Because this content is too good to miss, the SMCR leadership agreed to rename the blog to something a bit more obviously topical. The blog’s new name will be “Menstruation Matters.” And for consistency’s sake, we chose a new Twitter handle: [@MenstruationOrg](#). Follow us!
- Our journal *Women’s Reproductive Health* is churning out important research and building a readership. Two special issues are in pipeline—one picking up on our 2015 conference theme (reproductive justice and human rights) and the other focused on the menstrual cycle and cancer. To date, we published 3 issues in 2014/2015 with 3 more planned for 2016 and 3 more again in 2017. In 2018, we will begin publishing 4 issues/ per year. *So get that research ready for publication!*

What a heady time to be part of the movement to change the menstrual status quo! I am grateful for--and inspired by--the work that each member of this small but mighty organization does--every day--to promote menstrual health and awareness. After all, it is these efforts that built the foundation of the current “menstrual moment.”

Congratulations to us all ... and back to work!

Chris Bobel

## Save the Dates!

The next SMCR Conference is June 22-15, 2017 in Atlanta, Georgia

Fall 2016 Newsletter Deadline: September 15, 2016

## Member News

### Help SMCR Thrive

As you're all members of SMCR, I am sure that you recognize the importance of this organization. That said, we tend to have a dip in membership in the years between conferences, and I am starting to see evidence of that happening again.

In order to remain an active organization and to be able to organize and publicize the 2017 conference, we need to maintain, and ideally, increase the size of our membership.

Please help us by promptly renewing your membership when you receive notification that it will soon expire. You can also help us by spreading the word to your friends and colleagues about SMCR. After all, members benefit in numerous ways.

### Member Community

The primary benefit of membership is access to a wide-ranging, international, interdisciplinary community engaged in work related to the menstrual cycle and its role in women's health and quality of life.

### Email List

The primary means through which members have access to each other is through a shared email list. Unless members opt out, all members are added to this list and can send and receive messages. This list is used to discuss business related to the running of the Society. More frequently, however, it is used to discuss relevant new stories, request resources from members, develop research collaborations, raise awareness about ongoing activist work, etc.

### **Newsletter**

All members will also receive our newsletter, *The Periodical*, which is published three times each year. The Newsletter provides information about the ongoing projects of the Society as well as the activities of our members.

### **Journal**

*Women's Reproductive Health*, is the official journal of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research. As a member of SMCR, you will receive electronic access to all issues of the journal.

### **Conference Registration**

Members are able to register for the biennial SMCR conference at discounted rates compared to non-member attendees.

Mindy J. Erchull

*Member, Board of Directors*

*Membership Coordinator*

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### **News From ZanaAfrica: Kenya & Menstrual Equity: What you didn't know**

There is a global call to action to end the tax on tampons. Bills are being put forward across the US and the UK with advocates and politicians clamoring to end a tax code that so obviously and unfairly penalizes women and girls. In some states in the US, prescription drugs like Viagra are not taxed, but tampons are. There is simply no justification in that.

What many people overlook, or they simply do not know, is that Kenya was the FIRST nation in the world to end the tampon tax in 2004, and also ended an import duty on sanitary pads in 2011, helping to reduce costs significantly for low-income women and girls.

What's more is that through the support of our organization's advocacy efforts, in 2010, Kenya became the first country in the WORLD to provide free sanitary pads in schools, another important piece of legislation that is now on the docket in New York.

And although it was female leaders of the Kenyan government that led the charge to have the tampon tax abolished and provided for free in schools, they have yet to see the media attention and accolades that they deserve.

I have been thinking about why these achievements have not received the same ink as those in North America and Europe.

My conclusion: What happens in Africa (and the countries within) is something that happens over there...to them.

Africa is the "other" that is too often overlooked. While it is the second most populous continent rich with history, diversity, and innovation, the successes achieved and records broken fail to be recognized in equal measure.

We need to shift that paradigm. Let's not view Africa as over there. America and Africa need each other as thought partners and change makers, together in the fight for equal rights, menstrual equity, and the empowerment of women and girls.

The call to action to make pads and tampons more accessible is a global movement. And that starts with advocates, the press, and the general public also turning their attention to their sisters in arms who may be far away, but so very much the same.

**KELSEY KNIGHT:** The Fifth Vital Sign is a traveling project, co-initiated by a doula and registered nurse, who are driving all across the U.S. for three months to teach free reproductive health classes in 63 locations along the way. The classes focus on menstrual cycle awareness and charting, hormonal and non-hormonal contraception, menstrual cycle hygiene products, breast awareness, how to discuss options with a provider & more. The information is unbiased, encouraging people to advocate for themselves within the healthcare system and to be more body literate, with the hope that we all feel safer and more alive in our bodies. Their tour schedule can be found on their website: [www.5thvitalsign.com](http://www.5thvitalsign.com). Reach out to them via email: [thefifthvitalsign@gmail.com](mailto:thefifthvitalsign@gmail.com), on [Instagram](#), or [Twitter](#).

