

ON AN EARLY OCTOBER AFTERNOON when an unseasonable humidity lay over a torpid Brooklyn, I closed my web browser and shut my windows to block out the reggaeton bass line pounding from a pickup truck outside. As Skype's familiar dial tone cued up, I was nervous about the intimacy I was about to engage in with a stranger. We may live in a time that celebrates oversharing anything and everything, but talking about the details of my sexual health remains a challenge for me. So when a redhead

problems was life-threatening, but I was seeking advice about my next move. On offer from my doctor: a ten-minute annual cervical exam and another IUD. On offer from Johnson: a discussion about what was going on in my body on a holistic level to help determine how best to move forward.

Period Piece

Vaginapracitors. Tampon moguls. Sexological bodyworkers. As more women wean themselves off hormonal contraceptives, menstruation has become a hot (and lucrative) topic. By Emily Witt.

Photographed by Grant Cornett.

in her early 40s beamed into view on my computer screen from Southern California, I panicked and was soon rattling off a list of medical symptoms. Kimberly Johnson snapped me back into focus.

"Let me just pause you for a second," she said, sensing my uneasiness. "What are you noticing in your body, in this moment, as you're talking to me?"

What I was actually noticing, as I avoided eye contact, was the spines of two novels by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on the bookshelf behind her. But we were meant to be discussing my "pelvic health," a term I had never before uttered aloud.

Johnson is a certified sexological bodyworker, another term that had only recently entered my vocabulary, which means that she uses various methods such as breathwork, touch, massage, and yoga to help people improve their sexual, physical, and emotional well-being. She is best known as a postpartum-recovery specialist, although I sought her out for a different reason. With a five-year hormonal IUD nearing its expiration date, at 36 I found myself at a crossroads: having to decide whether to order a replacement or choose a new birth control method that still kept the door open to having children.

As much as I liked my IUD, which prevented pregnancy while allowing me to have nicely controlled periods, I had some issues with it. Chief among them: persistent, low-grade cramping and an out-of-whack internal pH balance that manifested as occasional infections that could not be cured with cranberry juice alone. I had cleared with my doctor that neither of these

Often called a "vaginapracitor," she is just one participant in an increasingly popular alternative health care movement that is being embraced by women intent on avoiding chemical contraception while bio-hacking their hormones, expanding their sexuality, prolonging their fertility, and still preventing pregnancy. The tech world and female-backed businesses are going full tilt with algorithm-based services and product launches to accommodate these "pro-period" and "mindful menstruation" crusaders who are championing an attitude that is more attuned to unmedicated cycles.

Their work reflects a culture that has grown tired of euphemism and secrecy around women's health. The result is a new willingness to address the most personal of matters with frankness and an entrepreneurial spirit. On social media, Padma Lakshmi and Lena Dunham have gone public about their struggles with endometriosis and its painful effects on menstruation; the photographer Petra Collins has posed in a T-shirt with a line drawing of a bleeding vagina. Meanwhile, organic cotton tampon-subscription services and cramp-soothing herbal supplements from brands such as Lola have launched, along with pain-relieving cannabinoid-laced topical products, and the Honey Pot's range of chlorine- and pesticide-free cotton sanitary pads treated with healing essential oils. We have emerged from the dark ages of the 1940s, when the household disinfectant Lysol was advertised as an effective, odor-eradicating way to "safeguard her dainty feminine allure." Now skepticism about the pharmaceutical industry has combined with the emerging wellness movement to promote lifestyle solutions over prescription fixes.

In 2017, the supermodel Natalia Vodianova isn't lending her name to a handbag line; she's fronting a Belarusian-designed app that tracks ovulation and hosts anonymous chat

rooms and message boards about menstrual health. "It's a life-changing experience," she says of the opportunity to not only know yourself better but know that you're not alone. "It's like therapy." Despite being a mother of five, Vodianova cites her own incomplete knowledge of the mechanics of

RELIEF PITCH

"That time of the month," no longer a punch line, is the *raison d'être* for a new crop of women-led organic-tampon and oral-supplement companies, cannabinoid treatments to manage menstrual pain, and science-backed apps that track the body's hormonal rhythms.

