

How Art Impacted The Seven Demands of Feminism in
Reference to Artists Judy Chicago and Rupi Kaur,
Through The Lens of Menstruation

Shona Duffy

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) 3D Design, Modelmaking & Digital Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Duffy', written over a horizontal line.

Shona Duffy

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to identify and examine the seven demands of feminism, outlining the history of feminist liberation and waves of feminism that influenced the work of two artists, Judy Chicago and Rupi Kaur, with reference to society's views on the menstruating body. Research and analysis is conducted on two selected pieces of work by Chicago and Kaur, in an effort to see how varying medias of art have made an impact on shifting societies perspectives on the natural process of menstruation, exploring how contemporary society reacts to menstruation in contrast to decades prior, with major focus on the 1970s and 2010s. Throughout this thesis I will be revisiting the unmet demands of feminism, to further communicate the necessity for change and continued activism for equality. This thesis considers an overarching question: is art merely something beautiful or can it hold a statement part as of a larger conversation in our society?

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Introduction

“The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person,
is by creative work of her own.”

Betty Friedan¹

Self-expression, self-exploration, self-liberation, self-identity; as humans we are in constant search to define oneself. However, when your identity is defined for you, oneself is no longer self but a mold of societal expectation, definition, and oppression. Thousands of groupings of people are reduced to a mere stereotypical definition, to keep society in line, reduce noise, silence the voices demanding change. This thesis will focus on the grouping of feminist menstruators, and how art assisted in being a breakaway avenue, perhaps even a mode of confrontation to voice oneself in a patriarchal, chauvinistic, oppressive society.

The seven demands of feminism, set out during the second wave of feminism, 1963-1980s², are the demand for equal pay, education and job opportunities, free twenty four hour nurseries for child care and support, free contraception and abortion, financial and legal independence, the demand to end discrimination against lesbians, and women’s right to define their own sexuality, freedom from violence and sexual coercion.³ These demands will be discussed with reference to the work of artists Judy Chicago, situated in the patriarchal 1970s, and Rupi Kaur, in the contemporary present, through the lens of menstrual shame and oppression of self.

While art is an expression of human experience, desire, passion, loss, joy, and sorrow, it is also a weapon for making a statement or multiple statements. Art can be both beautiful craftsmanship and hold the weight of an ambiguous commentary on political

¹ (Friedan, 1963)

² (Pruitt, 2023)

³ (Griffin, 2017)

society, questioning authority, opening conversation of subjects silenced. This thesis will examine how, if at all, art impacted the societal view of disgust surrounding menstruation and how the feminist movement spurred on by the conversation of inequality upon women being opened, continued through art. Here fixating on one piece in particular from 1971 and a further piece from 2015, all under the arch of feminism.

The fight for female rights and equality has come in waves, building to a tsunami of desperation, dedication, and declaration of this necessity. The necessity for women to be viewed equal in standing to men within this constant patriarchal society. ‘‘We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men, and women are created equal’’⁴, a rewrite of the Declaration of Independence, in the Declaration of sentiment, written in 1848, and signed at the first women rights convention, July 19th-20th, 1848, organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott at Seneca Falls, New York. This movement stood valiantly unshaken for a further 72 years for suffrages, the mere right for women to vote, passed by congress on the 19th of August 1920. The second wave of feminism, on which this thesis will focus heavily, brought about a new mode of protest or expression; that of art with strong reference to menstruation, and the societal taboo and subsequent shame forced upon menstruators as in the midst of a male dominated world in which women must fit into an acquiescent mold, to be a mother, a wife, a home maker, the second wave of feminism strived to break this mold.

Chicago is an artist of this time whom I aim to analyze and understand throughout this thesis, focusing further on her striking piece, *Red Flag*, (1971). Behind each piece of art, is a vast compilation of influences and inspiration taken from past artists and figures. Taking the masterfully crafted photolithograph, *Red Flag*, Chicago, 1971,⁵ as an example, though this piece was created by one artist an entire army of women inspired the work, and gradually impacted and changed the course of patriarchal society. Giving women a chance to be more than the assumed molds they were restricted to. *Red Flag* is not simply a

⁴ (Stanton, 1848)

⁵ (Chicago, 1971)

photolithograph in a frame, but a burning passion for change passed down from the first wave 1848, to the liberated free thinkers of the sixties, to those marching in the US in support of the ERA 28th Amendment,⁶ to Chicago.

In conjunction with this study, I endeavor to explore the seven demands of feminism, four declared on February 1970 and the further three affirmed four years later, 1974.⁷ Over the course of this piece, I will go into greater detail of these demands, and hone in on how art impacted the change of this during the 1970s, and how art continues to alter societies views on women and menstruators through discussion and analyzing work of Rupi Kaur, an Instapoet, bringing exposure and opening the conversation of menstruation to social media platforms through the artistic medium of poetry and photography. The necessity around this stems from the fact that these demands, fifty odd years later are still not met across the world. The second wave of feminism, in the late 1960s into the 1970s led to a further third wave, led by Rebecca Walker, daughter to Alice Walker a prominent woman of the second wave. Rebecca Walker publicly declared the “third wave”, in 1992 watching the testimonial of Anita Hill, a successful African American lawyer, before the Senate Judiciary Committee, of her sexual harassment claims and accusations against, Clarence Thomas, Supreme Court nominee at the time of 1992. Confirming this, 1992 became widely regarded as the “Year of the Woman”.⁸ Progress was made, with an unparalleled number of women elected to Congress within America, yet still not all demands were met.

Contemporary society has seen the introduction of the fourth wave of feminism, a further continuation of individuals passion and desire to bring about the equality rightly deserved by women, and menstruators alongside them. Feminism will feature heavily within this piece; however, my thesis will be homing in on the societal shame menstruators experience, the taboo around the natural functions of the human body, and how art has

⁶ (Pruitt, 2023)

⁷ (Sherwood, 2023)

⁸ (Pruitt, 2023)

impacted the perceptions of this, how artists attempt to make a statement to the conversation of menstruation, and how over the space of fifty years societal perceptions have indeed altered. The lack of visibility the menstruating body has in the world contributes towards the major problem of menstrual poverty. This phrase refers to the inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and educations, sanitary products, ideal washing facilities, and waste management.⁹ Approximately 53,000 women and girls in Ireland may be at risk of period poverty, according to National data on poverty rates and number participation in social protection schemes, 2017-2020. Menstruators can use up to twenty-two tampons per period,¹⁰ with on average thirteen period cycles a year, which is a maximum total close to three hundred tampons yearly. In Ireland, sanitary towels or pads can cost anywhere from €2-€6 a packet, averaging 10-15 pads per pack, most individuals ranging from three to six pads daily during their cycle.¹¹ Tampons price range from €1.50-€6 a pack, these essentials alongside necessary pain relief, a twelve pack of Nurofen Ibuprofen costing around €4. Leading to an estimated cost of €132.34 on average for sanitary products per year.¹² Chicago's and Kaur's efforts to bring the menstruating body to light proves its importance with menstrual poverty being a harsh reality in our society today. The reality of the matter is, there is still a definite prerequisite to fulfil these seven demands, this thesis is simply a stem of the conversation of change. In addition, I will contextualise these demands of the late 1960s and 1970s, giving historical depth to the necessity of feminism, the unwavering passion for societal evolution beyond patriarchal ways of thinking, under the power art itself and artists have to impact, to break these societal norms, taboos and open the conversation motive to influence shame culture to cease.

