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# TSS (Tampax's Side Story): The Influence of Menstrual Product Manufacturers on Menstrual Education and its Perception

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# TSS (Tampax's Side Story): The Influence of Menstrual Product Manufacturers on Menstrual Education and its Perception

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities

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**TSS (Tampax's Side Story):**

The Influence of Menstrual Product Manufacturers on Menstrual Education and its Perception

By

Folasade Lapite

2018–2019 Wolf Humanities Center Undergraduate Research Fellow

University of Pennsylvania

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A SENIOR HONORS THESIS

in

Health and Societies

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Presented to the

Department of History and Sociology of Science

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Stephanie Dick

2019

## Table of Contents

<b><u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</u></b>	<b>4</b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>5</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER ONE: TENSIONS, PERIOD.</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b>HISTORICAL NARRATIVE / BACKGROUND INFORMATION:</b>	<b>12</b>
CONTEXT OF SEX EDUCATION IN AMERICA 1900-1970	12
MENSTRUAL EDUCATION SITUATED IN SEX EDUCATION	14
NO ONE WANTED TO TALK	17
<b>TENSIONS HEIGHTENED</b>	<b>20</b>
PHYSICIANS' CONCERNS ABOUT MENSTRUATION	20
PHYSICIANS MINIMIZED MOTHERS VOICES	22
RISE OF MEDIA EDUCATION	24
<b>MENSTRUAL PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS ROSE TO THE OCCASION</b>	<b>27</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER TWO: PAGING THROUGH PAMPHLETS</u></b>	<b>34</b>
<b>KOTEX PAMPHLETS/BOOKLETS</b>	<b>36</b>
IMAGES	39
CONTENT	43
<b>AN ORGANIZATION VS MENSTRUAL PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS</b>	<b>47</b>
May 2018, Wolf Humanities Center Undergraduate Research Fellowship Folasade Lapite, College of Arts and Sciences 2019, University of Pennsylvania	2

PLANNED PARENTHOOD	48
KOTEX	50
<b><u>CHAPTER THREE: AN EXPERT’S POINT OF VIEW</u></b>	<b>54</b>
<b>IDENTIFYING EXPERTISE</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>SITUATING MENSTRUAL PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS</b>	<b>58</b>
MEDIA EDUCATION MET EXPERTISE	59
<b>REASONS MANUFACTURERS GAINED ROLE OF EXPERT</b>	<b>61</b>
WHY NOT PHYSICIANS AND TEACHERS?	62
REASON WOMEN DEFAULTED TO MANUFACTURERS	64
CULTURE AND PRIVACY	66
RELATABILITY	67
<b>PRIMARY SOURCES SHOWCASE MENSTRUAL PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS’ EXPERTISE</b>	<b>69</b>
PAMPHLETS AND MOVIES	69
TAMPAX WEBSITE	71
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b>74</b>
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	<b>77</b>
<b>PRIMARY SOURCES</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>SECONDARY SOURCES</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>WORKS REFERENCED:</b>	<b>84</b>

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## Introduction

In the early twentieth century, the concept of “menstrual education” was a common term used among both the general population and its menstrual educators. However, by the late 1960s, the term vanished and became a component of sexual education (sex education).<sup>1</sup> My thesis explores the transformation of menstrual education between the 1920s and 2013, and it asks the following questions: Who was an expert on menstrual education? How and why did the delivery of menstrual education, to the younger female population, drastically change from the 1920s to current day? In order to answer these questions, I analyze the conversations among and information disseminated by the following actors who were involved in educating the female youth about menstruation: (1) families, (2) teachers, (3) physicians, and (4) menstrual product manufacturers.

Beginning in the 1920s, American families and teachers questioned which actor was *the* appropriate source to educate the female population about menstruation. According to Marvin Levy, a supervisor of health and safety education for the State Department of Health, parents should teach their children about topics such as menstruation.<sup>2</sup> Levy further explained that parents, unfortunately, experience difficulty teaching their children about such topics because (1) they could not “give objective information and advice” to their children—due to the emotional involvement existing within their relationship— and (2) mothers felt inadequate giving their daughters information about menstruation because they, themselves, did not know the

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1. James A. Michener, “Sex Education: A Success in Our Social-Studies Class,” *The Clearing House* 79, no. 5 (2006): 210-14.

2. “What Happens When Children Have Children?,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 16, 1978, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1849138480?accountid=14707>.

essentials.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the conversation surrounding menstruation was pushed outside of the home-setting and into the formal education system. However, since few school teachers were qualified to teach about menstrual education, schools requested Tambrands's and Kimberly-Clark's trained menstrual educators—a free service—to educate both their students and parents.<sup>4</sup>

At first, I found Tambrands's and Kimberly-Clark's presence in menstrual education to be quite bizarre. However, my thesis explains how it was possible that menstrual product manufactures—such as Kotex and Tampax—became the de facto experts on menstrual education and what this entailed for female consumers. Families (specifically mothers) and school teachers commonly overlooked physicians and registered nurses as potential sources of menstrual information, and this thesis will uncover why this regular practice existed. In this thesis, I illustrate why this seemingly bizarre “system” not only took shape in the 1920s but also why it progressed into the twenty-first century.

I thought it was peculiar that families and physicians, alike, looked to these menstrual product manufactures as the experts in menstrual education—despite their incentives for sales of their menstrual hygiene products. Therefore, I ask following: Why does the population listen to these manufacturers and not push back against them constructing themselves as experts in the field of menstruation? I argue that corporations not only mobilized the taboo and societal silence that surrounded women's bodies and expectations, in order to fashion themselves as experts in

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3. “Educators Approach Sex Information Lag with Caution,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer Public Ledger*, January 22, 1967, accessed February 18, 2018, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1841542084?accountid=14707>; Russell Smart and Mollie Smart, “Menstrual Education,” *Marriage and Family Living* 21, no. 2 (1959): 177-79.

4. *Ibid.*, 178.



women's health and menstrual education, but also utilized menstrual education to depict norms, “ideals,” and standards for women.

Menstrual product manufacturers created pamphlets intended to educate women about menstruation in a private manner. In fact, Kimberly-Clark’s pamphlets were one of the prominent sources in disseminating information about menstrual education to both the young and adult female populations.<sup>5</sup> These manufacturers had an educational department—dealing with the pamphlets’ content—which, according to Dr. Lara Freidenfelds (a historian of women’s health) “contributed tremendously to [the] revolution in the availability of information about menstruation” in the 1920s.<sup>6</sup>

Kimberly-Clark downplayed its pamphlets’ commercial incentives because the corporation desired women to view them as a confidant, when concerning menstruation. This “peer relationship” would increase product loyalty. Menstrual product manufacturers used their expertise to reinforce stigmas about menstruation while simultaneously marketing their menstrual hygiene products as the solution. For example: Kimberly-Clark’s pamphlets emphasized the aspects of shame, embarrassment, and “secrecy” surrounding menstruation which “contribute[d] to [the formation of] negative attitudes toward menstruation.”<sup>7</sup> By propagating an air of disapproval around topics pertaining to menstruation, women turned to menstrual product manufacturers—which greatly benefited their sales. Corporations mobilized

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5. Lara Freidenfelds, “The Modern Way to Talk about Menstruation,” in *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth-Century America*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 38-73.

6. Ibid., 49; Ibid., 56.

7. Mindy J. Erchull et al., “Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets About Menstruation,” *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 22, no. 4 (2002): 455-474; Ingrid Johnston-Robledo and Joan C. Chrisler, “The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma,” *Sex Roles* 68, no. 1-2 (2013): 9-18.

the taboo and societal silence that surrounded women's bodies and expectations in order to fashion themselves as experts in women's health and menstrual education to improve their sales.

Menstrual product manufactures influenced not only menstrual education but also the general population of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' perception of menstruation. This project focuses on how menstrual educational pamphlets, health-related textbooks, and medical findings shifted perceptions about menstruation. The pamphlets, for example, not only illustrated the information circulated throughout schools between the 1920s and 2013 but also showcased the changes in menstrual education during this timeframe. However, menstrual education was not only documented within these pamphlets but also managed and critiqued throughout this time period. Analyzing these bodies of text showed the intersection between marketing and educating as well as the power of reinforcing stigmatized culture surrounding menstruation. This story of menstrual education illustrated the profound impact corporate America inflicted on the perception of women.

This project adds a new dimension to the history of sexual education in the United States. It sheds light as to why sexual education classes masked menstrual education, in the late twentieth century. While historians have previously discussed women's empowerment via menstruation, they did not interrogate how specific actors fashioned themselves as experts in menstrual education when many different knowledgeable entities existed. My project analyzes products and media sources to understand how menstrual product manufactures not only reflected expectations of women during this time period but also contributed to it.

This project includes information that many scholars commonly left out and ignored pertaining to menstrual product manufacturers' position in menstrual education. I look at a variety of primary sources from these manufacturers to explain why and how these corporations

attained the status of expert. By answering this question, I shed light as to why physicians, teachers, and mothers were often overlooked. In addition to exploring this topic of expertise in menstrual education, I uncover the concept of the “ideal lady” in the 1900s. I offer a different perspective to how women empowerment was fashioned during this particular time frame.

In this thesis, I provide explanations and create depth in order to prove my argument about how menstrual product manufacturers became the de facto experts of menstrual education. In Chapter One, I provide analytical information which interrogates menstrual product manufacturers’ position in menstrual education and demonstrates how menstrual education transformed between the 1920s and 2013. Then, in Chapter Two, I compare physicians’ and menstrual product manufacturers’ publications and goals during this timeframe—pertaining to menstrual education. However, not only do I interrogate these corporations’ role in this discussion but I also illustrate the reason women viewed menstrual product manufacturers as the expert in the field and manufacturers’ influence on the American society’s perception of menstruation—by maintaining theories of taboos. Lastly, in Chapter Three, I discuss how menstrual product manufacturers carefully constructed themselves into the experts of menstrual education. They do this by following societal norms and culture demonstrated in websites and media, and they used this tactic to leverage their education as superior during the 1920s to 2013.

## Chapter One: Tensions, Period.

I learned about menstruation and the disparity of knowledge pertaining to this topic due to the plethora of articles that are based in developing nations. These nations, such as Ghana and Kenya, struggled with keeping girls enrolled in schools due to their menstrual cycle. However, no one taught these girls about their menstrual cycle since the topic of menstruation was deemed taboo. In fact, menstruation was considered “taboo” in not only developing nations but also the United States.<sup>8</sup> Many twenty-first century Global and Public Health scholars—such as Marnie Sommer—have emphasized that menstruation needs to be discussed in both the (public) health and education sectors.

Menstruation was not the most beloved topic to be discussed in the classroom—let alone in the 1920’s culture and norms. In this chapter, I trace the transformations in how menstruation was discussed—from the 1920s to the 1970s—in American education systems. The fact that the concept of taboo propagated in literature surrounding menstruation not only in menstrual education but also in fields such as biology illustrated the strength that this tool yielded in the twentieth century. The taboo, shame, and embarrassment around this topic encouraged women to hide menstruation from public discussion.

In order to understand and contextualize why menstruation was “hidden” from public discussion for many years, it was essential to outline the discussions, similarities, and differences between the following actors: physicians, families, teachers, and menstrual product manufacturers. These actors contributed to the transformation of menstrual education. However,

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8. Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 12.

corporations particularly mobilized the taboo and societal silence that surrounded women's bodies and expectations in order to fashion themselves as not only the experts but also the "trendsetters" of how menstrual information should be presented to young women.

The presence of the menstrual product manufactures in menstrual education alongside to physicians, families, and teachers might seem surprising. Teachers, families, and physicians acknowledged their own authority concerning menstrual education but instead deferred to menstrual product manufacturers—such as Kimberly-Clark (Kotex) and Tambrands (Tampax)—because they chose to promote these manufacturers' "expertise" on the subject. Why did both popular culture, physicians, teachers and families, in this discussion, not only listen to these manufacturers but also contribute to their rise to expert in the field of menstrual education? I argue that menstrual product manufacturers became the de facto experts on menstrual education by mobilizing women's societal expectations and "duties" (pertaining to privacy) and being relatable in its presentation of menstrual information.

It was apparent that Kotex's and Tampax's entry into the education system significantly influenced menstrual education starting in the 1940s. I analyze this seemingly bizarre presence of manufacturers in that time period. Not only do I uncover how menstrual product manufacturers posed themselves as experts in the field but I also demonstrate how Tampax and Kotex use the rise of media and commercialization as new mediums to foster taboos surrounding women. This stunt separated corporate America from the remaining actors due to the stakes they held in how women perceived menstruation.