Sittings Editor: Phyllis Posnick.

PROP STYLIST: JANINE IVERSEN

THEN&NOW



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Francis (#8), “You’ve met a lot of these girls before, but they’re not who you think they are.”

Perkins continues, “It’s just so radical to have these young women onstage and not have it be in relation to men. It’s all their own stories.”

“We transcend gender,” says Coates.

“We’re the Wolves!” says Millan.

At this, they all start howling, and when the howls have died down there is a brief moment of silence as they look to one another. Then Millan says, “You guys!” □

PERIOD PIECE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 242

her reproductive organs and fertility. “I’ve heard all kinds of terminology, but 40 to 60 percent of the information I am getting now was new to me, like the fact that the ovulation period can be quite precise. On my phone today, there is an alert that I have a high chance of getting pregnant.” In New York with her husband, Antoine Arnault, for a romantic weekend, she notes, “We’ll have to be very careful!”

Alisa Vitti, the founder of the Flo

Living Hormone Center in New York, agrees that “most women don’t understand the basics of how their hormones work.” After struggling for much of her young adulthood with a hormonal imbalance that caused weight gain, cystic acne, and missed periods, Vitti now offers online courses to help women understand underlying causes of conditions such as PMS, endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and any period problem that can create a host of symptoms and chaos in a woman’s life. One such fix is a practice Vitti describes as “cycle syncing,” in which a woman tailors her diet and exercise to the four different phases of her menstrual cycle—luteal, menstrual, follicular, and ovulatory. This helps mitigate the urge to lie down on the closest piece of furniture on some days of the month, and to throw your Vitamix through a plate-glass window on others. Following these suggested guidelines, such as roasting vegetables instead of eating them raw during your luteal phase to stave off sugar cravings, and booking your most punishing SoulCycle classes during the follicular

and ovulatory phases, is made that much easier with the My FLO period-tracking app. Vitti imagines a future where women will consult feminine-health practitioners—menstrual coaches! menopause counselors!—in addition to their OB/GYN, the way an expectant mother might choose to work with a midwife, doula, or lactation consultant.

While I admire the dedication of the lissome 20-somethings posting online videos about monitoring their cervical fluid while nonchalantly skipping the pill, an apparent backlash against hormonal contraception also worries me. I had my IUD to thank for the glorious, pregnancy-free window of my mid-30s when I traveled and worked on four different continents, started and ended relationships, wrote and published two books, and witnessed my life come together in the best kind of way. “I get it,” says Tara Shirazian, M.D., a gynecologist and assistant professor in the department of obstetrics and gynecology at NYU Langone Health, of this cultural shift. “But as far as the long-term health implications go,

In This Issue

Cover look 82: Blouse (\$895), pants (price upon request), and jacket on chair (\$7,995); select Michael Kors stores. Fred Leighton earrings, price upon request; Fred Leighton, NYC. Tiffany & Co. necklace, \$27,500; tiffany.com. Tailor, Lucy Falke. **Cover look 82:** On Hammam: Jacket (\$3,150), sweatshirt (\$1,250), pants (\$2,350), and belt (\$1,475); select Chanel boutiques. L.L. Bean turtleneck, \$23; lbean.com. Turban, \$510; gucci.com. Earrings, \$125; dinosaurdesigns.com. On Williams: Jacket (\$3,150) and pants (\$2,350); select Chanel boutiques. Shirt, \$840; select Prada boutiques. Watch, price upon request; richardmille.com. Manicure, Gina Viviano. Tailor, Lucy Falke.

Nostalgia 108: Coat, \$8,500; Calvin Klein, NYC. Slip dress, \$375; frame-store.com. Ring, \$350; assemblynewyork.com.