This thesis will begin with an analysis of Chicago, and her impactful 1971 piece, followed by the historical context that led to this second wave hence forth the third and current wave. It will then refer to the contemporary Instapoet, Kaur, and the societal impact

⁹ (Alvarez, 2019)

¹⁰ (National Strategy for Women and Girls, 2020)

¹¹ (Williams, 2023)

¹² (Pollak, 2018)

of her photography, in order to comprehend the necessary steps our present-day society must take to meet the seven demands and perceive the freeing of the menstruating body from stigma, with freedom of expression through all media, and in self.

Breaking the Taboo; Judy Chicago's Artistic Influence and Impact on Society's Perception of The Menstruating Body



Figure 1, Judy Chicago – *Red Flag*, 1971¹³

“Women’s history and women’s art needs to become of our cultural and intellectual heritage.”¹⁴

Judy Chicago

Unapologetically, this photolithograph, depicts close up a crimson tipped tampon being removed from a vagina. This piece represents the voice of the artist herself makes a statement in a conservative society. It speaks for women, young girls and menstruators across the world, whose voices have been trodden down in shame and fear of expression. Menstruation is a natural part of life, a natural function of bodies with a uterus. I will begin by giving background context and substance to the artist herself before moving forward. She is an artist of true character, placing all her cards out on the table without fear of negative connotations, consequences of insults to the flaws in character, she stands as an artist of true self. I will be analyzing this piece, exploring the artist’s background as a means of investigating the response of 1970s society to the natural function of the body, menstruation,

¹³ (Chicago, J. (ed.) (1971) *Red Flag*. Santa Fe.)

¹⁴ (Chicago, no date)

amid the turn of second wave feminism. I aim to analysis this piece, review the responses it received and in turn interpret the impact, if any, it had on society. This chapter will exhibit that Chicago was aligned with the views and goals of second wave feminism and the many activists who continued to strive for the seven demands of feminism. These demands remain unanswered and unmet, within contemporary society.

Referring to the photolithograph above, this transgressive, contentious piece remains on display in the Turner Carroll Gallery, Santa Fe, United States. However, it has been plastered across newspapers, articles, art journals, blogs, from the time of its initial creation to recent, receiving a variety of responses, from praise to absolute disgust. The following are excerpts of reviews, encapsulating the negativity the artist received, “‘critics love to hate’¹⁵, “vulgar,” “an outrageous libel on the female imagination”, “Hokey art”.¹⁶ It takes a moment of true vulnerability, seldom spoken about, silenced for centuries before and presents it proudly, a beautiful depiction of the reality of menstruation. I pose these questions to the above piece of art and to those reading, and I implore for you to keep it in mind as you read:

Do artists create art solely from the mundane parts of life to make them beautiful or can art be a statement, to bring light and noise to the silenced? If the latter, must it then be twinged with an underlying ulterior motive of selfishness that transcends into every aspect of our society, is it simply an expression of self, or indeed to a certain extent can both ring true?

Judy Chicago, born Judith Sylvia Cohen in 1939, Illinois, in a surprisingly liberal environment, her Jewish high achieving parents Arthur and May Cohen raised Judy and her younger brother Ben, to always speak her mind, define herself. Chicago grew up influenced by left-wing politics, inspiring her liberated views and determination for social change. Chicago, become enthralled with the arts, spanning across medias, this passion led her to

¹⁵ (Journal, 2020)

¹⁶ (Snider, 2018)

attending art classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, later she attended UCLA, receiving her master's in fine art.¹⁷

Chicago, a feminist, art educator, and writer, created *Red Flag* during the rise of her career in the artistic community. Chicago began her journey of activism art in stride with the declaration of the initial four demands, upon the steps of Oxford. This feminist movement was not confined to simply one state or one country, it was global. It had to be in order for the voices to be heard, for women to be seen. Chicago's art flowed from the female expression and the areas of reality often deemed unsuitable topics for society. Chicago focused her art, taking inspiration from menstruation and the experience of the menstruator, towards the end of the second wave of the feminist liberation movement in the United States, occurring early 1960s spreading to the late 1970s.

Red Flag, is an awe-inspiring piece, amongst art critics and the art community, of an action so simple, second nature to half the population, that shook a generation, and still gains attention to this day, 50 years on. *Red Flag*, sparked the flame that ignited the fire of menstrual themed art, with the dawn of present day Menstruala, the use of menstrual blood in art. Chicago's controversial piece opened up the conversation of, is this completely natural thing really worth shaming our women over, and posed the question, will we continue, as a society to impose silence around these issues, making young girls ashamed of their bodies? Chicago continued to create large scale, complex, visual pieces, *Dinner Party* (1974-1979), *Menstruation Bathroom* (1972), were both installations that continued to engage with this theme. Chicago not only explored thematic areas rarely touched by previous artists, but also experimented with media, and styles of artistry. These pieces were not simply to cause controversy, but to open the eyes of the patriarchal society to their women, and the reality of their suffering. I aim to delve into and examine how the above piece, *Red Flag*, has impacted

¹⁷ (Jenkins, 2012)

the cultural societal stigma surrounding menstruation and how this in turn has advanced female empowerment and laid way for breaking the cycle of menstrual shame.

In order to fully understand Chicago's determination and reason for creating this striking piece, and the impact it made within the gradual shift from conservative patriarchal society to a more liberal contemporary one, we must look at the history of 1960s-70s, which paved the way for her creative expression.

The 1970s, was a time of change in American history, a decade of climbing inflation, political upheaval, and uncertainty. Despite these changes, feminist issues were not fully addressed, demands not met, even today in our contemporary society these demands remain unmet. Change indeed was in the air of the 1970s, the younger generations, embracing disco, the working age, struggling with unemployment, increased cost of living and energy crisis, this laid way for a new nation of liberated individuals. In particular focusing on the voice of those who had been silenced for centuries before, women.¹⁸ Feminist activists of the 1970s, were inspired by the women of the early 1960s Feminist Liberation Movement in the States, and the earlier first wave of feminism of the late ninth century and early 20th century who fought and won the rights for women to vote.