**DAVID LINTON** continues to write and perform menstrual themed poetry at spoken word events and will be participating in a panel in Brooklyn during events surrounding this year's Menstrual Hygiene Day in May as well as at a June conference in Bologna, Italy where he will be speaking about the cultural construction of games and rituals to celebrate the onset of menstruation.

**SANIYA LEE GHANOUI** will present at the Media Ecology Conference in June in Bologna, Italy on her work on game/play in sex and menstrual education in Swedish educational material. In addition, she will give an invited lecture at Stockholm University on the history of sex and menstrual education films in the United States and Sweden.

**DR. ARPAN YAGNIK**, SMCR member and activist, recently had the opportunity to present a TED talk. Here's a portion of the description posted on the TED Site:

'Action inspired by creativity' is Dr. Arpan Yagnik's mantra. A creative and critical thinker, Dr. Yagnik is a natural teacher and therefore has been a positive influence on professionals and his students. Dr. Yagnik is a native of Ahmedabad, India and currently resides in the United States. He is a recipient of numerous awards and accolades for his contributions in the academia, corporate sector, and community through his scholarship, teaching, consulting and involvement. Dr. Yagnik was first introduced to Creative Aerobics in 2006 when he was a student. Creative Aerobics is a radical new way to speed up the creative process using four mental exercises that develop elasticity between the left and the right brain - the analytical and creative sides - allowing them access to solutions outside their present problem-solving techniques. Creative Aerobics is a useful concept for individuals who wish to explore creativity within themselves and even more useful for Ad agencies that are striving to deliver creatively crafted output in limited time.

**TOMI-ANN ROBERTS, PhD: A Feminist Psychological Scientist's Musings on Evidence-Based Menstrual Justice Advocacy**

My research explores the relationships between sexual objectification, self-objectification and negative attitudes toward women's bodily selves, including menstruation. Currently, I am working with a civil rights law firm to provide an expert report to a judge in a case involving dehumanizing, degrading treatment of female jail inmates during strip and body-cavity searches. These searches are conducted en masse, in large groups, and female deputies often demean the naked women, who must bend over and spread their labia, during the procedure. Menstruating women must remove their soiled pads or tampons in front of the entire group. Many have been seen bleeding down their legs onto the concrete floor of the bus depot where these searches are conducted. The class action suit cannot eliminate the procedure itself (which is legal and will remain so), but seeks restitution for women who have been traumatized by the way the procedure is conducted.

I have been asked to provide a "gender specific analysis" of how women, particularly, feel about exposing their bodies in this way. Over and over again, as I draft and edit my report, which cites countless scientific studies as well as philosophical approaches on objectification, self-objectification and women's reproductive health, I find my feminist moral compass wavering. As I attempt to explain that the majority of *women* feel ashamed and even disgusted by their naked physical bodies, and especially by their genitals and by their own menstruation, that *women* make comparisons to other women's bodies, that *women* rarely if ever appear naked or share their menstrual status in front of one another, as they must do here, and that states of self-objectification in *women* can lead to poorer cognitive functioning, I wonder: am I reifying negative attitudes and emotions around menstruation that ensue from objectification and self-objectification? Am I essentially blaming these jailed women for reacting the way they do to the strip search procedure?

It would be easier to stick to publishing in academic venues, where I can hide behind the purely descriptive voice that social research in the "big name" journals requires. But I'm committed to a new persona in the latter part of my career as an evidence-based menstrual justice advocate. And so as I work on this report, I console myself by focusing on the potential this work for making a significant impact in real people's real lives in several very concrete ways. First, should we win this class action lawsuit, it would mean restitution for hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of women who have been traumatized by this dehumanizing procedure, many of whom reported that it felt to them like sexual assault and was one of the worst experiences of their entire lives. Second, in addition to payment to victims, the case may further force reform in the system so that the conditions under which future jail inmates undergo the procedure would be improved. We are asking that the searches no longer be conducted in a group setting, and that deputies be trained to give clear instructions and be monitored to cease verbal abuse of the inmates during the procedure.