The prevalence of menstrual education pamphlets as well as movies shed light to the changes within education during the early 1900s and how these corporations maximized their

influence. This power dynamic affected the transformation of menstrual education via the analysis of the pamphlets produced by the manufacturers. This chapter illustrates the historical narrative of menstrual and sex education and contrasts the different stakeholders takes in education, so I can elaborate on the norms, standards, and ideal behavior expected of women. With this information, I illustrate how menstrual product manufactures fashioned itself as an expert in the field of menstrual education via *The Story of Menstruation*'s debut to schools. The fact that manufacturers gained the leading role demonstrated how playing on taboos and silence from the community propelled their image as expert forward.

### **Historical Narrative / Background Information:**

#### Context of Sex Education in America 1900-1970

The story about menstruation must be preceded with information about sex education. Sex education has been debated for centuries; in fact, literature pertaining to sex can be dated before the Victorian time period. However, starting in the early twentieth century, the idea of “Victorianism” pertaining to sex education was challenged by physicians and leaders of education. This term was coined in the nineteenth century and described the relation of sex education in that period where “the time-honored policy ha[d] been one of silence and mystery concerning all things sexual.”<sup>9</sup> The information given during this time period was sex advise from clergy, doctors, and moral reformers.<sup>10</sup> Although a lot of literature was censored, such as Margaret Sanger’s “What Every Girl Should Know,” progressives tried to get sex information

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9. Courtney Q. Shah, *Sex Ed, Segregated: The Quest for Sexual Knowledge in Progressive-Era America*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015).

10. *Ibid.*, 3.

distributed in 1914. Therefore, it was clearly hard for adults—let alone children—to receive information about sex education. So how did sex education get introduced to be a somewhat-normalized topic?

The ideology of hygiene and purity permitted sex education to be discussed by different stakeholders in the community. In 1913, teachers and physicians worked together at the Fourth International Congress on School Hygiene on ways to promote health and hygiene in school children.<sup>11</sup> It was in this year that progressive educators brought up the discussion of sex education in social education. This was also the same instance where “public schools began taking over more responsibility over more and more educational responsibilities that had traditionally been in the domain of the home” from immigration classes to sex.<sup>12</sup> These social hygienist were concerned about parents opposition to this change, so they placed the emphasis for sex education on “sex hygiene training . . . linked [to] morality with Christianity.”<sup>13</sup> This group knew without parental support, the program would fail; in fact, these new programs initially started in public colleges and used for younger children initially via the Chicago experiment.

Also during this time period, elementary and secondary education was in a movement of professionalization. This provided context as to why social hygienists deemed that teachers and mothers were not suitable to talk about sex education.<sup>14</sup> Instead, hygienist wanted guest lectures

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11. Ibid., 15.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 16; Ibid., 17; Although I will not be able to address the theme of religion in this project, it contributed to reception of sex and menstrual education to society multiple times throughout this narrative.

14. Shah, *Sex Ed, Segregated: The Quest for Sexual Knowledge in Progressive-Era America*, 19.

from physicians.<sup>15</sup> However, much of the information that was discussed about sex education pertained to men. It was not until World War I that there was a shift in focus that was inclusive of women. In fact, Yarros argued that mothers were needed to help support the government's ideas in teaching their children about sex education as well as act as a model of purity.<sup>16</sup> In fact, C. H. Leverage, an educator at Adelphi College also supported that Public Schools should gather mothers to help provide instruction to their daughters and fathers to their sons.<sup>17</sup>

### Menstrual Education Situated in Sex Education

Menstrual education must be understood in the context of "sex education," in general in America. This was because, during the early twentieth century, menstruation was considered to be a sexual topic. Public school teachers, from Colorado, started to introduce sexual education into the classroom, only in the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> James A. Michener conducted a study, in Colorado, on approximately fifty public-schooled students that he discussed in his article, "Sex Education: A Success in Our-Social Studies Class." The data gathered from these students provided insight to the following topics: (1) how students felt towards training in sex education, (2) the best methods of dispersing content to students, and (3) parental reactions "regarding the teaching of sex and marriage problems in public schools."<sup>19</sup> Prior to Michener's experimental class, many students frequently asked teachers to provide information about sex education and marriage.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it

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15. Ibid.

16. Robin E. Jensen, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870-1924*, (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

17. Shah, *Sex Ed, Segregated: The Quest for Sexual Knowledge in Progressive-Era America*, 27.

18. Susan K. Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 45.

19. Michener, "Sex Education: A Success in Our Social-Studies Class," 210.

20. Ibid.



was no surprise that the students demonstrated perfect attendance while enrolled in this *optional* class. This demonstrated that students wanted to (1) understand their bodies and (2) make better informed sexual and marriage decisions—in the future.

Although the students were learning more about “hushed” topics, the different levels of participation between the sex education and marriage lessons illustrated the apparent “shame” around sexual education. In fact, Michener stated that the term “sex education” had a negative connotation associated with the topic—which illustrated the inherent evasion of sexual oriented topics/conversation.<sup>21</sup> For example, students freely spoke in discussion about marriage-related topics; however, they would more frequently submit questions and comments via writing concerning sex education topics instead of discussing aloud in the group due to embarrassment.<sup>22</sup> This trial class had many positive outcomes because not only did the students feel that they benefited from the material but the students’ parents also were appreciative and thankful for the school educating their children in such topics.<sup>23</sup> In addition to positive feedback provided in the surveys, many of the adolescents wished that they learned the class material at an earlier stage (like during junior high school) because “a great deal of unhappiness [would have been] prevented.”<sup>24</sup>

Michener’s study consisted of only fifty students, which made it difficult to extrapolate the data to other scenarios. However, Michener disputed this claim by stating that acceptance of such a course primarily dealt with the supply of “sane” teachers instructing such classes.<sup>25</sup> The idea of competent teachers was also introduced by Russell Smart and Mollie Smart. Their article

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21. Ibid., 213.

22. Ibid., 211.

23. Ibid., 212.

24. Ibid., 213.

25. Ibid.

“Menstrual Education” is based in the late 1950s unlike Michener’s contemporary piece. Contrasting Michener’s and the Smarts’ articles gave insight to how menstrual education has progressed. Michener demonstrated that sex education was a necessity for adolescents, and the Smarts illustrated the need of educating the female population about menstruation. Almost all mothers, daughters, and teachers “agree[d] that girls need[ed] to know the facts about menstruation before they beg[a]n to menstruate”—which was earlier than junior high school.<sup>26</sup> Students in co-ed sex education classes, during the 1950s, recognized that menstruation education benefited not only girl students but also males—which aligned with Michener’s conclusions.<sup>27</sup>

Starting in the late twentieth century, sex education encompassed the term “menstrual education,” by incorporating this topic as a component of sex education. In a sense, it disappeared from the literature, yet it still had a presence through sex education since it was one of the crucial lessons. A major change, in the late twentieth century, was that sex education was no longer deemed as a controversial topic to education systems but, instead, the controversy lied around who should do the teaching.<sup>28</sup> Michener’s experiment illustrated that parents were grateful when schools did a competent job of educating their children about sex education.<sup>29</sup> This was an important factor because students could not effectively learn if the teacher was unable to verbalize the concepts effectively to them.<sup>30</sup>

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26. Smart and Smart, “Menstrual Education,” 177.

27. *Ibid.*, 179.

28. “What Happens When Children Have Children?”

29. Michener, “Sex Education: A Success in Our Social-Studies Class,” 212.

30. James L. Malfetti and Arline M. Rubin, “Sex Education: Who Is Teaching the Teachers?,” *The Family Coordinator* 17, no. 2 (1968): 110-17.

## No One Wanted to Talk

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, many public schools invited menstrual product manufacturers to hold information sessions on menstrual physiology. Both mothers and daughters would attend these sessions to learn about menstrual education because they “agree[d] that girls need[ed] to know the facts about menstruation before they be[gan] to menstruate.”<sup>31</sup> The stakeholders struggled with (1) how to dispense menstrual information to girls, (2) when to do it, and (3) who should do it. The main question in public concern of menstrual education revolved around who should be teaching the youth about menstrual education. So, why were menstrual product manufacturers spearheading this educational process?

In the 1920s, girls—let alone boys—were not taught about menstruation. I will illustrate the lack of information provided to girls via the experiences of Ida Smithson and Samantha Fried (two girls from different periods of the early twentieth century yet shared similar stories). Both Ida and Samantha were interviewees of Lara Freidenfelds, a historian of women’s health. Freidenfelds debuted their stories to illustrate the lack of information—pertaining to menstruation—that women received between the late 1920s and early 1940s.

Ida was an African-American born in the late 1910s on a rural, Southern tobacco farm. Although Ida’s school had health programs for students, menstrual and sex education were not incorporated into its lessons. Therefore, when experiencing her first menstrual cycle, Ida was terrified because she had no knowledge of what was occurring to her.<sup>32</sup> After getting married, Ida

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31. Smart and Smart, “Menstrual Education,” 177.

32. Freidenfelds, “The Modern Way to Talk about Menstruation,” 38-73.

learned about menstruation and reproduction from her family doctor, who would use his medical books to answer her questions.

The second example involves Samantha and occurred two decades later, in the early 1940s. Samantha learned about menstruation in her first-year of high school—at an all-girls school—in home economics. In this class, girls learned about menstruation minimally and, instead, focused on their future roles as wives.<sup>33</sup> Samantha, like Ida, was not satisfied with the information presented to her concerning menstruation. Although I cannot address the topic of race within this thesis, I must note the blatant disparity between Ida and Samantha in receiving menstrual education. Ida receives knowledge about menstruation much later in her life than her white counterpart, Samantha. It is evident that the component of race limited certain demographics to menstrual education more than others.

Ironically, during the 1920s and 1940s, women could surreptitiously purchase books explaining menstruation in a clinical manner.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Ida and Samantha referred to the literature. These girls, like many during this time period, gathered information about menstruation via literature and books since the information in schools was basically nonexistent.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, from Freidenfelds multiple interviewees' responses, menstrual education was not discussed by parents nor teachers during this portion of the twentieth century.

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33. Ibid., 41.

34. Ibid., 42; Despite the 1873 Comstock Laws forbidding the distribution of contraceptive and pornographic information, smaller publishers filled in the gaps to provide information to the female population; Ibid., 44.

35. Ibid., 42

“After the menstrual cycle [wa]s well established, the best advice for the average girl [wa]s, ‘Don’t give it another thought.’ Our grandmothers made a good deal of fuss over menstruation, worried about anemia and ‘going into a decline,’ avoided cold drinks, baths and shampoos, whiffed smelling salts and in general took it lying down. Now we know a great deal more than Grandma did. Even so judging from the practices and prejudices of college girls, a high percentage of mothers cling to Grandma’s ways.”<sup>36</sup>

According to Levy, during the 1940s and 1950s, there was a consensus, among teachers and families, that mothers were responsible for teaching their daughter(s) about menstruation. Unfortunately, many mothers felt inadequate in teaching their daughters about menstrual education.<sup>37</sup> Remember, Levy stated that parents should teach their children about topics such as menstruation.<sup>38</sup> But Levy understood that, realistically, “schools [gave] some information [and] the parents [gave] even less.”<sup>39</sup> Many American parents experienced difficulty teaching their children about sex education topics such as menstruation. Levy stated that “parents [were] not at fault” for not educating their child because they couldn’t “give objective information and advice” to their children due to the emotional involvement.<sup>40</sup>

In 1959, Mollie and Russell Smart—educators at the University of Rhode Island, who primarily focused research about children development—published “Menstrual Education” which provided insight to the changes in this topic since the 1920s. At this point, mothers pushed

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36. Marjory Nelson, “What Mothers should tell her Daughter,” *Parents’ Magazine* 25, no. 3 (1950): 68.

37. Smart and Smart, “Menstrual Education,” 177.

38. “What Happens When Children Have Children?”

39. “Educators Approach Sex Information Lag with Caution.”

