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Bee Hughes

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Conceptual Framings of Menstruation in 20th-Century British Menstrual Product Advertising: Visible Stigma, Invisible Bleeding

Bee Hughes

Media, Culture, Communication, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This article aims to build on previous scholarship on the analysis of menstrual product advertising through a case study of British print advertisements in magazines from the latter half of the 20th century. Drawing on curatorial techniques and thematic analysis, the discussion situates these advertisements within the context of the study of youth cultures, girlhood studies, and postfeminist media cultures alongside sociological examinations of menstruation. The analysis demonstrates key continuities between discourses of postfeminist media culture and modernity represented in these archival advertisements and contemporary notions of menstrual normativity.

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Introduction

Magazines for women and girls flourished in the 20th century, with many of these magazines providing templates for "successful" and "desirable" modes of femininity (Chambers, 2015; Gibson, 2018; Gough-Yates, 2003; Knowles, 2023; McRobbie, 1991, 2008). This was also a period of innovation in the menstrual product industry, with many of today's recognizable disposable product brands competing for customer loyalty (Kissling, 2006; Røstvik, 2022; Vostral, 2008). Within magazines that boomed into the cultural explosion of the 1960s, nestled alongside pop music poster boys, agony aunt columns, and fashion features, we can find a plethora of advertisements for menstrual products and other Femcare consumer goods. The cultural practices of consumption and leisure encouraged in—and inherent within—magazines are relevant to developing an analysis of these advertisements. Women's and girls' magazines are among literary and media "recognised as key cultural forms reflective of distinctively female pleasures" (McRobbie, 1991, p.135). Within their pages, deep-seated negative beliefs about menstruation have been deployed to sell products. This hailing of the menstruator through narratives of shame and secrecy speaks very clearly to the tone of "pervasive insecurity which these forms actively invoked" (McRobbie, 2008, p.535) through their features, editorials, and accompanying advertising. The advertisements printed among advice and fashion columns reiterate the "communication taboo"

CONTACT Bee Hughes b.hughes@ljmu.ac.uk Media, Culture, Communication, Liverpool John Moores University, John Foster Building, 80-98 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, L3 5UZ, United Kingdom.

Kissling (1996a, 1996b) found in North American culture and, as Treneman (1988) noted in her comparison of a small selections of British menstrual product advertisements of the twentieth century, maintain a visual language of menstrual invisibility and concealment.

This article considers what discourses of menstruation are (re)presented in advertising published in magazines aimed at young women and girls during a period we may consider formative to the menstrual norms of the 21st century. The research focuses on published advertisements from the 1960s—which saw the emergence of British culture from postwar restraint into the excitement of mass and popular culture forms—to the final decade of the century. The analysis considers how we might read these historical texts now, aiming to avoid reproducing the "modernity discourse" (Jensen, 1991), characterized by Joke Hermes as analysis that shows "*concern* rather than *respect* for those who read women's magazines" (Hermes, 1995, p. 1), and aims to avoid moralizing about the readers and consumers of magazines or menstrual products. It is also important to recognize that making assumptions about audiences and their interpretation of the advertisements is not possible from textual analysis. Furthermore, I do not argue here of an effect these texts had on their contemporaneous audience. I cannot know how much attention the readers of these magazines paid to the advertisements they were presented with—audience *agency* does not equal audience *attention*. In other words, while an individual may exercise agency in choosing a particular publication, we cannot know how they engaged with it and which components or features received their attention. As Jensen notes, media consumption can be "virtually meaningless or at least a secondary activity" (1995, p. 15), so no assumptions will be made about impact these representations of menstruation had on people who menstruated who may have read these magazines.

Instead, this work is interested in the ways these advertisements contribute to the wider visual cultures of menstruation and what discourses they (re)produce. What narratives of menstruation are constructed through advertising, and how do they reflect or reinforce broader cultural understandings of menstruation? What did corporate marketing teams consider the most useful framing to entice their young consumers through the pages of popular magazines like *Jackie* and *Just Seventeen*? Treneman points to the "co-option of the female gaze" as an essential component of modern marketing language for many consumer goods, including menstrual products (1988, p. 164). Later, McRobbie situates the postfeminist consumer landscape as one where corporations "appropriate the site of girlhood" and "actively [draw] on a quasi-feminist vocabulary which celebrates female freedom and gender equality" (McRobbie, 2008, p. 532). Similarly, Mandziuk argues that the developing capitalism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries steered women into "illusory cultural participation […] via consumption" (Mandziuk, 2010, p. 43) rather than toward liberation. The analysis here will examine how menstrual product producers adopted a type of quasi-feminist language—particularly through invoking lifestyle narratives—from the 1960s, alongside a range of more negative framings. These contradictory cross-industry messages are reminiscent of linguistic strategies (particularly concealment and omission) employed by teens when discussing menstruation (Kissling, 1996b) and link these mid- to late-20th-century advertisements with later theorization of postfeminist media culture as a sensibility—that is, texts for critical analysis, rather than a theoretical or historic

shift (Gill, 2007)—as well as to recent analysis of menstrual product advertising (Røstvik 2018; Fahs & Collins, 2024).

The (Social) Politics of Menstruation

As Lotter et al. explain in an introduction to their interdisciplinary collection on contemporary menstruation, it remains "a complex, gendered, and widely stigmatised phenomenon" (Lotter et al., 2024, p. 1). One way of considering this is through menstrual normativity, defined as "a range of socially constructed beliefs, behaviours and cultural practices relating to menstruation in any given culturally and historically contingent context" (Hughes, 2023, p. 130). Another recent framework is *menstrunormativity*, which Persdotter developed to consider how contradictory discourses of menstruation—historically and contemporaneously—co-construct "normative" (and unattainable) subjectivities for/of people who menstruate through the figure of the menstrual monster (Persdotter, 2020). Anthropologists Buckley and Gottlieb argued against the existence of a universal menstrual taboo and instead for "a wide range of distinct rules for conduct regarding menstruation that bespeak quite different, even opposite purposes and meanings" (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988, p. 7). In the UK, Prendergast's work with secondary school–aged girls revealed that many experienced menarche without prior knowledge of menstruation or with an anticipation of experiencing something unpleasant (see Prendergast, 1994, 2000). Victoria Newton examined teenage girls' attitudes toward menstruation through an in-depth portrait of what she terms their "folklore of menstruation" (Newton, 2016, p. 1). She found that her participants' responses signaled a "historical shift from the invisible menstruating woman to invisible menstruation" (p. 183).

The medical model of menstruation has been highly influential in modern Anglo-American culture. Louise Lander's work traces moralistic Christian ideologies in medical understandings and the treatment of menstruation in lieu of evidence-based clinical practice in the long 19th century and develops the notion of menstruation as both a biological and social phenomenon (Lander, 1988). Emily Martin's research also analyses 19th-century medical narratives that characterize menstruation as traumatic and debilitating (Martin, 1987/2001), in contrast with early-modern framings of menstruation as an essential component of overall health (Read, 2008). Lander and Martin both consider the transmission of these attitudes toward menstruation into everyday contexts through various historical documents, including medical advice books for the home, literary sources, and illustrations. More recent work has examined 21st-century online medical advice as a more recent venue for these quasi-medical texts encountered in the everyday, particularly finding that these sources frame menstruation as "failed fertilisation" and simultaneously reinforce and trivialize menstrual pain and other related conditions (Hughes, 2018, pp. 5–9). These models position menstruation as a private and hidden phenomenon and within the gender roles constructed through reproductive capital. They almost exclusively adopt a paternalistic tone and are deeply (cis)gendered, reinforcing sex/gender binaries and therefore excluding trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people who menstruate. In cultural and political discourse, menstruation has been framed as a "women's issue," not worthy of serious (or any) consideration until very recently.

This context has shifted significantly within the last decade. *Cosmopolitan* declared 2015 "The Year the Period Went Public" (Weiss-Wolf, 2017, p. 4) and 2016 the year of "period power" (p. 4). Though the recent rise of menstrual advocacy and awareness in the Global North might seem sudden, with attention from mainstream politicians and media largely centering on the hot topic of period poverty, menstrual activism has a long history as part of the women's health and environmental movements from at least the 1970s. Academic work in the United States in this area covers topics including menstrual activism/activists (e.g., Bobel, 2010; Fahs, 2016) and menstrual product safety (e.g., Vostral, 2018). In recent years, American and British scholars have examined the impact of Scotland's universal Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act (2021) (e.g. Bildhauer et al., 2022, p. 5). Others, including Weiss-Wolf, have discussed earlier non-universal legislation and policies on the provision of menstrual products (Weiss-Wolf, 2020). In her study of the materiality of menstruation, Persdotter also discusses the intertwining of the medicalization and commercialization of menstruation, proposing this dual effect as "the *hygienization of menstruation*" (Persdotter, 2022, p. 37, original emphasis). This hygienization discourse can be seen in many examples of menstrual product advertising, solidifying notions of shame around the process of bleeding (p. 37).

Visual Cultures of Menstruation and Magazines

In addition to the growing academic and legislative attention afforded to menstruation, there is an established body of literature on the visual cultures of menstruation, dominated by studies of advertising and popular culture representations. Merskin's work provides a brief history of menstrual product advertising, noting the consistency between early examples that "presented products in a scientific way, focusing on the value and convenience of their brand" (Merskin, 1999, p. 946), while attempting to present factual descriptions of menstruation that would not cause offense, and late-20th-century advertising, which "continues to present a world akin to the past" (p. 954). Merskin notes that throughout the last century, menstrual advertising in the United States reflected the dominant ideology of menstruation as a "hygienic crisis" (Merskin, 1999, p. 941) and "that evidence of femininity, that fact that women bleed, is best kept hidden" (p. 954). Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler note the "important role" advertisements play "in the social construction of meaning" and briefly summarize findings of scholarship on menstrual product advertising (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2011, p. 11). Their influential paper provides a detailed discussion of the social construction of menstruation as a stigmatized condition, for example, through discourses of respectability, practices of menstrual concealment, menstrual product advertising, and other venues such as "books, magazine and newspaper articles, jokes, and other cultural artifacts, such as 'humorous' products like greeting cards and refrigerator magnets" (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013, p. 11). They list themes scholars have identified in their analysis of advertisements, which include embarrassment; "freshness"; images traditionally associated with femininity, such as flowers; blue liquids; and stigma.

The researcher and activist Chella Quint has published multiple explorations of aspects of menstrual stigma, including some reflections on advertising such as the digital Ad*Access collection's section of "feminine hygiene" advertising materials

(holding from 1911–1956) (Quint, 2019). Her wider academic and activist work has seen her satirize and critique menstrual stigma and advertising through zines, performance, visual art, and educational resources (see, e.g., Quint, 2006, 2011, 2012, 2022). Recent longitudinal studies of menstrual product advertising in the United States have identified several continuities and changes in advertising discourses, particularly the persistence of narratives of concealment, underpinning gender roles, and the framing of menstrual blood and menstruating bodies as abject (Fahs & Collins, 2024).