In order to be heard, many protesters and activists turned to the arts, and some key artists and writers Betty Friedan¹⁹, Ana Mendieta²⁰, Gloria Steinem²¹, in the 1970s were associated with second wave feminism. It gave them means of expression, safety behind their piece rather than taking to the streets in risk of arrest, however this risk stopped very few. Looking to August 26, 1970, the National Organization for Women, NOW, sponsored the protest on New York City, with approximately 50,000 women participating in a protest, including many artists.²² This is the starting point for all the artists to follow, the empowered

¹⁸ (History.com Editors 2010)

¹⁹ (History.com Editors, 2009)

²⁰ (Lapetina, 2023)

²¹ (History.com Editors, 2009)

²² (Boomer, 2023)

feminist activists who speak out unphased and strongly proclaiming their rights, standing firm on the shoulders of artistic women like Judy Chicago.

Comparing the disgust and strife within society during the 1970s, caused by many pieces including and similar to *Red Flag*, to the present seemingly open arms of society. For those who monthly experience this completely natural part of womanhood, bold, artistic females such as Chicago, who stood out and spoke out in the midst of a male chorus, are a true inspiration and powerful influence. Chicago deemed herself a liberal feminist, yet liberal feminism soon became labelled as ‘radical’²³ feminism with the conversation of women’s sexual liberation, health, and choice in partner or indeed the freedom to have multiple partners. Such women received backlash from society as being male-haters, crude women, and extremists. Against this noise, Chicago remained strong and stood her ground in her beliefs, expressing it all through her artwork. Art became a means of expression for these silenced women, a way for them to be heard amongst the patriarchal noise. *Red Flag* has become a piece of history.

Red Flag, could be interpreted as simply an artist’s cry for attention and yet it is so much more. It is an act of activism, or indeed an act of radical feminism, according to Jane Gerhard. Chicago embraced individualist expression of women's right, under the idealism of egalitarianism, the doctrine that all people despite gender, race, age of any diversity are equal to one another and deserve equal rights.²⁴ Through her art Chicago sought to bring attention to those pushed aside, and silenced in society, herself included. *Red Flag*, is a direct representation of this, taking a daily mundane task, and bringing it to light, not to be crude, or cause uproar but simply to open the conversation to the normality of menstruator’s health, and to give a voice to the silenced shame. *Red Flag*, impacted society, bringing something done behind closed doors, to the walls of galleries. It started a conversation, that led to debate, that led to noise, breaking the societal silence around menstruation.

²³ (Howard-Hassmann, 2011)

²⁴ (Gerhard, 2011a)

As with many artists, Chicago's work was often met by varying opinions, many agreeing with its merits, others siding against it, even opinions on her as an individual again varying from positive to negative. Despite these, Chicago powered through determined to make her mark. As Gerhard writes, at the time of the creation of *Red Flag*, Chicago opened an art studio, a classroom, at Fresno State College. Fifteen young bright-eyed women arrived, before beginning the new artists had to declare not only their interest and devotion to the arts but had to ensure they were "aware of themselves as women" and "able to be emotionally honest with themselves and others." Chicago took her teaching role extremely seriously, perhaps even to a point of authoritarian with her skewed teaching techniques. Mirroring her own piece, the classroom was a place for open conversation, with no area, discussion, or topic inappropriate. The fifteen students stepped into the classroom for part teaching in the studio, part group therapy in which conversations could vary from anything as innocent as dating to sexual objectification. The final part of the class was consciousness-raising, a way to use one's own life, combined experiences, to understand concretely how we are oppressed and who was actually doing the oppressing. For some this process was brutal, one individual in particular describing her experience as "personality reconstruction", another, "soul searching, gut wrenching, tumultuous, cleansing, exhausting, exhilarating". The comments on the space itself as, "suffocating and uncomfortable one moment and nurturing and comforting just a short time later." Interestingly, similar to her photolithograph, *Red Flag*, Chicago's teaching style received mixed reviews, from one extreme to the other. Once again, despite these diverse and varying comments, Chicago stood her ground, receiving further hatred for her exploitation of fellow artists. Chicago believed strongly in the making artistic creation and the development a cooperative activity, in order to unite women and grow stronger as artists.²⁵

The impact of *Red Flag* brought heightened interest and desire amongst aspiring artists to work alongside the legend behind *Red Flag*. Over the early 1970s Chicago engaged

²⁵ (Gerhard, 2011b)

with numerous apprentices and fellow artists. Upon one occasion in particular Chicago took on several eager feminist apprentices to create an exhibition, the installation of *The Dinner Party*, 1974-1979. In exchange for their free time young artists received the opportunity to work and learn technical skills of a high standard under Chicago and become part of the women's artistic community that was gradually being established. This community of artists came about due to *Red Flag* igniting the conversation of menstruation themed art. Without such laborers Chicago could not have completed her design, *The Dinner Party*, celebrating forgotten achievements in female history. Chicago herself described it as, 'a reinterpretation of The Last Supper from the point of view of women, who, throughout history, have prepared meals and set the table.'²⁶ Comprised of a triangular table divided by three wings, each 48 foot in length, representing 1038 women in history by individual art pieces, 39 women are defined by place settings and another 999 names are expressed by inscriptions in the Heritage Floor on which the three-winged table stands.²⁷ In later years critics viewed this as potential exploitation of free labor, devaluing their ability as artists but them as individuals. While many others view this piece as too monumental and impactful to question the design process behind it.

This ideology of not questioning artists despite full knowledge of their negative actions and treatment of fellow women, undermines and is frankly hypocritical of feminism, as is this not what feminist artists spent decades fighting for. An authority role taking advantage of those below them, taking advantage and indeed encouraging 'volunteerism' should be held to account in some way²⁸. Upon reflection, this is something that stands to this day in the arts industry, and in the film industry, volunteerism and unpaid experience is encouraged, with young artists being taken advantage of.²⁹ Chicago's character fell down in various aspects; her deviousness, deceptive nature to lure in young artists to complete her work, and yet at such an expense masterpieces were created. I do not believe Chicago was a

²⁶ (Jenkins, 2012)

²⁷ (Sackler)

²⁸ (Rabinovitz, 1980)

²⁹ (Voynovskaya, 2019)

perfect exemplar of 1970s artistic feminist expression, however she contributed greatly to this movement. She was committed to her art, bringing imperfect qualities forward in an imperfect society to make a ripple of difference. The fact that Chicago's pieces are still in circulation, proves Chicago indeed left her mark, and I do believe brought the stark, crimson reality to light before many others dared. It is because of Chicago we are closer to raising that *Red Flag* in pride, to an accepting society.

