

Blood in the water?

Swim gym policy indicative of larger societal stigma

**Name changed for confidentiality*

Senior Allie Baker* has never been able to wear tampons. Due to her mother's concerns about toxic shock syndrome (TSS) (see edge), Baker sticks with pads whenever she is on her period. Usually, this is not an issue for Baker; she prefers pads anyways.

However, when the P.E. swim unit comes around, some complications arise.



CASSIDY DELAHUNTY
Editor-in-Chief

In most cases, her period has not overlapped with the swim unit. On the occasions where it does, however, she found the rules to be less than convenient.

Last semester, Baker got her period during the swim unit. She got a note from her mother, excusing her from the pool for three days. However, after her three days were up,

she had to go back into the pool even though she was still on her period. Her teachers informed her that she could get a doctor's note to excuse her for longer, but Baker is unable to wear tampons due to personal preference, not due to a medical reason.

According to a survey of 739 women conducted by the Centers for Disease Control, 62 percent of women use pads, compared to only 42 percent who use tampons.

On top of this, a study conducted by Euro-monitor, a market research company, found that the average American woman purchased 111 pads in a year but only 66 tampons. The main reasons cited for the pad preference were similar to Baker's: women see tampons as uncomfortable and do not want to risk getting TSS.

According to Educational Support Personnel for Aquatics Bob Reibel, every concern a student has brought up has always been addressed. However, Reibel makes an important point about this matter.

"I hope kids do feel comfortable coming to us, but I know that's not the case for everyone," Reibel said. "We can only address concerns that we are aware of. So if someone doesn't come to us, it's hard for us to address that."

In the process of writing this article, I experienced plenty of the discomfort that Reibel describes. I pitched the idea to a news-

paper staff composed of about half men, I discussed what I was writing with my fellow staff members, and I had to discuss the topic of periods as a whole with several people to conduct my interviews, most of whom I had never met or only met briefly prior to the interview.

Staff members' faces turned red as soon as I brought up the story, and a female friend walked out of a conversation more than once to avoid hearing me say the word "tampon" 10 more times.

As you read this, you might even be uncomfortable. Is this topic even appropriate for a school newspaper? Why publish something so graphic where so many people will see it?

If my staff, myself, and even my readers are uncomfortable with this topic, how can we expect Baker and other students like her to confront their (possibly male) teachers about the explicit details of their periods?

As the policy currently stands, students can get three days to sit out of swimming where they will either complete a swim packet or another exercise, depending on the nature of their excusal. After the three days are up, students can either bring in a doctor's note or have a discussion with their teacher to ask for an extension on their days out of the pool. Reibel mentions that for the latter, students will usually have to bring in a second parent note.

According to Health and P.E. teacher Cristen Sprenger, the three-day rule came from a combination of what the department thought was fair and discussions with other district schools with pools.

Sprenger says that, as a female teacher, she is sympathetic to students in situations like Baker's. As an alumna of Wheeling High School, Sprenger had to deal with similar situations of her own during her high school days.

"I understand where girls are coming from," Sprenger said. "But there's a responsibility that the student needs to meet for our program. ... We're trying to stick with a policy that can be both fair to our program and fair to our students."

According to Sprenger, the P.E. department handles each student case individually to help accommodate students' unique situations, which was confirmed by Reibel. However, she also believes that consistency with the rules is important.

"The three day policy just goes back to what we felt was fair," Sprenger said. "It wasn't just related to a girl with her period; it could be related to someone who might be sick. We do look at sensitive issues, and it's all about individual students and a discussion with the teacher."

I will confess, I initially thought that the problem was the three-day rule; girls don't have enough days, so give them more days.



SINK OR SWIM: A female student gets pushed into the pool. During the swim unit, some girls have been made to go into the pool when they are on their period due to a rule that only gives students three days out with a parent note. This can create issues for students who cannot or do not want to use tampons.

(photo illustration by Erik Velazquez)

However, Sprenger and Reibel are, admittedly, right. The three-day rule is a reasonable time limit, and students do need to be held to a certain consistent standard. The real issue lies with the discussion students must have with a teacher.

