



EW, THAT'S GROSS!

MYTHS, STIGMAS, TABOOS AND WHY TALKING ABOUT PERIODS IS SO MESSY

JENNIFER PALM, SAMANTHA MINNIS, JENNA VAINNER, AND WAVERLY EUBANK



ABOUT THIS SESSION:

WELCOME TO THE TEACH-IN ABOUT THE PRESENTERS



WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

- Not all women have periods.
- Not all individuals who have periods are women.
- On any given day, 800 million individuals around the world are menstruating.
- Anyone can participate in a discussion regarding menstruation!



EUPHEMISMS & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

JENNIFER PALM

What have you heard?

EUPHEMISMS:

- Aunt Flo
- My friend
- On my cycle
- That time of the month
- Shark Week
- The curse
- “You know”

BEFORE THERE WERE TAMPONS...

- Hawaiian and South Asian cultures: moss, ferns, and grasses.
- Ancient Egypt: papyrus tampons.
- Roman Era: wool tampons.
- Victorian Era: free bleeding.
- Strips of cloth, rags, and other fabrics.
- Sea sponges.
- Menstruation huts.
- Wood pulp pads.
- Garter belts.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HYSTERIA

Pre-1900s

- Periods and women as unsanitary, unhealthy, and unstable.
- Greek “restless uterus” and the “Female Nature.”
- 1831: Menstruation is detoxification for women.
- “Every woman carries with her the seeds of hysteria.”

1900-2000s

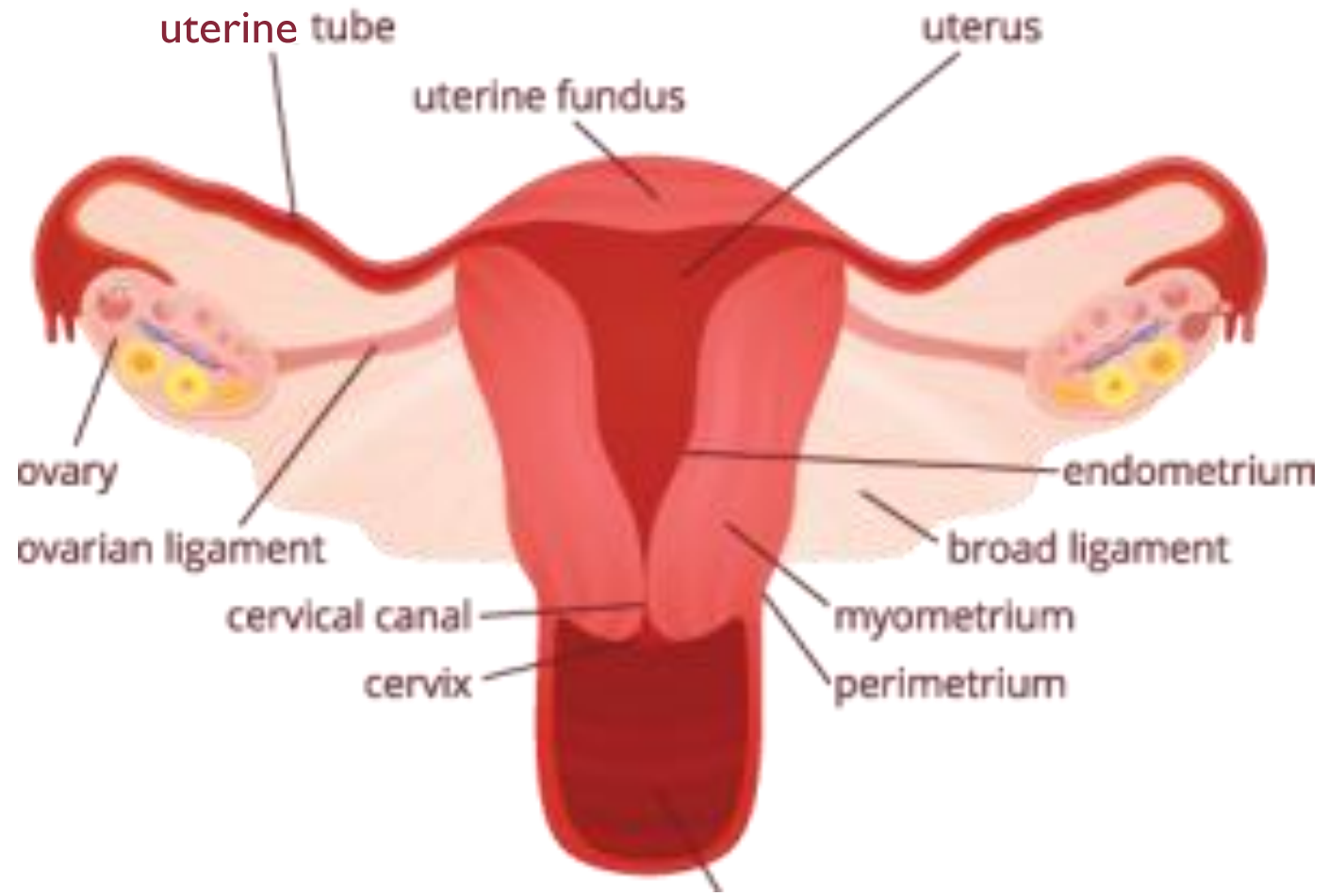
- The Rest Cure.
- Stereotypes regarding pre-menstrual syndrome and hormonal “rages.”
- 1970s: embracing menstruation is the first step to feminism.
- Social media activism.