Suiting up 130: On Wijnaldum: Jacket and dress (priced upon request) and shoes (\$1,290); select Tom Ford boutiques. On Rosa: Jacket (price upon request), bodysuit (\$1,150), pants (price upon request), and shoes (\$1,290); select Tom Ford boutiques. **Talking fashion**

140: Céline earrings (\$620) and sandals (\$690); Earrings at Céline, NYC. Sandals at Nordstrom, Seattle. Alexis Bittar gold-tone bangle, \$295; alexisbittar.com. Michael Kors Collection black bangle, \$295; select Michael Kors stores. Manicure, Kana Kishita. Tailor, Alexander Koutny. **Beauty**

164: Robe, \$2,495; versace.com. Earrings, \$500; Céline, NYC. **178:**

Top (\$1,990) and pants (\$1,220); The Row, NYC. Earrings, \$695; Proenza Schouler, NYC.

THE PHARRELL FACTORY

190–191: On Afrodita Dorado: Carven top, \$550; carven.com. L.L. Bean turtleneck, \$23; lbean.com. Alberta Ferretti pants; Barneys New York, NYC. Prada sneakers, price upon request; select Prada boutiques. On Dilone: Dress, price upon request; similar styles at Loewe, Miami. Pants, \$640; jeremyscott.com. Valentino Garavani sneakers, \$945; similar styles at select Valentino boutiques. On Montero: T-shirt, \$155; Dover Street Market New York, NYC. Dress, \$1,535; preenbythorntonbregazzi.com. Valentino Garavani sneakers, \$945; similar styles at select Valentino boutiques. On Furman: Cardigan, \$980; select Prada boutiques. Marni shirt, \$440; select Marni boutiques. Pants, \$65; adidas.com. Uniqlo parka (worn around waist), \$40; uniqlo.com. Kolor sneakers, \$544; farfetch.com. On Mason: Vest, \$895; missoni.com. Perry Ellis shirt, \$128; perryellis.com. Pants, \$950; select Valentino boutiques. Adidas Originals sneakers, \$80; adidas.com. On Bermannelli: Knit bra (\$265), sweater (\$375), and skirt (\$395); kenzo.com. On Williams: Sweater (\$1,102), shirt (\$798), and pants (\$625); rafsimons.com. Adidas Originals sneakers, \$90; similar styles at adidas.com. On Jones: Dress, \$693; antoniomarras.com. Louis Vuitton turtleneck, price upon request;

select Louis Vuitton boutiques. Adidas Originals pants, \$65; adidas.com. Public School sweater (worn around waist), \$475; select Saks Fifth Avenue stores. Nike jacket (worn around waist), \$100; nike.com. Chanel bag, \$3,200; select Chanel boutiques. Valentino Garavani sneakers, \$945; similar styles at select Valentino boutiques. On Curtiss: Tory Burch cardigan, \$448; toryburch.com. Dress, \$495; maeje.com. On Hammam: Cardigan (\$1,080) and sweater (\$840); Sonia Rykiel, NYC. Pants, \$130; puma.com. Gucci turban, \$510; gucci.com. Chanel earrings, \$825; select Chanel boutiques. Miu Miu shoes, \$990; select Miu Miu boutiques. **192:** On Valdiés: Jacket, similar styles at Barneys New York, NYC. Victoria Beckham shoes, \$995; victoriabeckham.com. On Smalls: Earrings, \$825; select Chanel boutiques. Bag, \$90; fredperry.com. Socks, price upon request; kenzo.com. Shoes, \$1,295; Calvin Klein, NYC. On Williams: Coat (\$3,250), jacket (\$1,450), and pants (\$1,150); select Valentino boutiques. Shoes, \$1,250; jimmychoo.com. **194:** Jacket (\$4,735), T-shirt (\$720), and shorts (\$1,720); Comme des Garçons, NYC. Hat, \$100; cactusplantfleamarket.bigcartel.com. **195:** On Smalls: DVF turtleneck, \$268; dvf.com. Earrings, \$585; jenniferfisherjewelry.com. Bag, \$2,750; Capitol, Charlotte, NC. Boots, \$2,456; off-white.com. On Williams: Shirt, price upon request; select Louis Vuitton boutiques. Shorts, \$400; Dover Street Market New York, NYC. Sunglasses, \$320; gentlemoonster.com. Bag, \$2,750; Balenciaga, NYC. Belt,