Houppert's work connects menstruation, adolescence, and magazines. She characterises the latter as contradictory and filled with "Fem[inist] Lite articles" (Houppert, 1999, p. 94). She identifies these publications as key contributors to construction of the body as abject in Western culture and in the psyche of teenage girls through media designed specifically to appeal to them. The magazines are filled with advertisements designed to train them into becoming consumers of the "right" kind of products for a good, clean girl (Houppert, 1999, p. 94). These types of contradictions have been recognized by scholars such as McRobbie as inherent to this media form; she points out "the internal tensions and contradictions which disrupt the magazine, making it more open to contestation than might otherwise be imagined" (McRobbie, 1990, p. 141). More recent work, such as Knowles' study of fashion features in *Jackie* in 1973–1974, demonstrates that these tensions permeate girls' magazines in many different forms—fashion is at once desirable and "incomprehensible" (Knowles, 2023).

For Houppert, teen magazines leave girls "perplexed about why sex, or more specifically desire, and menstruation seem to share the same concealment taboos" (Houppert, 1999, p. 95). The idea that "sex and menstruation are linked under the heading of 'Naughty'" (p. 95) is one of the dominant ideologies surrounding menarche and menstruation in Western culture (Lee, 1994). Houppert argues that "menstruation announces to the world that you're a sexual being, and the world denounces your sexuality" (Houppert, 1999, p. 95). Such contested and contradictory cultural milieus—and their representation—can be read through Gill's postfeminist framework, particularly the characteristic of texts that foreground discourses of sexualization and simultaneous feminist and antifeminist discourses (Gill, 2007). The sexualization and condemnation of the menstruating girl/woman can be read in menstrual product advertisements, as I will examine in the case of Bodyform and Tampax advertisements later. The multiple messages of the magazines and the advertisements they contain offer solutions and aspirations for their respective readers that shift over time. As Gibson reminds us, these publications "cannot be regarded as ideological monoliths providing a single unchanging view of girlhood, class and agency" (Gibson, 2018, p. 133); this assertion aligns with Fahs and Collins' analysis of changing and persistent discourses present in 20th-century menstrual product advertising (Fahs & Collins, 2024).

While magazines may be shared or read collectively with friends and family, scholars have traditionally associated magazine consumption with the private sphere of the girl's bedroom (McRobbie & Garber, 1980). In contrast, television viewing is often considered a semipublic activity, rendering the marketing of stigmatized subjects tricky. Though television advertising is beyond the scope of this research, it is useful to acknowledge the differences in the role that medium and form can play in the delivery of menstrual discourses. For example, Kate Kane examines the dominant framings of ("feminine") "hygiene commercials [that] situate the body in a complex of pollution beliefs that

reconcile the individual body to society" (Kane, 1990, p. 83). Payling discusses 1970s viewer complaints about television advertisements for vaginal deodorants in which women "wrote vividly of the shame and embarrassment they felt having their intimate bodily functions projected into their living rooms and discussed openly in front of family and visiting guests" (Payling, 2023, pp. 2–3). Television advertising has also been the subject of analysis in menstruation research, with more recent work tackling not only menstrual brands in the United States, United Kingdom, and Northern European countries but also the construction of menstrual norms beyond the Global North. For example, Yagnik (2012) examined 50 Indian television advertisements, identifying themes including "social captivity," where menstruating women "have to choose to be less mobile or stationary" (Yagnik, 2012, p. 767) rather than face the inconvenience of leaving the home, some form of restriction on their lives, perceived impacts on professionalism, and physical and mental distress. Chabih and Elmasry's (2022) comparative study of Arab and Western television advertisements identified similar themes, with social isolation counterposed to the menstrual product that "saved" their users through engaging with scripts of concealment.

Røstvik analyzed "the ways in which late-capitalism embraces and co-opts feminism in depictions of menstruation" (Røstvik, 2018, p. 1) in recent big brand television advertising. Røstvik's article draws links between popular culture and art representations of menstruation to analyze the link between menstruation and water in menstrual advertising that capitalizes "on their products' ability to give consumers 'that shower-fresh feeling,' thus directly suggesting that menstruators should pay close attention to hygiene" (Røstvik, 2018, p. 5). As noted by Hughes and Røstvik (2020), until the Bodyform/Libresse's "Blood Normal" campaign in 2017, imagery presented by the menstrual product industry created a visual culture of menstruation where symbolic representation is rife but the materiality of menstrual bleeding is entirely invisible. For a detailed critical historiography of the menstrual product industry (though not specifically its advertising) see Røstvik's book *Cash Flow* (2022).

The impact of marketing images in the real world has been the subject of psychological (see, e.g., the literature review by Cialdini & Trost, 1998), sociological (see, e.g., Johnston-Robledo et al., 2007; Kissling, 2006), and business research (Spadaro et al., 2018). Research has examined the influence television advertising has on behavior surrounding menstruation. A study by Spadaro et al. takes into account the sociocultural and educational context of where the advertisements are aired—in their case, Italy and Sweden—in its consideration of how they shape social norms around menstruation (Spadaro et al., 2018). They conclude that advertisements centered around narratives of concealment "led Italian women to experience state self-objectification" (Spadaro et al., 2018, p. 691) mirroring menstrual taboos, in contrast to Swedish women who showed "no significant effects" (p. 691). Though the study of audiences is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the literature on advertising, and on menstrual advertising specifically, has suggested that these materials contribute to menstrual stigma, with real-world impacts on people who menstruate. Understanding what narratives, framings, and social scripts about menstruation have been deployed in marketing—historic and contemporaneous alike—is important in understanding the way stigma has developed and been transmitted over time, space, and generations.

Materials and Methods

The primary source materials discussed in this article are a selection of advertisements from the Femorabilia Collection, an archive predominantly comprising comics, newspapers, and magazines aimed toward women and girls from the 1920s through 1990s held at the Liverpool John Moores University Special Collections and Archives. There are a small number of earlier publications among Femorabilia's 223 catalogued titles (more than 3,000 individual items). Some of the earliest items include 1857 editions of *The Lady's Newspaper* and *The Queen* (published 1857–1916; later merged with other titles to become *Harper's Bazaar*). The holdings record for this archive (though not the digitized items or descriptions of their content) can be found on the LJMU Archives website (Parsons, n.d.).

Since the archival research discussed here was undertaken, two key museum collections have become available. The Museum of Menstruation, founded by Harry Finley and now held at the Smithsonian Institution, has a large collection of menstrual product advertising that can be viewed online. While it existed online before its acquisition by the Smithsonian, this collection was not indexed in a formal way. The collection provides a vast resource for future archival work, especially since its donation to the Smithsonian in 2022, which means that its holdings are now navigable using the institution's well-established archives website. The timeline and collection of menstrual management solutions and ads included in the Museum Europäischer Kulturen *Flow* exhibition and accompanying publication provide insight into changing menstrual technologies and their uses, the development of which is less linear than marketing discourses of progress and improvement would have us believe (Wittenzellner, 2023, pp. 36–61). Both of these resources provide the potential to further contextualize and expand on the analysis presented here.

Some titles in the collection were excluded from this study based on their content type, years of publication, or target audience. This process was aided by online collections including crowdsourced and volunteer-led sites like the Grand Comics Database, Albion British Comics Database Wiki, and ReadComicOnline, which include scans of various issues—though it is not clear whether these include every page of the scanned issues. These proved useful where institutional or academic archives list online the titles of holdings in text catalog form only (e.g., the United Kingdom's Imperial War Museums and Femorabilia itself) or where online access is restricted by paywalls (e.g., the British Newspaper Archive).

Comics and illustrated story publications were excluded because of their intended preteen audience, who would be less likely to have reached menarche. This was confirmed through viewing a random selection of these titles (e.g., *Bunty*, published 1958–2001), which revealed limited advertising content, most of which pointed to confectionary, other titles, or competitions from companies like Raleigh bicycles. Though it was not possible to review every item in this category in detail, meaning that there may be menstrual product advertising content therein, the time and funding constraints of the project necessitated exclusion of the category (but opens an avenue for future research). Titles with fewer than five held editions were excluded, such as *Woman's Friend* (issues from 1951) and *The Miracle* (issues from 1947), along with titles for which the only holdings are annuals, such as the 1973 *Girls! Girls! Girls!*

annual and three *Boyfriend* (published 1955–1974) annuals. Titles aimed at adults were excluded, such as *Housewife* (1944), *Good Housekeeping* (editions held from 1926–1938), *Honey* (published 1960–1986), and *Spare Rib*, an explicitly feminist women's magazine published in the United Kingdom from 1973–1993. Holdings from outside the United Kingdom, such as *Jardin des Mondes* (France, 1922) and *Look Now* (Australia, 1971–1981), and the small number of holdings aimed at male audiences were also excluded.

The final selection comprises magazines aimed at teenage girls that focus on popular and consumer culture. The period of publication represented aligns with the solidification of mass and popular culture in the 1960s and the growth of the women's movement and second-wave feminism. The discussion that follows and Tables 1 through 4 include advertisements published in the following magazines: *Blue Jeans* (1977–1990), *Fabulous* (later *Fabulous 208* and *Fab 208*) (1964–1980), *Jackie* (1964–1993), *Just Seventeen* (1983–2004), and *My Guy* (1978, merged with *Oh Boy* in 1984). The earliest example in the sample is from 1964 and the latest is from 1990. This study did not aimed to comprehensively map the breadth of advertisement placement by product manufacturers, and the examples discussed here do appear across multiple issues of the same magazine or across different publications. There are also editions of each title that feature no menstrual product advertisements; therefore, the full archival holdings are not represented here. Future work with the archive (and other archival sources where gaps exist in holdings) may be possible to fully map this aspect of menstrual product advertising. Instead, the details provided in the tables aim to provide future researchers with clear information on where they might locate the advertisements discussed, and the descriptive text aims to enhance the accessibility of the archive (and this analysis) for researchers who cannot access the physical collection or who may be visually impaired. This approach also provides detail for readers where copyright restrictions limit the use of illustrative figures—a common problem with advertising materials—and aims to counter the limited bibliographic detail some earlier research (e.g., Treneman, 1988) which may list the advertisement and year it was published but provide limited information to aid readers and future researchers. The study includes 28 menstrual product advertisements from 6 brands: Bodyform, Dr White's, Kotex, Lil-lets, Simplicity, and Tampax. As illustrated by the extensive exclusions from the titles examined, the wealth of material left unexplored by this limited study, and the necessarily bounded analytical discussion below, there is potential for further research into menstrual representations within this archive. In addition to advertising materials, the magazines contain feature articles and reader-submitted content that touch on different aspects of the menstrual life cycle that could be explored.

