



SPRING, 2013  
SMCR NEWS

## **OCCUPY THE CYCLE!** **JUNE 6-8, 2013 NEW YORK CITY**

**The program for the upcoming meeting in June is finalized**, and we were delighted with the number of high quality submissions we received.

In addition to the conference highlights mentioned elsewhere in this edition of the newsletter, there will be many poster and paper presentations that engage a wide range of topics relevant to our theme *Making Menstruation Matter: Translating Our Knowledge into Action*. Specifically, presenters will consider menstruation and menstrual events across the lifespan, within relationships, and in the context of other domains of women's embodiment (e.g., sexuality, reproductive health, body experience). Many sessions address menstrual politics and activism as well as representations of menstruation in literature, digital communications, advertising, and social media. We have also included several workshops and performances in the program.

### **SMCR KEYNOTE ADDRESS ANNOUNCED**

**One of the highlights of the June conference will be the Keynote Address by Professor Jane Ussher.** *Here's a hint of what's in store.*

### **Women's madness: myth and experience**

For centuries, expert explanations for women's reproductive distress have centered on the corporeal body, with the wandering womb, and more recently raging hormones or neurotransmitter imbalances, positioned as to blame. This has resulted in a reductionist bio-medical conceptualization of the causes and treatment of distress experienced in the premenstrual phase of the cycle, perinatally, and during menopause.

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Making Menstruation Matter

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Feminist critics argue that this medicalizes women's misery, legitimizes expert intervention, and negates the political, economic, and discursive aspects of reproductive health. However, the alternative model of social constructionism may appear to dismiss the "real" of women's misery, and deny agency and resistance. Drawing on a series of mixed method research studies conducted across women's reproductive life cycle, this presentation will argue that a material-discursive-intrapsychic (MDI) model acknowledges socio-cultural context, as well as intrapsychic, relational, and corporeal factors associated with women's reproductive distress.



## **GLORIA STEINEM TO RECEIVE FIRST "MAKING MENSTRUATION MATTER" AWARD**

**One of the highlights of the SMCR June conference will be the opening night awards ceremony** at which Gloria Steinem will be honoured for her work in the advancement of women's rights and health and for her contributions to challenging the myths and taboos surrounding the menstrual cycle.



## **SMCR HOSTS WORLD'S FIRST MENSTRUAL POETRY SLAM**

**Following the closing night banquet on Friday, June 8, the SMCR will host the world's first ever Menstrual Poetry Slam.** Emceed by poet and playwright Karina Billini and featuring a number of individuals drawn from the New York Slam scene, presentations will include menstrual-themed works by noted writers such as Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds, and Ntzosake Shange as well as new original compositions. And there will be an open mic opportunity for anyone in attendance to present their own inspirations. It promises to be a unique event.



## SMCR CO-SPONSORS “SELLING SICKNESS” CONFERENCE

In February seven SMCR members presented a symposium I in Washington, D.C., at the **Selling Sickness conference** (<http://sellingsickness.com>). The conference was the third of its kind, the result of an international grassroots movement to convene “academic medical reformers, consumer activists, and health journalists to examine the current scope of disease mongering and to develop strategies and coalitions for change.” See the conference website for more details and information about Booktivism, an activism project that encourages book clubs to read and discuss outstanding books on related health issues.

In addition to joining many other organizations to co-sponsor the conference, our symposium, entitled “The Medicalization of Menstruation” illustrated how the menstrual cycle is medicalized throughout the life span, from menarche through PMS to menopause. Presenters were Peggy Stubbs, Paula Derry, Joan Chrisler, Chris Bobel, Elizabeth Kissling, Holly Grigg-Spall, and Ingrid Johnston-Robledo. The presentation will appear on both the Selling Sickness and the SMCR websites in the near future.



## SPECIAL ISSUE OF SEX ROLES JOURNAL

The latest issue of Sex Roles: A Journal of Research is edited by SMCR leaders Ingrid Johnston-Robledo and Margaret L. Stubbs and is dedicated to new research on the menstrual cycle. The Table of Contents demonstrates the wide variety of topics that the field entails.

