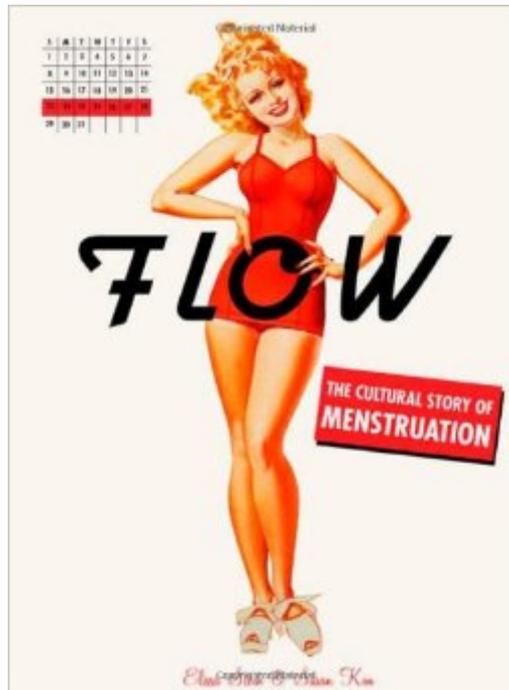


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# Flow: The Cultural Story Of Menstruation



## Synopsis

In this hip, hilarious and truly eye-opening cultural history, menstruation is talked about as never before. *Flow* spans its fascinating, occasionally wacky and sometimes downright scary story: from mikvahs (ritual cleansing baths) to menopause, hysteria to hysterectomiesâ”not to mention the Pill, cramps, the history of underwear, and the movie about puberty they showed you in 5th grade. *Flow* answers such questions as: Whatâ”™s the point of getting a period? What did women do before pads and tampons? What about new drugs that promise to end periodsâ”a hot idea or not? Sex during your period: gross or a turn-on? And whatâ”™s normal, anyway?Â With color reproductions of (campy) historical ads and early (excruciating) femcare devices, it also provides a fascinating (and mind-boggling) gallery of this complex, personal and uniquely female process. As irreverent as it is informative, *Flow* gives an everyday occurrence its true props â” and eradicates the stigma placed on it for centuries.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is informative, disturbing, infuriating....and fun. The authors address the gamut of issues involving menstruation, from physiological causes/effects, to cultural taboos and traditions, social history and ethical concerns. The writing style at times is a little TOO breezy/chatty, but the illustrations (a lot of vintage advertisements for "femcare products") more than make up for that. Even though this book is packed with data, and offers a lot of food for thought, you can sail through it in one sitting. Even a casual reading will give you insights into this pivotal, and still largely hidden,

aspect of women's lives. Some examples:--References to menstruation are still largely euphemistic; the best one listed here is the Danish phrase, "The Communists are in the funhouse!"--Way back in 1918, Sears, Roebuck used to sell vibrators. With attachments.--Primates (like us) and some species of bats and shrews are the only mammals that really menstruate.--Lysol douches were popular from the 1920's until the 1960's. Lysol, which shares germicidal properties with carbolic acid, was a highly recommended treatment for "offensive" vaginal odors. This initiated a vicious cycle, so to speak: a self-conscious, but often healthy, woman would douche with Lysol and kill off normal flora (and scald her tissues), which would pave the way for bacterial/yeast infections, which WOULD cause an offensive odor, which would compel her to douche more often. Because an abnormal body odor in a normally clean person indicates an underlying problem, women who actually did have a raging infection only made matters worse with this frequent purging.--Menstruating women have more nightmares, and erotic dreams, than when not menstruating. Plus, they can hold alcohol better. Good to know.--Female sexual climax has historically been frowned upon (by men), but clitoral stimulation was often performed in a doctor's office to address "hysteria," during the 19th/early 20th Centuries. Kinda creepy, no?--The independence that resulted when "femcare products" became available was a huge leap for women in society. This advance cannot be overstated.--Big Pharma has a big stake in women's health: there are more than 500 PMU farms in the US, where thousands of mares are kept pregnant so that their urine can be processed for hormone replacement therapies. (The foals that result from these gravid horses are usually sold to pet food companies.) Newer drugs that can suppress menstruation are also huge moneymakers, although there isn't a lot of long-term research available on the effects of such hormonal manipulation.--Religious authorities, especially in the West, tend to be really wigged out by the idea of menstruation (with the possible exception of Jesus Himself, who in Matthew 9:20-22 apparently cured a woman who suffered from menorrhagia, or abnormally excessive flow).--Some Orthodox Jews believe that if a menstruating woman walks between two men, one will drop dead. Sort of like a superpower. I hope that, some day in the not-too-distant future, menstruation will no longer provoke feelings of disgust and revulsion in people who should know better. I also hope that more women will move beyond seeing it as a disease or a disability, but as an amazing, if not always comfortable, attribute of our gender. This book gave me hope that I may one day realize my dream: to open a Moon Lodge for women who would appreciate taking a week off every month. It would be kind of like a high-end spa, somewhere in the mountains, with lots of delicious food, good books, cats, and no kids or men. Except for Lars the masseur.