\$1,475; select Chanel boutiques. Earrings, \$125; dinosaurdesigns.com. Shoes, price upon request; select Prada boutiques. On Williams: Jacket (\$3,150) and pants (\$2,350); select Chanel boutiques. Prada shirt, \$840; select Prada boutiques. Watch, price upon request; richardmille.com. Sneakers, \$110; adidas.com. **197:** On Hammam: Jacket (price upon request for similar styles), jumpsuit (\$450), pants (price upon request for similar styles), and boots (\$650); puma.com. On Williams: Jacket (\$2,910), T-shirt (\$930) and shorts (\$610); Comme des Garçons, NYC. **198–199:** On Montero: Shirt, \$1,020; Givenchy, NYC. Balenciaga belt, \$450; similar styles at Balenciaga, NYC. Etudes T-shirt, \$105; etudes-studio.com. Ellery pants, \$1,095; ellery.com. On Fukushima: Top, \$850; select Chanel boutiques. 3.1 Phillip Lim jumpsuit, \$895; 31philliplim.com. A.P.C. cap, \$125; usonline.apc.fr. On Forrest: Top, \$375; shopbop.com. Jumpsuit, \$4,500; select Dior boutiques. Fila Visor, \$16; fila.com. Adidas by Stella McCartney belt bag, \$50; adidas.com. Miu Miu belt, \$555; select Miu Miu boutiques. On Dominic: Sunnei blazer, \$1,205; sunnei.it. On Mason: Prada polo shirt, \$890; select Prada boutiques. On Bermannelli: Jumpsuit, \$1,900; Givenchy, NYC. Dinosaur Designs earrings, \$125; dinosaurdesigns.com. Tory Sport backpack, \$395; torysport.com. On Curtiss: Jumpsuit (\$4,865) and sweater (\$1,200); select Miu Miu boutiques. Dinosaur Designs earrings, \$95; dinosaurdesigns.com. & Other Stories belt; similar styles at stories.com.

On Williams: Jumpsuit, \$600; ambushdesign.com. Cactus Plant Flea Market for Human Made cap, \$100; cactusplantfleamarket.bigcartel.com. On Smalls: Jumpsuit (\$4,865), earrings (\$310), visor (\$260), and bag (\$1,480); select Miu Miu boutiques. In this story: Manicure, Gina Viviano. Tailor, Lucy Falke.

QUEEN C

204: Dress and gloves; Alexander McQueen, NYC. Tiara, earrings, and necklace, priced upon request; siphillips.com. Tiffany & Co. bracelets, \$30,000–\$45,000; tiffany.com. Cartier bracelet, price upon request; Cartier boutiques. House of Garrard bracelet; garrard.com. **205:** Jacket, skirt, and boots, priced upon request; Alexander McQueen, NYC. Hat, \$650; lisashaub.com. Brooch on hat (\$55,700) and earrings (price upon request); bentley-skinner.co.uk. Gloves, \$55; (212) 647-1107. In this story: Tailor, Della George.

ONE NATION

208–209: Ambush earring (\$350) and padlock charm necklace, \$610; Barneys New York, NYC. Kenneth Jay Lane hoop earring, \$60; kennethjayanline.com. Child of Wild choker, \$88; childofwild.com. Jennifer Fisher charm (\$990), chain (from \$430), dog tag (\$1,750), and chain (\$1,100); jenniferfisherjewelry.com. Shihara rings, \$895–\$1,383; twistonline.com. Hoorsenbuhs ring, \$4,500; hoorsenbuhs.com. Doyle & Doyle ring, \$2,800; doyledoyle.com. Aurélie Bidermann ring, \$160; Aurélie Bidermann, NYC. Shay Jewelry, \$2,415; shayfinejewelry.com.

we do know that oral contraceptives have been shown to decrease the risk of cancer of the uterus, cancer of the ovaries, and not affect fertility." There are "no data," she says, that support the health benefits of allowing your body's cycle to run its course without tampering.