ANATOMY

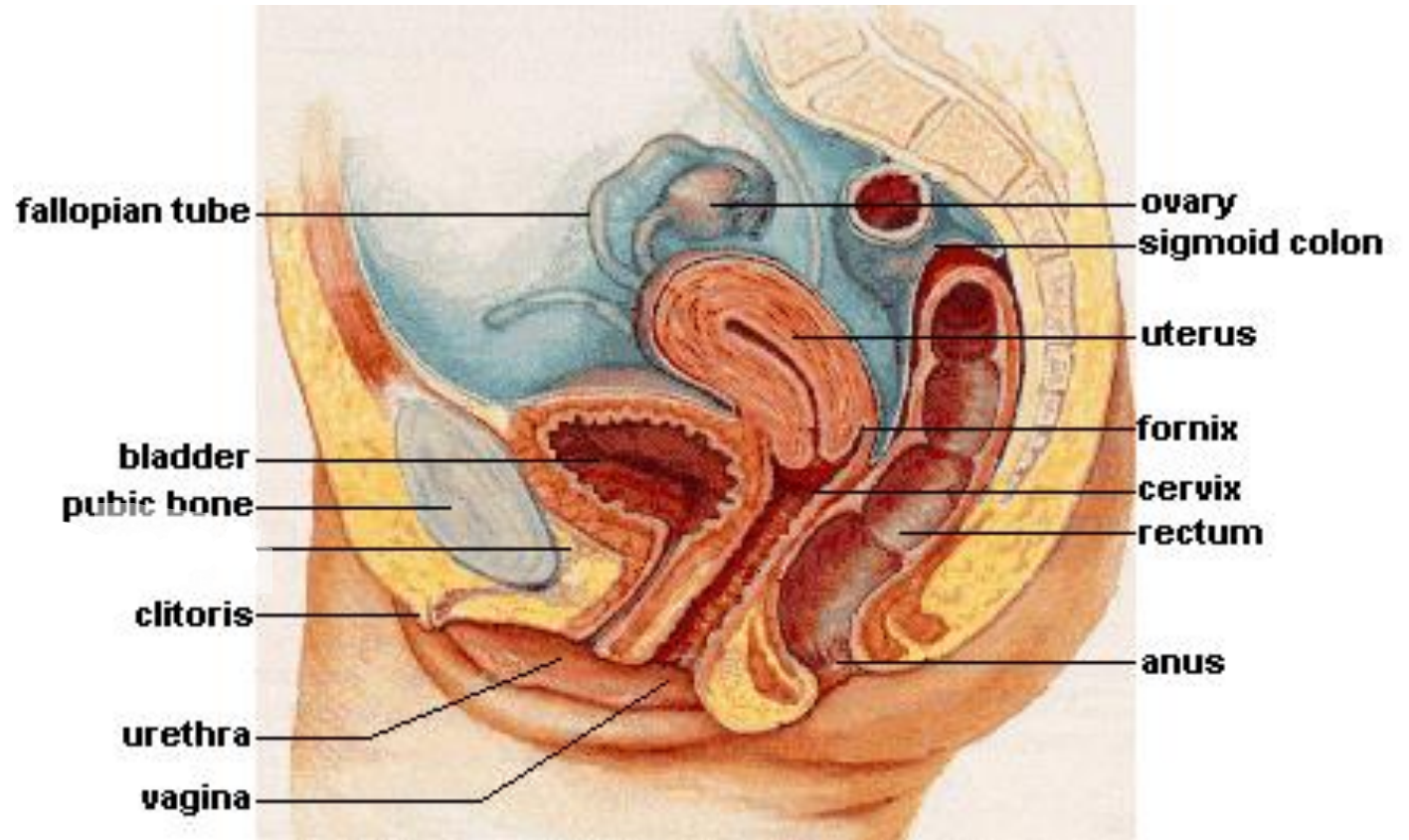
SAMANTHA MINNIS

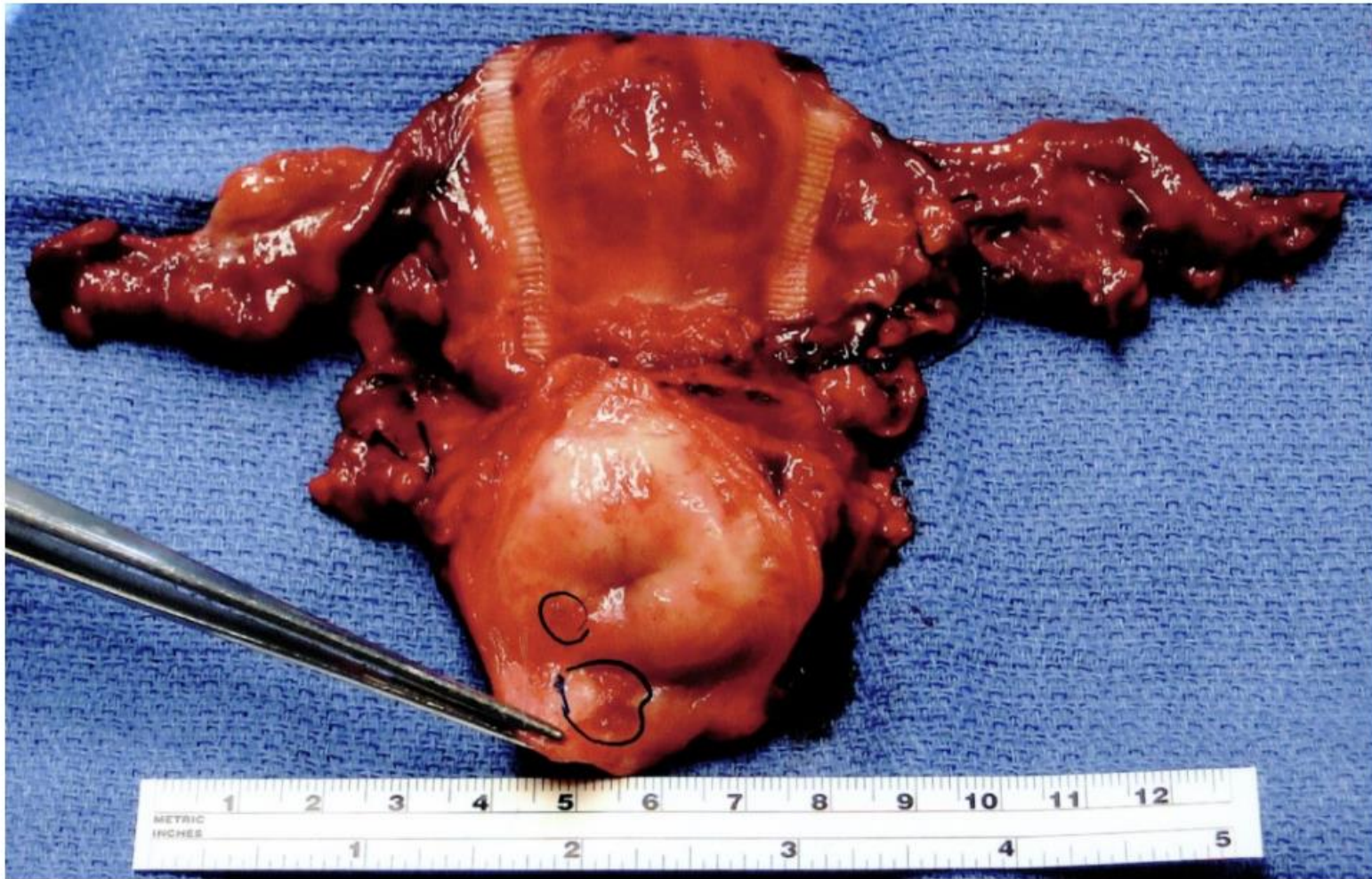




INTERNAL ANATOMY

- Vagina – tube-shaped organ, approximately 3-4 inches long when unaroused.
- In resting state, vaginal walls touch. When aroused, they balloon out to allow penetration.