Although this study takes a historical approach, it is not longitudinal and does not offer a full and comprehensive catalog of the menstruation-related content available within the Femorabilia Collection. Rather, the discussion below builds on earlier curatorial practice, which was included in the public exhibition held at Liverpool School of Art and Design as part of a UK-wide festival of the humanities (Hughes, 2018a). The discussion here reflects analysis of the curated sample of print advertisements selected for display during the exhibition. The advertisements were displayed thematically in vitrines, though—to avoid an overly didactic or leading approach and to allow for the interpretive agency of the viewer within the curation—they were not labeled

Table 1. Style and lifestyle discourses.

Brand; advertisement headline	Description	Publication and edition	Size	Key themes
Lil-lets; Discover the blessings of Lil-lets confidence for yourself this month	Image: c. ½ page column, photograph takes up c. ½. Young woman with dark hair in a 1960s style and carefully applied make-up. Wearing a white collared top, and there are some flowers visible over her shoulder. Limited background, as closely framed around her face. There is a small image of a Lil-lets box at the bottom of the column. Text: Small insert text gives information about the woman: name, age 23, her job. c. ¼ of column taken up with text about the way Lil-lets will benefit you. Bottom of column information about procuring free sample.	*Fabulous* April 15, 1964	½ page	Leisure, independence, work, confidence
Bodyform; How come nobody suggests you try on a towel to see if it fits you?	Image: Most of the page is taken up by a color photograph. Young woman with back to camera, with her front and face reflected back at the viewer in a mirror. She is seen from the thigh upward. She is White, has dark hair in an updo, wears hoop earrings, and is wearing a tight-fitting, button-up, sleeveless black dress. She looks confident and svelte. On right information panel, there is an image of a Bodyform pad. Text: Encourages you to try on a Bodyform pad. States you'll be comfortable and it "never shows." Explains tapered thickness of pad—more where you want it. Pad image is labeled, and text explains how it is shaped to fit, the composition, with tapering of thickness, etc. "For a free fitting, try out the coupon" and information on getting a free sample.	*Jackie* November 17, 1973	Small black and white, c. ¼ page in a single column	Older teen; time, leisure, fashion, fit
Dr White's Panty Pads; Don't stop the carnival. When you wear panty pads you wear what you like	Image: Green speckled photo backdrop. A young Black woman poses as though mid-dance. She wears a yellow dress with black polka-dots that has ruffles at the hems. Her belt, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and high-heeled shoes are red. Her hair is in an updo and covered by a fascinator or headdress of black voile/net topped with grapes and leaves. At the bottom right of the page, there is an inset image including text and 3 small inset photos of the range of products in packaging: yellow, lilac, and green packs with a stylized flower graphic. Text: First line—"Fashion by Janice Bell. Freedom by Panty Pads." Short paragraph goes on to explain ease of use and flushability and emphasizes that "nothing" will stop users from wearing whatever they want. Address for free sample request.	*Blue Jeans* April 7, 1979	Full-page, full-color	Teen, leisure, fun, freedom, fashion
Bodyform; Why not buy your towel the same way you buy your jeans	Single-page version of ad described above. Main differences are layout (white space with headline and information/text to the top and right), with the image in this advertisement a photograph of the topless woman standing up, with her back to the camera.	*Just 17* October 1, 1986	Double-page	Older teen, fashion, lifestyle, style, convenience, fit

(*Continued*)

Table 1. Continued.

Brand; advertisement headline	Description	Publication and edition	Size	Key themes
Dr White's; Have you ever wondered how men would carry on if they had periods?	Image: A color photo of a White, dark-haired man with his hand raised to cover the top half of his face. He is standing against a plain lilac background in a contrapposto pose and wearing pink silky and lacy underwear: a pair of loose knickers/shorts and an underwire bra. The image has labels pointing to different areas of the body with thoughts one might have while having their period, some slightly adapted to traditionally "male" activities, e.g., "how can I go to the cup final when my head's throbbing?", "don't expect me to shave with these spots all over my chin," and "my stomach aches and it's so bloated my boss asked if I was pregnant." Text: Ironic and wryly humorous tone—"At the risk of sounding sexist, we must observe that men can be terrible babies when they're ill." Points to "month after month" of enduring periods for c. 35 years. Presenting Dr White's and their tampons and pads as a solution. Features the table/matrix for deciding on product for flow and tagline about making periods "less of a problem."	*Just 17* June 18, 1986	Double-page	Gender relations, men, time/duration, humor, irony
Dr White's; If men were shaped like tampons …	Image: a full-page color illustration in ink and watercolor (or similar). White background, with a wash of lilac to the left and a wash of rose pink to the right. The left side has a drawing of an anthropomorphized applicator tampon with a blunt/flat end. Its long, thick arms are crossed and there is a slightly disgruntled look on its face and a speech bubble with "Grrrr!!" On the right is a friendly-looking anthropomorphized tampon with a rounded tip and short arms tucked into the sides. The speech bubble says "Hello!" On the opposite page are a table with information and a small inset photo of a product box. Text: Right page of spread—Headline reads "If men were shaped like tampons, the human race would have died out by now," alluding to penis-in-vagina sex and the shape of a penis compared to the shape of "older" applicator tampons vs. Dr White's innovative rounded shape. Text on page has relatable and open tone, pointing to use of humor as "an exaggeration perhaps … but only to make a point." The table is a matrix for determining which Dr White's product best suits your flow. Prominent: "Dr White's Contour Applicator Tampons. Help make your period less of a problem."	*Just 17* June 18, 1986	Double-page	Gender relations, men, time/duration, humor, irony
Simplicity; Stowaway towels (bowling)	Image: Full-color illustration with text overlaid on bottom third. Colorful (yellow, green, orange, blue, purple, red). A woman at a bowling alley, releasing her ball (which is red) onto the lane. Shown in profile, captures movement. Casual clothing, green and white loose-fitting t-shirt and orange trousers. Bowling shoes and a green earring. The bottom of the page shows 3 illustrations of Simplicity product boxes. Text: Discretion, ability to carry on with normal leisure time without the "chance you'll give the game away."	*Just 17* July 29, 1987	Double-page	Inconvenience, nuisance, humor, irony, maturity

Table 2. Discourses of time and being trapped.

Brand; advertisement headline	Description	Publication and edition	Size	Key themes
Lil-lets; Take the Away-day tampon	Image: Takes up ¾ of the page. Train tracks leading to mid-distance of a non-UK landscape. Train and building in mid-distance. Blue sky and mountains on horizon. In foreground, sleepers/ platform with an unlocked ball and chain sitting atop them. In the lock, a key with Lil-lets branding. Inset images of woman's manicured fingers holding a tampon (demonstrating scale), of Lil-lets and other brands in beakers (demonstrating absorbency), and of packaging for 4 absorbencies available. Text: Subheading "the small key to freedom." In bottom ¼ of page, emphasis on neatness, discreetness, and ease of use—"you'll never return to towels." Emphasizes natural insertion (no applicator), expansion and absorbency, and range of sizes "to fit every body." Sample and discount voucher offer.	*Blue Jeans* May 15, 1982	Single-page	Carceral, escape, ease, discretion, freedom, travel, key
Tampax; It can add 6.2 years to your life	Image: Close-up photograph, labeled, of tampon and applicator on blue background. High-contrast. Text: Detailed 2-column text relating to the amount of time spent menstruating during which you will be unable to engage with life fully unless you use Tampax. Details of how to get a free sample.	*Just 17* July 16, 1986	Single-page	Time, time-saving, lost time
Tampax; The Towel User's Year	Image: ¾ of spread—illustrated text framed by decorative border, and images representing the 4 seasons. Poem that parodies "thirty days hath September" but with 5 fewer days (i.e., when you are menstruating). Text: Lower ¼ of spread, focuses on how you will save time and have more time in your social calendar if you use Tampax instead of towels. Points to "bulkiness" of pads and responds to worries around "difficulty" of tampons. Details of how to get a free sample.	*Just 17* December 10, 1986	Double-page	Time, time-saving, lost time
Tampax; It can add 6.2 years to your life	Double-page version of same ad described above.	*Just 17* June 11, 1986	Double-page	Time, time-saving, lost time
Tampax; Is it any wonder towel users have a smaller social calendar?	Image: Autumnal color–themed side-by-side photographs of 2 calendars for November. Left image has c. 4 boxes/days covered by an applicator tampon. Right image has c. 10 squares covered by a menstrual pad. Text: Focuses on bulkier size of pads and that they are uncomfortable and "more likely to dictate your social and working life for the 5 days" of your period. Emphasizes uniqueness of applicator and comfort and discretion of use and that it gives 5 "extra" days a month to the user. Details of how to get a free sample.	*Just 17* June 3, 1986	Double-page	Time, time-saving, lost time
Tampax; Five days a month this girl was imprisoned by her own body	Image: High-contrast lighting photograph. Nude young White woman with her back to the camera, reclined and leaning up on one elbow, on a plinth or hard surface of some kind. Blonde hair in a ponytail. Dappled blue and white backdrop. Quite stark in color and tone. The woman's skin is covered in blue "broad arrow" motifs—traditional heraldic motif. Also used to denote British government property and used on the uniforms of convicted criminals in the 19th century. Text: Equates a period with a crime—that "no court in the land" would convict. Notes difficulty of forgetting you're having a period and switching to Tampax as the solution. Explanation of how they work, the different absorbencies available, and free sample information, saying when you try them, "it will be the date of your release."	*Just 17* August 6, 1986	Single-page	Time, time-saving, lost time, restriction, carceral, imprisonment, lack of freedom

Table 3. Discourses of safety and self-defense.