Still, the more I engaged with the platforms championed by Johnson, Vitti, and others, the more it became clear that as someone who might want to conceive a year or two in the future, I should probably give my body the chance to reveal potential fertility issues or hormonal imbalances by menstruating without synthetic hormones. "The number of women getting pregnant over 30 and 35 and 40 is the only cohort where the birth rate is going up in the U.S.," reveals Robin Berzin, M.D., a physician and the founder and CEO of Parsley Health, a medical practice and platform that combines Western medicine with a focus on nutrition, wellness, and prevention. "I think we need to be really proactive in thinking about how we plan our families, and that can include going off the pill

before you're ready to get pregnant, to ensure your cycles are healthy."

As the bass-blasting pickup outside my window was replaced by the thrumming of a cement truck, I described to Johnson a sense of pressure that I had started to notice in my uterus. She suggested taking this as a possible sign that my body had hit a barrier of endurance, and experimenting with removing my IUD—and not replacing it. This was, in the end, the answer I had been looking for. Here was someone who seemed to understand what I wanted, even if I had yet to get there myself: For the first time, I felt ready to try to figure out exactly what discomfort I could attribute to my birth control and what might be symptomatic of another problem. I scheduled an appointment with my OB/GYN for an IUD removal and splurged on a Lola subscription and something else I'd been eyeing online: the Lady-Comp, a \$500 fertility computer from Germany that keeps you apprised of your ovulation—and flashes a big red light on days when you're most fertile. □

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.com. Building Block bag, \$380; building-block.com. Kangol hat, \$70; kangolstore.com. Boots, \$1,310; dsquared2.com. **210–211:** Pants, price upon request for similar styles. Sunglasses, \$350; net-a-porter.com. Bag, \$450; thedreslyn.com. Erickson Beamon earring, \$750; ericksonbeamonshop.com. Mounser earring, \$125; Barneys New York, NYC. Tuza Jewelry necklace, \$127; tuzajewelry.com. Pandora Jewelry necklace, \$2,750; pandora.net. The M Jewellers necklace, \$375; themjewellers.com. Ambush bracelet, \$325; Barneys New York, NYC.

NIGHT BY NIGHT

214–215: On Williams: Top and skirt, priced upon request. On Faretta: Top and skirt, priced upon request. On Forrest: Dress and bustier, price upon request. On Choi: Dress, top, and pants, priced upon request. On Van Rompaey: Dress, price upon request. On all: Boots, price upon request; select Louis Vuitton boutiques. Alexander McQueen canes, \$485–\$625; Alexander McQueen, NYC. In this story: Manicure, Honey, Tailor, Leah Huntsinger.

MODELS & MUSES

217: Hat (price upon request) and earrings (\$370).

SHOCK AND AWE

219: Leather-and-shearing sleeves (\$5,990), tank top (\$490), and pants (\$990); Saint Laurent, NYC. In this story: Tailor, Della George.

THE ROBOT WILL SEE YOU NOW

222–223: Dress, \$1,700; Barneys New York, NYC. Turtleneck, \$58; teesbytina.com.

FREE AND EASY

225: Coat (\$20,000), dress (\$8,800), hat (\$1,250), necklace (\$700), woven bracelet (\$250 for two), metal cuff (\$440), and rings (\$340 each). Earrings, \$650; Bergdorf Goodman, NYC. Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello cuff, \$595; Saint Laurent, NYC. Form Vintage cuff, \$400; formvintage.com. Manicure, Naomi Yasuda.

STATE OF MINDFULNESS

226–227: Sweater (\$1,400), skirt (\$2,340), and shoes (price upon request); select Prada boutiques.

