



The Vagina Dialogue

The conversation is changing. What was once taboo is now cocktail party-approved.

By Briony Smith

I

t was 2003, and I was a young pup of 20 thrilled to be invited to join two slightly older editors from the university newspaper for dinner. That night, our conversation flitted over the usual topics: school politics, music we liked.... But I almost choked on my penne when one of them casually mentioned her vibrator. The other chimed in, laughing, with a joke about her tools. I still remember the visceral jolt I felt at these women openly admitting to something so private. To me, this small moment felt like an act of great bravery. Such honesty helped inspire me to start speaking up more about my body and sexual proclivities—and to buy my own vibrator. (Almost a decade and a half later, we are still together.) For the past 14 years, I've felt like I was one of the few women willing to talk about these things, but now it's finally the norm to discuss our vaginas, debate the merits of different sex toys or period panties and celebrate the return of the bush—even during dinner party chit-chat.

It turns out that vaginas are like fashion trends: They always come back in style. Psychologist and psychology professor Laurie Mintz, 57, just published *Becoming Cliterate: Why Orgasm Equality Matters and How to Get It*, in which she reminisces about coming of age in the pro-vag '70s—the era when “women were getting together in groups and looking at their vulvas,” she says. “We have this cultural cycle of things rising to the top and being buried again, especially concerning women's sexuality. During the sex-positive feminist revolution, everyone knew about the clitoris. When I got back into [the sex field in recent years], I looked around and was like ‘Holy shit! Where has all this knowledge gone? These young women don't know about themselves. They're not having orgasms; they're not talking about [sex].’”

So why has the veil on the vagina been lifted again? Mintz attributes it to the resurgence of the women's movement in general—the one positive outcome of the Donald Trump era. “It is in reaction to this more conservative, anti-women atmosphere that change and liberation happen,” she says. Women

are saying: ‘Oh, no, no, no, you're not gonna silence my voice. You're not gonna silence my sexuality. I am powerful.’ And that includes pussy power.”

Our punanis now have more purchasing power, too—and companies want to capitalize on that. “The market is starting to realize that women are interested in taking control of their sexual and vaginal health,” says Laura Schubert, CEO and co-founder of Fur, the maker of Fur Oil, a product that was marketed initially for pubic hair but works on all kinds of hair. The 34-year-old's experience with body hair has changed over her lifetime; as a gymnast growing up, she felt pressure to groom year-round. In recent years, however, she has felt “a big shift, from *Sex and the City to Girls*, in terms of pop culture references to body hair, which has promoted a wider acceptance of variation in grooming,” she says. “Women are becoming more comfortable discussing pubic hair nowadays, perhaps with the rise of social media as a filter-less platform for conversation.”

After years of our staying silent about our monthlies, they have also become a hot topic. Toronto-based comedian and actress Sandra Baggiani, 46, remembers growing up in a less “flow-friendly” time. “Italians wouldn't tell you to use a tampon because tampons are for sluts,” she says, laughing. “My mother wore cloth at night—like in the old country.”

Now, there are many more options, including menstrual cups as well as organic tampons, pads and liners from Lola and Jessica Alba's The Honest Company. Remember the photo of runner Kiran Gandhi bleeding through her tights that went viral in 2015? She became the poster girl for the increasingly popular practice of free bleeding, where you forgo tampons and pads and drip straight into specially designed ultra-absorbent underwear instead. Most encouragingly, the companies leading the fast-growing period panties market—including Thinx and Canadian brands Knixwear and Luna—are run by women.

Not all of these new products are good for our junk, however. An American chiropractor was criticized online this past winter for securing a patent on »

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