40. *Ibid.*

for menstrual education to be brought into the formal education system because they themselves did not know the essentials.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, mothers welcomed schools to teach their daughters *and* themselves about menstrual education. Although this plea was made, “mothers, girls, and teachers agree[d] that it [was the] right [of] mothers and daughters to talk over menstruation and other aspects of sex education.”<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, schools taught menstrual education via home economic teachers and physical education teachers because it was thought that “any teacher [could] learn the material.”<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, there were few qualified teachers in the school systems. Therefore, if neither mothers nor teachers were teaching young girls about menstrual educational information, who was educating them?

## **Tensions Heightened**

### Physicians’ Concerns About Menstruation

Both Michener and the Smarts focused on the same two actors: (1) teachers and (2) the students and their families. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), however, discussed the relevance and importance of educating girls and their families in relation to medicine. Like the previous scholars, the AAP and ACOG believe that “young females should understand that menstruation is a normal part of development.”<sup>44</sup> The difference between these medical entities and the previous scholars was

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41. Smart and Smart, “Menstrual Education,” 177.

42. *Ibid.*, 177.

43. *Ibid.*, 178; Home economics was a class where girls learned about menstruation minimally and, instead, focused on their future roles as wives.

44. American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “Menstruation in girls and adolescents: using the menstrual cycle as a vital sign,” *Pediatrics* 118, no. 5 (2006): 2245-2250.

shown via the information they wanted to provide young girls. For example: physicians wanted to provide information in relation to health and physiology while educators and families wanted practical information.<sup>45</sup>

The reason menstrual education was important to physicians was due to the fact that, nowadays, many girls as well as their parents did not know how to distinguish normal periods from abnormal menstrual cycles.<sup>46</sup> This was alarming because—like blood pressure—having an abnormal menstrual cycle can be indicative of potential health concerns.<sup>47</sup> The AAP and ACOG believed girls needed to be provided information about menstruation as well as hygienic management techniques prior to the onset of their menarche—which in America was before the age of 12 on average.<sup>48</sup> They also indicated that primary care physicians needed to participate in educating young girls in addition to the girls’ parents.<sup>49</sup> Studies showed, that girls who were educated in menstrual education tended to be less anxious and more proactive at the onset of their menarche.<sup>50</sup> Unlike Michener and the Smarts, both the AAP and ACOG did not believe menstruation needed to be discussed in conjunction with family planning or marriage. Instead, these medical entities believed that it was vital for both the parents and the girls to understand the “usual progression of puberty” and how it tied into better assessments in the female population’s health.<sup>51</sup>

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45. Ibid., 2248.

46. Ibid., 2245.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 2246.

49. Ibid., 2248.

50. Ibid., 2245.

51. Ibid., 2248.

AAP and ACOG educated women about their menstrual cycles but disregarded their bodies in the conversation. The sole focus on their education style was to ensure that future health problems would not occur by understanding what a normal menstrual cycle looked like. The education physicians were providing did not address the female body and only looked at menstruation, which was not what mothers and daughters wanted.

The actors concerning menstrual education had different motives for educating girls about menstruation. The physicians viewed this milestone as a way to not only benefit the individual girls but also the healthcare field. By girls being more aware, open, and educated about their menstruation, physicians would be able to enhance assessments and use menstruation as a “tool.” Michener and the Smarts presented two equally, if not more, important actors in this discussion: (1) the teachers and (2) the girls and their families. It was clear that all these actors believed that menstrual education benefited the youth population.

### Physicians Minimized Mothers Voices

With the surge of many women getting involved in the work force, physicians set out to educate women concerning their menstrual education. The medical field wanted women to understand their menstrual cycle to debunk myths to encourage women that it was okay for them to work and be active while menstruating. In fact, Rachel Lynn Palmer and Sarah Deborah Koslow Greenberg, two women who were doctors during this time period, set out to rectify the misleading information that menstrual product manufacturers were publishing. These two female physicians wrote *Facts and Frauds in Woman's Hygiene: A Medical Guide Against Misleading*



*Claims and Dangerous Products* in order for women to feel comfortable freely talking about menstruation (between mothers and daughters) and avoiding the feeling of embarrassment.<sup>52</sup>

During the late 1930s and 1940s the trend of blaming mothers for poor menstrual education became popular within the medical field.<sup>53</sup> Physicians blamed this group of women for not only misinforming their daughters but also psychologically damaging their perception towards menstruation due to the faulty information. It was not until the early 1950s that many physicians within the medical field realized that mothers were not valid sources of information about menstruation. Instead of blaming mothers, physicians recognized that they needed to re-educate this population of women.<sup>54</sup>

“Time and time again it bec[ame] apparent that the most important factor in establishing a normal menstrual cycle [wa]s the attitude of the girl’s mother. The average mother c[ould] not be blamed for her inhibiting modesty, nor for an actual lack. Of facts. These are the results of our generation’s Victorian prudishness, based on a taboo as old as race. But in this modern day, a mother was seriously to blame if she allowed her deficiencies to warp her daughter’s life. It was every mother’s profound duty to give her daughter the full facts about menstruation and menstrual hygiene—and before she needs them! It was her duty first to check her on beliefs and practices, so as to make sure her information was up to

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52. Margot Elizabeth Kennard, “The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films,” (PhD diss., The University of Wisconsin, 1989), 59-93.

53. *Ibid.*, 84.

54. *Ibid.*, 82.

date. Since the girl's menstrual health may depend on it, it was her duty to present the physical facts in a healthy, positive way"<sup>55</sup>

Although primary care physicians were supposed to participate in educating young girls, the main educators about menstruation were organizations and menstrual product manufacturers.<sup>56</sup> In 1921, the "Girl Scouts of America developed teaching aids" and required their members to learn about the physiology of menstruation—in order to earn the Health Winner Badge.<sup>57</sup> Although the Girl Scouts were getting information about menstruation to the young, female population, pamphlets made by Kotex were one of the prominent sources for circulating information about menstrual education to both the young and adult populations.<sup>58</sup>

### Rise of Media Education

The concept of using videos for educating the population was on the rise during the twentieth century. Paul Reed, editor of *The Educational Screen*, was one of the first to claim the rampant favor education would have towards audiovisual learning experiences. He provided five reasons as to why schools would be overwhelmed with a plethora of sponsored films soon.<sup>59</sup> Individuals took a knack to these 16mm films which caused its market to grow quickly.<sup>60</sup> Charles Hoban, a

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55. Nelson, "What Mothers should tell her Daughter," 66; Again, we see that race surfaces into this conversation. The fact that menstruation was deemed as taboo like race illustrates how complicated the conversation around menstruation was.

56. American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "Menstruation in girls and adolescents: using the menstrual cycle as a vital sign," 2248.

57. Freidenfelds, "The Modern Way to Talk about Menstruation," 48.

58. Ibid.

59. Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films," 60.

60. Ibid., 60-61.

media educator like Reed and the author of *Movies That Teach*, worried about the rise in corporation-sponsored media education brought into the classrooms; he felt that “advertisers and public relations divisions were turning to motion pictures with new realization of their potential power, and were looking to the school as sources of easy and wide distribution of films to invite the good will and patronage of a new, large potential consumer group.”<sup>61</sup> Reed wrote in the November *The Educational Screen* volume about meeting with the advisors to hear their take on the situation. Educators stated that they would watch the videos first to ensure that there was “no objectionable advertising” presented in the films.<sup>62</sup> However, both Reed and Hoban felt that administrators were “not critical in their evaluation of sponsored films.”<sup>63</sup> This led into the debate during this time period about media education.

It was important to ensure through evaluations that educational films introduced into schools were not biased. Reed believed that the videos and resources should not be used simply on the basis that the items were free.<sup>64</sup> In his November issue, Reed suggested four ways for school administrators (and some teachers) to evaluate the sponsored films: “1. Attempt to determine the sponsor’s purpose . . . 2. Re-examine teaching purposes . . . 3. Consider all available materials . . . 4. Equate sponsor and teaching purposes.”<sup>65</sup> However it was not only these media educators that felt this way but, additionally, other groups and organizations, such as

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61. *Ibid.*, 61; Charles F. Hoban, “Approaches to New Film Production,” in *Movies that Teach*, (New York: Dryden Press, 1946), 56-83.

62. Paul C. Reed, “The Curriculum Clinic,” *The Educational Screen*, November 1945, 405.

63. Kennard, “The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films,” 61.

64. Reed, “The Curriculum Clinic,” 405.

65. *Ibid.*, 405-406.

the Detroit Group, also proposed their own set of questions to help teachers, mainly, to “determine both the educational value and the sponsor's special interest.”<sup>66</sup>

- “1. To what degree d[id] the objectives of the material harmonize with the educational objectives of the school?
2. [Wa]s the material:
  - a. Accurate and authentic in fact
  - b. Representative in its selection of fact?
  - c. Truthful and sincere in treatment?
3. D[id] the material present general understanding, facts, processes or methods, or d[id] it present a particular point of view or promote a specific brand?
4. To what extent [wa]s the material sound in educational philosophy?
5. To what extent [wa]s the material significant in the sense that it promote[d] an educational program better than any other material generally available at the time?
6. Is the material adapted to the needs, interests, and the maturity level of the students who will use it?
7. To what extent [wa]s the sponsor's relationship to the material clearly known and acceptably stated?”<sup>67</sup>

With all the guidelines to screen and caution teachers and administrators from using these movies to teach about topics, it was no surprise that many individuals who commented on media education in *The Educational Screen* between 1945 and 1947 felt that advertisements did

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66. Kennard, “The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films,” 63.

67. Ibid.

not belong within the school systems, especially schools that were funded “by general taxation[. Therefore,] they must not promote the special interests of any individual or organization to the detriment of others.”<sup>68</sup> Education was not supposed to serve a biased interest, but instead remain neutral for kids to gain insight and form their own beliefs. In addition, the seven points revealed how many individuals perceived school knowledge as truthful, accurate, sincere, and authentic without having confounding factors to the content.<sup>69</sup>

Since media education was on the rise in this time period, it only made sense for menstrual product manufacturers to also use this tool to promote its brand and knowledge. I discussed the tension between teachers, physicians, and mothers that were apparent during the mid-twentieth century. However, Kotex and Tampax successfully used taboos and societal silence surrounding women’s bodies to promote themselves as menstrual educators for women.

### **Menstrual Product Manufacturers Rose to the Occasion**

At this rate it was easier for menstrual product manufacturers to gain respect because they dismissed mothers’ creditability.<sup>70</sup> Menstrual product manufacturers ensured that their information complied with the medical standards, after receiving pushback from Palmer and Greensburg, the female physicians previously mentioned. It also helped getting support from physicians and nurses to certify that menstrual product manufacturers’ information were scientifically correct. This also led mothers to advocate for these corporations’ menstruation

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68. Ibid., 64.

69. Ibid., 63.

70. American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “Menstruation in girls and adolescents: using the menstrual cycle as a vital sign,” 2248.

films because not only did they have to educate young girls but also the mothers. By having the medical community's support, Kimberly-Clark was able to intervene the mother-daughter relationship and act as a "substitute" for mothers.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, schools were not enough to get this information out to the general female population.

In the late 1950s, it was common for corporations (such as Tampax) to send menstrual educators and films (such as *The Story of Menstruation* by Walt Disney Productions and *Molly Grows Up* by Kimberly-Clark) to present information about menstrual topics not only for daughters but also, in fact, primarily, for mothers. The "protocol" for learning about menstrual education, at schools, was that the film would be shown and a discussion about the film would be followed afterwards. The representative served as a source of information that could not be incorporated into the film and to provide answers for the viewers' questions. Therefore, instead of using its teachers, schools would request trained menstrual educators—a free service—from Tampax and Kotex to not only educate their female students but also their students' mothers.<sup>72</sup> In addition to using manufacturers' menstrual educators, schools would also use the teaching aids to teach the mothers. Although parents did not directly teach their children about menstrual education, they still held some authority in the information given to their daughters. The mothers were taught, in a session prior to their daughters' session; this system was in place to see what information should be withheld during the young girls' session.

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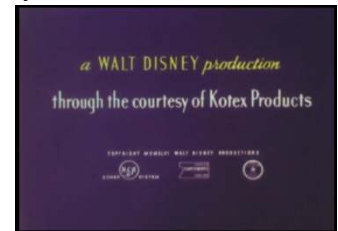
71. Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films," 92.

72. Smart and Smart, "Menstrual Education," 178.

The menstrual product manufacturers assumed the role of an educator by utilizing the rise of media during the mid-1900s. The information that these corporations included demonstrated biased information that propagated taboos and played on themes of shame and “deficits” within women. I describe and analyze the prominent menstrual film created by these corporations to illustrate how taboo and stigma was fashioned as a tool for menstrual product manufactures’ to benefit from.