## Volume 68, Issue 1-2, January 2013

**Special Issue: Positioning Periods: Menstruation in Social Context**

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Ingrid Johnston-Robledo, Joan C. Chrisler

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Joseph Albert Wister, Margaret L. Stubbs, Chaquica Shipman

**Distancing Through Objectification? Depictions of Women's Bodies in Menstrual Product Advertisements**

Mindy J. Erchull

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**Public Arena** Leslie-Jean Thornton

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**The Function of Ethnicity, Income Level, and Menstrual Taboos in Postmenarcheal Adolescents' Understanding of Menarche and Menstruation**  
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**The Baby Boomers Meet Menopause: Fertility, Attractiveness, and Affective Response to the Menopausal Transition** Judy R. Strauss

**“Am I Going to be Natural or am I Not?”: Canadian Women’s Perceptions and Experiences of Menstrual Suppression** Robin Repta, Laura Hurd Clarke

**Normal and Natural, or Burdensome and Terrible? Women with Spinal Cord Injuries Discuss Ambivalence about Menstruation** Heather Dillaway, Katherine Cross, Catherine Lysack, Janice Schwartz

**Restriction and Renewal, Pollution and Power, Constraint and Community: The Paradoxes of Religious Women’s Experiences of Menstruation** Nicki C. Dunnivant, Tomi-Ann Roberts

**PMS as a Gendered Illness Linked to the Construction and Relational Experience of Hetero-Femininity** Jane M. Ussher, Janette Perz

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Book Review **Two Tales of Menstruation Directed Toward Two Different Audiences**  
Dacia Charlesworth

**Emancipatory Research: Then and Now** Alice J. Dan

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## Positioning Periods: Menstruation in Social Context: An Introduction to a Special Issue

Ingrid Johnston-Robledo · Margaret L. Stubbs

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**Abstract** The menstrual cycle is often conceptualized in the biomedical literature as a unidimensional, biological, and pathological aspect of women's bodies and health. Feminist social science scholars recognize that the biological event of menstruation is experienced and perceived within a broader sociocultural context. The authors of articles in this special issue address the myriad ways menstruation is positioned within this social context, and the consequences for women's well-being, cognitive functioning, health, sexuality, and social status. Authors examine menstruation as a social stigma, the positioning of menstruation in popular culture, contextual factors relevant to menstruation across the lifespan, the ways women negotiate menstruation in their lives, and the role of women's social location in shaping their attitudes toward and experiences with menstruation. Implications for future research, education, activism, and clinical intervention are considered.

**Keywords** Menstruation · Positioning · Social context · Social location · Social stigma · Development

### Introduction

The menstrual cycle is often conceptualized in the biomedical literature as a unidimensional, biological, and pathological aspect of women's bodies and health (Chrisler and Johnston-Robledo 2012; Ussher 2006). The focus of a traditional biomedical approach to menstruation (see Lock and

Nguyen 2010), which predominates in the scholarly literature, is on biological and clinical aspects of the menstrual cycle: the role of cyclic hormones in reproductive capacity and on women's behavior and cognition, physical symptoms, "disorders" such as premenstrual dysphoric disorder and endometriosis, and pathologizing and medicalizing normative menstrual events such as premenstrual change and peri-menopause (Bell 1987; Chrisler and Johnston-Robledo 2012; Taylor 2006; Ussher 2006). Some biomedical scholars and healthcare providers are now questioning the value of monthly menstruation, and arguing that it is both unnecessary and unhealthy (Coutinho and Segal 1999; Kaunitz 2000). This approach inherently separates menstruation from the rest of women's bodies, health, identities, and sexuality. When menstruation is stripped of its social, cultural, and political meanings, the diversity of women's experiences with and perspectives on menstruation are neglected.

Feminist social science scholars (e.g., Kissling 2006; Koeske and Koeske 1983; MacPherson 1981; Peterson and Taylor 1980; Voda 1997) recognize that the biological event of menstruation is experienced and perceived within a broader sociocultural context. As such, it is associated with many psychological and social issues such as girls' and women's gender identity (Flaake 2005), sexuality (Schooler et al. 2005), body image (Roberts and Waters 2004), reproductive lives (Johnston-Robledo et al. 2007), and social status (Young 1997). Further, women's knowledge about, attitudes toward, and experiences with all aspects of menstrual life vary with their social location (Chrisler and Zittel 1998; Marvan and Trujillo 2009). Accordingly, the articles in this special issue explore and position menstruation in this broader sociocultural and political context and highlight the complex, subjective, interactive, varied, and politicized nature of menstrual experience. The diversity of women's experiences is privileged through this contextual approach. Although the vast majority of papers in the issue focus on U.S. girls and

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## By and About Our Members (cont.)

### Where's the Menstrual Blood in Vampire Stories?

by Lisa Leger

TV and movie vampires abound and paranormal romances are best sellers. Observing this, a member of SMCR noticed a profound lack of menstrual blood in stories about the sexy blood-drinkers. Justisse fertility educator, Lisa Leger started to wonder; "Are vampires squeamish about menstrual blood... or is it just we humans?"