Menstrual art is a current and topical piece to focus on, and there is constant progress being made by feminists in challenging the societal taboo around menstruation and women's health. It is a growing conversation, and yet there is still so much ground still to cover to rid these shameful stigmas. Continuing on, through the lens of the seven demands, I will delve into the history of feminism in more detail in the following chapter. This will pave the way to in turn illuminate how society's views have in fact changed and encourage readers to find a new perspective outside of these restrictive molds.

Steps Taken; Tracing the Liberating History Paving the Way for Feminist Artists Statements and its Influence on Contemporary Society

In order to fully comprehend art, and the artist behind each work, it is essential to educate oneself and analyse the history that led to such times. What influence did current events have on inspiring the artists, not only artists but activists, feminists? In the words of the world-renowned, famously skilled painter, Van Gogh, “Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”³⁰ In this case finding our way back to the mid-1960s and progressing forward to the early 1970s will provide a well-rounded understanding of the foundation the second wave of feminism stands upon, giving stability and grounds for the demands declared.

WLM, Women’s Liberation Movement, not only holds a place in American historical timelines but also in England, all reflecting the heart and soul behind Judy Chicago pieces and the unwavering determination of those desperate to change their own ideology, that of society in 1960-1970s, and into modern day society.

The decade of the sixties, the hippie era, the ‘Summer of Love’, 1967, referring to “anyone drawn to the counterculture, rejecting the mainstream.”³¹ The emergence of Rock’n’roll music came as a result of the age of teenage refusal to conform, each song tainted with a hint of rebellion. A new wave of R&B and folk became the soundtrack to the decade of political protest. Bob Dylan, The Beatles, and Marvin Gaye, a select few of the hundreds of artists who contributed to this pop culture revival, their lyrics determined to change the world. “We all want to change the world.”³² The Beatles hit song, Revolution, 1968. United by the desire for change and liberation from old thinking, students began to rise against authority. This drug infused, free peace lifestyle, brought a sexual revolution, a

³⁰ (Gogh, no date)

³¹ (Street, 2020)

³² (Beatles, 1968)

gender identity liberation to the young across the world, and individuals determined to break societies mould that bound them for centuries. Nick Thomas, an American journalist looks into the influence historical events had on urging young people to assume arms and protests. Before the sixties, young people were not educated on current events, nor encouraged to seek knowledge on them. However, the sixties brought much to be questioned, debated and in turn protested.

The war in Vietnam, 1955-1975, caused youth to question authority. Demonstrations and protests became a new phenomenon, youth protesting Enoch Powell, a British politician, as well as nuclear weaponry, and the war itself.³³ Events such as these gave young people a desire to change the course of their future, a determination to not let things remain broken, an attempt to fix things. A group of students, International Marxist Group, IMG, acting through the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, created the movement VSC, Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, during the 1960s. This brought about the revolutionary wave of 'student power', 'student-worker alliances'.³⁴ Youth of the sixties were determined to advocate and protest in as many ways as possible. These individuals contributed as part of the political and societal movement, New Left, a radical leftist movement, composed largely of students, determined and passionate to challenge the inequality in race, gender, education, foreign affairs.

Here then blossomed, the term coined, Flower Power, 'make love, not war,' a slogan on the tongues of youths across the globe. A slogan claimed to be created by a student at University of Oregon in April 1965, Diane Newell Meyer, wrote, 'Let's make love, not war,' on an envelope pinned it to her sweater and went to a rally.³⁵ Protesting, or rallying, became a part of the lifestyle of young individuals during the 1960s, this was uncomfortably foreign to the more conservative older generations, one commentator expressing, "no such thing

³³ (Thomas, 2002)

³⁴ (Robinson, 2008)

³⁵ (Creative Review, 2018)

could possibly have occurred . . . twenty years ago... first, because very few of us cared enough about politics; secondly, because we would have regarded such behaviour as a breach of hospitality; thirdly, because we were disposed to be courteous to our elders, even when we despised them; and finally, because in any case at all we should have had more amusing and profitable things to do.’³⁶

“Imagine there’s no countries. It isn’t hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for. And no religion too.”³⁷ The beautifully crafted dreams of John Lennon, 1971, melodically paired by a symphony of young voices dreaming of societal transformation. Echoing the liberated mindsets of the youth in the 1960-1970s. A further revolution or perhaps even a revival occurred, namely, the faith revolution, permeating the states of America and across the globe.

In Palm Springs, California, the faith revolution grew, thousands of hippies, searching to fill the void within them through drugs, hallucinogenic and freeing lifestyle, came to Calvary Chapel, pastored by Chuck Smith, 1927-2013, fronted by a ‘nudist, vegetarian hippie’³⁸, Lonnie Frisbee, 1949-1993. Some called him, the “first Jesus freak” or the first Jesus hippie³⁹. Thousands came to the Christian Faith during the 1960s, being baptised and affirming their faith at Pirates Cove, Avila Beach, California. Abandoning the strict beliefs of their homelands, many Irish individuals rebelled against the Catholic Church, embracing this contemporary connection with the higher power. For years religion held authority over women, labelling them unclean, inferior, impure, “she shall be unclean,” Leviticus 15:25.⁴⁰ For generations within the Catholic Church, the biblical scriptures were not up for interpretation or conversation, what was read was fact. Many individuals rebuked any faith as a result of such beliefs forced upon them. However, this wave of liberated minds, brought about personal connection to oneself and this higher power. Communities

³⁶ (Spectator, 1968)

³⁷ (Lennon, 1971)

³⁸ (Smith, 2021)

³⁹ (Salter, 2023)

⁴⁰ (New York: American Bible society, 1856)

developed in faith, as members of society formed their own personal relationship with God, in turn they strived for a better world, for love and equality.

Younger individuals were determined to change the world created by generations before them, dreaming of a place of peace and equality. All events mentioned above paired alongside the first wave of feminism, spanning for seven decades, from 1848 to 1920. In which women fought relentlessly for the right to vote, further change was upon the horizon.