WALKING THE WALK

231: Bodysuit (price upon request), bag (\$695), and boots (price upon request). Turban, price upon request. **232:** Skirt, price upon

request; vetementswebsite.com. Sneakers, \$1,040; matchesfashion.com. **233:** Coat at Saks Fifth Avenue, NYC. Gloves (\$185), tights (\$125), shoes (\$995), and bag (\$2,750). Manicure, Megumi Yamamoto.

FRONT MAN

234–235: Tank top, \$40; paskho.com. Jeans, \$60; levi.com. AMI Alexandre Mattiussi jacket (Jordan is holding), \$1,970; barneys.com.

BOLD STANDARD

238: On Akech: Top (\$2,460), skirt (\$2,690), earrings (\$570), and necklace (\$590). Top, earrings, and necklace at Marni boutiques. Skirt at select Saks Fifth Avenue stores. On Oumie: Top (\$2,890), dress (\$5,660), earring (\$380), and necklace (\$740); Marni boutiques. **239:** Dress, \$7,560; select Gucci boutiques. Fallon ear cuffs, \$100 each; fallonjewelry.com. Lynn Ban for Fenty Puma ear cuff, \$600; lynnban.com. Agnes earring, \$470; agnesnyc.com.

UNDER AND OUT

244–245: All lingerie priced upon request. In this story: Manicure, Elsa Durrens. Tailor, Carole Savaton.

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER

246–247: Photographed at Hook Studio. On Combs: Coat, price upon request; Alexander McQueen, NYC. T-shirt, \$455; rickowens.eu. Pants, \$750; versace.com. Necklace, \$150,000; Raffaello & Co. NYC. Ring, \$168,000; Jacob & Co., NYC. On Christian: Jacket, \$30; uniglo.com. Briefs, \$36 for four; supremenewyork.com. Pants, price upon request; Berluti, NYC. Hat, \$245; hatshop.com. Earrings, price upon request; (800) 843-3269. David Yurman necklace, price upon request; davidyurman.com. Shay Jewelry necklace, price upon request; shayfinejewelry.com. Cartier ring, \$7,850; Cartier boutiques. Hoorsenbush ring, \$8,200; Barneys New York, NYC.

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248: From far left: On Julia Hafstrom: Gucci dress, \$3,980; gucci.com. Alberta Ferretti skirt, \$1,455; Barneys New York, NYC. Beladora earrings, \$3,750; beladora.com. Stuart Weitzman boots, \$535; stuartweitzman.com. On Sasha Kichigina: Tome dress, \$1,495; tomenyc.com. Erdem dress, price upon request; erdem.com. Larvin brooch, \$845; Larvin, NYC. Valentino Garavani boots, \$2,475;

Valentino boutiques. On Lineisy Montero: Alberta Ferretti dress, \$1,430; Barneys New York, NYC. Erdem dress, price upon request; erdem.com. Raphaële Canot earrings, \$2,250; Dover Street Market New York, NYC. Fox & Bond locket, \$845; foxandbond.com. Zero + Maria Cornejo boots, \$1,095; zeromariacornejo.com. On Andreea Diaconu: Altuzarra dress, \$4,995; Barneys New York, NYC. Preen by Thornton Bregazzi shirt, \$720; preenthortonbregazzi.com. Altuzarra boots, \$1,995; Barneys New York, NYC. On Maartje Verhoef: Dolce & Gabbana blazer (\$2,395) and trousers (\$845); select Dolce & Gabbana boutiques. Tory Burch flats, \$428; toryburch.com. Moynat Paris bag, \$3,400; Moynat, NYC. 2. Blazer, \$2,495. 3. Watch, \$14,000. 4. Bracelet, \$28,480. 6. Ring, \$12,000. 8. Wreath, price upon request. **252:** 10. Porcelain flowers, price upon request. 11. Earrings, price upon request. 14. Bench, \$3,980. **256:** Marchesi 1824 chocolates, price upon request.

LAST LOOK

266: Shopping bag and flap bag; select Chanel boutiques.

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Then & Now

CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF
WHO WE WERE, WHAT WE LOVE,
AND WHAT'S NEXT

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