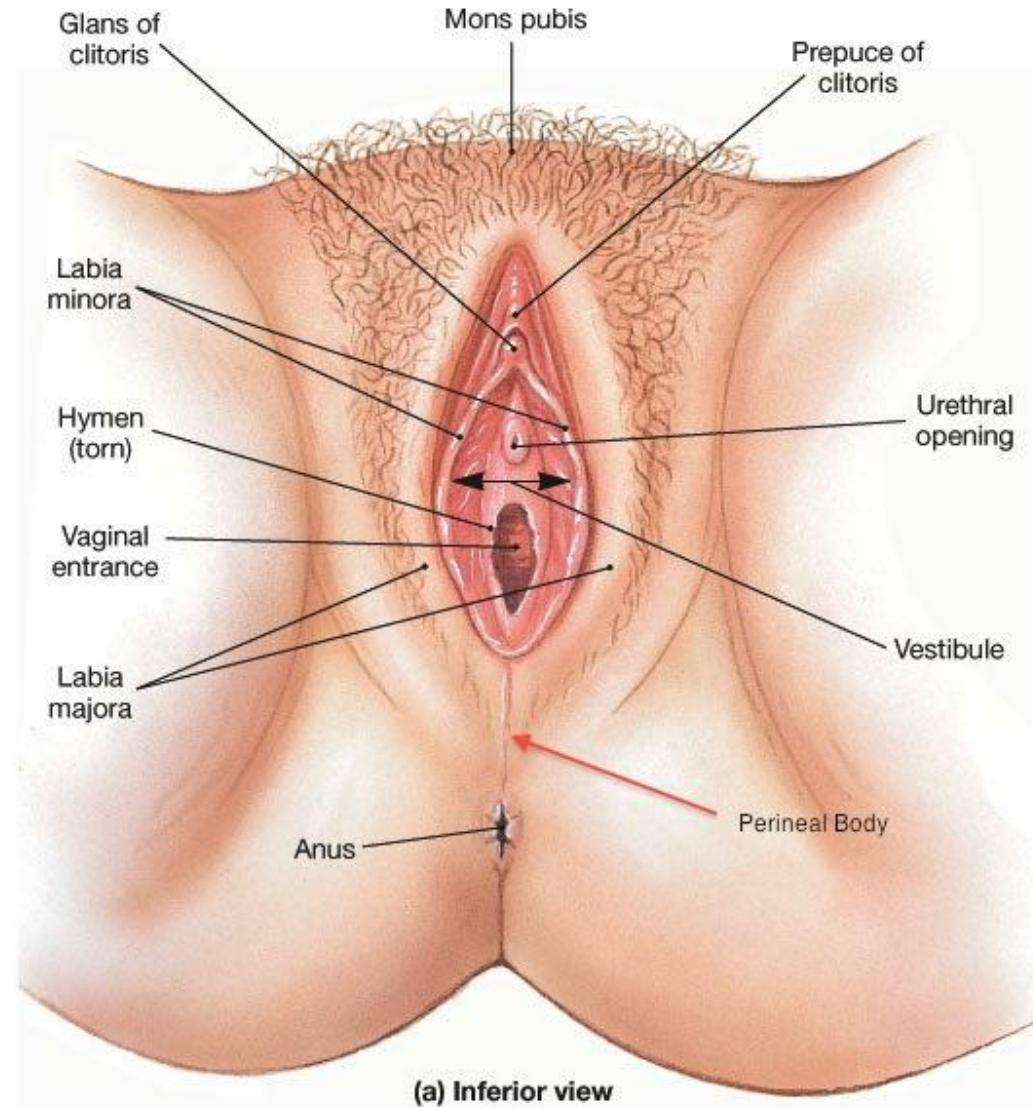




Uterus after hysterectomy

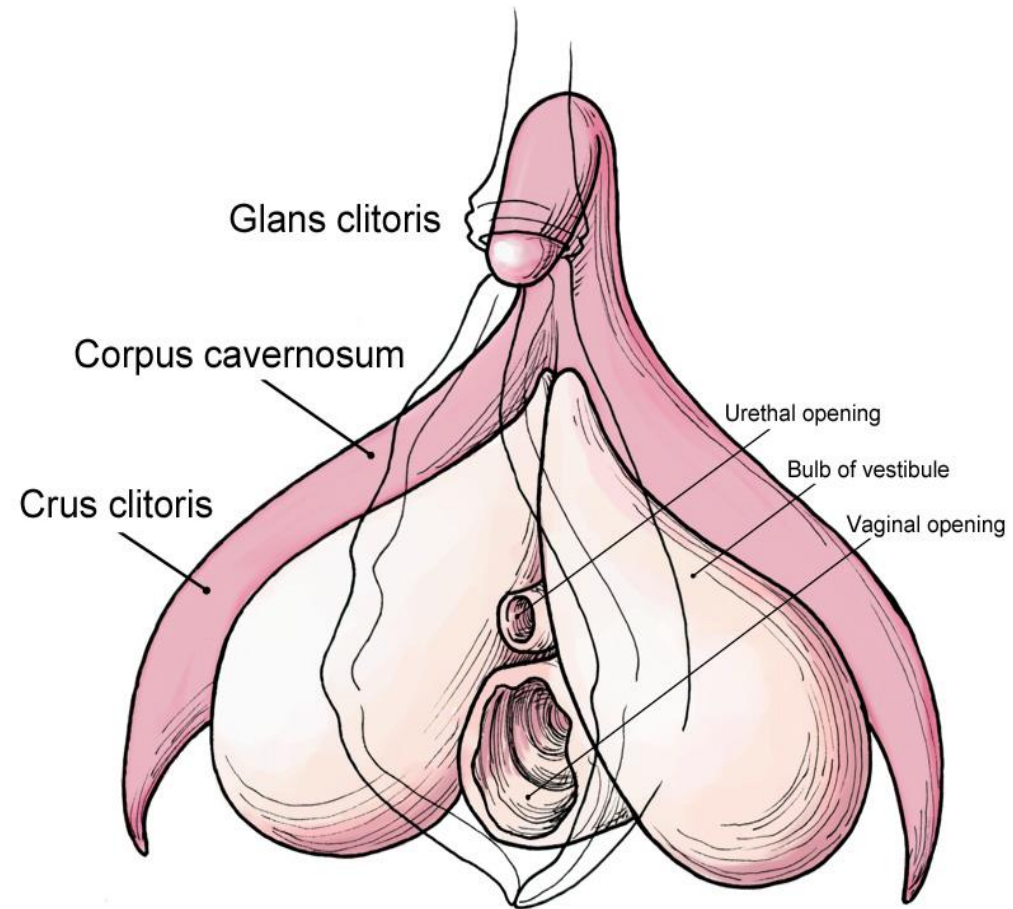
EXTERNAL ANATOMY

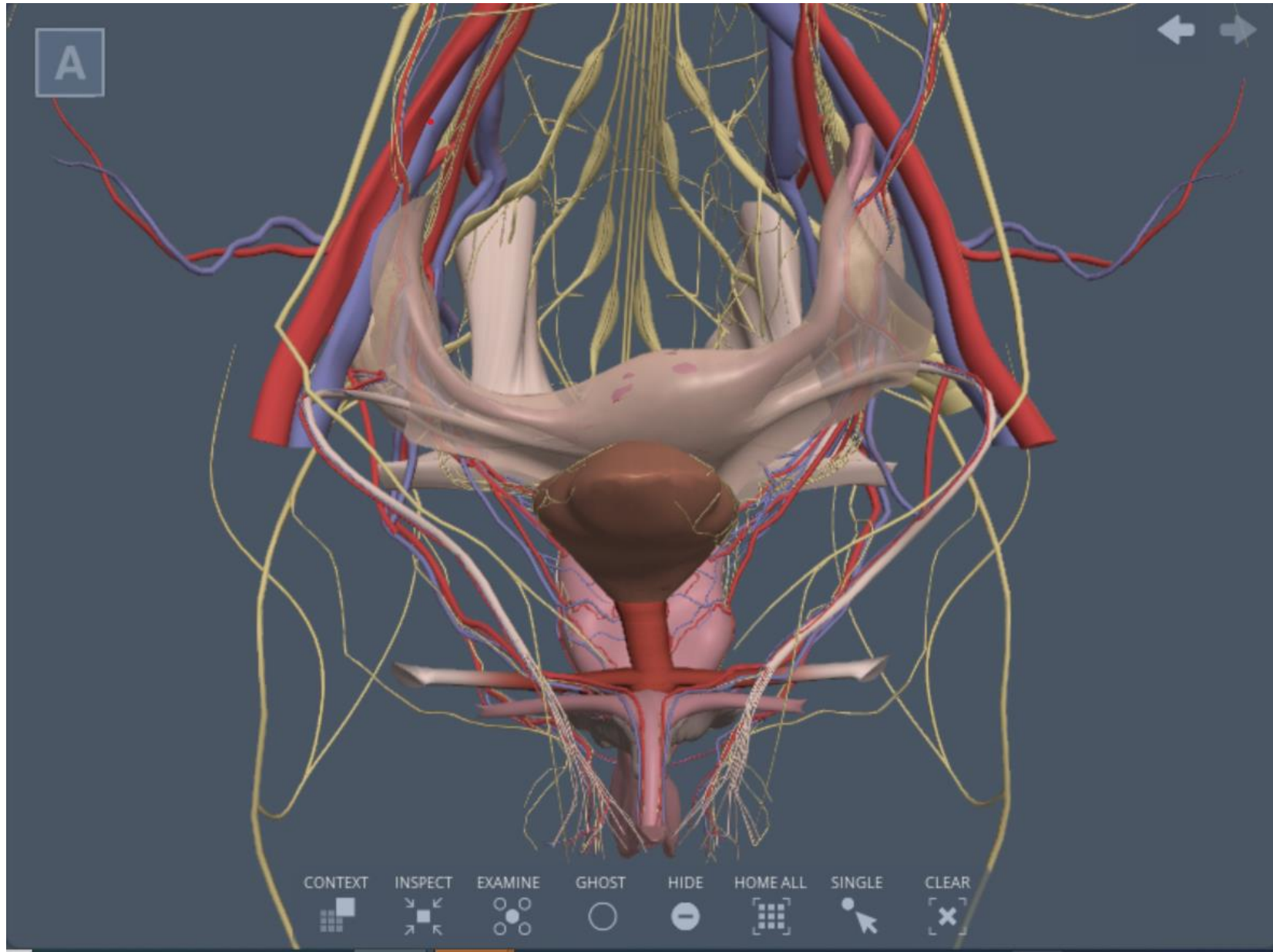
- External genitals – sometimes referred to as the vulva.
 - Clitoris
 - Glans, bulb, & crus
 - Prepuce
 - Mons pubis
 - Labia minora – Inner labia (lips)
 - Labia majora – Outer labia (lips)
 - Vaginal entrance
 - Urethral opening



INTERNAL CLITORIS

- Discovered in 1998?