I got this book hoping for a good read covering different cultural perspectives and some good science about menstruation. There's really little actual scientific information and while the authors repeatedly lament the lack of good studies on the subject I can't help but be disappointed that while the back cover claims "Flow answers questions such as: What's the point of getting a period?" in fact the authors only make very brief mention of a couple of theories and admit that no one knows. Not exactly their fault that the subject hasn't been thoroughly studied, but a bit misleading to people buying the book wanting to find out. The cultural aspect is mostly limited to discussing how attitudes in America have changed over the last 200 years with a few passing references to other cultures. Fine if that is what you are looking for but I was expecting a bit more from "The Cultural Story of Menstruation". Probably the biggest disappointment to me is how everything seems to revolve around the assumption of a "normal" healthy flow. While repeatedly admitting that many women have much worse experiences the authors do not seem to have gained any real knowledge of what that is like before writing this book. The vintage ads liberally incorporated through the book dating back to the 1800's are probably the best reason to look at this book; old medical ads are always good for horror and laughs. I wish that the authors treated "alternative" treatments for PMS problems with the same distrustful outlook they regard large pharmaceutical companies with. Being "natural" doesn't make them harmless. It shouldn't be too much of a leap to look at the discredited "medicines" whose ads so amusingly adorn the pages of this book and then look at the claims of the largely unregulated alternative treatments market and suspect that perhaps some of today's untested treatments will be viewed the same way 100 years hence.

Wow. I can't finish this book. First, the lackadaisical "folksy" tone became grating on my nerves halfway through the first chapter, but I figured I'd press on and give the authors a chance to deliver some insight into the social issues surrounding female reproduction and menstruation. The insight never came, though. There were plenty of irritating misuses of facts, however, and a supremely annoying tendency for the authors to beat the dead horse of the birth control pill, all the while making snide remarks about the "less enlightened" people from the ancient Babylonians to our grandparents' generation to Native Americans and male gynecologists. The constant tone of "OMG those [insert generation/nationality/historical figure] were so stupid!" got old really quick. I finally had to throw in the towel after the authors alleged, without offering any sources to back up the ridiculous claim, that "British Columbian Indians" would leave their menstruating adolescent girls in the wilderness for 3 or 4 years. Uh, I would love to see your documentation for that, ladies. Hell, I'd love to see ANY documentation that went into the writing of this book. The glee with which the authors

make these bizarre claims and then fail to either explain or discuss them just did not speak well for their credibility. I realize not everyone wants to wade through footnotes and academic jaargon, but the lack of analytical thought in this book was pretty galling. This book had a lot of potential, because a cultural history of menstruation is definitely a fascinating subject, but an 8th grade student could have done a better job writing it.

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