Leger contemplated how our cultural attitudes shape even our most escapist forms of fiction. It led her to write an essay, titled, "Twilight Stories – Where's the Blood" about the role of scent in human attraction, menstrual taboos, primal fears, and the ties between danger and eroticism.

The essay appears as the final piece in the anthology "Blood", the latest volume from Trunk Books. The artistic and academic collection examines the cultural meaning of blood in history and mythology. Leger is amused that readers of Blood are left with the final image of Edward sniffing around Bella during her period. "Pop culture manages to brush against such hidden subjects without confronting their gory details," she points out. "My job as an educator is to shine some light on those dark shadows in the collective psyche."

You can ponder the odd lack of menstrual blood in vampire stories and other types of erotic literature with Leger when she presents "Making Menstruation Sexy" as part of a panel discussion at the upcoming SMCR conference in June.

The Trunk Book Vol 2: Blood is published by Bocca Latte and edited by Meredith Jones and Suzanne Boccalatte. Copies will be available at the conference, or go to <http://boccalattemakebooks.com/> to order.

Here is a video about the book: <http://vimeo.com/47000795>

### ELIZABETH KISSLING

"Pills, Periods, and Postfeminism: The New Politics of Marketing Birth Control" will be in print in *Feminist Media Studies*, later this year ( vol. 13, no. 4). I've just completed "What Does Not Kill You Makes You Stronger: Young Women's Online Conversations about Quitting the Pill", for Meredith Nash's *Reframing reproduction: Conceiving gendered experiences in late modernity*, to be published by Palgrave-Macmillan next year. In the last few months, I've published three pieces about menstrual cycle issues at the Ms. Magazine Blog:

Of Menstruators and Manhole Covers <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2013/02/11/of-menstruators-and-manhole-covers/>

## By and About Our Members (cont.)

Is PMS Overblown? That's What Research Shows - <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2012/10/23/is-pms-overblown-thats-what-research-shows/>

Yes, There's Even an App for THAT: Menstruation and the Quantified Self - <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2012/09/14/yes-there%e2%80%99s-even-an-app-for-that-menstruation-and-the-quantified-self/>

I was also interviewed on local radio Dec 16, 2012, on Tony Flinn's "Just a Theory", on Spokane Public Radio (mp3 available here:

[http://kpbx.org/podcast/justatheory/media/2012-12-15\\_2012-12-16\\_jat\\_103.mp3](http://kpbx.org/podcast/justatheory/media/2012-12-15_2012-12-16_jat_103.mp3)).



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### JOAN CHRISLER

Joan Chrisler has recently been awarded the Margaret Floy Washburn Award for career contributions to the psychology of women by the New York State Psychological Association. Dr. Washburn was the first woman to receive a Ph.D. in psychology from an American university, Cornell, in 1894. She was also the second woman to serve as President of the American Psychological Association. This prestigious award was granted in recognition of Dr. Chrisler's years of scholarship, teaching and leadership in the field of the psychology of women. Those involved in menstrual cycle research are well aware of her contributions and laud the NY State organization for its selection.



### THE SMCR BLOG CONTINUES TO GROW

**re:Cycling** continues to attract new readers and social media followers. We have 355 Twitter followers and 250 Facebook fans. With 250 fans, our average weekly reach is about 603 Facebook readers, but we want more, so keep liking and sharing our Facebook posts! The re:Cycling site is currently averaging about 4,000 site visits each week, but we'd like to see it get that many hits each day. So keep reading it, linking it, and commenting on our posts!





## By and About Our Members (cont.)

### LAURA WERSHLER

SMCR board member and re:Cycling blogger, Laura Wershler is now the weekly women's health columnist for Troy Media, a Canadian online news content provider. Her first column - The Value of Ovulation to Women's Health (<http://www.troymedia.com/2013/01/22/the-value-of-ovulation-to-womens-health/>)- featured the work of Dr. Jerilynn Prior, another SMCR member, and the Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. Laura graduated from the Certificate of Journalism program at Mount Royal University in Calgary in 2011. She intends to write frequently about the menstrual cycle and it's connection to women's overall health and well-being. You can follow Laura on Twitter @laurawershler.