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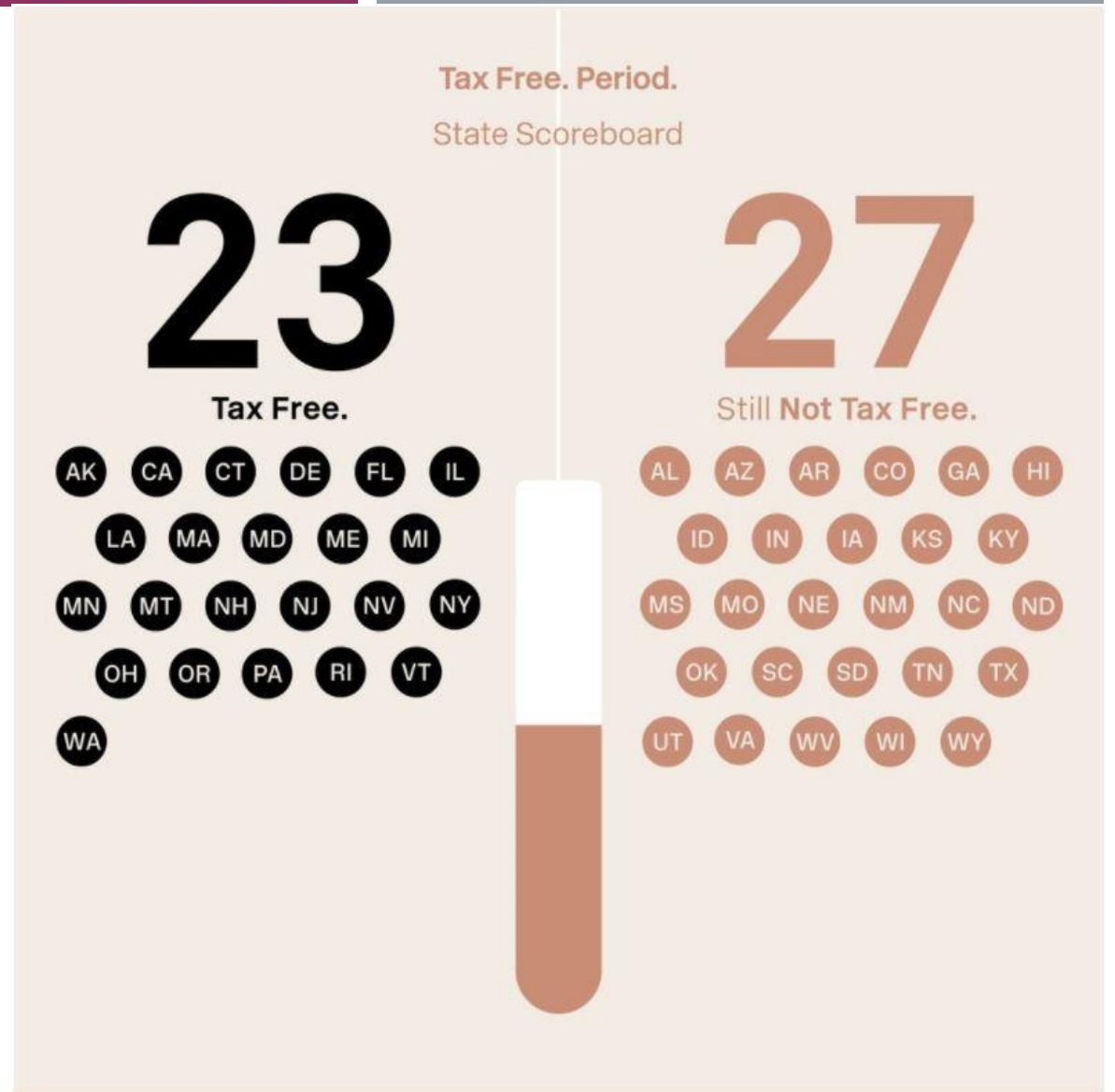


GOSH MY PERIOD IS EXPENSIVE...

JENNA VAINNER



- The Tampon Tax
- Tax Free. Period.



GOSH MY PERIOD IS EXPENSIVE...

"After years of trying to repeal this tax, I am proud that we are bringing people together to put Michiganders first and drive down costs on these essential products. Everyone should be able to take care of their most basic healthcare needs without an unnecessary added financial burden."



What Is Period Poverty?

Period poverty is when someone is not able to access or afford period products, like pads and tampons. When people don't have access to running water or toilets, the effects of period poverty can get worse.

Living in period poverty may mean:



Missing school, work, or job interviews



Suffering from high levels of anxiety and depression



Running away from homes/placements



Having to choose between buying groceries or paying bills and buying period products



Using unhealthy alternatives to period products



Health problems such as UTIs and bacterial vaginosis from using alternative products

AT GVSU

Replenish

Allendale

- Kirkhof 074
 - Open Monday, Tuesday and Friday 12p-5p
 - Wednesday and Thursday 12:30p-5p

Downtown

- Steelcase Library (DeVos Campus, first floor, Building A)
 - Open during library hours

GVSU Basic Needs Team

www.gvsu.edu/basic

Free menstrual products located in bathrooms across campus.