The third, more general way this case might be enormously impactful is in setting a precedent for getting judges and courtrooms to accept the expert testimony of researchers. When I was contacted by the law firm to serve as an expert, I hesitated to say yes, feeling ill equipped for such a role. The lawyer told me that the judge in this case is not sympathetic to these women, and that they need me to convince him that the inmates' experience during the procedure is indeed different from being naked with other women in a spa or locker room. He is reportedly shocked to hear that very few if any women insert or take out their menstrual products in front of one another in such settings. I know that lawyers make frequent use of clinical psychologists for their expertise, and in fact the firm sent me the expert testimony reports of three clinicians

working with them on the case. But as a researcher, this is not my kind of writing, nor my kind of evidence.

As I contemplated whether I was up to the challenge of taking this case, I contacted a cognitive psychologist friend of mine for advice. She has served as an expert witness in many court cases involving eyewitness accuracy. Hers is one of the rare few areas, she told me, where research psychologists are respected as experts. She advised me to take the case because, she said, we psychological scientists need to be heard in courtrooms. We are armed with data that ought to be considered in cases like this one. So I carry with me the added hope, beyond restitution for the actual women affected, that I can change a judge's mind with feminist psychological science. And if my report can be taken seriously by this judge, then perhaps that will open the doors of other judges' courtrooms to other researchers like many of you reading this issue of *The Periodical*, armed with data, working toward reproductive justice. Imagine that!

## WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH JOURNAL NEWS

If you are teaching a graduate or upper-level undergraduate course that includes menopause, consider adding the articles from the special section on postmenopausal hormone therapy to your reading list. The special section (which appeared in vol. 2, no. 1, spring 2015) includes an overview article by Paula Derry (psychology), with a multidisciplinary set of commentaries by Adriane Fugh-Berman (medicine), Heather Dillaway (sociology), Lynette Leidy Sievert (anthropology), and Nancy Fugate Woods (nursing). A response to the commentaries by Paula Derry was published in the most recent issue of *Women's Reproductive Health* (vol. 2, no. 2, fall 2015). The full set (anchor article, commentaries, response to commentaries) makes a multidisciplinary and provocative package of readings that is sure to elicit class discussion.

Watch for more special sections coming up soon! We are working on one on off-label uses of oral contraceptives with adolescents and another on toxic shock syndrome.

Two special issues of the journal are also in the works: one on Cancer and Women's Reproductive Health (Guest Editors: Lisa R. Rubin & Jane M. Ussher) and the other on Menstrual Health: A Matter of Human Rights (Guest Editors: Chris Bobel & Amy Agigian).

In 2016 the journal moves to three issues per volume. The spring issue (vol. 3, no. 1) is already in press. It includes articles, book reviews, and a media review on such diverse topics as menstruation, breastfeeding, birth, prenatal care, abortion, and sex education. Happy reading!

Questions about the journal? Contact the Editor, Joan C. Chrisler, at [jchr@conncoll.edu](mailto:jchr@conncoll.edu).

### What Can You Do to Make SMCR's Journal a Success?

- Read it!
- Submit your best work to *Women's Reproductive Health*.
- Tell your colleagues and students about the journal; encourage them to submit their best work.
- Ask your college, university, medical center, or other institutional library to subscribe to *WRH*.
- Cite articles from *WRH* in your publications, especially those sent to other journals.
- When you are asked to review a manuscript, say yes!
- Blog about articles in *WRH* or cite them in your blog posts.
- Announce the contents of the issues on your *Facebook* page or website.
- Announce the contents of the issues on professional listservs.
- Tweet about interesting articles you read in *WRH*.

### What is the most innovative or exciting paper you ever heard presented at an SMCR conference?

*Women's Reproductive Health*, the official journal of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research, plans to debut an occasional feature in which a classic paper from an SMCR conference is reprinted and followed by commentaries from several scholars. Commentaries could describe the importance of the paper at the time it was presented, its impact on later research, its impact on the career of the commentator, or its impact on women's health care delivery.

The editor has her favorite papers, but what are yours? Write to Joan Chrisler ([jcchr@conncoll.edu](mailto:jcchr@conncoll.edu)) to nominate a classic that you would like to see revisited.

It can be difficult to get permission to reprint journal articles, but most of SMCR's books (based on conference presentations) are out of print, and at least two of them were published by Hemisphere, which was acquired by Taylor & Francis, our journal's publisher. Thus, chapters from those books might make the best target for this feature, both because permission to republish would be easy to get and because the classics in those books are likely to be unfamiliar to young researchers and otherwise difficult to locate. Reprinting a classic paper from time to time would make the papers available once more and provide an opportunity for them to inspire a new generation of health care providers and menstrual cycle researchers and activists.

So, help us get this feature off by the ground by suggesting a classic SMCR paper that you would like to see revisited.

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You are receiving the SMCR Newsletter.

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