Brand; advertisement headline	Description	Publication and edition	Size	Key themes
Kotex; Play Safe – Kotex Safety Shield	Image: Late-teen/early 20s, blonde woman. 2/3 portrait. She looks straight at the camera with a direct gaze and neutral expression. Inset image is an illustration showing the layers of the towel. Text: Emphasizes safety shield technology to save you from leaks and stains. Care of construction, 7 layers. Absorbency and comfort, uniqueness of materials. Perfect security/safety. 3 different sizes noted.	*Fabulous 208* December 30, 1967	¼-page vertical	Safety, protection, comfort, technology
Kotex; Make Sure – safety shield	Image: Late-teen/early 20s woman with long dark hair. 2/3 portrait inset. She looks directly at the camera over her shoulder, with a neutral expression. Inset image is an illustration showing the of the layers of the towel. Text: Emphasizes safety shield technology to save you from leaks and stains. Care of construction, 7 layers. Absorbency and comfort, uniqueness of materials. Perfect security/safety. 3 different sizes noted.	*Fabulous 208* May 4, 1968	¼-page vertical	Knowledge, reassurance, technology, confidence
Kotex; 1 of 4 simple reasons why Kotex towels make a woman feel safe	Image: Half-page color photo. A woman's hand (with a white cuff at the wrist) holding/cradling a fluffy cloud-like substance on the palm of the hand against a blue gradient background. Headline of ad placed above against the darkest blue section. Below are 4 inset images including product and packaging with descriptive/explanatory text. Text: Headline and body (short paragraph) emphasize comfort and safety of the innovative materials.	*Jackie* September 21, 1974	Single-page	Comfort, protection, innovation
Kotex; Confidence is New Freedom towels and pantie set: a new kind of comfort	Image: Top (1/2 page) shows a young White couple sitting against a fence at a pebbled beach. Both wear jeans and fur coats; the man has his arm and coat wrapped around the shoulder of the woman. Both are looking to something beyond the frame and smiling. Text overlaid says "confidence is knowing that nothing can possibly go wrong." There are 3 inset images below: innovation around the belt fastening on the pad; cropped-in image of a woman wearing white underwear to illustrate the "new bikini style"; and picture of packaging with 3 decorative daisies next to the products. Text: Mainly focuses on themes of comfort, freedom, and security of the innovative "New Freedom" products—towels and panties sets. Absorbency highlighted as "extra safe."	*Jackie* November 24, 1973	Single-page	Freedom, security, convenience, confidence, relationships, innovation
Lil-lets; Karate	Image: 2 figures in an empty dojo performing martial arts in the middle ground; white space of the exercise mat takes up around half the space, and background is also predominantly light in color. In the foreground sits the unlocked ball and chain—"the small key to freedom." Next to the figures, text reads "the art of self-protection." Text: Limited—convenience "neat, discreet, precise" and enables you to be active. Technical information, sample information.	*Just 17* July 30, 1986	Double-page	Protection, safety, independence, self-defense, carceral
Lil-lets; Streetwise	Image: A photograph taking up 7/8 of the spread. It is sunset/getting dark, and we are presented with a street corner/pavement. To the left is the corner of a building, to the right are the blurred lights of passing vehicles, and the background is a city skyline. In the left foreground is a ball and chain, unlocked, with the text "the small key to freedom" inserted adjacently. In the midground, a figure (tall, White, thin, female) is escaping on roller skates. At the bottom of the page are small inset photos of an unwrapped non-applicator tampon held between a manicured finger and thumb; 2 tampons (1 Lil-lets one "other") placed in beakers of water demonstrating absorbency; and product packed photos. Text: Very limited, points to choice offered by Lil-lets. There are captions on the product packet photos and information on how to request a sample.	*Just 17* September 3, 1986	Double-page	Protection, safety, independence, freedom, escape, carceral

Table 4. Connoisseurship, instruction, and encouragement discourses.

Brand; advertisement headline	Description	Publication and edition	Size	Key themes
Lil-lets; Stop using internal protection – until you know all about it	Image: Late-teen/early 20s woman with long blonde hair. Head portrait only, small inset. She looks directly at the camera with her mouth open in surprise. Text: Emphasizes previous experiences you may have had with the shape of tampons not providing adequate absorption. Proposes that Lil-lets will give confidence because you know it will work. Explains the lack of time needed, ease, superiority and gentleness of Lil-lets. Unparalleled absorbency. Write to Sister Marion for free sample. Discreet.	*Fabulous 208* 4 May 1968	¼-page vertical	Knowledge, reassurance, technology, confidence
Lil-lets; Do you know enough about tampons to choose the right one?	Image: 2 black and white inset photos of a girl and one inset black and white photo of a tampon box. Top—a square headshot photo of the girl: White, dark hair in a low ponytail, headband. Head tilted slightly, looks open and thoughtful. Bottom left—girl dressed for ballet (black leotard, light ballet shoes, hair in same style as above). Has one leg lifted and placed on an object (imposed with a cutout sample request form) tying a ballet pump. Text: Appeals to you, "like most girls your age," being unsure about what is right for you. Highlights shape (round end) and widthways expansion. Introduces "Sister Marion," the brand's "tampon consultant," who has written a special booklet to answer questions school has not covered. Booklet and sample request information. These tampons will "make things easier for you."	*Jackie* November 17, 1973	Half-page	Anxiety, choice, instruction, reassurance
Lil-lets; How old do you have to be to try your first tampon?	Image: Just over ½ page taken up with full-color head and shoulders group photo of 3 young (White) teens smiling at the camera, dressed casually (shirt, pullover, dungarees, turtleneck). Below is a product packaging photo. Text: Bio info about each of the girls, friendly and open, instructional, and reassuring.	*Blue Jeans* April 7, 1979	Single-page	Girlhood, instruction, reassurance
Tampax; What is so special about Tampax tampons?	Image: Takes up 2/3 of the page, full-color photo of a girl (early teens) with long mid-brown hair, headband, and fringe standing against a white and light off-white/yellow splotched background. She is wearing pink trousers and a green jumper, with a pink collared top, looking at the camera. She has one hand in her pocket, and in her right hand she is holding an applicator tampon. Her expression is thoughtful and fairly neutral. Text: 1/3 page in a column. Friendly tone. Starts with "you've probably wondered" why friends have switched to tampons. Describes Tampax Slender, designed specifically for "young girls like you." Highlights things that make them easier to use, like applicator (do not have to use your fingers), leaflet with every pack, and how to know it is in right. Will not smell or be visible. Can wear favorite clothes, go to a disco, wear a bikini, and swim. Information on how to get a sample. Highlighted as "special" and claims that Tampax is used by more women and girls than other options.	*My Guy* July 4, 1987	Single-page	Younger teen, starting out, menarche, special, common use

(*Continued*)

Table 4. Continued.

Brand; advertisement headline	Description	Publication and edition	Size	Key themes
Tampax; Thanks to our applicator, a tampon also becomes easy to use with a little practice	Image: Inset full-color photo of 2 (older) teens at a messy dressing table, with one applying make-up to the other. Text: Emphasizes that lots of things take practice and time, make-up and tampon use included. Emphasizes slender line's design as good for beginners, small, and slim. With practice, "you'll be free to do whatever you want every day of the month." Sample coupon to send to "Barbara Lee."	*Jackie* August 5, 1989	Single-page	Practice, beginners, make-up, reassurance
Tampax; How to deal with periods explained by Kate aged 13	Image: Bottom half—photo of 2 young teenage girls facing each other in conversation. Text: Personal narrative from Kate, reassurance, and instruction to her friend (and the reader).	*My Guy* December 28, 1985	Single-page	Coping, beginner
Lil-lets; Some girls find it difficult to insert a tampon the first time, but it's only a mental block	Image: Full-color inset photo taking up c. ¼ of spread. Color palette of pastel pink, blue, and white. A blonde-haired young woman, wrapped in a towel, sitting with her back to the camera in a softly lit white bathroom with awkward, downcast body language. Small inset image of product packaging and small inset image of the non-applicator tampon with string trailing out behind. Text: Feelings of anxiety/nervous; tells the reader to "relax." Narratives of concealment and uncleanliness, "nobody will know you're having your period" because tampons are not visible, and "there's no embarrassing odour to worry about." Free sample information.	*Jackie* January 16, 1988	Double-page	Difficulties, problems, anxiety, concealment
Lil-lets; Do you want the whole class to know you're having a period?	Image: 2 images side-by-side. Photos of same model with arm raised, asking "Please sir, can I be excused [from class]?" School uniform with a grey jumper sleeve and white cuff on a young girl with blonde hair. Left image—hand is holding an applicator tampon that is clearly visible. Right image—presumably a non-applicator tampon is fully concealed in the hand. Text: Emphasizes discretion of tampons and the benefit of finger insertion: "fingers are softer than a cardboard tube." Encouragement not to be nervous even if it is your first tampon. Free sample information.	*Jackie* November 17, 1990	Double-page	Comfort, embarrassment, discretion, concealment, encouragement
Lil-lets; How to make a packet of tampons disappear	Image: Pink, white, and blue color scheme. Full-color photos taking up c. ½ of each page of spread. Left—hands holding a product box clearly labeled as Lil-lets tampons. Right—hands holding the same box with text of wrapper removed. "Now you see it / Now you don't." Text: Emphasizes discretion, "pretty box," nerves around first tampon use, and reassurance. Comfort. Free sample information.	*Jackie* January 30, 1988	Double-page	Comfort, discretion, concealment, encouragement

with the latest pop music news, listings, and poster pull-outs. The half-page Lil-lets advertisement presents a box of tampons—the product itself is not shown—and encourages the reader to "discover the blessings" (Lil-lets, 1964) of confidence in the tampon (Figure 1). The Lil-lets tampon will provide protection from menstrual leaks and is discreet enough to enable the menstruating person to *pass* (Vostral, 2008) as not menstruating thanks to their "perfect internal protection" (Lil-lets, 1964). The main image presents an attractive and stylish young woman, Joanna, introduced as 23 years old, single, and employed. The key themes here are of aspiration, confidence, and independence, reinforced by the text below in which Joanna describes the extra confidence and security provided by Lil-lets tampons. This mid-century advertisement's alignment with aspirational engagement with the labor market demonstrates a continuity in relation to modernity discourses, such as those analyzed by Mandziuk (2010) in her study of Kotex's American campaign of the 1920s. Her analysis situates this campaign within emerging capitalist discourses that offered consumer products as technologies of modernity and the menstrual product as a tool of the smart, and meticulously presented, modern woman (Mandziuk, 2010, pp. 46–48).

Later advertisements from Bodyform published in *Just Seventeen* also make explicit links to lifestyle, particularly foregrounding the empowering potential of fashion and shopping culture. Their campaign features one advertisement with the tagline "why not buy your towel the same way you buy jeans" (Bodyform, 1986a) and includes a photograph of a young woman wearing a pair of fashionable jeans. She is naked from the waist up and facing away from the camera. The poses in both the double- and single-page versions are reminiscent of contemporary advertising for jeans: stripped back, simple, and straight to the point. Another Bodyform advertisement asks: "how come nobody suggests you try on a towel to see if it fits you?" (Bodyform, 1986b), this time presenting a woman trying on a tight-fitting dress. Both advertisements allude to the power of consumer choice and urge the customer to question the way they have bought menstrual products in the past, without any real offer of a new way of doing so; they must trust that Bodyform's new design will slip on as well as their favorite jeans or little black dress. These advertisements explicitly draw on discourses of fashion consumption from within a magazine form—cultural texts that are, at least in part, a medium that reinforces normative ideals of empowerment through the potential of shopping, fashion, and beauty-related cultural practices.