ACCESSIBILITY, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, AND SUSTAINABILITY

WAVERY EUBANK



PERIOD POVERTY: WOMEN'S PRISONS

- Products given are scarce and cheaply made
 - 5 pads/week/cell
- Commissary is not accessible to every individual
- Periods as humiliation

PERIOD POVERTY: TRANS AND GNC INDIVIDUALS

- Increased dysphoria surrounding menstrual products
- Lack of products in men's restrooms
- Financial inaccessibility

NAVIGATING THE BINARY: A VISUAL NARRATIVE OF TRANS AND GENDERQUEER MENSTRUATION



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

Table 3: Environmental impact per indicator per woman's lifetime

	Abiotic depletion per woman (mg Sb eq.)	Fossil Fuel Depletion per woman (MJ).	Global Warming Potential per woman (kg CO ₂ eq.).	Acidification per woman (g SO ₂ eq.).	Eutrophication per woman (g PO ₄ eq.).	Dry waste (kg)	Wet waste (kg)
Tampon	173.62	952.45	73.66	673.57	310.72	17.83	119.92
Tampon with applicator	304.15	5192.88	248.62	1260.12	499.91	63.17	165.25
Sanitary pad	1869.14	8994.94	397.82	2474.50	649.90	105.92	208.00
Menstrual cup	0.27	2.95	0.16	0.61	0.18	0.06	0.06

- Traditional menstrual products (pads, tampons, or tampons with applicators) are the most used among those who experience periods- meaning they have the largest impact
 - We might be quick to point to physical waste, but the largest environmental impact comes from the raw production of these products

SO WHY DO WE USE THESE PRODUCTS SO MUCH?

- Ease of access
- Advertising power
- Information about how to use products
- Narratives surrounding menstruation
- Alternatives are pricey (?)



MOVING TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES

Traditional Products

- Pads
- Tampons

Alternative Products

- Menstrual cups
- Menstrual discs
- Reusable pads
- Product free leggings?! (Dear Kate)
- Period underwear
- Organic tampons
- Reusable tampon applicator
- Sea sponges (?)





ACTIVISM

LEVERAGING YOUR PRIVILEGE



WHAT IS MENSTRUAL EQUITY?

In order to have a fully equitable society, we must have laws and policies that take into account the reality that half the population menstruates. Menstrual products should be tax-exempt. They should be affordable and available for all, safe for our bodies and the planet. Periods should not hold anyone back, period.

~ Jennifer Weiss-Wolf

Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity

WHAT DOES MENSTRUAL EQUITY LOOK LIKE?

- Comprehensive education and information on periods and period products.
- Removing sales taxes on menstrual products.
- Oversight from the Food and Drug Administration on what is used to make menstrual products.
- Access to low-cost, quality menstrual products.
- Available period products for vulnerable populations, such as homeless, incarcerated and trans individuals.
- Appropriate medical and personal leave for individuals suffering from period symptoms.

MENSTRUAL EQUITY FOR ALL ACT OF 2021

- U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY) in May 2021
- “Period products are necessary and essential items for anyone who menstruates, and access to these items are a health care and human right,” said Meng.
- A 2019 study found that among low-income women in a major U.S. city, nearly half had to choose between buying food and spending money on menstrual products.
- The recent State of The Period 2021 study shows that nearly 1 in 4 teens in the United States struggle to access period products. Over 80% of teens say they missed school or know someone else who has.
- <https://meng.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/meng-introduces-bold-plan-to-improve-access-to-menstrual-products>

HOW CAN YOU HELP? GET INVOLVED!

- Normalize periods in conversation.
- Use gender-neutral terms when referring to period products.
- Advocate for products that are safe for your body and the planet.
- Donate menstrual products to those in need:
<https://period.org/uploads/PERIOD-How-to-Host-a-Product-Drive.pdf>
- Support organizations that are dedicated to fighting for menstrual equity:
 - [The Homeless Period Project](#)
 - [Helping Women Period](#)
 - [I Support the Girls](#)

DISCUSSION

- What can individuals living in situations with privilege and power do to address this issue?
- What is one key take-away from today?
- What was your education about periods like?
- How are you informally learning more about menstruation (friends, internet)?
- Do you have a period story to share (funny, surprising, painful, etc.)?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.womensvoices.org/what-does-menstrual-equity-mean-to-you/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/22/health/tampon-tax-periods-menstruation-nyt.html>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/18/period-cost-lifetime_n_7258780.html

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/period-equity-what-is-it-why-does-it-matter-202106012473>

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama-health-forum/fullarticle/2783499>

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/fast-facts-nine-things-you-didnt-know-about-menstruation>

https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/uploads/filer_public/d3/d3/d3d3914a-d23c-4819-a69a-bc437aca922a/2020_period_poverty_fact_sheet.pdf

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tampon_tax

<https://www.periodequity.org/>

<https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/wellness/story/10-college-students-experience-period-poverty-us-report-75721828>