### NEWS FROM KENYA

by Megan White Mukuria

**This month ZanaAfrica has officially launched The Nia Network**, a mobile phone app supporting girls with sanitary pads and health education. *Nia* in Kiswahili means *purpose*, and the network is designed to help girls achieve their purpose through coordinated distribution of sanitary pads, standardization of reproductive health education, and deeper monitoring and evaluation. Historical data for 2012 documents over 246,000 girls receiving pads and underpants in over 2,600 schools by 18 distributors. With enhanced visibility through the app launch, these numbers could grow exponentially, which would be in the best interest of girls everywhere.

Through a new partnership with PaperSeed Foundation and Transformation Textiles, we will give away nearly 61,500 packets of sanitary pads and 30,800 adjustable (yes!) underpants to serve 7,685 girls through the school year. This will be done through a Pad Giveaway Challenge to promote the use of The Nia Network and vet stakeholders that have capacity to accountably distribute the products. We estimate 35 new partner organizations will come for training in age-appropriate reproductive health education and will use the app to document the pads and underpants they will provide to girls.

Megan White Mukuria | Founder and CEO | [ZanaAfrica](#)  
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## By and About Our Members (cont.)



**It's the month to  
Support Girls**

In honour of the 7th Anniversary of the  
National Sanitary Towels Campaign,


**Join us for a launch  
of the best new app to  
support girls' education!**

**The Nia Network**  
Coordinating National Sanitary  
Towel Distribution to School Girls

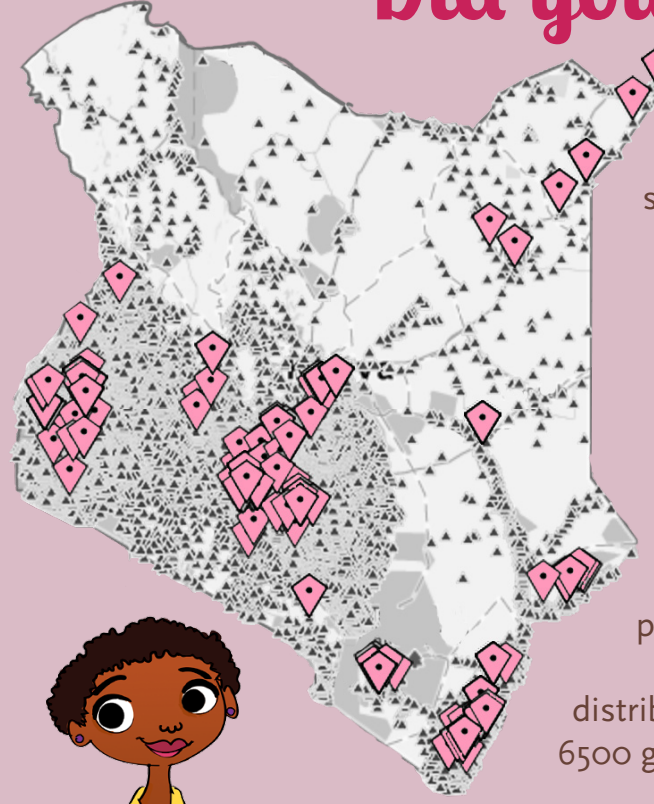
Sarova Stanley Hotel  
Thursday, 21 February 2013 @ 10am  
RSVP to Faith 0729 750 537 or [faith@zanaafrica.org](mailto:faith@zanaafrica.org)

Kenya ♥ girls!

## By and About Our Members (cont.)



# Did you know?





An estimated 850,000 girls miss school every month due to a lack of sanitary pads. These girls are in over 32,000 schools across 580,400 km<sup>2</sup> of Kenya.

Our mobile phone app currently documents 17 distributors serving over 6500 girls in 261 schools.

Help us colour the map!


Download the app at [www.zanaa.org/informing-policy-kenya](http://www.zanaa.org/informing-policy-kenya)

 Documented school  
 Undocumented school

Providing Pads. Creating Promise.

**zana**  
AFRICA

Supported by Chase Group Foundation




## By and About Our Members (cont.)

### JANICE A. CAMPANELLI

I've completed my doctoral research titled: "The Menstrual Cycle is All Month Long: Women's experiences of the menstrual cycle as told through narratives and art" and have been able to share it with a variety of audiences.

The Women's Health Center at the Veteran's Administration hospital in Milwaukee, WI has asked me to share and discuss my finding with their staff. I work in mental health with Veterans diagnosed with psychotic disorders so was very pleased to be able to cross over and offer what I know about women's experiences of the menstrual cycle to a different area of health care providers.