*The Story of Menstruation* began with a purple background and a statement of the affiliated contributors to the production of the video. After this screen faded away behind the emergence of flower petals, the narrator asked, “Why [wa]s nature always called Mother Nature?”<sup>73</sup> The narrator then continued to guess that nature might be

considered female because she quietly managed many tasks— particularly cycles— simultaneously. The movie then digressed into a physiological lesson starting with the pituitary gland which was



*The Story of Menstruation*

one of the many routine activities Mother Nature had in store for a girl. The pituitary gland gave orders that were different for each girl but the girl must “obey” said controls.<sup>74</sup> The movie then advanced into how the pituitary gland, around the age window of 11 and 15—the average being

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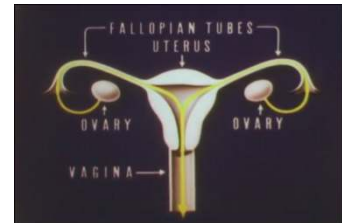
73. *The Story of Menstruation*, (International Cellucotton Products Co., 1946), January 01, 1970, accessed September 14, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/StoryOfMenstruation1946>.

74. Ibid.

13—had to send some of its attention into maturing the female body: this was the onset of menstruation.<sup>75</sup>

The narrator elaborated on the sequence of signals and messages that occurred for releasing the egg, and its relation to a woman's flow.

“Menstruation [wa]s just one routine step in a normal and natural cycle that [wa]s going on continuously within the body. The time between periods [wa]s usually 28 days. However, it may be shorter for some girls, longer for others. The flow, itself may last anywhere from three days to seven, yet each of these different schedules may be normal.”<sup>76</sup>



*The Story of Menstruation*



*The Story of Menstruation*



*The Story of Menstruation*

The video pushed that women should be regular with themselves, and allow some irregular activity when body had not fully situated yet with its cycle.

“Try not throwing yourself off schedule by getting over tired, getting emotionally upset, or catching cold. And if your timing [went] severely wrong or you're bothered with severe headaches or cramps, you should have a talk with your doctor.”<sup>77</sup>

I found the narrator suggesting that the girls should consult their physicians to be interesting. It seemed that physicians were endorsing menstrual product manufacturers which boosted these companies' credibility. I wondered if physicians held a similar response to

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75. Ibid.

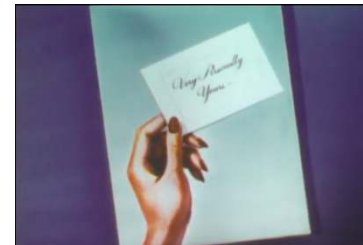
76. Ibid

77. Ibid.

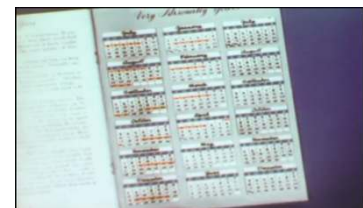


menstrual product manufacturers with dispersal of information about menstruation. In a film review, in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, physicians raved about how excellent *The Story of Menstruation* was to education. The article acknowledged that there “ha[d] long been a problem in schools [on] how to present any material related to reproductive processes without creating an atmosphere of tension, not to say fear and disgust.”<sup>78</sup> They further continued to state that *The Story of Menstruation* was “an answer to the problem; it accomplishe[d] the extraordinary feat of teaching something essentially serious while preserving an air of good cheer and relieving the tension by unexpected humor.”<sup>79</sup> The article went forward to give a brief, praise-worthy summary of the movie, but concluded that the viewing of the film “should of course be accompanied by the teacher’s guide and by the pamphlets for individual distribution.”<sup>80</sup>

Although the film discussed the physiological aspects of menstruation—which one would expect to not be biased . However, that was not the case. In fact, classes concerning biology and reproduction emphasized different troubling themes that perpetuated negative connotations not only about women’s reproductive systems but specifically menstruation. Emily Marting notes that “female biological processes [we]re [considered to be] less worthy” than their male counterparts, during the late 1900s.<sup>81</sup> Medical textbooks referred to menstruation as a



*The Story of Menstruation*



*The Story of Menstruation*

78. Medical Motion Pictures, *JAMA*, 133, no. 14 (1947): 1033.

79. Ibid.

80. *The Story of Menstruation*.

81. Martin, Emily. “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16, no. 3 (1991): 485-501.

failure and “dogged insistence on casting female processes in a negative lighting.”<sup>82</sup> This negative lighting resulted in the need for women to hide this shameful process that even biology would not defend.



*The Story of Menstruation*

The video encouraged record keeping and stated that you could do this with the calendar that “appear[ed] in an interesting booklet called *Very Personally Yours*, this booklet has[d] been prepared to enlarge upon what you learned from this brief film.”<sup>83</sup> It encouraged common sense because most of the activities women did were on the “mild” side which was demonstrated with the brunette cleaning the house. In addition, the movies stated that exercise was good for women and preceded to state that approved exercises could be located in the booklet. Lastly, the narrators stated for women to not slouch because they would let their organs function as nature intended them to in a straight back position.<sup>84</sup> The movie also stated which foods to eat. The narrator concluded that with the following remark: “It’s smart to keep looking smart. That well-groomed feeling will give you new poise and lift your morale.”<sup>85</sup> She encouraged healthy living every day. *The Story of Menstruation* ended with saying how the menstrual cycle was natural cycle for an eternal plan, and when she gave this remark, a picture of



*The Story of Menstruation*

a bride appeared followed by said woman looking at a baby in a bassinette—presumably hers



*The Story of Menstruation*

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82. Ibid., 488.

83. *The Story of Menstruation*.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

which would make her a mother.<sup>86</sup> The last screen that displayed was “Present with compliments of Kimberly-Clark makers of Kotex products.”<sup>87</sup>

This brief overview illustrated how menstrual product manufacturers were a relevant actor in this discussion. It was beneficial to understand the tensions between teachers, families, and menstrual product manufacturers when concerning who should educate young girls because it provided insight to the stakeholders’ perception of menstrual product manufacturers in contrast to physicians, families, and teachers. In order to see how Kotex and Tampax were educating the populations, it was important to not only examine the content these manufacturers provided girls and mothers during their educational presentations but also the advertisements they circulated to women.

This information supported my argument because by illustrating the historical narrative of menstrual and sex education, I hinted to the norms, standards, and ideal behavior expected of women. In addition, it was evident that progressives used themes of hygiene to push both sex and menstrual education into the public sphere of education. By doing this, standards were circulated among women faster and became intertwined with other subjects which contributed to ridiculing women and menstruation. Menstrual product manufacturers used this sequence of events to fashion itself as not only being knowledgeable but also assisting with fooling others about one’s cycle. This information showcased how menstrual product manufactures fashioned itself as an expert in the field of menstrual education via *The Story of Menstruation*.

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86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

## Chapter Two: Paging through Pamphlets

The production of pamphlets for educational purposes was also on the rise in the 1900s. Not only did menstrual product manufacturers insert themselves into the field of media to enhance their reach to consumers and promote their expertise but they also used pamphlets to create product loyalty and build trust with young women. However, embedded into these pamphlets was a concept of the “ideal woman” which exuded the ideal whiteness desired during the Cold War.

The earliest pamphlet I found dated to 1929. It was a way for mothers to indirectly discuss menstruation with their daughters, since the age of Victorianism perpetuated the ideas of shame surrounding the female body.<sup>88</sup> In fact, the “1920s marked the moment when mass produced images distinctly and powerfully began to influence female self-conceptions and beauty rituals.”<sup>89</sup> I would like to preface this discussion that it was no secret that “white women were the [intended] audience for national advertising that tied beautifying to broad cultural concerns over female sexual mores and social roles”<sup>90</sup> I will not discuss the contributions of race in this thesis, but it is important to frame that these product were aimed for white women which denied women of color entry in the vision of beauty.<sup>91</sup>

It might seem odd that Tampax and Kotex coached the behavior and appearance that women should partake in, but one must remember that these menstrual product manufacturers

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88. Harry Finley, “Kotex Teaches and Wins Girls: Marjorie May's Twelfth Birthday, 1929, Puberty & Menstruation Booklet for Kotex Sanitary Napkins.” *Museum of Menstruation & Women's Health*, accessed February 15, 2018, <http://www.mum.org/MarMay0.htm>.

89. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The making of America's Beauty Culture*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

profited from women using their products. Therefore, modeling behavior that they wanted from their consumers benefited the corporations. In trying to create behaviors that fit within social context, these menstrual product manufacturers incorporated taboos surrounding women's bodies to reinforce the necessity for not only their products but also their coaching and knowledge.

This chapter analyzes menstrual education pamphlets from Kotex and Planned Parenthood between the years of 1940 and 1992.<sup>92</sup> As time progressed, the criteria and format for manufacturers' pamphlets drastically changed. I explore contrasts between Kotex pamphlets from the years 1940, 1961, 1981, and 1992. It was important to demonstrate the changes not only within Kotex but to also to contrast Kotex's pamphlets against the pamphlets from organizations who were not menstrual product manufacturer (such as Planned Parenthood). The differences found between these pamphlets demonstrated the role marketing played in the circulation of menstrual information. This monopoly of information proved to be an important contribution to politics during the mid and late 1900s, when pertaining to women's rights.

Johnston-Roberto and Chrisler, doctors of psychology, believed that information in manufactures' pamphlets (1) became not only less critical of females but also more factual yet (2) still promote menstruation as a secret.<sup>93</sup> However, I will show that Kotex's pamphlets stigmatize menstruation in later pamphlets, contrary to their first claim. The pamphlets and products promoted secrecy concerning menstruation. First, I will illustrate major themes from Kotex pamphlets and their transformation throughout time. Secondly, I will contrast Kotex's

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92. In order to provide a critical analysis on menstrual product manufacturers' pamphlets, this thesis will only address those produced by Kotex. This decision was made because of the popularity in discussion involving Kotex in the secondary literature.

93. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, "The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma," 12.

pamphlets with Planned Parenthood’s pamphlet, supporting my argument against Johnston-Roberto’s and Chrisler’s claim. By doing this analysis I uncover the impact that Kotex had—and still has—on the female population. In addition, the images and text provided background of the norms and standards deemed “appropriate” during the 1900s and how corporations mobilized taboo and societal silence surround women’s bodies to fashion themselves as the experts in women’s health and menstrual education.

### **Kotex Pamphlets/Booklets**

It is common knowledge that menstruation is considered “taboo.” In fact, nowadays the term taboo insinuates the reference of menstruation.<sup>94</sup> Johnston-Roberto and Chrisler expanded on what this ideology meant for society: stigma referred to an indication that set people apart from others; the term conveyed that said group had “a defect of body or of character that spoiled their appearance or identity.”<sup>95</sup> In 1985, the stigma surrounding menstruation caused two thirds of both men and women to believe that menstruation should not be discussed in either social nor work settings.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, the usage of pamphlets was “a form of ‘private’ education” that girls could consult without violating social norms.<sup>97</sup>

This action of “private education” not only reinforced menstruation being stigmatized in American culture but also gave more authority to menstrual product manufacturers because they

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94 . Elissa Stein and Susan Kim, *Flow: The Cultural Story of Menstruation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 38.

95. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, “The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma,” 12.

96. Warren L. McNab, “What They Should Know About Menstruation,” *The Science Teacher* 52, no. 2 (1985): 27-29.

97. Erchull et al., “Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets About Menstruation,” 460.

wrote the pamphlets. Although Kotex benefited from this style of teaching, many females who were embarrassed to ask questions about menstruation valued these books. A concern that Johnston-Robledo, Chrisler, Diorio, and Munro brought up was the fact that Kotex negatively described menstruation in order to require the topic to be addressed in a private manner. In fact, information discussed with boys, at the time, concerning masturbation, were considered information to be privately discussed in handbooks.<sup>98</sup> In a sense, private education allowed for secret conversations to occur about topics that were usually frowned upon.<sup>99</sup> This concept of private education streamlined into a prominent theme illustrated in Kotex pamphlets which centered around the concept of secrecy to achieve societal normalcy concerning menstruation.

