



Under Wraps: A History of Menstrual Hygiene Technology

By Sharra L. Vostral

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Menstruation provides one of the few shared bodily functions that most women will experience during their lifetimes. Yet, these experiences are anything but common. In the United States, for the better part of the twentieth century, menstruation went hand-in-glove with menstrual hygiene. But how and why did this occur? This book looks at the social history of menstrual hygiene by examining it as a technology. In doing so, the lens of technology provides a way to think about menstrual artifacts, how the artifacts are used, and how women gained the knowledge and skills to use them. As technological users, women developed great savvy in manipulating belts, pins, and pads, and using tampons to effectively mask their entire menstrual period. This masking is a form of passing, though it is not often thought of in that way. By using a technology of passing, a woman might pass temporarily as a non-bleeder, which could help her perform her work duties and not get fired or maintain social engagements like swimming at a summer party and not be marked as having her period. How women use technologies of passing, and the resulting politics of secrecy, are a part of women's history that has remained under wraps.

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Editorial Review

Review

In this influential book, Vostral tackles what is often viewed as a taboo subject...Written with academic rigor and filled with keen insights...*Under Wraps* is a fascinating book to read. It provides a detailed history of an often overlooked aspect of the social history of American women. (*History In Review, January 2009*)

Under Wraps is a valuable addition to our understanding of gender, technology, and consumer culture. (Linda Layne, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute)

While other writers have discussed the hidden nature of the menstrual process, none, to my knowledge, have used the analogy of passing with such consistency like Vostral has. (*Journal of the History of Sexuality*)

About the Author

Sharra L. Vostral is associate professor of gender and women's studies and history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Users Review

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