Another brand that accesses discourses of maturity in this decade is Dr White's. Their advertisements at this time avoid narratives of fashion, with some instead drawing on allusions to maturity and lifestyle through references to gender politics and sex, for example, their 1986 advertisement that muses on how men would behave if they had periods. Whether or not this is a deliberate reference to Gloria Steinem's satirical essay "If Men Could Menstruate" (Steinem, 2019, first published 1978) is not clear (though it does seem likely). The accompanying image of a young, fit, and muscular man wearing silky pink women's underwear (while covering his face) and worrying how he will watch the upcoming sports match with his period-induced headache is an ironic and humorous jab at gender relations that many young women could empathize with. The appeal of the near-naked male form in a teen magazine is difficult to ignore, though here we see a postfeminist sexualization of culture (Gill, 2007) that objectifies a man, rather than a woman. Dr White's leans into sex in another

Figure 1. Lil-lets advertisement: "Discover the Blessings of Lil-lets Confidence for Yourself This Month," 1964, in *Fabulous*, April 1964, Femorabilia Collection, LJMU special collections and archives. Reproduced with permission of Lil-lets.

advertisement from the same year, this time with an illustrated spread that features a blunt-ended tampon applicator and a rounded applicator product that is directly compared to the shape of a penis. To understand this advertisement and its

not-so-oblique sexual references, one might require a certain level of maturity or experience (whether theoretical or practical). Dr White's also makes use of notions of maturity in earlier advertising for their pads, as seen in their "Don't Stop the Carnival" ad (1979) (see Table 1). Here, a young woman—notably one of the few advertisements seen where the subject is not White—poses daringly, seemingly mid-dance in a colorful yellow polka-dot dress. The fashion and pose here are clearly mature, not a younger teen, and the first line of the (limited) text notes "Fashion by Janice Bell. Freedom by Panty Pads." Again, a stylish and sophisticated, mature, sexually confident femininity is foregrounded—the sort of young woman who enjoys herself with abandon *and* might be able to name-check fashion industry names.

Discourses of Time and Being Trapped

Multiple advertisements in the sample draw on lifestyle-related themes indirectly through the appeal to a sense of using time productively, whether for work—as in the case of Joanna—or in appealing to uses of leisure time. In an example of a Tampax advertisement published in *Jackie* (1973), the tampon is framed as a technology of convenience that will ensure menstruation does not disrupt the planning of a holiday. The text of the advertisement reinforces the theme of convenience: Any time can be a holiday; you do not need to plan for your period arriving; you do not need to curtail your leisure activities; you do not even need to worry about packing bulky menstrual management materials, all because "you're counting on Tampax tampons" (Tampax, 1973). The double photograph of the young, independent, capable woman—taking her own photograph, rather than simply being a passive spectator—is unphased by the potential arrival of her period. The discourses of leisure, desire, consumption, and activity are echoed in the other features of the page, as stylish rings, pop music, and "heartthrob" Rod Stewart all vie for the readers' attention.

This connection with leisure time and the technology of menstrual management enabling the menstruator to forget they are menstruating appears again in a later advertisement for Simplicity stowaway towels in *Jackie* (1988). This full-page illustrated advertisement offers a stylized and anonymized representation of an active menstruator releasing a red bowling ball off-page, with a row of purple bowling balls in the background. The message—"wear what you like, do what you like, Stowaway slim towels won't give you away" (Simplicity, 1988)—is reiterated in the visuals of the advertisement. We are shown the (anonymous) subject, active in their leisure time, bowling their menstruation away. The illustrated, faceless figure signals the achievement of anonymity (in this case through passing as non-menstruating), security (from leaks or discovery), and freedom from the restrictions and stigma of bleeding.

Whereas the examples discussed so far frame menstrual products through the positive and aspirational lens of leisure, lifestyle, and freedom, there are multiple examples that frame menstruation as an event with the potential to disrupt or even to produce a sense of imprisonment. Tampax advertisements seen in 1986 and 1987 editions of *Just Seventeen* explore how menstruation, and the menstrual management devices being used, might impact the time available to their reader. One advertisement asks, "is it any wonder towel users have a smaller social calendar?" (Tampax, 1987), juxtaposed with a very literal representation of a menstrual pad blocking out more space on a calendar than a tampon. The imagery here appeals to a common-sense

notion that managing menstruation is time-consuming—here taking up five days a month—and that menstrual pads are an encumbrance to a busy social calendar. The advertisement engages with other familiar normative discourses of advertising, invoking the good sense of "millions of other women" as well as the medical discourse and authority of "thousands of family doctors" who agree that Tampax tampons are convenient, safe, and hygienic. As these advertisements invoke the logistical practicalities and embodied experience of menstruating alongside medical authority, they offer "a synthesis of these two kinds of menstrual knowledge" (Kissling, 1996a), albeit in a different form than the positive one Kissling and her research participants considered necessary (p. 493).

Another advertisement that draws on the calendar imagery presents the reader with the concept of "the towel user's year" (Tampax, 1986a), adapting the nostalgic and commonplace rhyme: "Thirty days has September …", but subtracting five days from each month to demonstrate the inconvenience of menstruating and using a menstrual pad. Here we have an even more dramatic framing of the reduction in available time the towel user experiences, as the advertisement's closing line states "with a little help from us you could discover there are 365 days in every year. Not 305" (Tampax, 1986a). Whereas the former example foregrounds a loss of leisure time, the latter raises the stakes considerably to remove 60 days from the menstruator's year. The connection between menstrual products as technologies of modernity is once more reiterated here using old-fashioned stitch sampler images to present the rhyming text, juxtaposing, as 1920s Kotex did, "the modern against the obsolete" (Mandziuk, 2010, p. 57). We see a more concrete threat of losing time in two more examples of Tampax advertisements from *Just Seventeen* in the same year.

These examples adopt a much bleaker tone, shedding the nostalgic and playful visual imagery seen in the others. We are presented with a (labeled) photograph of a tampon and applicator on a starkly lit blue background, the tagline reading: "It can add 6.2 years to your life" (Tampax, 1986b). The text of the advertisement again relies on common-sense discourses of menstruation: They are inconvenient and difficult; it takes mental effort to menstruate. There is an appeal to a normative experience, providing an average amount of time spent menstruating—6.2 years—which the advertisement claims will be "given back" once the switch from pads to tampons is made. The construction of the tampon as a technology that frees up space for the menstruator by minimizing the tangible experiences of menstruation once again reinforces menstruation as a burden to be overcome. There is also a sense that tampons may be in some way more difficult to use or require practice (a theme that also surfaces in other examples), which makes them the menstrual management choice of the connoisseur: a certain degree of patience, knowledge, and resilience is required to master their use. Furthermore, the advertisement minimizes the potential discomfort of a new tampon user by juxtaposing the brief months they might spend getting used to the new device with the 6.2 years they will regain in the long run. This message echoes medical discourses of menstruation where discomfort, pain, and serious conditions have often been minimized or missed entirely—illustrated by the long wait times that persist for many reproductive and gynecological conditions such as endometriosis (see Endometriosis U.K., 2024). The minimization of possible discomfort in the language of this advertisement also echoes the scientific discourses deployed by menstrual product

manufacturer Procter & Gamble in their (attempted) defense of Rely tampons (withdrawn in 1980), which caused toxic shock syndrome (see Vostral, 2018).

The most extreme iteration of this theme uses a similar composition, color palette, and lighting, but this time depicts a naked woman whose skin is adorned with 20 blue broad arrows, a motif often associated with historical uniforms of British prisoners (Figure 2). The tagline in this example ominously reads: "five days a month this girl is imprisoned by her own body" (Tampax, 1986c) because she uses a menstrual pad. The hyperbole, imagery, and cold colors create a paternalistic tone more akin to a police appeal, in a clear departure from the aspirational, carefree, and encouraging tone possessed by the examples discussed above. Here we might draw a parallel with the "social captivity" (Yagnik, 2012, 2014) identified in later television advertising—though Yagnik articulates this as a choice to be immobile, not the mandatory connotations of the prison motif seen here.

Another divergence from the expected in this advertisement is the depiction of a completely nude figure. Though we only see her from behind, the body is presented in a direct manner unusual for an industry usually invested in concealing as much of the material and potentially leaky body as possible. The young woman is socially and physically captive—also captured in a photograph—and simultaneously abject and objectified; menstruating, a prisoner, and naked. Unlike the Bodyform texts analyzed

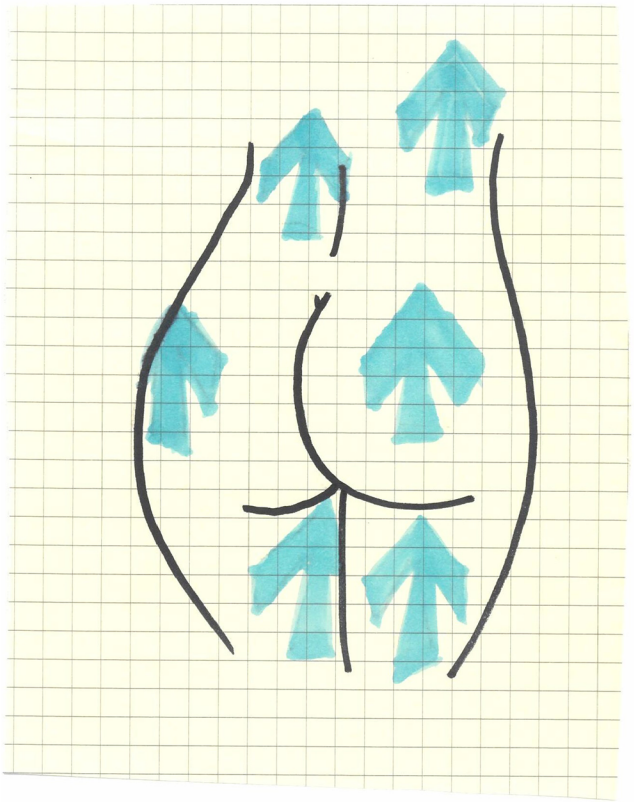


Figure 2. Drawing by the author illustrating the broad arrow motif on a naked female bottom, after the Tampax advert. Reproduced with permission of the author.

earlier, there is no empowerment through lifestyle here—the woman cannot simply try on her jeans/menstrual product. Though this is an image that conforms with normative Western esthetic standards (White, tanned, slim, blonde, young) and there is no hint of a menstrual leak in the photograph, the broad arrow markings proliferating over the woman's skin stand in for the menstrual mark, making it clear that this is an image of an encumbered and immobile menstruating woman.

Discourses of Safety and Self-Defense

The mid-1980s saw Lil-lets taking a different approach to images of punishment, with their "ball and chain" series, featuring an unlocked ball and chain in different scenarios, with text reading "the small key to freedom." This research encountered three variants of the campaign (see Tables 2 and 3). Here, I focus on Figure 3, published in *Just Seventeen* in 1986, illustrating two figures in an otherwise empty dojo performing martial arts in the middle ground. The white space of the exercise mat takes up around half the space, reaching forward to the reader, and the background is also predominantly light in color. In the foreground sits the unlocked ball and chain. Next to the figures, text reads "the art of self-protection." Beneath the photo, we have the requisite technical information, scientific-looking images of tampons expanding in water, pictures of packaging for each absorbency level, and the main copy elucidating the product's many benefits.