Just before the turn of the new decade of the seventies, a “tidal wave”⁴¹ of women’s liberation hit the streets of cities across the globe, one in particular Atlantic City, United States. Hundreds of women took to the streets of Atlantic City boardwalk, New Jersey, United States, September 7th, 1968. Protestors, marched for the inequality and sexualization of women since 1921, within the Miss America Competitions, outside the Convention Center in which Miss America was held.⁴² Passionate protestors held signs in pride, “All Women Are Beautiful,” “don’t be a playboy accessory,” and, “Can make-up hide the wounds of our oppression?”⁴³ Across borders in Oxford, England, an event initially intended to be a women’s history conference, educating, and discussing within a small group, quickly changed its course. Between five hundred and six hundred, empowered, learned, determined women, gathered at Ruskin College, 27th February 1970. Here they protested for three days, against a beauty competition, held in London, 20 November, of the same year. Men catered for the women protesting, supplying them with food and childcare across this three-day endeavour. This was the first conference of its kind and several more would follow. Not only was this a time of protest but of great discussion, settling on four key demands, equal pay, educational, and job opportunities, free contraception, abortion on demand, and free 24-hour nurseries.⁴⁴ This gained an incredible amount of coverage and attention, the liberation

⁴¹ (Bruley, 2017)

⁴² (Unknown, 2020)

⁴³ (Gay, 2018)

⁴⁴ (Sherwood, 2023)

movement finding their voice in the public eye. The BWLM, British Women's Liberation Movement, had found their footing in this monumental movement of history and change.

The beautiful aspect of this movement is that it connected women, feminists across lands and oceans, from the first BWLM Conference and protest in Oxford, England, to the marches across American States in support of the ratification of the ERA, Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution, 1970. This Amendment strived for guaranteeing, protection from discrimination and inequality on the basis of sex. Essentially this involved the US congress putting in place a seven-year deadline for the formal action of including Equal Rights in the US constitution, as the 28th Amendment. This would only be put in place by three-fourths of the states, 38 of 50, opting for ratification by 1979. The first year, twenty-two states ratified, yet this did not continue, in attempt to implore change, the deadline was extended to 1982, unfortunately to no avail.⁴⁵ To this day, the ERA remains not a part of the US Constitution, this battle of inequality continues, women never tiring to break this injustice. In recent years, more so since the rise of the #MeToo campaign, a further push for this to be passed and ratified in US Constitution has been seen. With several states still refusing this necessary change, 40 years on the ERA is still not a part of the Constitution.⁴⁶ It is for reasons such as this there is a necessity to implore those in authority to listen to the feminist movement.

A woman who inspired so many across the world at the beginning of the 1970s, adding momentum to the second wave, was the late Betty Friedan, 1921, Illinois. Author of the landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which depicted the analysis of the dissatisfaction amongst women in mainstream society. 'Feminine Mystique' became a term commonly heard across the movement, as societies assumption, a label for women, to find satisfaction and life fulfilment through the mundane, acquiescent chores of a housewife, housework, marriage, 'sexual passivity', becoming a mother. In this assumption, women

⁴⁵ (Napikoski, 2019)

⁴⁶ (Kelly et al., 2019)

would want for nothing, desire no education, self-identity, careers, or voice in society. Women would sit pretty in the mould society built for them and be grateful. Friedan took it upon herself to challenge this societal assumption, noting the dissatisfaction in life, lack of purpose, and deep sense of worthlessness so many experiences, but cannot articulate their feelings as they have been taught to remain compliant, silent, and agreeable. Friedan quotes, “The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own.”⁴⁷ Friedan, stood as a mentor to many women searching for identity, she was invited as an honoured guest, to a march supporting the ratification of the ERA to US Constitution as previously mentioned. Friedan created art with her words, creatively bearing her soul to society through this. She inspired female artists to take their place in the WLM. Feminists within the States and overseas regard Friedan’s written piece as ‘revolutionary.’⁴⁸ With her passing on the 4th of February 2006, Washington D.C, Friedan is still a well-known feminist, and the impact of her work, *The Feminine Mystique* has gone down in history.⁴⁹

Another large segment in the WLM history is the seven demands, spreading from 1970-1978, making the ‘womanifesto’.⁵⁰ Adding to the four previous demands, constructed on the steps of Oxford, a further three demands came to be. The legal and financial independence of women, before this time a woman could not own her own money it must be under marriage, under male dependence, this came about in 1974. Further, the right to self-defined sexuality and an end to the discrimination against lesbians, also brought to light in 1974. Finally, 1978 gave voice to the final demand, freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion regardless of marital status, and an end to the laws assumptions and intuitions that perpetuate male dominance. This final demand was not simply a demand but indeed morosely a cry for help as the fight against male violence increased over the 1970s, in males’ response to this new-found freedom

⁴⁷ (Friedan, 1963)

⁴⁸ (Fetters, 2013)

⁴⁹ (Churchill, 2020)

⁵⁰ (Sherwood, 2023)

women held. The Irish times dubbed this domestic abuse as the phenomenon called, ‘battered wives’⁵¹ This remains significantly poignant and important in today’s society, UN Women reported in 2021, approximately 45,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members.⁵²

From my research and analysis, I can fully affirm the necessity for one to understand and give context and recognition to the entire history that ignited the flames that burns within the feminist artists, of the 1970s. It is crucial to be able to fully digest the magnitude of such piece of art and historical change of the women in our society then and now. They echo the previous quotation by Friedan, without creative work, how may we come to find ourselves and understand who we are in society.⁵³

⁵¹ (O’Moráin, 2018)

⁵² (UN WOMEN, 2023)

⁵³ (Friedan, 1963)

Paint to Posts; Rupi Kaur Redefining Feminist Art on Social Media Platform in a Contemporary Society and Addressing Unmet Demands

Rupi Kaur, born in 1992, is a poet, illustrator, photographer, author, and avid feminist.

Kaur's photography celebrates the menstrual body in an age of social media and benefits from the vast audience accessible with Instagram. While using this platform to expand the potential reach of her work, it opens her up to direct criticism, negative comments, exposing the persistence of societal stigmas against the menstruating body. From looking at the history behind the second wave of feminism, homing in on the works of Chicago, we move into contemporary society, current times.

To this day the seven demands made during the second wave, as stated previously, remain not met, there is still a need and passion for change amongst women and feminists across the globe. The menstruating body remains close to invisible in this contemporary culture we deem so progressive. This chapter explores the response contemporary society has to menstruation through the art medium of photography with reference to poetry. The dedication seen in artist Chicago, 1970s, expanded in the previous chapters is mirrored in the contemporary artist, Kaur. Kaur is more commonly known for her poetry, of love, femininity, heartbreak, cultural heritage, sexual abuse, and healing.⁵⁴ However, I will be looking at her photography and social media presence with slight deviations to her poetry to add depth and context to her as an artist. Unlike Chicago, Kaur's art is far more easily accessed by the public in this current time by social media. In particular, I will be focusing on the Instagram post created by Kaur, March 2015, as a part of a collection of menstrual themed photography.

