

Two guys walk into a bar... Do you think their menstrual cycles ever synced up?: The unexplored potential of queer period humour

Period jokes are changing comedy — and not just for women.



A personal favourite recent period joke, from Fleabag (2016-2019).

Nearly every piece of comedy targeted at women features at least one joke about menstruation. This is a way for female comics to call-in their target audience, and align themselves with the groups of people who you want to make laugh. Joking about menstrual cycles is the perfect way to do this — as it targets, historically, cisgendered women.

I would argue, though, that there is even more unexplored potential in the period joke. As conversations around queerness become more prominent in our society, I think there is a space to be made for more intersectional approaches to period humour. In the wake of TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) ideology working its way into popular culture, I believe now is the time to put a little distance between the essentialist relationship of womanhood and menstruation.

Early period humour often framed those who menstruate as irrational or crazy, paired alongside the ideas that periods were grotesque and something not to be discussed. In this way, the comedy around periods has simultaneously been influenced by and created the social attitudes towards menstruation. Though this has shifted dramatically in recent years, as

cultural conversations around menstruation have been on their way to becoming more normalized. This kind of representation is critically important, as [Nadya Okamoto \(author of "PERIOD POWER"\)](#) writes: "Changing media portrayals of menstruators is a crucial aspect of changing public opinion and making menstruation an open conversation, so that menstruators aren't held back from reaching their full potential." This speaks to the ever-changing nature of period-related humour and the potential it has to reframe social ideas about things and people.

Joking about menstruation may strip it of its taboo, which helps us unlearn preconceived notions about women and menstruation — however, I don't think the potential of period humour ends at cisgendered women.



A popular internet meme using Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham, from the NBC TV series Hannibal (2013-2015).

The meme above, featuring two cisgendered men, does very interesting work in terms of queering the space of period jokes. In context, Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham have an queer-coded relationship, which has led to the show having a dominantly queer fanbase. I think this joke in particular is so interesting because it's clearly meant to make a joke about how deep the bond between the two men is. This is an intriguing bridge made between typically feminized experience and queerness, two things you would have to have some knowledge of in order for the joke to be funny. So it still functions in a similar way to period jokes of the past, in that they call-in specific groups; however this one includes a broader scope of people in a meaningful, intersectional way.

This bridging of experience could lead to a formation of kinship, which I believe is something that comedy absolutely grants space for. [Kylie Cheung writes for Salon](#): "Period stories are unifying, whether from the perspective of a young girl in the global south who struggles in school without menstrual hygiene products, or a detained immigrant woman who's denied these products, or even a woman in a corporate setting whose office bathroom doesn't offer tampons and pads." I think there is potential for period stories to be even more inclusive than that as we broaden the scope and invite more people in.

Allowing more identities and communities to participate in humour and storytelling about menstruation can make space for bodies and anecdotes previously considered abject within the public realm. Jokes like the Hannibal meme complicate ideas around who menstruates and what it means to be someone who menstruates in a way that I feel has a lot of potential in terms of representation — in acknowledging that not all women menstruate and not all those who menstruate are women.

I would also argue that this type of joke not only fosters kinship between marginalized identities, but it reframes menstruation away from something scary and into something almost joyous. Likening the experiences of menstruation to ones of deep connection can rewrite the shame around periods.



Phoebe Bridgers shares a similar meme featuring the members of The Beatles.

This is not to say that we should silence voices of cisgendered women and their experiences of menstruation but rather push to acknowledge the potential of allowing other voices into the discussion. I believe this would also benefit cisgendered women, as it confuses and denaturalizes the narrative that women exist to menstruate and procreate. In this way, I believe there are radical possibilities within the context of period humour and its ability to bridge identity gaps, as well as queer a comedic space that was once used to shame certain bodies.

The future of comedy could work towards something intersectional, that creates the opportunity for serious societal change and a total shift in popular narratives. So, I encourage you to go and speculate if your favourite male characters or celebrities have had their menstrual cycles sync up!