Menstruation could be a visible stigma; however, women concealed their menses which caused the stigma to be “hidden.” If handled “correctly,” with items such as pads and tampons, no one would know that a female was menstruating.<sup>100</sup> This was where the topic of “menstrual denial” entered the scene of menstrual education because the “importance of passing as a non-menstruator” was important in order to avoid shame, embarrassment, and ostracism.<sup>101</sup> Although women were granted freedoms at this time, the menstrual product manufactures still dominated the field of menstrual education which meant using taboo as a form of reform on women still occurred.<sup>102</sup> This idea of passing and utilizing taboos to further push specific ideals and

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98. Joseph A. Diorio and Jennifer A. Munro, “Doing Harm in the Name of Protection: menstruation as a topic for sex education,” *Gender and Education* 12, no. 3 (2000): 347-365.

99. *Ibid.*, 355.

100. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, “The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma,” 11.

101. David Linton, “The Menstrual Masquerade,” in *Disability and Passing: Blurring the Lines of Identity*, ed. Jeffrey A. Brune and Daniel J. Wilson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 58-70.

102. *Ibid.*

expectations were not unique to menstruation. In fact, this theme can be seen in the Deaf Education culture. Kristen Harmon gave the example of a male, deaf graduate student who struggled with disclosing his “serious” disability because it would make him susceptible to vulnerability.<sup>103</sup> Passing as “normal” and capable was an important theme during the twentieth century.

These pamphlets, in addition to corresponding advertisements, were “cultural artifacts that play[ed] an important role in the social construction” and meaning of menstruation.<sup>104</sup> By closely reading advertisements within/outside of pamphlets, I noticed similar themes used in the menstruation advertising industry. Kotex rose self-awareness within its own pamphlets via ads while also using different media to garner attention. However, the most fascinating information that I learned from the ads pertained to the role of femcare ads. These ads provided a new vocabulary—which constantly evolved—for the female populations.<sup>105</sup> Instead of having words that were too clinical, advertisers “created a shadow code that lurk[ed] beneath the vaguely scientific-sounding terminology of absorption technology. . . This secret language consist[ed] primarily of friendly, cozy words” which resonated with the female community.<sup>106</sup> These advertisers effectively created a strategy over the centuries to not only influence how society felt about menstruation but also viewed their female bodies.<sup>107</sup> In fact, in the 1972 Kotex ad, they demanded women to “Be truth. Be beauty. Be nature’s own. But be sure” that they were not

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103. Kristen C. Harmon, “Growing Up to Become Hearing: Dreams of Passing in Oral Deaf Education,” in *Disability and Passing: Blurring the Lines of Identity*, ed. Jeffrey A. Brune and Daniel J. Wilson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 167-198.

104. Ibid.

105. Stein and Kim, *Flow: The Cultural Story of Menstruation*, 114.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.



letting their menstrual secret out.<sup>108</sup> It was clear in these few short commands that Kotex used its ads to dictate female behavior. This trend seen in their ads bled into how menstrual product manufacturers wrote their pamphlets for the female populations.

Menstrual product manufacturers’ booklets have existed since the 1930s and became an essential part to not only the American culture but also the “menstruation experience.”<sup>109</sup> Between 1930 and 1992, there were two components that changed within Kotex’s pamphlets: (1) images and (2) information validity. In order to illustrate this transformation, I will pull and analyze information from the following pamphlets’ images and content: *As One Girl to Another* (1940), *You’re a Young Lady Now* (1961), *Very Personally Yours* (1981), and *Becoming Aware: Sarah’s Story* (1992).

### Images

This section will address the analysis of the images, first. In the



*You’re a Young Lady Now*, 10.

earliest pamphlets there were few images (apart from the cover). This was demonstrated in Kotex’s 1938 pamphlet titled *Marjorie May’s 12<sup>th</sup>*

*Birthday*.<sup>110</sup> However, right after this pamphlet edition, Kotex added many images into their pamphlets. The 1940 and 1961 pamphlets represent the earlier editions while the 1985 and 1992 pamphlets



*Marjorie May’s Twelfth Birthday*, 1.

108. Kotex, advertisement, 1972.

109. Erchull et al., “Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets About Menstruation,” 459.

110. Kimberly-Clark, *Marjorie May’s Twelfth Birthday*, (1938), 1.

represent the later editions. In both the 1940 and the 1961 pamphlets, there was a “model young lady” who appeared on almost every page of the pamphlets.<sup>111</sup> Aside from wearing a long-sleeved blouse underneath a knee-length dress, where stockings can be seen until they enter a pair of closed-toed penny loafers, the girl pulled her stomach in, held her head high and her chin in, and had great posture.<sup>112</sup> This girl, in a normative image, represented the “ideal woman” and provided warnings, dos, and do nots to the female reader.

This “ideal woman” emphasized vital behaviors of women such as not being discovered when menstruating.<sup>113</sup> The “neat and sweet” girl also demonstrated the necessity for women to be fresh by taking a bath to ensure no sign of menstrual blood was present.<sup>114</sup> The images provided in the pamphlets did not provide additional information for the readers; instead, the woman acted as a caricature that readers should mimic or aspire to. In addition to these superfluous images, the pamphlets used images to illustrate products the manufactures could offer the readers and how girls could *hide* using menstruation products.<sup>115</sup> The images in these earlier pamphlets are different from the new pamphlets’ images.

Unlike the earlier pamphlets, the 1981 and 1992 booklets eliminated nonessential images from its content. In fact, the only extra images found in the 1992 piece were the chapter images which was special in this case because it was an educational kit. The “ideal woman” image was

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111. Kimberly-Clark, *You’re a Young Lady Now*, (1961), 10.

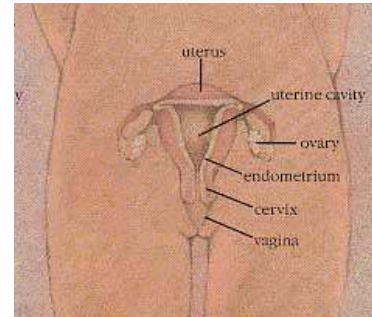
112. Ibid.

113. Kimberly-Clark, *As One Girl to Another*, (1940), 8.

114. Ibid; Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, “The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma,” 11; *You’re a Young Lady Now*, 8.

115. *As One Girl to Another*, 11.

removed from the pamphlets due to the third-wave feminist movement rejecting the traditional and stereotypical understandings of femininity.<sup>116</sup>



*Becoming Aware: Sarah's Story, 54.*

Third-wave feminism had an important factor in the transformation of the pamphlets that I analyzed. Therefore, it is essential to have context of what third-wave feminism is, so I will provide context to supplement my analysis. Third-wave feminism was thought to be the “younger generation’s feminism” because these women rejected traditional, stereotypical ideologies about femininity.<sup>117</sup> However, this movement contained elements from second-wave feminism that critiqued society’s and cultures’ beauty standards, sexual abuse, and power dynamics. Judith Lorber, a professor of sociology and women’s studies at the College of the City University of New York, described third-wave feminism to “valorize women’s agency and female sexuality as forms of power.”<sup>118</sup> Therefore, women desired to see more multicultural, multiracial feminism as well as concepts that did not play into women being a doting figure in society because they believed that women possessed a “rebellious” edge.

Now, going back to the pamphlets, in place of these extra images, Kotex incorporated body diagrams of the female anatomy and images of the company’s products. The body diagrams included the female reproductive organs and labeled the uterus, uterine cavity, ovaries, endometrium, cervix, fallopian tube, and vagina within a realistic drawing, within the pamphlet.

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116. Chris Bobel, *New blood: Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation*, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 16.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

The company incorporated a page dedicated to six different menstrual management tools that the reader could use to promote her hygiene.<sup>119</sup> The last new component incorporated in this pamphlet concerned exercise diagrams for the reader to pursue. In all four pamphlets, the manufacturer referred to its merchandise. From pages nine to fifteen, Kotex not only stated that girls “needn’t stay home or sit on the sidelines” but they also should join in the activity because, now, it was okay for girls to exercise while menstruating.<sup>120</sup> This push towards activity was partly due to the influence second-wave feminism inflicted during the 1960s for the liberation of women under gender norms. The pamphlets go on to describe how to use Kotex sanitary napkins as well as other products in great length, detail, and pictures for its readers. Kotex ensured that the reader had a variety of options to choose from that might suit the girl’s taste in this liberating period of femininity.

The older pamphlets provided a plethora of different menstrual management technologies/tools to emphasize the many possibility of hiding one’s menses with different equipment. However, in later models the different advertised products celebrated differences in women which can be mirrored in different products such as Kotex’s “Lightdays Long Pantiliners” or Kotex’s “Security Tampons.”<sup>121</sup> Kotex even stated that its “full line of products . . . met all women’s protection needs.”<sup>122</sup> The use of “need” demonstrated the necessity to keep menstruation a secret even during 1992. Although the images provided a lot of insight to the transformation of these menstrual booklets, the content was another vital source of information.

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119. Kimberly-Clark, *Becoming Aware: Sarah’s Story*, (1992), 56.

120. *You’re a Young Lady Now*, 9.

121. Ibid.

122. *Becoming Aware: Sarah’s Story*, 56.

## Content

In the 1940 pamphlet, there were two pages that illustrated what girls could and could not do. The pamphlet stated very specific activities—such as warm baths and drying one’s hair immediately—to be vital in soothing one’s body during menstruation.<sup>123</sup> These were essential tasks for women to do for centuries due to religious, ethnic, and geographical divides that centered around menstruating.<sup>124</sup> In fact, religious texts, including the *Bible*, stated that “whenever a woman has her menstrual period, she w[ould] be ceremonially unclean for seven days. Anyone who touche[d] her during that time w[ould] be unclean until evening.”<sup>125</sup> This quote from the Bible illustrated how themes of “dirtiness” and “uncleanliness” surrounded menstruation for centuries. However, the protocol funneled into different paths depending on a woman’s marital status. For example: it was custom for married women to use a cleansing douche of tepid water at the end of their menstruation but this action would be frowned upon for unwedded maidens.<sup>126</sup>

The pamphlets also stated which activities girls should think twice before *not* doing. These forbidden activities included doing any type of strenuous exercise—even jump roping—and associating with large amounts of water and cold weather.<sup>127</sup> The newer versions voided previous statements that the company produced concerning both exercise and swimming because

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123. *You’re a Young Lady Now*, 14.

124. Hanna Brooks Olsen, “You Can’t Do That on Your Period: A Compendium – Bloody Hell – Medium,” Medium.com, August 25, 2018, accessed September 13, 2018, <https://medium.com/s/bloody-hell/you-cant-do-that-on-your-period-a-compendium-1eb32c3126e3>.

125. Leviticus, 15:19-33.

126. William August Evans, *Dr. Evans “How to Keep Well: A Health Book for the Home,”* (New York City: Sears, Roebuck & Company, 1917), 1277.

127. *You’re a Young Lady Now*, 15.

they were all false superstitions.<sup>128</sup> I believe that menstrual product manufacturers needed to ensure the information that it disseminated was reliable because there were other organizations that were on the rise of making their own pamphlets. Therefore, in order to stay girls' primary companion during their menstruation cycle, menstrual product manufacturers had to not only update its menstruation vocabulary but also the information pertaining to the process. In fact, in the 1950s, Tampax encouraged girls to not be timid nor give up swimming while on their periods because tampons would prevent them from experiencing any embarrassment at the poolside.<sup>129</sup> It was clear, from the 1981 pamphlet, that manufacturers removed content that was included in the earlier booklets which reflected "faulty" information which illustrated the advancements being made in the field as well as cultural, social, and medical norms.

The 1981 pamphlet not only celebrated female differences but also provided tips for the reader to manage her period—instead of dos and do nots.<sup>130</sup> The booklet continued to provide beneficial exercises, sensible eating tips, and life patterns generally within this time. For example: the pamphlet stated that eating regular meals consisting of fish, meat, eggs, dairy, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains while avoiding junk food meals helped girls to not only gain clear complexion but to also guard the individual against discomfort of constipations—a problem that increased in discomfort when a female was menstruating.<sup>131</sup> In addition, "stretching like a cat [wa]s fine for your back and lower pelvis" while "backward bends strengthen[ed] abdomen and pelvic areas."<sup>132</sup>

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128. Kimberly-Clark, *Very Personally Yours*, (1981), 10.

129. Tampax, "Of course you can go swimming," advertisement, 88.

130. *Very Personally Yours*, 10.

131. *Ibid.*, 14.

132. *Ibid.*, 12.

