



EPISODE 6 ...and Menstrual Equity for All

In the last episode of season one, young activists tell us about their work for “menstrual equity” – the idea that period products should be affordable, safe, and available to everyone who needs them.

Rachel: *“I don't know the exact statistic of how many times a person gets their period in their lifetime, but the average age you get it is like 12 or 13 and you go through menopause at what, like 55, or something? That's once a month from the age of, like, 13 to 55...and for a whole week, and if you can't afford products... then what are you supposed to do for that many years of your life?”*

Narration: Welcome to Feeling My Flo. We see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I'm Kamilah Kashanie. My pronouns are she and her.

If you've been listening to Feeling My Flo this season, you know that we spend a lot of time talking about how people feel about their periods.

But we also need to talk about something just as important: menstrual equity. It's a complicated term, and it can mean a lot of different things. So, we're going to spend the final episode of this season breaking down what exactly menstrual equity is and why it's so important.

To do that, our producer Mia and I sat down with six young activists who know all about this issue.

Rachel: Hi, my name is Rachel. I'm 15. My pronouns are she/her.

Soph: My name is Soph. I'm 16 years old. I use he/him pronouns.

Lexi: My name is Lexi. I use she/her pronouns. I'm 18.

Ani: I'm Ani. I'm 17. And my pronouns are she/her.

Madeline: I'm Madeline. I'm 17 and she/her.

Mercedes: My name is Mercedes. My pronouns are she/her/hers. And I am 17.

Narration: Lexi, Mercedes, Soph, Ani, Madeline, and Rachel go to school together in Brooklyn, New York, and the six friends weren't always activists. Before they got involved in the fight for menstrual equity, they were just a really close group of friends. Here's Ani and Madeline.

Madeline: We used to have a lot of dance parties at school, and we had a strobe light and we thought it was the most exciting thing ever.

Ani: I feel like, also, just a really key thing of our friend group is just bouncing around the city all the time.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah.

Ani: Like we always go from neighborhood to neighborhood and, like, never really know where things are going to take us.

Narration: Both in and out of school, the six friends spent a lot of time thinking about the world they were growing up in.

Rachel: We don't all have the same opinions, but a lot of the ways that we see the world is similar...what's right and what's wrong. So I think that makes it easier to be friends and connect.

Narration: So how did the friends start thinking about menstruation? Ani remembers it like this.

Ani: Mercedes and I did a project together learning about menstrual justice in prisons. I learned that the way that you get menstrual products is through commissary, so you have to buy your products and it's not automatically given to you.

Narration: Commissary is a store in a prison for things like snacks, soda, basic clothing, and personal care items. In some American prisons, just two tampons can cost as much as five dollars and fifty-five cents. That's about six and a half times the average cost of what you would pay outside of prison.

Menstrual equity means that products like pads and tampons are affordable, safe, and available to everyone who needs them.

But the truth is, people who don't have a regular income often have to choose between buying products or other necessities, like food. And as Ani and Mercedes learned through their school project, menstrual equity is not a reality for everyone—like folks who are incarcerated.

After learning about menstrual equity, Ani and Mercedes made it the focus of a school project the next year. Here's Madeline and Lexi.

Madeline: We went throughout the whole school and took as many whiteboards as we could and just were writing down ideas and things that we could do.

Lexi: We were like, "We think we know what we want to do. We want to make it all about blood and periods."

Narration: Throughout that brainstorming process, they realized it wasn't just about periods in prison...

Madeline: When you think about homeless people, you hardly ever first think about periods. And it's mostly thinking about shelter and food and warmth, which is all important to think about. But very often, when you're thinking about donating to homeless, it's never about period products.

Narration: The six friends realized that access to products is a problem for many people. So, they did something about it by starting an organization.

Lexi: Just Period...

Mercedes: ...NYC...

Ani: ...is a Brooklyn based...

Soph: ...teen collective...

Rachel: ...for menstrual justice.

Madeline: We help people who bleed.

Narration: And just like that, Just Period NYC was born. The six friends went from playing music and exploring the city together to organizing in the fight for menstrual justice.

We'll talk more about that after a short break.

LOLA Ad: *When it comes to my period, one of the things I care about the most is knowing what's in my tampons.*

But the FDA, the government agency that makes rules about these things, doesn't require companies to say what they put in tampons.

But LOLA is different. LOLA offers complete transparency about the ingredients in their tampons, pads, liners, and wipes. And LOLA products are made of 100% organic cotton. That's it—there's no added chemicals, fragrances, synthetics, or dyes.

LOLA also makes managing my period so much easier. I can customize my subscription by picking a mix of products with different levels of absorbency. So, I have everything for my really heavy days and a mix for the lighter days, too. I can choose the number of boxes, how often they arrive. And I can change, skip or cancel my subscription any time.

I love that LOLA tells me exactly what's in their menstrual products, and it also feels good to know that with every purchase I make, LOLA donates products to homeless shelters.

And guess what? Feeling My Flo listeners will get 40% off subscriptions. Just visit mylola.com, that's mylola.com and enter flo when you subscribe.

Narration: Okay, we're back. So we know that menstrual equity means that products are affordable, safe, and available to everyone who needs them.

But we don't live in a world where this is a reality. So, how does that actually play out?

The average menstruator spends 2,535 days menstruating. That's almost seven years of your life. Most people in the U.S. use some sort of menstrual product to manage their flow. And that means menstruators have to purchase a lot of pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or other products during their life.

Rachel: So... for people who can't afford that, they are then without products for a week every month.

Ani: Then you resort to using unhealthy things like plastic bags or toilet paper, things that have bleach in them or aren't safe to put around sensitive areas of your body.