⁵⁴ (Vega, 2022)

‘Poetry is in the midst of a renaissance, and is being driven by a clutch of young, digitally-savvy ‘Instapoets’, so-called for their ability to package their work into concise, shareable posts.’⁵⁵ Online poetry did in fact increase the overall popularity and exposure of poetry, according to a study done published in 2020 by The National Endowment of the Arts. This study gives a comprehensive account of their 2017 SPPA (Survey Size of Poetry Audience) findings, a key statistic being a 12 percent increase in adults reading poetry, equating to 28 million readers.⁵⁶ ‘Instapoets’ are among the driving forces of this increase, with Kaur inspiring many to engage with and write their own poetry.

Kaur's ability to convey such relatability through so few words (often her poetry does not exceed 250 words) is a major part of her appeal. These bitesize pieces of poetry act as inspiration, questioning and relatability to a vast audience. Her poetry posted on Instagram has captured the hearts of many young individuals from all walks of life, bringing a sense of unity and comfort to those with shared trauma, healing journeys, and self-image struggles. Journalist Rob Walker discusses the impact of her poetry and how her multitudes of followers fall ‘under her spell’⁵⁷.

‘you cannot
walk in and out of me like a revolving door
i have many miracles
happening inside me
to be your convenient option’⁵⁸

⁵⁵ (Yii Lee, W., 2019)

⁵⁶ (Dewey, 2021)

⁵⁷ (Walker, 2017)

⁵⁸ (Kaur, 2017)

Kaur's lack of punctuation gives her work a sense of continuation, as though we are simply reading a segment of her internal monologue. There is no exact beginning or end to her pieces, it is a statement in a conversation, conversation readers are welcome to be a part of. Through so few words, she gives hope, a sense of self-worth in her work, stating she is not yet whole but a working progress. Hope and perseverance spur up within the reader, upon engaging with her honesty and relatability.

Kaur has written and self-published several books, the first in 2014, *Milk and Honey*, followed by *The Sun and her Flowers* (2017), *Home Body* (2020), and *Healing Through Words* (2022), among others. All of which delve into aspects of female and race struggle, constantly making it personal. Kaur, originally born in Punjab, India, before migrating to Canada at a young age, expresses through her poetry and through interviews the difficulty she experienced as her family religion is Sikh. In Canada, menstruation is accepted, and yet her Indian heritage and culture says otherwise. Kaur and her art have become a voice for many women, and menstruators. I will look at aspects of her poetry to give context and depth to her photography collection created with her sister, Prabh, around menstruation. The artist herself created these in an effort to destigmatize the female body, to make society 'realize these are just regular, normal processes,' nothing to reject or to shame or shun.'⁵⁹

⁵⁹ (Dewey, 2021)



Figure 2, Instagram post, *Period*, 2015, posted as part of series of menstrual themed photography.⁶⁰

One of the most interesting aspects of Kaur's photography collection, is the way in which it has been policed, by both fellow Instagram users, and the moderators of the platform itself. On March 23rd, 2015, Kaur posted an image on Instagram, of a woman laying on her bed in comfortable clothes, with a blood stain in the crotch of her sweatpants, with a mirroring stain on the bed sheet. Instantaneously this post receives an unimaginable amount of attention and became 'trending'. Just as *Red Flag*, Chicago, received backlash, as did Kaur's post, however a downside to social media is this backlash can be expressed instantaneously, as well as anonymously. Following suit of every piece of art put out to challenge societies views, this post evoked anger, disgust, and hatred within the walls of society, so much so the post was deleted by Instagram themselves. Supposedly the post violated community guidelines, the guidelines of which forbid imagery of videography of nudity, a fully clothed woman, illegal activity, lying in bed, and the glorification of self-harm, a natural part of life that is menstruation? This simply does not add up, the image frankly is the opposite of all these guidelines as seen above. In response we are left to question, 'why is society so afraid of it?'⁶¹ Kaur expresses the confusion and questioning many menstruators battle with, in the

⁶⁰ (Kaur, 2015)

⁶¹ (Dewey, 2021)

line of her poetry, ‘apparently it is ungraceful of me to mention my period in public cause the actual biology of my body is *too* real.’⁶²

Once again, I bring back my question previously posed to *Red Flag*, do artists simply take a mundane part of menstruating life and making beautiful or can this piece be more, a statement, or indeed is it simply an expression of self?

From reviewing Kaur’s work in conjunction with Chicago’s, I do believe a statement must be made to bring light to a situation, a statement is made out of passion and desire for change. Kaur and Chicago embody this desire and perseverance to alter society, to make individuals question. And yet neither *Red Flag*, 1970, nor *Period*, 2015, are solely statements for the sake of causing pointless commotion, or to bring the artists fame. These are artists expressing the need for change, the need for open conversation, and the need to normalize that which is natural.

In response to the backlash of Instagram removing her post, Kaur reposted the exact same image, captioning it, “thank you [@instagram](#) for providing me with the exact response my work was created to critique ... i will not apologize for not feeding the ego and pride of misogynist society that will have my body in an underwear but not be okay with a small leak.”⁶³ This was not the first time Kaur received negativity around her artistry, critic Lindsay Adler and blogger Iman Usmani have deemed her, a “hack” and a “dunce”⁶⁴, an ‘ugly feminist,’⁶⁵ and further critics claiming her work as exhibiting, ‘lazy technique’⁶⁶, ‘corny’.⁶⁷ Arguments that contemporary western society is more openminded, progressive, and accepting towards art depicting the menstruating body than the society Chicago's work emerged, become diminished when reviewing the comments in response to Kaur’s post. The comments section under this post devastatingly displays and further solidifies the fact that

⁶² (Kaur, 2014a)

⁶³ (Kaur, 2015)

⁶⁴ (Adler, 2017)

⁶⁵ (Usmani, 2021)

⁶⁶ (Fysudeen, 2019)

⁶⁷ (Yii Lee, W., 2019)

the demand for; freedom from sexism towards women, outlined five decades previously is no closer to being met.

In male dominated sports, bleeding is seen as strength, defying the odds despite bleeding, gaining victory all while bleeding. A video surfaced gaining quick virality in May 2023, of Spanish Rugby player, Francisco Hernandez, making a tackle despite bleeding from his head.⁶⁸ However when a menstruating body bleeds, it is frowned upon, it is seen as disgusting. Several comments left by men under Kaur's 2015 Instagram post are as follows, 'what a waste of life you are',⁶⁹ '1 year later ... still disgusting',⁷⁰ 'Nasty filthy bitch'⁷¹ and '...it's gross no matter how you look at it get a life'.⁷² Many men saying the blood stain looks more like the women has defecated in her sleep.