But what do martial arts have to do with tampons? First, there is the convenience (for art directors) of the white kit—what better to demonstrate the efficacy of a tampon than pristine cotton. Second, the activity itself harnesses the longstanding menstrual advertising trope of the "can do" sporting menstruator, more recently fleshed out in a more positive light through Always' #LikeAGirl campaign (2014) or Sport England's This Girl Can campaign (2020). Here, though, it is not a call to support the well-being of people who menstruate to participate in sport—instead, the technology of the tampon is the savior, keeping you safe and protected from leaking, just as martial arts will enable you to protect yourself from other threats to your bodily boundaries. Mirroring the broader turn to postfeminist media culture, here we see the image of the menstruating girl/woman who can take on anything boys/men can do and through that secure their freedom—presumably by passing as someone who does not menstruate (Vostral, 2008). Third, martial arts entered the Western cultural zeitgeist in a new way in the late 20th century: from the inclusion of judo in the Olympic Games in 1964 to hugely popular Bruce Lee films of the 1970s and the release of the first three *Karate Kid* films (1984, 1986, 1989). Video games likewise brought martial arts into the sights of Western youth cultures, with American arcades including games like *Kung-Fu Master* (1984) and *Karate Champ* (1984).

The ball-and-chain motif across this series is reminiscent of Tampax's broad arrows. Though the phrase has become a rather misogynistic idiom in UK and US English to refer to someone's wife (e.g., "Left the old ball and chain at home, did you?"), the object itself is tied with its use on prisoners in England and territories it had colonized from around the 17th to the 19th centuries (Victorian Collections, 2019). The appearance of colonial-era carceral motifs is grimly ironic to a contemporary eye, where the expansion of menstrual product corporations into the Global South through marketing and nongovernmental organizations has been robustly critiqued (Bobel, 2018). Despite

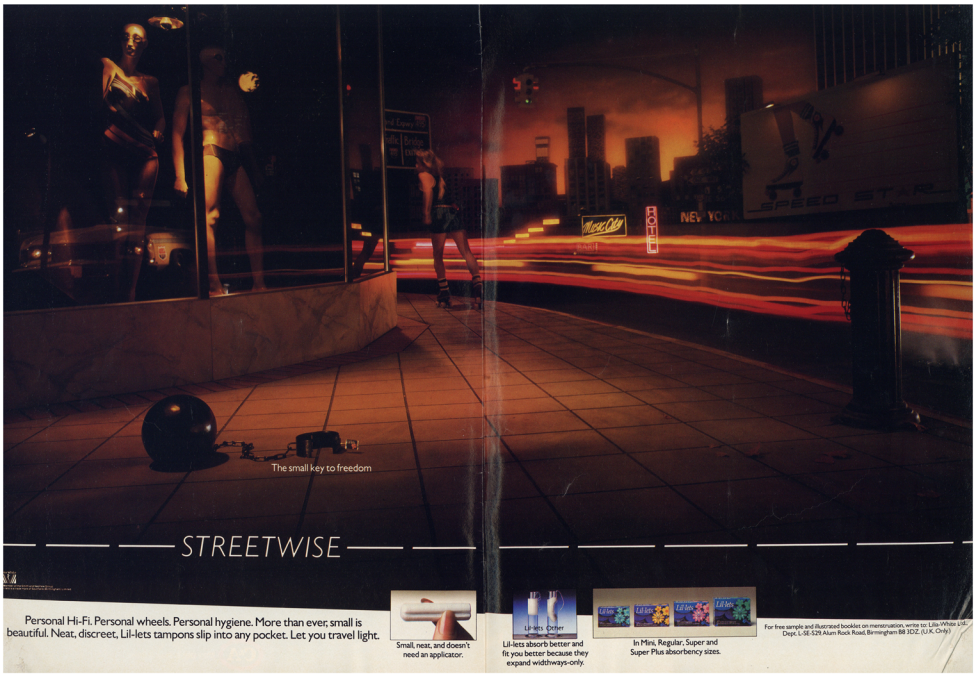


Figure 3. Lil-lets advertisement: "Lil-lets. The Art of Self Protection," in *Just Seventeen*, September 1986, Femorabilia Collection, LJMU special collections and archives. Reproduced with permission of Lil-lets.

employing similarly carceral imagery, the tone of the Tampax and Lil-lets advertisements could not be more different.

In contrast to Tampax's bleak framing of menstruation as incarceration, Lil-lets presents their menstruators as active agents of their own liberation (1986b). In their 1990 advertisement, we see the Lil-lets user speeding away from her shackles on roller skates, leaving behind a window display of mannequins as "specimens of a world without motion" (Treneman, 1988, p. 153). The action takes place at night to offer the additional edge of equality to roam whenever they want, though the parents of *Jackie* readers may balk at the notion of their daughters skating off into the night. In the third examined "ball-and-chain" advertisement, we encounter it discarded on a railway siding, tracks leading off into a wide blue yonder, Lil-lets clearly labeled on the key that facilitated the escape (Lil-lets, 1982, Table 3). Of course, the underlying message is the same across each of these brands and advertisement variants: You will only be liberated by using our product. Tampax has chosen to frame this choice negatively, whether through incarceration or the blocking out of time on the calendar. Lil-lets instead embraces the emergent postfeminist discourses of freedom, choice, and empowerment (Gill, 2007) and continues its established marketing discourses of leisure—choose us, and you can do whatever you desire.

Connoisseurship, Instruction, and Encouragement Discourses

Whereas the Tampax advertisements above frame menstruation as a life-draining event, a softer approach is taken in Lil-lets advertisements published in *Jackie* in 1988. These

using these themes. The exhibition juxtaposed historic advertising with contemporary artistic representations of menstruation, with the artistic work often (obliquely) responding to the cultural and social notions of menstruation foregrounded by the archival material. Esthetic and logistical considerations in the curation included selecting advertisements that could be displayed in exhibition vitrines and read easily through the acrylic panels protecting exhibits. This approach also meant that only one advertisement per publication would be exhibited. The curated archival selection coincides with the formative years of most of the participating contemporary artists, offering a counterpoint to the attitudes circulating during their formative years through the critical framings of menstrual stigma examined in their practice.

The analysis and discussion presented here aim to expand on the visual curation to synthesize theoretical and historical work conducted and also to offer insights into the representation of menstruation in print advertisement in the United Kingdom. Whereas other studies, such as Fahs and Collins (2024), have drawn from wider sampling via internet searching, this study focused on the physical archive. While there were limitations with regard to time and funding constraints—the research could be significantly expanded in multiple directions, as suggested earlier—there are benefits to the archival focus. These include being sure of the provenance of the advertisements examined: We know they were published in the United Kingdom, in particular magazines, and for their specific audiences as well as the specific "concerns and considerations of girlhood which were perceived to be relevant to them" (Moody, 2018, p. 9). This methodological constraint therefore contributes insights into the British market for menstrual products, building on previous research, which has often centered on advertising in a North American context or on television advertising. Many of the selected advertisements appeared multiple times and in multiple publications during their sometimes multiyear publication run, in line with the findings of Simes and Berg (2001) that "variation in menstrual product advertisements tends to be time based, rather than associated with specific magazines" (p. 457). However, as research into historic menstrual advertising (both here and previously) suggests, there are many common themes across time as well as stylistic, thematic, and tone-based changes. This study does not indicate the span of particular advertising campaigns because of gaps in the archival holdings; that is, not every issue of every title is available.

The archival material was examined using a combination of methods. Individual advertisements were analyzed following a semiotic approach, drawing on Barthes' notions of mythological images (Barthes, 1957/2009) and Williamson's discussion of "referent systems" (Williamson, 1994). The materials were examined collectively through thematic analysis to identify themes, interpret linguistic and visual material, and "theorize the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85) informing the framing of menstruation in these texts. While previous research indicates that some themes are likely to be present, such as concealment and shame, following Braun and Clarke, the data themselves also informed the coding process, allowing for the identification of other categories/themes, such as carceral images, leisure, and fashion. Advertisements were photographed in the archive to support off-site analysis, as these images cannot be reproduced due to copyright constraints. The initial sample identified through curatorial methods was catalogued using a description of the images used, a summary of any accompanying text, thematic keywords

relating to themes, and where and when the advertisements were published. The composition of featured images and the overall advertising layout were considered alongside visual signs, such as objects, locations, and color palettes. The text of each advertisement was read and summarized, and a short list of keywords was assigned to each encompassing tone and content of the text, key imagery, and underlying messages (see Tables 1–4). The time frame of the curatorial project resulted in some limitations in the sampling method. However, despite the relatively small sample size, the findings offer valuable insights into the changing representation and public presentation of menstruation and menstrual products in British culture. This study aims not to be exhaustive, but to offer an entry point into British discourses of menstrual product advertising and methodological and archival tools for future research(ers).

Results

Because we are dealing with printed ephemera, initial observations were related to the design, form, and layout of the printed advertisements. There is a clear shift across the sample from inconspicuous inset advertisements in the earlier magazines to full-color, full-page and double-page spreads in the later examples. While the small sample means these are not concrete conclusions, I tentatively suggest that this may reflect shifts in printing technology and the position of advertising within the business model of the magazine, as well as broader cultural acceptance in the later 1970s and 1980s that menstruation *can* be part of public discourse, though—paradoxically—only in the guise of showing us how to regulate and control our bodies and render it invisible.

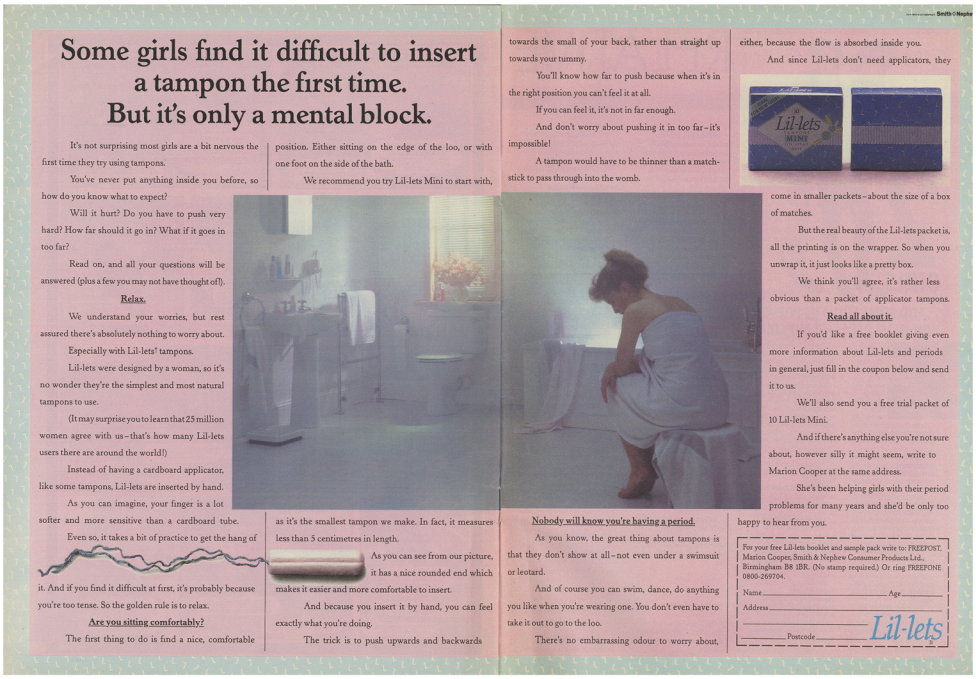
Almost all the core themes identified in the thematic analysis—the exception being those relating to *fashion and lifestyle* (Table 1) and some of the ads foregrounding freedom (Table 2)—have negative connotations. The themes identified in earlier studies—particularly secrecy, embarrassment, and delicacy—were present in the sample. While humor is present across a number of these categories, there is an overarching suggestion of menstruation as a burden or as shameful or embarrassing. Perhaps surprisingly, given the emphasis on hygienic crisis and cleanliness found in previous studies, only one of the print advertisements in the sample is clearly situated in a bathroom space and references cleansing practices. As Treneman states, "in the ad world they never seem to get near the porcelain" (1988, p. 160), except here, where the bathroom is staged as a site of social and emotional crisis. Magazines such as *Just Seventeen*, aimed at an older teenage reader, tended to contain advertisements that drew on discourses and themes of humor, freedom, (life)style, or aspirations for work or leisure, the latter in particular a cornerstone of menstrual product advertising since its early days. Magazines aimed at a younger readership tended to contain advertisements with a more practical, reassuring, or advisory tone. It is interesting that several advertisements appealed to a sense of fashion or lifestyle, presenting menstrual products as a technology that provides access to maturity, adventure, and independence.