From the wording of these phrases, it was apparent that Kotex still assumed societal cultural beliefs by making menstruation still appear as an illness. Looking at the following quote from this pamphlet demonstrated the coupling of illness to menstruation even still in the later pamphlets:

“You will probably perspire more during menstruation. And the menstrual flow does have an odor once it is exposed to air. . . Remember to sponge bathe the public area frequently during your period.”<sup>133</sup>

However, Kotex did this less than in prior pamphlets and here promoted activities such as swimming and biking while a female was menstruating.<sup>134</sup> Unlike the other pamphlets, the 1981 pamphlet provided a disclaimer against its own products and even encouraged readers to seek help from a physician—which can be attributed to the spreading news in the 1980s pertaining to the risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) directly related to the use of tampons.<sup>135</sup>

The exposé of TSS led to backlash against specific manufacturers. Ironically, no one could “tell young women not to use tampons” because tampons were a part of women’s culture at this point.<sup>136</sup> There was much tension between consumers and Procter & Gamble’s (P&G) “Rely” tampons which not only spiraled into lawsuits but also forced P&G’s tampons off the

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133. Ibid., 11.

134. Ibid., 14.

135. Ibid., 16; Freidenfelds, “The Modern Way to Talk about Menstruation,” 190; The fear surrounding TSS temporarily decreased sales for tampons, so manufactures strove to regain their consumers’ trust.

136. Victor Cohn, “Toxic shock: Only the Interest has Warned,” *The Washington Post*, September 3, 1982, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/147424416?accountid=14707>.

shelves.<sup>137</sup> Meanwhile during this period there were speculations made that “super absorbent” tampons led to the TSS “outbreak.” Soon after this news was announced, Kotex abandoned increasing absorption levels in its products and instead lessened how absorbent its tampons were while “rebranding” their names. In addition, Kotex suspended advertisements until “the TSS situation [was] clarified.”<sup>138</sup> Not only was Kotex wise from avoiding attention during this time period, but “the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended on Sept. 17[th] that women who had been using Rely [tampons should] switch to another brand.”<sup>139</sup> While Kotex practiced silence on the issue, Tampax was on the offense by releasing many advertisements via different mediums. Although Kotex and Tampax took different approaches, both led women to becoming new, trusting customers for their products.

All four pamphlets alluded to tampons and pads produced by the menstrual product manufacturer, but the later models not only blazoned its products but also gave information as to why they were phenomenal. Kotex explained the fortunately comfortable accommodations that were incorporated in their beltless pads that not only protected women during their first menstrual cycle but also for years of menstruation to come.<sup>140</sup> Aside from commenting on how their products were versatile to support a woman’s entire lifetime of cycles, they used language to emphasize the many layers that their “New Freedom” pads and pantyliners possessed to keep

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137. Ibid.

138. “Tampon Advertising Re-evaluated in Light of Rely Letter,” *Broadcasting*, October 13, 1980, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/962715217?accountid=14707>.

139. “Tampons and a Marketing Fiasco,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 18, 1980, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1842565611?accountid=14707>.

140. *A Very Personal Yours*, 20.



women clean from not only menses but also the occasional discharge that they might experience on a normal day!<sup>141</sup>

### **An Organization vs Menstrual Product Manufacturers**

Now understanding Kotex's pamphlets' transformation throughout the twentieth century, it is important to remember that Kotex had a stake in menstrual marketing. Therefore, this section contrasts a Kotex pamphlet against Planned Parenthood's pamphlet. One difference between these groups' pamphlets centers around the concept of normalcy. While Planned Parenthood stated that "each girl [was] a special individual," Kotex stated it was normal for girls to not be normal which implied a sense that the girls were "defective."<sup>142</sup> At this point, normality referred to girls who experienced menstruation between the ages of ten and eleven; therefore, it was not normal for Sarah, the girl in the pamphlet, to not experience her period until the age of twelve. Kotex's statement drew on the concept of stigmatizing that Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler illustrated.

Both Kotex's *Becoming Aware: Sarah's Story* and Planned Parenthood's *Having Your Period* were published between 1985 and 1992, but Planned Parenthood's pamphlet was published first. The earlier publication date would indicate that Kotex should have had the most up-to-date information when comparing the two pamphlets. Both booklets provided a sense of empowerment for the reader by emphasizing the importance of the girls' individuality. This can be attributed to the fact that third-wave feminism was occurring around the time that these two

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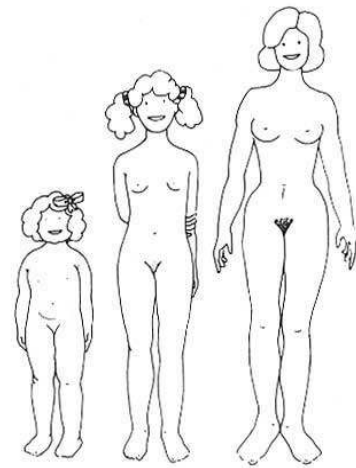
141. Ibid., 21.

142. Planned Parenthood, *Having Your Period*, (1985), 8; *Becoming Aware: Sarah's Story*, 7.

specific booklets were published which allowed for the freedom of female sexuality to be discussed.<sup>143</sup> However, both pamphlets took different approaches in illustrating how females should deal with and handle the concept of “normalcy.” The difference between the pamphlets illustrated how Kotex not only pleased society’s wishes but also influenced and reinforced stigmas and ideologies which promoted their product.<sup>144</sup> Kotex clearly demonstrated in their pamphlets motives for portraying information in specific way due to their biased economic interests. This bias influenced how they presented information to the female population and demonstrated how Kotex went beyond stigmatization to lengths of control in order to ensure product loyalty among their consumers.

### Planned Parenthood

*Having Your Period* phrases its headings with questions that many readers generally had concerning menstruation. This organization was meant to inform girls about all questions that



*Having Your Period, 3.*

they might have about not only menstruation but also their bodies. In addition to its factual content, Planned Parenthood presented few pictures throughout its pamphlet. The girl used to

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143. Third-wave feminism was thought to be the “younger generation’s feminism” because these women rejected traditional, stereotypical ideologies about femininity.<sup>118</sup> However, this movement contained elements from second-wave feminism that critiqued society’s and cultures’ beauty standards, sexual abuse, and power dynamics. Judith Lorber, a professor of sociology and women’s studies at the College of the City University of New York, describes third-wave feminism to “valorize women’s agency and female sexuality as forms of power.”<sup>119</sup> Therefore, women desired to see more multicultural, multiracial feminism as well as concepts that did not play into women being a doting figure in society because they believed that women possessed a “rebellious” edge; Bobel, *New blood: Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation*, 16.

144. McNab, “What They Should Know About Menstruation,” 27.

depict diagrams was a cartoon character that was naked which eliminated the possibility of formulating an “ideal female” for the reader.<sup>145</sup> By not clothing the women, Planned Parenthood eliminated an “ideal woman” that society should embody and instead focused its attention on how to educate the population about menstruation.

The only other images used in this pamphlet were brand-less tampons and pads. In fact, the pamphlet did not show support for any specific manufacturers’ product. Instead, Planned Parenthood went to the extent to state that females have 1 in 25,000 chance of becoming sick due to tampons and encouraged women to do what was best for their own body.<sup>146</sup>

Another vital component of this pamphlet was the “Don’t Believe It!” section which told girls about the truth and debunked many existing myths roaming through society such as menstruation being a curse.<sup>147</sup> Planned Parenthood addressed the fact that many “old wives’ tales” existed pertaining to the topic of menstruation such as “menstruation [was] ‘the curse’” or that “menstruation [got] rid of ‘bad blood.’”<sup>148</sup> The nonprofit reaffirmed that these beliefs were not true and instead menstruation was a “sign that a woman’s body [wa]s healthy and working the way it should” in context of that woman’s normal.<sup>149</sup> While Planned Parenthood tried to downplay the negative comments/stigmas associated with menstruation, Kotex did not negate these beliefs but, instead, reasoned as to why menstruation was a hassle.<sup>150</sup>

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145. *Having Your Period*, 9.

146. *Ibid.*, 12.

147. *Ibid.*, 16.

148. *Ibid.*

149. *Ibid.*, 17.

150. *Becoming Aware: Sarah’s Story*, 11.

## Kotex

Kotex presented its information about normalcy in *Becoming Aware: Sarah's Story*. However, instead of pointing to facts and data that might better a girl's understanding about menstruation, it drew on stereotypical social settings to emphasize the importance of using (its) menstrual hygiene products. In the second chapter, the main dilemma centered around Sarah not yet experiencing her period and feeling left out. At this point, periods were still a hushed topic, but menstruation was considered a "necessity" to being a woman. In fact, in Sarah's dream, she was not allowed to get married because she was not deemed a true woman since she never menstruated.<sup>151</sup> The images included in the Kotex booklet had females nicely dressed, painting their nails, and doing their hair. It was apparent that Kotex was still encouraging the concept of the "ideal woman" through both the images and the narrative.

Unlike Planned Parenthood, Kotex manufactured products and made sure to list, picture, and describe seven different products that the reader might want to use to "protect" themselves during menstruation.<sup>152</sup> Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler stated that many women's "main concern would probably be *avoiding accidents* with an appropriately absorbent pad, *avoiding a wet feeling*, and using a pad that *doesn't show*."<sup>153</sup>

Kotex encouraged young ladies "to take [extra] special care about your daintiness at this particular time. During these days [,] your whole system [was] operating a bit differently. Your perspiring equipment [was] working overtime, and in unexpected places. So, to make

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151. Ibid., 8.

152. Ibid., 56.

153. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, "The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma," 12.

sure you don't offend, put on a fresh pad every three or four hours. And when you change, sprinkle Quest (the Kotex deodorant powder) on [the] napkins. If you do this, not even your worst enemy can make catty remarks about you! For Quest *positively* destroy[ed] body odors."<sup>154</sup>

It was evident in Kotex's pamphlets that the manufacturer tried to emphasize an air of secrecy and the potential embarrassment if their "hidden stigma" became visible to the rest of society.

This fear instilled in women about being "discovered" encouraged them to look to the menstrual product manufacturers to ensure their "safety." Kotex created a position that women naturally wanted to be clean.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, the monthly menstrual cycle brought women problems while trying to maintain this expectation. Not only did Kotex equip women with menstrual management tools but it also provided this audience with tips to maintain the coveted clean atmosphere. This obsession with passing as clean/protected from menstruation related to themes of secrecy and containment during the Cold War.<sup>156</sup>

During the 1950s, "America participated in containment culture" which had the goal to limit the amount of communism spreading in society while promoting American technology, influence, and culture. Therefore, during this time it was important for America to not deviate from its social norms which brought menstruation into the picture. In the 1950s, second-wave and third-wave feminism had not yet occurred, and these two events helped initiate "progressive"

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154. *As One Girl to Another*, 10.

155. *Ibid.*

156. Nancy Lesko, "Cold War Containments: Freedom, Youth, and Identity in the 1950s," in *Act Your Age!: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 116-134.

thinking for conversations about menstruation. The American menstruation culture was adamant about keeping one's cycle out of sight and contained. David Linton, Professor of Communication Arts at Marymount Manhattan College, raised an important fact that menstruation secrecy also equated to menstrual denial that was taught in a repetitive culture at home, school, and other social settings.<sup>157</sup> In fact, this was the time period where women were excused from exercise and other activities that might prevent them from achieving the "coveted clean" that was so important for the culture of the '50s:

"Only do bathe often! It's especially necessary at this time. Keep your hair clean and tidy, your nails nice, and wear clean, fresh clothes! This not only makes you more comfortable—it makes you feel neat and well-groomed. It gives you poise. . . and makes you more attractive!"<sup>158</sup>

When reading this quotation, I wondered the relevance that clean clothes and nice nails had to do with menstruation. Firstly, this language reinforced, without explicitly saying the exact words, that menstruation made women "dirty." Then, I realized that these menstrual product manufacturers were not solely focused on furthering the stigmatization of menstruation but they also wanted to sell a whole image that women should aspire to be. This action demonstrate a controlling aspect that these manufactures had on menstrual information. At the end of the day, Kotex wanted to profit from its products. The goal of menstrual product manufacturers was to sell its products (which they "subtly" maintained stigmas to promote their product); therefore, if capitalizing on stigmatized female roles would allow such results, then the companies would

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157. Linton, "The Menstrual Masquerade," 58.