Such comments although cloaked in the appearance of vulgarity and hatred, perhaps are a result of miseducation or inability to decipher feelings upon being met with such an image, and the primal response being that of disgust. Such position is discussed thoroughly through a theory I will touch briefly on, Kristeva's theory of Abjection. Referring to the place where meaning collapses, the human psychological response of disgust, reaction of horror to something that threatens a breakdown in meaning between self and other, threatens our sense of identity, forcing us to question our boundaries and excavate our norms or between subject and object, where meaning collapses. With this, the abject is allied with off putting, and or abhorrent aspects the human body that appears to threaten the body integrity, death, fecal matter, vomit, childbirth and indeed menstruation.⁷³ It would be wrong to rebuke those who respond in a psychologically natural way, yet hatred forms when such reactions are put into words targeted at an individual, as seen in the comments above.

⁶⁸ (Bendon, 2023)

⁶⁹ (Deep Chawla, 2015)

⁷⁰ (Tyler Weston, 2019)

⁷¹ (@w33zy_91, 2015)

⁷² Kurt Ritchie 2015)

⁷³ (Kristeva & Lechte, 1982)

Kaur fought back, “Their patriarchy is leaking. Their misogyny is leaking. We will not be censored.”¹⁵ Amid this backlash, Instagram sent an email to Kaur stating an alleged member of their team, ‘accidentally’ removed her post. Instagram furthered their statement with, ‘When our team processes reports from other members of the Instagram community, we occasionally make a mistake. In this case, we wrongly removed content and worked to rectify the error as soon as we were notified. We are sorry for this mistake.’⁷⁴ Perhaps, this was a genuine apology on the behalf of the platform mediators. Yet, the fact there is need for an apology in the first place shows society’s inability to accept the normal functions of the menstruating body. If it was a genuine apology then why as Dewey so perfectly frames are ‘your (Instagram) pages (are) filled with countless photos/accounts where women, are objectified. Pornified. And treated less than human?’ It is almost laughable (exhausted, oppressed, defiant laughter) that ‘they allow porn on Instagram, but not periods?’⁷⁵ Kaur poetically states, ‘It is okay to sell what’s between a woman’s legs more than it is okay to mention its inner workings.’⁷⁶

Unlike with art that is presented in galleries, art shared on social media reaches thousands within seconds, the audience is vast, extensive, and instant. Kaur’s post is so prominent as it is the new form of art, instant art, allowing her work reach, influence, and inspire an audience faster than conventionally presented art. ‘Art should be accessible to the masses, and when we start to tailor it in a way that keeps people out, then there’s an issue with that. Like whom are we really creating art for?’⁷⁷ Kaur did not limit this post simply to a female audience or place it in a gallery so only those who wish to see it would go view it. She posted it on Instagram, a social media platform is instant and easily accessible to all genders, all race, all ages. In 2018, from a survey group of one thousand and sixty-eight adult individuals aged sixteen onwards, 19% attended an art exhibition (paintings, sculpture,

⁷⁴ (Dewey, 2021)

⁷⁵ (Dewey, 2021)

⁷⁶ (Kaur, 2014b)

⁷⁷ (Edes & Martin, 2017)

photography etc.⁷⁸ If Kaur's work was displayed in a gallery, it would not reach the demographics it can online, there is no like button for instant validations, or a comment section to receive instantaneous hate or praise. These factors involved in an online social media platform affect the reach, notoriety, and reception of the piece.

I find it quite astonishing how a single photograph, comprised of a woman, fully clothed, lying in bed not even facing the camera, with a blood stain, can be deemed, 'disgusting!'⁷⁹ Such an image depicts an event all menstruators have experienced at least once in their lives and is graphically compared to human feces. Undoubtedly both these are natural functions of the body, and yet can they be put in the same box? Can something deemed sexual and beautiful one moment be declared disgusting and shameful the next, simply as a result of the nature of the body? Society has deemed this to be true, outside of the five-to-seven-day menstrual cycle, in which bleeding occurs, the vagina is something of beauty, and yet actual menstruation deems it ugly, unclean, and unusable. Kaur voices this shame known to many in the final stanza of her one of her poems, 'the recreational use of this body is seen as beautiful while its nature is seen as ugly'⁸⁰

Just as the women before her, Friedan 1963, those on the streets of Oxford 1970, and Chicago 1971, the backlash from this post simply spurred Kaur on in perseverance and determination to alter the minds of those shamed for centuries before to a vision of self-expression and chorus of self-love. Kaur's unwavering and tenacious response added fuel to the fire within many women, to reclaim this part of themselves hidden and shamed for centuries and making it something beautiful. Five decades on from the initial construction and issuing of the seven demands of the 'womanifesto,'⁸¹ there has been movement, slow but steady movement, more are coming to the realization of the flaws in society, the unattainable, outdated, and simply wrong mold society forces upon women. As previously mentioned, the demand for the guaranteed protection from discrimination and equality on the

⁷⁸ (O'Mahony, 2018)

⁷⁹ (Tyler Weston, 2019)

⁸⁰ (Kaur, 2014c)

⁸¹ (Sherwood, 2023)

basis of sex, has still not been met in the US congress constitution, under the ERA Equal Right Amendment.⁸² Indeed steps of change have been made and yet, there is still a long way to go, we are gradually making our way towards a more equal, just, and accepting world. One Instagram post at a time.

⁸² (Napikoski, 2019)

Conclusion

To this day not all seven demands are met in general society, the demand for equal pay, education and job opportunities, free twenty-four-hour nurseries for childcare and support, free contraception and abortion, financial and legal independence, the demand to end discrimination against lesbians, and women's right to define the own sexuality, freedom from violence and sexual coercion.⁸³ There still remain individuals whose individuality is stripped from them as they forced into the stereotypical definition's society prefers them in.

From my analysis I can empathize with those who are taken aback by this new freedom of expression, it is not the norm, it is necessary, but it is new. Change is uncomfortable, it forces individuals to join the conversation that opens their eyes to the oppression, inequality, and reality of others. However, living a life oblivious to the corruption around oneself is a life of prejudice, nepotism, chauvinism, often without intention. Statistics provided by The US Government Accountability Office, 2022, state, females earn about \$.82 to every dollar male earn in the same positions and qualifications.⁸⁴ Within the film industry, in its ninety-six years of running, a total of eight female directors have been nominated for an Academy Award.⁸⁵ Taking a moment to look at our own theatre industry here in Ireland, studies from 2006-2015 show, only 33% of single-authored new plays produced were written by female playwrights. A mere 39% of new plays staged by a single director were female directed. The costume department is female dominated, with all other departments underrepresented by females. Despite 82% of Costume Designers being female, on 64% or the overall 737 play credited a costume designer, while male dominated design departments such as Lighting were credited on 82% and Set Designers on 77%.⁸⁶ This lack of representation in our arts industry shows the reality of hardships women faces daily.