Style and Lifestyle Discourses

Style and lifestyle discourses are demonstrated clearly in the earliest selected example, from the April 18, 1964, edition of *Fabulous* (1964–1980), a music magazine filled

examples adopt a reassuring and maternalistic tone, noting that a woman designed these tampons. *Jackie*, it should be noted, had a younger audience than *Just Seventeen*, so the tone adopted by both the magazine itself and by advertisements within differ. *Jackie*'s readership are presented here with a warmer, instructive tone: They are being gently brought into the fold of being grown-up menstruating women. Part of a cohesive series in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Figure 5), these advertisements address some of the anxieties associated with menstruation, whether those are private worries about using different menstrual technologies or social anxieties around concealment. In contrast, the readers of *Just Seventeen* are older teens, who are already perhaps "experienced" menstruators—here the tone focuses on reinforcing the accepted social scripts of femininity, including sexuality and social expectations. This is not confined to Lil-lets or to the 1980s; for example, Tampax advertisements of the period published in *Jackie* tend to focus on friendship and reassurance, seeking to underscore "what is special about Tampax tampons" for a new generation of menstruators (Tampax, 1987), and earlier Lil-lets advertisements ask "do you know enough about tampons to choose the right one?" (Lil-lets, 1973).

In these advertisements, Lil-lets presents a softer esthetic, with a lighter color palette of pastel pink, blue, and white. However, all is not positive, as a 1988 ad (Figure 4) depicts a(nother) blonde-haired young woman, wrapped in a towel and sitting with her back to the camera in a softly lit—purely white—bathroom. The model's awkward, downcast body language is explained by the headline: "Some girls find it difficult to insert a tampon the first time. But it's only a mental block"


Some girls find it difficult to insert a tampon the first time. But it's only a mental block.

It's not surprising most girls are a bit nervous the first time they try using tampons.

You've never put anything inside you before, so how do you know what to expect?

Will it hurt? Do you have to push very hard? How far should it go in? What if it goes in too far?

Read on, and all your questions will be answered (plus a few you may not have thought of!).

Relax.

We understand your worries, but rest assured there's absolutely nothing to worry about.

Especially with Lil-lets† tampons.

Lil-lets were designed by a woman, so it's no wonder they're the simplest and most natural tampons to use.

(It may surprise you to learn that 25 million women agree with us – that's how many Lil-lets users there are around the world!)

Instead of having a cardboard applicator, like some tampons, Lil-lets are inserted by hand.

As you can imagine, your finger is a lot softer and more sensitive than a cardboard tube.

Even so, it takes a bit of practice to get the hang of it. And if you find it difficult at first, it's probably because you're too tense. So the golden rule is to relax.

Are you sitting comfortably?

The first thing to do is find a nice, comfortable position. Either sitting on the edge of the loo, or with one foot on the side of the bath.

We recommend you try Lil-lets Mini to start with, as it's the smallest tampon we make. In fact, it measures less than 5 centimetres in length.

As you can see from our picture, it has a nice rounded end which makes it easier and more comfortable to insert.

And because you insert it by hand, you can feel exactly what you're doing.

The trick is to push upwards and backwards towards the small of your back, rather than straight up towards your tummy.

You'll know how far to push because when it's in the right position you can't feel it at all.

If you can feel it, it's not in far enough.

And don't worry about pushing it in too far – it's impossible!

A tampon would have to be thinner than a matchstick to pass through into the womb.

Nobody will know you're having a period.

As you know, the great thing about tampons is that they don't show at all – not even under a swimsuit or leotard.

And of course you can swim, dance, do anything you like when you're wearing one. You don't even have to take it out to go to the loo.

There's no embarrassing odour to worry about, either, because the flow is absorbed inside you.

And since Lil-lets don't need applicators, they come in smaller packets – about the size of a box of matches.

But the real beauty of the Lil-lets packet is, all the printing is on the wrapper. So when you unwrap it, it just looks like a pretty box.

We think you'll agree, it's rather less obvious than a packet of applicator tampons.

Read all about it.

If you'd like a free booklet giving even more information about Lil-lets and periods in general, just fill in the coupon below and send it to us.

We'll also send you a free trial packet of 10 Lil-lets Mini.

And if there's anything else you're not sure about, however silly it might seem, write to Marion Cooper at the same address.

She's been helping girls with their period problems for many years and she'd be only too happy to hear from you.

For your free Lil-lets booklet and sample pack write to: FREEPOST, Marion Cooper, Smith & Nephew Consumer Products Ltd., Birmingham B8 1BR. (No stamp required.) Or ring FREEPHONE 0800-269704.

Name ____ Age ____

Address ____

____

____ Postcode ____

Lil-lets

Figure 4. Lil-lets advertisement: "Some girls find it difficult to insert a tampon the first time. But it's only a mental block," in *Jackie*, January 1988, Femorabilia Collection, LJMU collections and archives. Reproduced with permission of Lil-lets.

(Lil-lets, 1988). As noted earlier, here the bathroom the stage not for the hygienic crisis of menstruation, but for a social and emotional one. Though the tone of the copy seems on the surface to be reassuring and friendly, the overall dismissal of menstrual anxieties is reminiscent of the medical framing of menstruation and related problems in both historic and contemporary studies. The copy presents norms of nervousness and tells the reader to "relax" before evoking narratives of concealment and uncleanliness with the subheading "Nobody will know you're having your period," because tampons are not visible, and "there's no embarrassing odour to worry about." This messaging contrasts with more recent menstrual advertising, which often take a more practical tone, such as the 2023 Tampax UK and Ireland video advertisement taking the form of a television news show and explaining when different absorbencies are most appropriate (Tampax, 2023). Concealment is again at the forefront of a 1990 advertisement (Figure 5), with a clear demonstration of how easy Lil-lets is to conceal in your hand, compared to competitors. The grey jumper sleeve and white cuff on the model here are a clear nod toward a school uniform, although the model is otherwise anonymous and ambiguous—presumably a young woman with blonde hair.

As with the Tampax advertisements discussed earlier, there is a sense that menstrual management is time-consuming and tricky, again appearing to minimize experiences of discomfort. Lil-lets perhaps works harder to persuade the consumer that their product is the connoisseur's choice, drawing on multiple familiar themes: secrecy and discretion, noting that the branding is removed with the box wrapper; the importance of comfort, telling the viewer to relax past any misgivings; and the ultimate freedom that can be

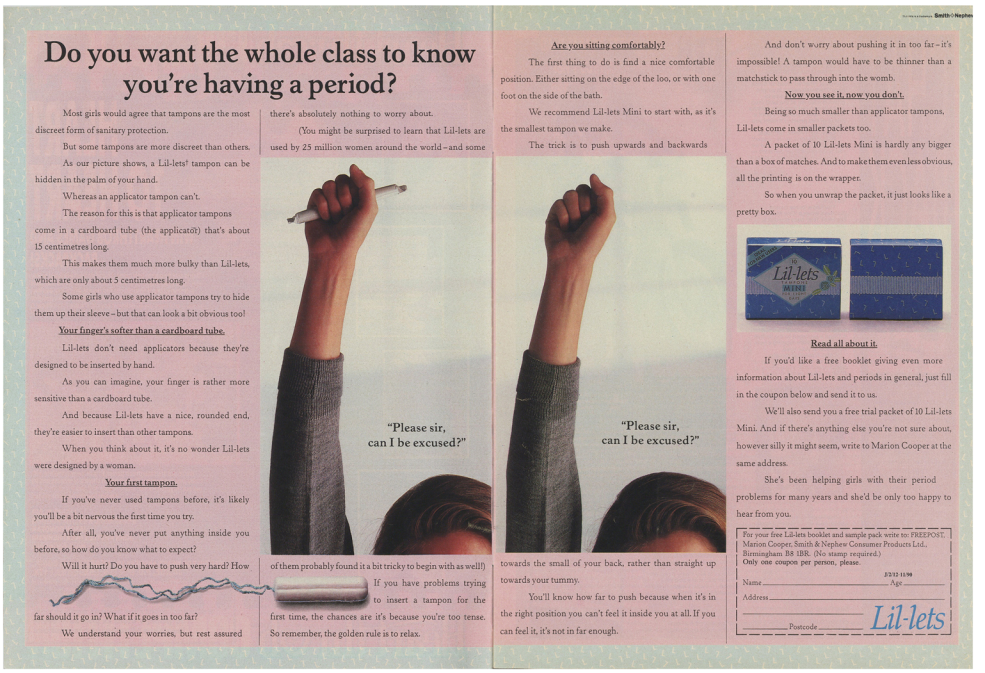


Figure 5. Lil-lets advertisement: "Do you want the whole class to know you're having a period?" in *Jackie*, November 1990, Femorabilia Collection, LJMU special collections and archives. Reproduced with permission of Lil-lets.

achieved through using the tampons. We see the paradoxical (in)visibility of menstruation that continues to permeate its visual culture here (Røstvik et al., 2022): The product is present as a photographed object, but it is not in use or being used. The models representing the person who menstruates is not shown to be menstruating. Here there is a sense that Lil-lets might provide a slightly more holistic acknowledgement of the apparent problems of menstruation, even while drawing on typically negative framings.

Discussion

Late 20th-century advertising provided a range of visual strategies for representing the positive technological fix (Vostral, 2008) of menstrual products without representing the embodied experience or visual appearance of menstruation. The examples analyzed here reproduce a range of normative understandings of menstruation and gender roles to position themselves as a solution to the problem of menstruation as a source of embarrassment, discomfort, and inconvenience and a burden on the time and aspirations of the menstruator. The emphasis on the alleviation of the burden on time situates these examples clearly within the dominant discourses of capitalism—which demands productive uses of time—and modernity, through an increased emphasis on convenience and leisure. They also harness emergent discourses of postfeminist media culture, with Lil-lets in particular foregrounding notions of freedom, choice, and empowerment more prominently than competing tampon manufacturers.