158. *As One Girl to Another*, 11.

execute such a task.<sup>159</sup> Manufactures such as Kotex appeared to downplay the commercial aspect of their pamphlets and, instead, acted as a confidant and aid for females to learn about menstrual education.

The pamphlets were originally geared for younger women, but, in the 1930s, the manufacturers began to target older girls for a wider market.<sup>160</sup> According to Freidenfelds, Kotex's educational department "contributed tremendously to [the] revolution in the availability of information about menstruation."<sup>161</sup> Although menstrual product manufactures revolutionized the discussion of open-menstrual education with females, they too avoided controversial topics. Kotex's pamphlets served a dual purpose: (1) to educate girls about pubescent changes and (2) to create product loyalty—via reinforcing stigmas.<sup>162</sup>

The analyses made in this chapter strongly favored the argument that corporations mobilized the taboo and societal silence that surrounded women's bodies and expectations in order to fashion themselves as experts in women's health and menstrual education. Using the pamphlets' images and content illustrated how menstrual product manufacturers used taboos surrounding women's bodies to push its roles as an expert in menstrual education. In addition, the language of some of the texts implicitly hinted to the norms and standards expected of women during the different time periods analyzed.

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159. Delaney, Lupton, and Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*, 111; Stein and Kim, *Flow: The Cultural Story of Menstruation*, 114.

160. Freidenfelds, "The Modern Way to Talk about Menstruation," 52.

161. *Ibid.*, 49; *Ibid.*, 56.

162. Erchull et al., "Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets About Menstruation," 459.

### Chapter Three: An Expert's Point of View

To start this chapter, I would like to bring the reader's attention to an image previously found on Tampax's homesite. This image connects to the themes addressed in Chapter Two because this blonde-brunette woman radiates the image of the "ideal" woman—even in 2018. Next to the woman is the



caption: "Ask the Expert." This link connects individuals to someone via live chat, phone call, or e-mail in order to learn more about the topic of menstruation or womanhood. It is apparent that these menstrual product manufacturers have used different tools and marketing strategies to still acknowledge themselves as the experts on menstrual education in the twenty-first century. Although I will address this website in more detail later in this chapter, this image sets the scene to how expertise and menstruation fits in this discussion. It may seem weird that women without medical training are sought as the experts about a physiological, biological process that occurs within women, but I will explain how this make sense within this chapter.

"Ask the Expert"

Menstrual product manufacturers contributed to the spread of information about menstruation to the female population since the 1920s. In Chapter One, I concluded with the question: Why does the women look to these manufacturers as the default expert in menstrual education? The history of tension between physicians and teachers as menstrual educators subsided once the manufacturers started introducing pamphlets into society's popular culture of the 1900s. However, looking at these different primary sources in both Chapter One and Chapter Two, I realized that the real question pertains to *how* companies such as Kotex became the experts of menstrual education. Therefore, in this chapter, I will unpack the information that I



introduced in those previous chapters while expanding and providing additional examples as to how these organizations utilized language and images to enhance their stance as the experts. Not only will I expand on the question at hand but I will also touch upon how expertise was fashioned to the discussion of menstrual educators.

The information here indicated how menstrual product manufactures were the experts despite the other actors during this time. This statement was concluded by how the manufacturers utilized culture and privacy in regards to the female body from movies to websites. Looking at these different sources as well as the rise of media demonstrated how menstrual education depicted different aspects of women which could be used in different ways to allow manufacturers to appear as a committed expert. Menstrual product manufacturers became the expert by rebranding clinical information from physicians into practical information that women could utilize and by using their products and information to promote women empowerment—which was the idea of passing at this time. Additionally, they incorporated the usage of media to promote the ideal women which could be achieved by using their feminine hygiene products.

This chapter is an exploration on menstrual product manufacturers' rise to as experts in menstrual education. These corporations not only address the “problem” of menstruation but they also provide practical solutions to women. In this advice, they promote women empowerment through the lens of the time period which resembles the idea of “passing” discussed in Chapter Two. While doing this, they sell knowledge for women to handle their femininity as well as their products, such as tampons and pads, to help these women achieve the expected norms.

## Identifying Expertise

I will discuss expertise before I illustrate / analyze primary sources as to how menstrual product manufacturers gained the title of expert in menstrual education.

Typically the idea of expertise was attached to knowledge, but this did not always have to be the case. Acquiring expertise was a social process. Expert status can be lost at any time if a large amount of time passed away from the group and expert due to contextual changes that occurred surrounding said topic or if context within the topic of interest simply changed.<sup>163</sup> The concept of expertise was fluid due to the fact that knowledge was constantly changing which shapes individuals' views on different topics and forced "experts" to ensure that they were constantly informed about said topics. "To treat expertise as real and substantive [wa]s to treat it as something other than relation. Relational approaches take expertise to be a matter so experts' relations with others."<sup>164</sup> However becoming an expert does not necessarily mean that the individual must acquire said expertise; instead, Collins wanted individuals to become more familiar with the process of attaining expertise to see the vital aspects of this social process. By looking at how expertise could be determined for trivial things, I realized that menstrual product manufactures embarked on a specified path that allowed them to successfully raise itself in ranks within the menstrual education realm.

It was important to remember that during the early twentieth century there was a "revolution" with communication, in addition to media education: there were more electronics

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163. Harry Collins and Robert Evans, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Expertise*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1-12.

164. *Ibid.*, 2.

and computer usage than previously.<sup>165</sup> In fact, “ordinary people [we]re said to have a more profound grasp of technology than do scientists.[Therefore,] our loss of confidence in experts and expertise” was only standard.<sup>166</sup>

“the nonexpert [wa]s really in no position to evaluate the worth or acceptability of the opinion. He lack[ed] the expertise. On the other hand, the expert, although she ha[d] the technical expertise to judge the opinion, [became] a party to the dispute, as soon as she [chose] to support the contention of one side or the other. Such a choice of sides on a controversial issue involve[d] a compromise of objectivity by the technical expert. . . A biased expert [could] not give an adequate or rationally compelling evaluation of an argument.”<sup>167</sup>

However, individuals liked to believe that they came to decisions independently and autonomously based on what they believed. People wanted to reserve the right to be skeptical and to use their “own best judgement on what to think with respect to those opinions that really matter.”<sup>168</sup> Therefore, it was understandable that a person would negate an entity’s “expert” status due to bias. However, it appeared that Tampax did not lose credibility with its pamphlets despite producing and profiting from the sales of their feminine care product. “The underlying assumption of this analysis [wa]s that, other things being equal, we ought to prefer the judgments of those who ‘kn[e]w what they [we]re talking about.’”<sup>169</sup> At, this time period menstrual product

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165. Paul Starr, “Introduction,” in *The Creation of Media*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 1-19.

166. Collins and Evans, “Introduction,” 2.

167. Douglas Walton, *Appeal to Expert Opinion*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press: 1997), xiv.

168. *Ibid.*, 1.

169. Collins and Evans, “Introduction,” 2.

manufacturers knew what they were talking about in the general public's eyes. Not only were menstrual product manufacturers' movies such as *The Story of Menstruation* supported by physicians in *The Journal of American Medical Association* but they also eluded an air of knowledge via their educational tools that were disseminated to the female population.

The topic of expertise was important in the discussion of menstrual education due to biases. Since menstrual product manufacturers became the “experts” of the field, it must be recognized that this organization had financial incentives to gain the female community's trust. Next, I will provide the foundation for what changes impacted education during the 1920s and the 1990s. In addition, I will describe menstrual product manufacturers with preliminary information for context.

### **Situating Menstrual Product Manufacturers**

Although it seemed uncanny that menstrual product manufacturers were actors in menstrual education, their pamphlets and position in educating women was very influential from the late 1930s to the early 1990s. Analyzing the pamphlets, movies, and advertisements not only provided me with information about the construction of “femininity” during this time period but also acted as a source of insight to the changes that occurred surrounding menstrual education. Kotex and Tampax were two of the main manufactures who became experts in menstrual education. These corporations were viewed as the experts of menstrual education by not only lay people but also by other contributing actors—families, physicians, and teachers. However, before explaining how these menstrual product manufacturers shaped the field to insert themselves as the experts, I will situate and illustrate what menstrual product manufacturers represented in the 1900s.

These menstrual product manufacturers, first, had to establish themselves as a peer and comrade to women. Kotex and Tampax quickly achieved this through their relatable and culturally appropriate pamphlets that were in the hands of many young women through school or home. Once gaining these women's trust, manufacturers exploited their trust into sales for their product. Menstrual product manufacturers played off of themes of secrecy and privacy that surrounded menstruation to promote themselves to women which only strengthened their position in the field. Since no one felt comfortable talking about this issue, who else did the female population have to turn to aside from their Kotex pamphlets or menstrual educators?

Kotex and Tampax used their position in both marketing and the education system to reinforce their influence and position as experts in menstrual education. Although scholars, such as Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, shed light to the meanings and contribution that menstrual product manufacturers' pamphlets instilled in the female community, no one was interrogating why women and other seemingly knowledgeable individuals in menstruation permitted companies like Kotex and Tampax to spearhead information dissemination in menstrual education. This aspect of how information was being exchanged concerning menstrual education demonstrated the many layers and components that shaped the transformation of menstrual education between the late 1930s and the early 1990s. Understanding menstrual product manufacturers' role in this discussion enabled better analysis of who could change the realm of menstrual education and how this process would look during the twentieth century.

### Media Education Met Expertise

In Chapter One, I discussed the rampant usage of videos incorporated by schools to educate the youth in the twentieth century. Although media educators Reed and Hoban knew this new trend

would be favored for teaching purposes, they worried about the increase in corporation-sponsored media education brought into the classrooms; Hoban, in particular, felt that “advertisers and public relations divisions [we]re turning to motion pictures with new realization of their potential power, and [we]re looking to the school as sources of easy and wide distribution of films to invite the good will and patronage of a new, large potential consumer group.”<sup>170</sup> However, Educators stated that they screened the videos first to ensure that there was “no objectionable advertising” present in the films.<sup>171</sup> Evaluation of the videos to ensure that the educational films were not biased were crucial terms in using these videos.

However, both Reed and Hoban felt that school administrators were “not critical in their evaluation of sponsored films.”<sup>172</sup> Reed suggested four ways for school administrators and teachers to evaluate the sponsored films: “1. Attempt to determine the sponsor’s purpose. . . 2. Re-examine teaching purposes. . . 3. Consider all available materials. . . 4. Equate sponsor and teaching purposes.”<sup>173</sup> Reed and Hoban were not the only people to raise concern of this practice; in fact, the Detroit Group, also proposed their own set of questions to help teachers “determine both the educational value and the sponsor's special interest,” which can be found in Chapter One.<sup>174</sup> Education was not supposed to serve a biased interest, but instead remain neutral for kids to gain insight and form their own beliefs. It is important to note that during the early-twentieth

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170. Kennard, “The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films,” 61; Hoban, “Approaches to New Film Production,” 66.

171. Reed, “The Curriculum Clinic,” 405.

172. Kennard, “The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films,” 61.

173. Reed, “The Curriculum Clinic,” 405-406.

174. Kennard, “The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles Over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films,” 63.

century that the role of health-related advertisement was a powerful way of giving advice to consumers.<sup>175</sup> Next, I will illustrate how these organizations rose to this status of expert in the field of menstrual education.

### **Reasons Manufacturers Gained Role of Expert**

Typically, authority was given a problem which had “stereotypically been portrayed “in the modern times by the analogy of Big Brother—a centrally established politicoreligious elite that [ran] our lives and [told] us what to think and how to act.”<sup>176</sup> This quotation illustrated how the creation of an expert could infringe on an individual’s autonomous thinking. I would assume that people should not want to have an expert. Yet, Tampax claimed this title of expert, and was considered more legitimate than physicians and teachers. Why? I believe that they were not only considered an expert but also a peer by the young women and consumers of their products’ population.

Knowing the information placed within menstrual product manufacturers’ pamphlets/booklets was vital to understanding how they leveraged these tools to gain the role of “expert,” in the field of menstrual education. However, during my analysis of their pamphlets, it was evident that these manufacturers first posed themselves as a prominent menstrual educator. This already established position allowed for menstrual product manufacturers to assume the role of expert in menstrual education among the female population. The way in which the pamphlets presented information illustrated how menstrual product manufacturers (1) were in sync with

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175. Nancy Tomes, “Merchants of Health: Medicine and Consumer Culture in the United States, 1900-1940,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 2 (2001): 519-547.