⁸³ (Griffin, 2017)

⁸⁴ (Office, 2022)

⁸⁵ (Stacy L. & Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, 2024)

⁸⁶ (Irish Theatre Institute, 2017)

Chicago created an installation, *Menstrual Bathroom* (1972), as part of the feminist exhibition Womanhouse, established by Chicago at California State University, Fresno, and later expanded to Cal Arts, Los Angeles.⁸⁷ The installation depicts a pristine white bathroom, strewn with used tampons and sanitary products, a bin positioned overflowing with used tampons. Chicago when interviewed about the installation recalled, ‘Under a shelf full of all the paraphernalia with which this culture ‘cleans up’ menstruation was a garbage can filled with the unmistakable marks of our animality.’⁸⁸ This piece not only came at a shock to a society in which the menstruating body was invisible, but it solidified the sheer amount of products needed to cope with menstruating, speaking to the issue of period poverty. Furthermore, in recent research from BMJ, state the absorbency levels on the packaging of sanitary products mismatch between the reported and actual absorbent capacity. The majority of products labelling their products greater capacity than the testing carried out by BMJ found. This is due to the product testing being completed using non-blood liquids, such as water or saline.⁸⁹ Menstruators are expected to spend over €100 yearly, on products that are not even fit for purpose due to the lack of education and appropriate research.⁹⁰

The above expresses the dire need for the representation of women and the menstruating body in today’s society to fight back against these prejudice and chauvinistic views towards the menstruators body being “vulgar,”⁹¹ and ‘filthy’⁹². This lack of education and compassion is the reasoning behind these unmet demands, menstruators are still burdened by shame, disgust, and apathy towards the nature within them. As I previously stated, change is a necessity, it is gradual as seen from the first wave of feminism, 1848 - 1920, second wave, 1963 – 1980s, third wave 1990 into the fourth present day wave of feminism. Each wave tackling a different area of oppression, persevering through,

⁸⁷ (Chicago/Woodman LLC, 2024)

⁸⁸ (Chicago, 1972)

⁸⁹ (BMJ Editors, 2023)

⁹⁰ (Pollak, 2018)

⁹¹ (Snider, 2018)

⁹² (@w33zy_91, 2015)

relentlessly pushing back against old society. Chicago urged artists to create beautiful statements, commentaries to society, to speak through their art. Kaur opened the conversation of normalizing menstruation to a modern social platform, receiving extreme exposure to a simple piece of art, simplistic in subject and striking in statement.

I previously posed the questions, do artists create art solely from the mundane parts of life making them beautiful or can art be a statement, must it then be twinged with an underlying ulterior motive of selfishness, or indeed is it simply an expression of self?

Upon reflection of writing this contribution to the conversation of menstruation and feminism, while debatable, I believe a piece of art is a reflection of the artists themselves, it is a window into the soul of the individual, it is beautifully transparent, raw, unapologetically authentic. It is a beautiful statement of self, one's own beliefs, emotions, desires, passions, sorrows in the vast form of art. Rather than the idea of selfishness as a motive it is the desire of change for oneself and others, for life to be greater than it is. *Red Flag*, and *Period*, are both statements of hope for change, thrown out into a sea of societal norms, preconception, comfortability. Art is often selfless, pouring oneself onto a canvas for the benefit of those to come.

Taking a moment to look at notorious statement, "... One Picture is worth a thousand words," printed by Printers Ink, March 1927, soon after it first emergence in the early 20th century. Frederick R. Barnard published a piece on the effectiveness of graphic advertising, titled, "One look is worth a thousand words", claiming inspiration from the Japanese Philosopher, "so said a famous Japanese philosopher, and he was right". This statement simply clarifies my point, a piece of art speaks volumes into whichever conversation the artist positions it to. Art is an expression of self in the conversation of the society an artist resides in. Chicago strived to further the conversation of menstruation being a normal, natural part of life, and there is no shame in it. Kaur added to this conversation decades on, posting an image to Instagram into conversation of centuries of female

oppression, shame culture forced upon menstruators, and the necessity to not remain stagnant in contentment of the level of change we have reached but instead to always move forward. Echoing all those before her, unwaveringly moving towards a future of equality and self-expression.

For changes regarding the demands not yet met, in reference to the Equal Rights Amendment, the 28th Amendment remaining absent to US Constitution. Conversations must be had, art has proven to be effective, a protest is immensely impactful, yet cannot be revisited, reviewed differently upon second inspection, art stands as a continuous conversation. Art is up for interpretation, deliberation, and scrutiny. Art is an expression of self for others, it is a statement in the conversation of society.

By and large, Chicago spoke into a political, patriarchal, passive society, her beautiful piece, *Red Flag*, a testimony to the simplistic reality of the menstrual cycle. Similarly, Kaur added to the conversation of contemporary society, posting a picture of this naturally occurring event, both artists taking the nature of reality and making it a beautiful conversation piece through art. It is beautiful to see how art has aided in the gradual change of societal views, altering menstruation from being viewed as a hygiene issue to now a health issue.⁹³ Both received negative remarks, yet the impact is seen in the fact that two artists separated by four decades can share the same desire to keep this conversation of menstruation, and the normalization of menstruating body open, to urge young individuals to self-exploration, self-liberation, and self-definition. The seven demands of feminism all fell under this desire for self, to not be seen as inferior, the demand for equal pay, education, and job opportunities. Self-discovery with the options of free twenty-four-hour nurseries for childcare and support. Self-liberation by the option of free contraception and abortion, Self-identity in financial, legal independence and the demand to end discrimination against

⁹³ (WHO, 2022)

lesbians. Self-definition of one's sexuality, freedom from violence and sexual coercion⁹⁴.

This is not with the motive of selfishness but the desire to be true to oneself.

Even within my own lifetime, my early years of adolescence, menstruation was part of science class rather than a real part of life. Education of menstruation was strictly factual, there was little to no conversation had, and yet now a mere decade later I observe the change. The conversation of menstruation is now part of daily interactions, there is no shame in carrying a tampon with you to the bathroom, the expression of physical and emotional pain is met with empathy. Nevertheless, if I have learned anything from writing this piece, I realize that this is not enough, this is incredible progress, but shame, menstrual poverty, and the lack of education is still prevalent in today's society.

In conclusion, reflecting upon all my research, I must hold this desire for change, in order for a future where there is not an ounce of shame, the conversation of menstruation is never met with faces of grimacing disapproval, identity is never predefined by society, to become a reality. I urge you as a reader to reflect on this piece, allow yourself to ask questions, insert yourself into the conversation, view art not as simply colors and shapes, but as expression of self. This wave of feminism is to benefit all for a better world of freedom and equality. This is the demand of feminism a time where all are free to define themselves by their own creativity.

“The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person,
is by creative work of her own.”

Betty Friedan⁹⁵

⁹⁴ (Griffin, 2017)

⁹⁵ (Friedan, 1963)

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