



LIZZIE CROCKER



## Do Women Really Need 'Period Leave'?

Menstrual leave policies might destigmatize menstruation as a topic in the workplace. But they also might reinforce the stigma.

News that a [British](#) company will soon implement a "[period policy](#)" that allows women to take time off when they're menstruating has kicked off a larger debate about whether similar policies would do women more harm than good in most co-ed workplaces.

Coexist, a small Bristol-based company, designed their “period policy” so that it’s predominantly female workforce (17 women to 7 men) won’t have to use paid sick days when suffering [menstrual](#) discomfort.

Coexist director Bex Baxter has said she wants to “tap into employees’ natural cycle to create a happier and healthier working environment.”

It’s hard to imagine a male manager prioritizing his employees “natural cycles” at any company, particularly a major corporation. Indeed, Nike is the only major international company that offers paid menstrual leave, having adopted the policy in 2007.

Similar policies exist in the Philippines, [Japan](#), Taiwan, Korea, and parts of China. (Neither Nike nor Coexist responded to requests for comment by the time this story was published).

Baxter [told The Guardian](#) that women “feel guilty and ashamed for taking time off” during their period and “often sit at their desks in silence not wanting to acknowledge it.”

Why force employees to work when physical discomfort prevents them from performing well?

“It’s not just about taking time off if you feel unwell but about empowering people to be their optimum selves,” she said. “And that’s got to be good for business.” Baxter also hopes to set a taboo-shattering precedent.

Without knowing the precise logistics and technicalities of “menstrual leave,” we have only a vague vision for how it would play out at most companies.

We’ve reached a point where most women will comfortably grouse about debilitating cramps to female colleagues and managers. Or they might euphemistically mention to a trusted male coworker that it’s “that time of the month.”

Imagine a work environment where women openly announced that they had taken a “period day” instead of a “sick day,” talking about heavy bleeding and cramps among both male and female colleagues in the same way they might discuss the stomach flu. (“Ugh, I’m so sorry—that’s the worst.”)

Do menstrual leave policies destigmatize menstruation as a topic in the office or on the factory floor—or do such policies reinforce the stigma?

A quick poll of women in the Daily Beast newsroom found that while many were idealistically in favor of “menstrual leave,” they worried that demanding extra paid days off would hamper gender equality in the workforce.

Several said a policy would likely divide the sexes and potentially be used against women to limit career growth.

Others expressed concern that it would create a division among women, too—those who suffer from endometriosis and experience more severe pain versus those who can tolerate cramps.

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One colleague worried that male managers would reward women employees who didn't take menstrual leave for being “tough” or “troopers.”

Another simply sent me [a video showing how men would cope with cramps](#) (not well). The same point was famously made by Gloria Steinem in her humorous essay, '[If Men Could Menstruate.](#)'

“To prevent monthly work loss among the powerful, Congress would fund a National Institute of Dysmenorrhea,” she writes. “Doctors would research little about heart attacks, from which men would be hormonally protected, but everything about cramps.”

Steinem imagines that “street guys would invent slang (“He’s a three-pad man”) and “give fives on the corner with some exchange like, ‘Man you lookin’ good!’”

‘Yeah, man, I’m on the rag!’”

The “menstrual leave” conversation also brings to mind a similar debate this summer about AC temperatures in office.

Women who complained bitterly that they were freezing were shut down by male colleagues citing a study that men have higher body temperatures.

While some women conceded that they should just put on a sweater, others insisted low AC temperatures were sexist in favor of men—including [the same Telegraph writer](#) who insists that “period leave” ++[is not at all sexist](#).

Perhaps the best solution, also idealistic, is to give both men and women more paid days off—  
and let them choose how or why to use them.



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