Most girls are willing to drop the issue once their time is up. It makes sense when you look at the options they're presented with: find time before class to tell your P.E. teacher the gruesome details of your period, your cramps and whatever other issues you might be having, or just put on a pad, hope for the best and jump in.

The comparison to a simple injury is an unfair one. A broken leg or a sprained wrist is no source of shame. The public tradition of signing a cast is no way compares to the secret ritual of pretending to grab an extra pencil from your backpack but instead shov-

ing a tampon up your sleeve and darting to the nearest bathroom.

Expecting girls to have that teacher conversation is neither reasonable nor realistic, no matter how much those words might apply to the three-day policy itself.

But, it's not exactly like this is just a Prospect issue. Women's bodies are often viewed as more inappropriate than men's, for whatever reason. Men's health issues are issues for everyone, but women's health issues can only be discussed behind the barricaded doors of a doctor's office, lest you leave behind your polite, ladylike sensibilities.

A girl might jump into the pool, knowing full well her pad will do her no good, knowing full well that it's either this or a discussion about her vagina with an authority figure, but hey, at least you're not uncomfortable, right? **P**

Curly-haired students go through less than smooth ordeal



CURLY: A student is distressed by her curly hair. Students with curly hair often have trouble, whether it be from intrusive classmates, humid weather or out-of-control frizz. (cartoon by Katie Hamilton)

Sitting in my health class, I whipped around quickly as I felt a tug on my hair.

The boy who sat next to me had pulled my hair again.

He looked at me apologetically; he's a friend after all.

"It's just so tempting," he says halfheartedly.

When my hair gets wet, lots of big curls spring up into tight coils, waiting to be pulled. At least that's how most of my friends view it.

In fact, everyone views my curly hair differently. It seems as though the

ratio of frizzies in my hair to compliments by my peers is equivalent.

That doesn't mean there isn't hate though, with many people in my life pressuring me to change my hair with the same force that a hot iron burns into my curls with.

My curly hairs biggest critic is the one who gave me the curls herself, my own mother.

Growing up in the humid, constantly rainy state of Oregon, my mom suffered through years of uncontrollable, puffy hair.

In her mind, if I have the opportunity to calm down my hair, why wouldn't I take it?

She had to put up with her curls and frizz against her will — since the weather was so humid and hot irons were less popular — so to her it's strange that I would choose to wear my hair curly if I could possibly have frizzy hair. (Cue dramatic gasp.)

When I wear my hair curly, I feel as though it is both a symbol of rebellion and individuality.

Sure, pretending I'm some all-powerful, rebelling teen is thrilling, but wearing my hair

naturally shouldn't have to be a power move.

There's a certain stigma around curly hair, whether that be it's messy or unprofessional.

English teacher Nicole Stoltz recalls always wearing her hair straight to important events like job interviews.

Even if it wasn't for a special event, Stoltz would straighten her hair in high school.

"I wanted to fit in; I didn't want to stand out. I didn't realize it was okay to be different at that point," Stoltz said.

Especially as teenagers, everyone is constantly trying to fit in, to be apart of the pack. And for those with curly hair, this conformity comes at a price.

For years I've woken up early every morning to have a battle between my curls and the hot iron, and every day I question whether or not it's worth it.

Coming home late at night,

I'll shower, blow dry, then straighten my hair, only to have to wake up early in the morning to straighten the stubborn curls again.

Yeah, teenagers like conforming but have you ever thought they like sleep, too?

When I look in the mirror while straightening my hair, I see a teenage girl constantly trying to meet society's standards while her hair tries to keep its natural curls. And a part of my mind wants to keep my curls, too. Every time I grab a new strand of hair, my mind tries to grab onto some logical reason for straightening my hair.

I'm pretty sure my brain is more fried than my hair.

But at the end of the day, when I hop in the shower I can smile knowing that no matter the physical heat of from a flat iron or verbal kind from criticism, my hair will always bounce back. **P**



RYANN HAROLD
Staff Writer