While many of the advertisements studied frame their products as positive and menstruation necessarily as negative, the starkest representation of this binary comes from the 1988 Tampax "prisoner" example. Here, menstruation not only is a time burden but also is positioned as physical and social restriction, echoing the 19th-century medical discourse of menstruation as limiting (Martin, 1987/2001) and as an outmoded event to be endured—and also echoing Kotex ads of the 1920s (Mandziuk, 2010)—through the deployment of the historical emblem of prisoners' broad-arrow uniforms. For the most part, this cultural messaging across different areas of everyday life renders the experience of menstruating as invisible, yet simultaneously estheticized, commodified, and open to comparison with the limited, normative experiences represented in the service of selling more products. This is supported by the stylized images prevalent in the advertisements analyzed here that present menstruation as something that should be hidden and may hold the menstruator back unless they harness their potential through the products being sold. They also mirror some medical framings of menstruation to present a similarly narrow conception of menstruation that falls within (some) established cyclical norms, for example, the apparent theft of five days a month suggested by Tampax. The emphasis on self-defense and freedom seen in the Lil-lets Streetwise (1986a, 1986b) series also speaks to a broader sense of sexism and harassment many women and girls experience. These experiences were highlighted in work in and around schools (Power, 1995; Prendergast, 1994, 2000). For example, Power outlines the negative attention girls received from boys around their periods (Power, 1995, p. 18). These advertisements could therefore be read not only as providing solutions to the inconvenient restriction of menstruating but even as a means of escape from the way they are treated by male peers in their everyday lives.

The discourses of advertising and medical advice significantly diverge in the values and aspirations of femininity drawn on. Whereas medical discourses of femininity are framed around biological models of fertility and menstruation as failed pregnancy (Hughes, 2018, 2020), menstrual advertising—notably in publications aimed at teenage girls—severed the link to fertility and pregnancy. Both domains are concerned with productivity, though medical discourses concentrate on biological productivity and the capitalist discourses of advertising are centered on work (in employment or school) and leisure. The discourses of work and lifestyle in publications like *Fabulous/Fab 208* foreground access to the workplace, perhaps reflecting the broader range of experiences of work and leisure these teens would encounter, as the school-leaving age in England was only raised to 16 in 1972.

The age range of the audiences of the advertisements also diverge elsewhere in the examples studied. For the younger reader, products are promoted either through querying the viewer's knowledge (Tampax) or offering advice (Lil-lets). For the older reader, the same brands deploy heavy-handed carceral imagery as the embodiment of menstrual restriction, whether through images of imprisonment (Tampax) or escape (Lil-lets). The carceral motifs of the Tampax broad-arrow imagery present another incongruity that contradicts the findings of other studies of menstrual product advertising, where representations of women instead act to distance "oneself from or escaping from reminders of one's own corporeality" (Erchull, 2013, p. 32). Here, the Tampax girl is sexualized (this itself not necessarily counter to Erchull's findings) and the symbolic weight of the broad arrows foregrounds the materiality of her menstruating body. The advertisement is an affirmation and a warning: menstruation as simultaneously feminine and something to be free from.

In many of the advertisements examined, concealment and discretion—whether in terms of packaging, internal use, or not interfering with clothing or activity choices—were key. This prevalent discourse links clearly with another aspect of manufacturers' marketing strategies: their provision of free "educational" lectures on menstruation in schools. Power found that these sessions were filled with "reference to the visibility of sanitary towels when worn, their bulkiness for storage and disposal and the risk of odour" (Power, 1995, p.18). The reinforcement of these ideas through advertising in leisure media and within the authority-laden setting of the classroom suggests that girls of this era had few spaces where a different representation and discourse of menstruation might develop.

Many of the people depicted in the advertisements aimed at older teen audiences were anonymously posed facing away from the reader, acting as "everywomen" and facilitating the interpellation of the viewer into the subject position of the model. The poses utilized by Bodyform in the late 1980s echo strikingly those of a 1958 Tampax advertisement published in *Good Housekeeping*, Ann Treneman writes:

> A woman sits with her back to us—a stranger without a face or front. Medium-length brown hair curls over her neck; bare shoulders contrast sharply with the back of a dark, one-piece bathing suit. Her upright posture is as controlled as the perfect wave in her hair. She is without life—a static image sitting in the left-hand corner of page 16, as wooden as the original pulp material of hat she is meant to be selling. (1988, p. 153)

However, the "wooden" and faceless woman of the 1950s seems in sharp contrast to the fashion-forward models of the 1980s, who successfully present the more dynamic

and aspirational modernity captured in many menstrual product advertising campaigns. Our only "everymen" of menstruation are represented in the humor-led Dr White's advertisements, which are laden with postfeminist sensibility through their deployment of sexualization, irony, and knowingness (Gill, 2007). Treneman (1988) discusses the 1980s Dr White's advertisements, and her analysis centered on the false liberation offered by capitalism, rather than considering a late-20th-century shift into postfeminism within female-facing media culture.

In contrast, the figures in advertisements aimed at a younger audience usually face outward, enabling the viewer to identify with a specific individual who is offering them advice or empathy. Predominantly blonde and White, all young, slim, and able-bodied, these advertisements do not represent nonnormative bodies, experiences, or desires. As in medical illustrations, the representation of the body in these advertisements is fragmented, produced in fleeting images that minimize and obscure the menstrual experience. This finding mirrors earlier studies, identifying a range of visual strategies for representing the positive technological fix of menstrual products without representing the embodied experience or visual appearance of menstruation. While the advertisements do not frame menstruation in the same ways as medical texts do, they do present a similarly narrow conception of menstruation that falls within culturally proscribed cyclical norms. Notably, my analysis found a strong emphasis on the alleviation of the burden on time, situating these examples clearly within the dominant discourses of capitalism and modernity, which demand that we use our time productively, and an increased emphasis on seeking convenience and leisure. As the advertisements demonstrate, individual choice of product is the key to empowerment (Gill, 2007; Kissling, 2013)—whether you are a 1960s career woman, a 1980s fashionista, or a 1990s karate champion. As Wood argues in her exploration of the "menstrual concealment imperative," the choice and freedom proffered by these menstrual product advertisements is false "and thereby facilitates women's complicity in their own subjugation" (Wood, 2020, p. 320). All these aspirational representations of femininity bridge the modern, the neoliberal, and a postfeminist media culture.

Conclusions

The first conclusion to draw from this discussion is that there is much more work to be done. This article offers some initial explorations of the materials catalogued in the tables, several of which have been omitted from deeper discussion here. Further work to map the menstrual materials held in the Femorabilia Collection and other archival sources is needed. I hope the data, methods, and discussion here will be taken up by others to expand our collective understanding of the British context for menstrual product advertising, on which I have no doubt there is much more to discover and say.

Though there is certainly a sense in the advertisements studied here that menstruation can be a source of embarrassment or difficulty, my tentative conclusions from this small selection of archival materials lead me away from a strong sense of menstruation as "hygienic crisis" (Merskin, 1999) in these examples. Rather, the advertisements here present menstruation as a *social* crisis (or restriction, in Yagnik's terms). This social crisis is manifested through discourses of embarrassment and/or

inconvenience, which can be alleviated or even eliminated by these products. The paradox of (in)visibility is central. It is also manifested in the carceral imagery of Tampax and Lil-Lets (regardless of their contrasting tones). The imagery deployed by both companies here foreground social immobility: The menstruator must escape the confines of their body/their bodily processes in order to be a successful and mobile member of society, inhabiting what Kissling has described as a "new subjectivity […] constrained by the neoliberal values of postfeminism" (Kissling, 2013, p. 501). Her only choice is to escape, and her only escape is through consumption.

As Wood argues, "the menstrual concealment imperative is about freedom and control to women; 'freedom' from their bodies that mark them as othered and are a significant source of their oppression" (Wood, 2020, p. 237). However menstrual blood is invisible in these advertisements, the products are always presented as clean and free from the stain of menstruation, and the imagined user as supposedly free from the embarrassment and hygienic labor of menstruating. The packaging is discreet and the products, unobtrusive in use, although where they go afterward is never addressed in these historical advertisements. The products offer freedom through enabling you to isolate and throw away the reminder of your stigmatized and oppressed/ing body. The disposal of these products, absent in these historical examples, is something that has emerged into the consciousness of the menstrual product industry more recently; for example, Persdotter examines Libresse packaging and the disposal of menstrual "dirt" as part of the broader practices of discretion around menstruation (Persdotter, 2022, p. 115).

This small-scale analysis of British advertising found multiple examples of advertising that foreground concealment and embarrassment but, in contrast with Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler's (2013) findings, few that directly reference freshness, blue liquid, or allegorical images. The advertisements studied foreground the notion of menstruation as something to be hidden and coped with—again, unsurprisingly, by using their own single-use products. Menstrual marketing harnesses two key arenas where menstruation must be managed: in productive time (i.e., work or school) and in leisure time. Importantly, these products promise to ensure that neither of these areas of activity will be disrupted by your period if you use their products. Again, this assumes that the only issue a person menstruating might face is a bit of a leak, rather than the many discomfort-related symptoms they may actually experience. Nobody here is doubled over in physical pain or huddled on the sofa struggling with cyclically exacerbated depression—even though period pain and low mood are a reality for many who menstruate, regardless of the type of tampon, pad, cup, or period pants they use.

The entanglements of editorial and advertising in magazines make them postfeminist texts *par excellence*, fusing guidance for performing gender "correctly" with the neoliberal focus on "personal choice and self-determination" (Gill, 2007, p. 8). Through providing resources for performing gender, magazines and their advertisements demonstrate that "the docile, non-menstruating body is well-suited for market success in a neoliberal economy" (Kissling, 2013, p. 500). Whether encouraging you to "try on" your pads, keep your social calendar on track, dance or rollerblade the night away, or defend yourself from the dual threat of your menstruating body and a sexist world, the advertisements analyzed here conform to the menstrual paradox observed across social and cultural studies of menstruation. The physical impact on the lives of those who experience it is

dismissed or minimized, while corporations capitalize on the social stigma of menstruation *and* notions of what we might contemporaneously refer to as FOMO (fear of missing out)—at work or play—to ensure that their consumers keep returning.

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Notes on Contributor

Dr. Bee Hughes (they/them/theirs) is an interdisciplinary artist and researcher; Senior Lecturer in Media, Culture, and Communication; member of the Liverpool Centre for Cultural, Social and Political Research and q:LJMU Research Network (part of the Public Health Institute) at Liverpool John Moores University; and founding member of the UK's Menstruation Research Network.

ORCID

Bee Hughes http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8968-268X

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the Femorabilia Collection, catalog available at: https://archives.ljmu.ac.uk/TreeBrowse.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&field=RefNo&key=FEM/212

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