Narration: So, the Just Period activists began organizing drives, where people could donate products to those in need.

Lexi: At first there wasn't a lot of donations, but then they started to come in. And I remember we got over 2,000 products.

Mercedes: Then, we just ended up going to different shelters and donating them.

Madeline: We actually were able to be in communication with someone that was experiencing what we were trying to help. She was talking about how once, she was in jail, she was sitting there and didn't have any product to absorb the blood. And so, she was just bleeding on this cement block of the bench in the cell. And that was her actual experience, and not just a statistic or something in an article.

Narration: Through Just Period, Lexi, Soph, Mercedes, Madeline, Rachel, and Ani are working to change the way people think and feel about periods.

Ani: I live most of the time with my dad and I've woken up in the middle of the night and just had blood covering my sheets, and he's had to be there and help me clean it up. Now, we're able to have a functional conversation where I'm just telling him what I need in the moment, and he's able to listen, and he can actually be a help and support during that time.

Soph: Talking about periods in schools would be really helpful, because, yeah, there's so much lack of information, especially for people who don't get their periods. Like, the couple sex ed classes I had when I was younger would always be split up and we'd talk about different things and that can be helpful, but at the same time, I think you need information no matter what gender you are.

Narration: Just Period's activism has also really changed the culture at their school.

Ani: The cis male students that are at our school have become a lot more comfortable than I think the average teenage boy usually is.

Rachel: Yeah. [Laughs.]

Ani: They have heard us have countless discussions about our periods all the time. They'll ask us questions about it, but in a really curious and cool way.

Narration: In June, two of the founders graduated, and with their departure, the group is figuring out what's next.

Madeline: It's scary, 'cause we're getting closer to college and moving away. I really want to keep this running and stuff, but I think that also knowing that we always have each other to have our backs, 'cause I think that's definitely something that not everyone has.

Narration: Lexi, Soph, Mercedes, Madeline, Rachel, and Ani all want a future where products are much more accessible to people who need them.

Lexi: Period products should not cost any money. I think that's the biggest thing right now in order for us to fully move forward.

Narration: Menstrual equity is complicated. But Just Period is based on the simple idea that period products, just like toilet paper, should be accessible to everyone who needs them.

We'll be right back to tell you more.

Patreon Ad: *Thank you for listening to Feeling My Flo! A podcast that sees and talks about menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies and affects menstruators in different ways.*

I'm Kamilah Kashanie, the host, and I want to invite you to join the Feeling My Flo community by supporting us on Patreon. Making the show for you is our passion, but there are real costs. Like studio time, and travel, and sound engineering. So, your support means that we can keep making a beautiful show. Aaaaand we want to celebrate you joining us!

For five dollars a month, we'll give you a personalized thank you on social media.

For ten dollars a month, we'll add a Feeling My Flo glossy sticker.

And for twenty dollars or more a month, we'll also name drop you in a future episode.

VISIT patreon.com/feelingmyflo to join us!

And now, back to the show!

Narration: Just Period is making a big difference for people who bleed in New York City. And they're part of a much bigger global movement for menstrual equity.

One of the leaders in that movement is Nadya Okamoto, who grew up in Portland, Oregon.

Nadya Okamoto: I'm Nadya Okamoto, I'm 21 years old, and I'm a rising junior at Harvard College, but I am taking time off and I'm living here in New York City and I am focusing on period activism.

Narration: When Nadya was a teen, her family didn't have a permanent home.

Nadya: I would change buses in old town Portland, where there are 10 homeless shelters in a two-block radius, and would regularly see some of the same homeless women every day sitting in that area, and kind of as a quirky, extroverted teen would strike up conversations with them.

Narration: Through talking with these women and asking them about the hardest parts of their living situation, Nadya decided to get involved in the fight for menstrual equity. When she was 16, she started PERIOD.org, a nonprofit working to achieve menstrual equity.

And her path to activism wasn't exactly what she had envisioned for herself.

Nadya: I grew up with best friends who would never say the word "menstruation," who would make fun of me when I was moody because I was on my period, right? And, I wish that I had the courage to stand up to that, but it wasn't until I learned about

period poverty that I was like, “This is something I’m going to speak out against.”

Narration: And today, her organization PERIOD has a nationwide network of over 300 chapters who are serving their communities.

Nadya: We distribute period products to people in need. And we’re trying to change the way people think, talk, and learn about periods through education.

Narration: Around the country, activists are fighting to make menstrual products affordable, safe, and available to everyone who needs them. And at the same time, they’re inspiring each of us to talk more openly and honestly about menstruation.

Feeling My Flo is a resource to help you start important conversations at critical moments...like when you’re deciding how you can play a role in achieving menstrual equity.

To learn more about the teen activists we just heard from, check out their Instagram @JustPeriodNYC. And for more on Nadya’s organization, visit PERIOD.org.

Feeling My Flo is a production of Lantigua Williams & Co. We’re here to inform, entertain, and empower. Visit us at feelingmyflo.com and follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to join the conversation.

Thanks for listening to the first season of Feeling My Flo! We’re already working on a second season, so stay connected with us on social media, and send us your period stories at hello@feelingmyflo.com.

Feeling My Flo is produced by Mia Warren. This episode was co-produced by Madison Mullen. Our sound engineer is Carolina Rodriguez. Our intern is Emma Forbes. I’m your host, Kamilah Kashanie.



CITATION

Kashanie, Kamilah, host. "...And Menstrual Equity for All." *Feeling My Flo*, Lantigua Williams & Co., August 15, 2019. FeelingMyFlo.com.

Produced by