I've also been able to share my findings with psychotherapists at the Annual Internal Family Systems conference in Providence, RI this past year. The workshop was titled: "At Last! A Companion for the Rollercoaster Ride: The Intersection of Hormones, the Menstrual Cycle and Psychotherapy using IFS"

#### **This is a brief bit of background:**

Years ago I worked with women who were in the psychiatric hospital, recovering from chemical dependency and found they didn't know much about their menstrual cycles. I started groups and found a little knowledge on biology/physiology, mixed with stories and menstrual cycle art went a long way to helping women increase their awareness on relapse prevention work. This led to my current research of today where I found "everyday" women to have rich stories about their menstrual cycle experiences and deeply expressive art depicting how they experienced themselves on every day of the month. I'm sharing these findings with a variety of audiences because, of course, most people are unaware that the menstrual cycle is all month long, and, there is much to be learned by paying attention to what information can be offered by the body experience. I'd be glad to share what I've found with others!

My contact information is: Jan Campanelli: [jancampanelli@gmail.com](mailto:jancampanelli@gmail.com)



Submission Deadline for next edition  
of the SMCR News:

**OCTOBER 1, 2013**

## By and About Our Members (cont.)

### NANCY REAME

Nancy Reame, MSN, PhD, FAAN is the Mary Dickey Lindsay Professor of Nursing at Columbia University. She is a member of the Conference Planning Committee and served as SMCR President in 19987-89. Her current program of research is focused on the neuroendocrinology of the menstrual cycle, PMS, and menopause with the aim of clarifying the factors associated with women's reproductive health.

#### **She has two funded projects in progress:**

1. a focus group study of cultural influences on the management of perimenopausal joint pain in urban Hispanic women.
2. She is one of 30 investigators participating from 3 countries in an industry-sponsored, FDA phase 2 trial of the Efficacy and Safety of TBS-2 Intranasal Testosterone Gel in Women With Acquired Female Orgasmic Disorder.

Nancy is a member of the Steering Committee for the newly-launched LGBT Health Initiative in the Division of Gender, Sexuality and Health of the Dept. of Psychiatry and was recently invited to serve on the Selection Jury for the 2013 International Award for the Health and Dignity of Women and GirlsFriends, bestowed by the Friends of UN Family Planning Association, based in New York City.



### DAVID LINTON

In addition to putting together the SMCR Newsletter (along with Alexandra Jacoby) and regularly posting on the SMCR blog, David Linton was recently interviewed on Australian radio by Lauren Rosewarne for her regular broadcast. Along with several other members, he discussed how he came to become interested in menstrual cycle research and included a pitch for the June conference, Making Menstruation Matter. The broadcast can be heard at this site:

<http://ondemand.rrr.org.au/grid/20121226194226>

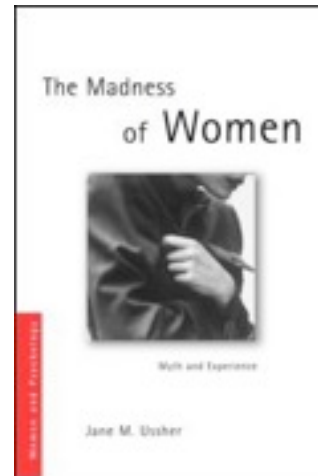
Meanwhile, David has been invited to do a presentation at the Practices and Their Bodies 2013 conference hosted by the Research Center of Social and Cultural Studies in Mainz, Germany, April 25-27, 2013. His talk, titled “Creating the Menstruating Body,” reviews the history of the cultural construction of menstruation including a look at the earliest television ads for menstrual products in post-war Germany. It promises to be an interesting and wide-ranging set of discussions. The full conference schedule can be viewed at this location: [www.symposium2013.socum.uni-mainz.de](http://www.symposium2013.socum.uni-mainz.de)



## By and About Our Members (cont.)

### JANE M. USSHER

Professor of Women's Health Psychology, in the Centre for Health Research, University of Western Sydney, **Jane Ussher's** most recent research has focused on relational factors and the evaluation of couple interventions for premenstrual distress, sexuality and fertility in the context of cancer, and reproductive health in cultural minority women. She is editor of the Routledge *Women and Psychology* book series and is author of a number of books, including *The Psychology of the Female Body*, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, *Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex*, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body*, and *The Madness of Women: Myths and Experience*.



### JOSEFIN PERSDOTTER

Menstrual themed jewelry crafted by Josefin Persdotter is now on display in the art gallery Urban Artroom in Gothenburg and will be available at the June SMCR conference.

See the accompanying images or visit her web site at:

<https://sites.google.com/site/lovethecurse/tampon-earrings>





## Our Board

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