176. Walton, *Appeal to Expert Opinion*, 1.

popular culture of the twentieth century, (2) listened to and created the general public's wishes concerning privacy about menstruation, and (3) were a relatable source for women to understand. Menstrual product manufacturers became experts by not only minimizing and rebranding the information that came from other actors but by also playing into themes of secrecy and privacy that centered around menstruation.

### Why Not Physicians and Teachers?

From the 1930s to the 1960s, there was a new sexual candor that surrounded the female community. However, Planned Parenthood made the claim that it took a lot of courage for women to see their gynecologist—physician—with intimate problems.<sup>177</sup> The fact that women felt uncomfortable around physicians, even when older, demonstrated how physicians could not be considered the expert in the field because there was no trust to build a foundation on. Since physicians were out of the picture, this left the role of teachers in contrast to manufacturers.

Anthony Grasha, conducted research for twenty years into the 1990s and studied the effectiveness of different teaching styles.<sup>178</sup> He came to the conclusion of five different teaching styles that had varying results on the students' abilities to learn course material, and they were the following: (1) expert, (2) formal authority, (3) personal model, (4) facilitator, and (5) delegator.<sup>179</sup> I focus on how Grasha defined the term "expert." In a table, he stated that an expert "possesse[d] knowledge and expertise that students need[ed]. Strive[d] to maintain status as an

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177. Andrea Tone, "Feminine Hygiene," in *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 151-182.

178. Anthony F. Grasha, "A Matter of Style: The Teacher as Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator," *College Teaching* 42, no. 4 (1994): 142-149

179. *Ibid.*, 143.



expert among students by displaying detailed knowledge and by challenging students to enhance their competence. Concerned with transmitting information and ensuring that students are well prepared.<sup>180</sup> However, the downside of an expert was that “if overused, the display of knowledge could be intimidating to inexperienced students.”<sup>181</sup> This tie[d] into why physicians could not be the experts for the female population pertaining to menstrual education. Therefore, this left both teachers and menstrual product manufacturers as viable candidates to being experts on menstrual education.

A teacher and physician could be considered an expert authority.<sup>182</sup> Both entities were knowledgeable in particular fields; however, despite having this knowledge, many people did not feel compelled to always listen to these individuals’ advice. This was commonly seen between physician-patient relationships. Marshall Becker (an Associate Professor in Johns Hopkins University’s Department of Pediatrics) and Lois Maiman (a Research Scientist in the same department) explained how noncompliance between physicians and patients had been a problem for multiple decades in the early twentieth century.<sup>183</sup> Although this had been a reoccurring issue for years, no one had figured out the exact reason as to why patients did not always comply with physicians orders. The behavior patients had with their physicians resonated as to why women viewed physicians as an expert authority. This type of authoritative figure might be an expert in

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180. Ibid.

181. Ibid.

182. Ibid., 142.

183. Marshall H. Becker and Lois A. Maiman, “Sociobehavioral Determinants of Compliance with Health and Medical Care Recommendations,” *Medical Care* 13, no. 1 (1975): 10-24.

that realm of knowledge but the receipt did not allow that entity to have the jurisdiction to command their actions simply by not complying.

Folk wisdom was a concept that “ordinary people [we]re wiser than experts in some technical areas.”<sup>184</sup> It was very apparent that between the 1920s and 1990s there were multiple waves of feminism that shaped the rights women. As discussed in Chapter Two, second-wave feminism first occurred in the 1960s and then third-wave feminism happened during the 1990s. Therefore, Tampax garnered folk wisdom that was meant for women to benefit from. The idea of folk wisdom negated the requirement of experts among them and instead promoted the ideology of “good thinking.”<sup>185</sup> Women, would then prefer to receive information from manufacturers than the paternalistic, male medical field at the time; in addition, these manufacturers provided practical thinking to women.

These subtle structures in place in the 1900s helped establish the way that information traveled and was recognized by the female community. By recognizing the uneven power dynamics and the strain of comfort experienced by women illustrated why it was possible for menstrual product manufacturers to grow into an entity that garnered much support and respect from women.

#### Reason Women Defaulted to Manufacturers

Physicians and teachers both held a type of authority but so too did menstrual product manufacturers. This was due to, in part, the fact that physicians and teachers defaulted to

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184. Collins and Evans, “Introduction,” 5.

185. Collins and Evans, “Introduction,” 6.

menstrual product manufacturers to educate girls and mothers.<sup>186</sup> At this point, I want to insert my opinion on this situation before delving into the literature: I believe that physicians like mothers had experience and education about menstruation but wanted to push this uncomfortable topic onto a different entity which happened to be menstrual product manufacturers. Since these corporation profited from menstrual products, it was important to gain product loyalty from the female community. Therefore, these manufacturers fashioned themselves as expert, in this field. However, what made manufactures, such as Tampax, feel capable of offering “Ask the Expert” services on their websites and hold a big influence on women pertaining to menstrual education?<sup>187</sup>

Although physicians and teachers offered information about menstruation, it also depended on what the audience wanted to hear/learn. Mothers and daughters wanted practical information about their menstrual cycles which physicians did not provide them. In addition, the information that was needed at this time focused on the idea of “passing” as a non-menstruating women while menstruating. Therefore, it was evident that companies such as Tampax and Kotex were capable in assisting women on how to pass and provided women with empowerment that could not be attained in a clinical or school setting. Therefore, keeping the interest of the “consumers”—which ironically suited these women better—helped provide context as to why women looked menstrual product manufacturers as experts.

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186. American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “Menstruation in girls and adolescents: using the menstrual cycle as a vital sign,” 2248; Freidenfelds, “The Modern Way to Talk about Menstruation,” 48.

187. “Ask the Expert,” Tampax Website, accessed March 4, 2018.

Through the increasing popularity of menstrual product manufacturers' products, pamphlets, movies, and services, it was evident that society reinforced their position as an expert in menstrual education. However, it was important to note that there were different types of knowledge that lent itself for an entity to gain expert status. The rise of media education post World War II contributed to major shift in ways educators and organizations taught children and the general public.

### Culture and Privacy

There were certain topics that were deemed taboo topics of discussion. In fact, there was an inherent evasion of conversation of sexual topics in many group settings.<sup>188</sup> For example, Michener—a high school teacher who wrote professionally for journals—conducted a study where female and male students freely spoke in discussion about marriage-related topics; however, they would more frequently submit questions and comments via writing concerning sex education topics instead of discussing aloud in the group due to embarrassment.<sup>189</sup> Many families made it clear that they wished to not discuss menstruation and topics concerning this matter in public settings.

During the mid-1900s, American culture encouraged individuals to think of menstruation and its information as a private matter. Therefore, menstrual product manufactures ensured parents that desired information—that the parents did not want discussed with their children—would be withheld. In fact, when menstrual educators, from Tampax, arrived at schools, they would first present their spiel and movies to mothers prior to the girls in case the mothers wanted

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188. Michener, "Sex Education: A Success in Our Social-Studies Class," 213.

189. *Ibid.*, 211.

specific information to be removed.<sup>190</sup> These manufactures gained mothers and teachers respect and trust by not only providing information that they themselves did not know but by also giving them the power to alter their presentation. The manufacturers desired to appear as a comrade rather than a cold corporation which consumers found appealing. Not only do Tampax and Kotex respect societal norms' wishes of privacy but they also oriented the information that they presented within these beliefs and perspectives. After, reviewing preliminary pamphlets and secondary literature, it was apparent that manufacturers' pamphlets emphasized secrecy and contributed to the negative attitudes towards menstruation in order to maintain control of the menstrual education discussion.<sup>191</sup>

### Relatability

Physicians and registered nurses were other options, for women to receive information about menstruation. In 2006, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), however, discussed the relevance and importance of educating girls and their families in relation to medicine. Like the previous scholars, the AAP and ACOG believed that “young females should understand that menstruation is a normal part of development.”<sup>192</sup> The difference between this medical entity and previous scholars was shown via the information they wanted to provide young girls. Physician wanted to provide information in relation to health and physiology to young females. In fact, the Smarts recommended to “not

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190. Smart and Smart, “Menstrual Education,” 178.

191. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, “The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma,” 9.

192. American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “Menstruation in Girls and Adolescents: Using the Menstrual Cycle as a Vital Sign,” 2245.

rely upon any and every M.D. [, medical doctor,] and R.N. [,registered nurse,] to take attitude towards menstrual education that you wanted to have displayed in [the] classroom.”<sup>193</sup> The reason to not trust these health professionals was due to the fact that women needed individuals “with special experience and training and gifted in communicating with the youngsters” like Kotex’s and Tampax’s menstrual educators.<sup>194</sup>

Many families commonly overlooked physicians and registered nurses as potential sources of menstrual information because they felt that health professionals could not present menstrual information in a practical—and secretive—way.<sup>195</sup> Families believed that physicians presented information too much in a clinical sense and did not present menstrual information in a way they wanted their children to learn. Ironically, the people writing the manufacturers’ pamphlets were “nurses and health educators employed by the companies.”<sup>196</sup>

Despite the source of the manufacturers’ educators, mothers, daughters, and teachers enjoyed these presentations for a variety of reasons. School administration viewed these educators as great resources because they (1) planned schools’ programs in line with their wishes—offering suggestions to better that schools’ program, (2) acted as an additional aid of supplementation accompanying the films that were watched by the students, and (3) acted as a resource to answer all questions.<sup>197</sup> Although there were only two menstrual educators to service

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193. Smart and Smart, “Menstrual Education,” 178.

194. *Ibid.*

195. Erchull et al., “Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets About Menstruation,” 471.

196. American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “Menstruation in Girls and Adolescents: Using the Menstrual Cycle as a Vital Sign,” 2245.

197. Smart and Smart, “Menstrual Education,” 178.

both the United States and Canada via information sessions, the educator expressed flexibility with each school which not only made the individual relatable but caused the school to believe that the educator valued the importance and success of that school.<sup>198</sup> The manufacturers also maintained an air of comradery with its audience by enforcing that the menstrual educator visiting the school did “absolutely no advertising or mentioning of the firm’s name.”<sup>199</sup>

## **Primary Sources Showcase Menstrual Product Manufacturers’ Expertise**

### Pamphlets and Movies

In Chapter Two, I critically analyzed a variety of pamphlets to illustrate the profound impact corporate America inflicted on the perception of women by mobilizing taboos. In addition, the information I pulled from *The Story of Menstruation*, in Chapter One, demonstrated how corporate America utilized the rise of media and commercialization to assume the role of expert by playing on the taboos and secrets of menstruation too. I will provide two concrete examples (one from the pamphlets and one from the movie) to illustrate how menstrual product manufacturers fashion themselves as the experts in these products.

*The Story of Menstruation* incorporated a theme of normalcy in its screening. I felt that the movie was making strides for women to accept their menstrual cycle. However, I shortly realized that this push for finding “their normal” was a strategy for Kotex to insert itself in the conversation. At this point, the narrator discussed the necessary calendar women should keep and use to track of their mensural cycle. The narrator, then, continued to discuss how the

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198. Ibid.

199. Ibid.

information would be accompanied with their pamphlet *Very Personally Yours*.<sup>200</sup> This digression from the physiological lesson, clearly demonstrated corporate advertising. It was not only the plethora of reminders that Kimberly-Clark produced products to help menstruating women, but also the corporation gave a brief segment of foods women should and should not eat.<sup>201</sup> The tone the video took concerning these women's behavior demonstrated the role of expertise they already achieved.

The pamphlets had similar characteristics to the movie. In fact, the exercise list that was discussed in the movie can be found in *Very Personally Yours*. The pamphlet girl encouraged young ladies to take care of their menstruation with their Quest products, so “not even your worst enemy [could] make catty remarks about you! For Quest *positively* destroy[ed] body odors.”<sup>202</sup> It was evident that Kotex utilized an air of secrecy and the potential embarrassment if their “hidden stigma” became visible to others. By reintroducing fears ingrained in taboo, menstrual product manufacturers provided their products which made them not only the hero but also the expert in the field of menstruation to this female community. The growing power behind print, radio, and visual advertisements in covering health issues benefited these manufacturers in securing a seat as experts during this time period.<sup>203</sup>

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200. *The Story of Menstruation*.

201. Ibid.

202. *As One Girl to Another*, 10.

203. Tomes, “Merchants of Health: Medicine and Consumer Culture in the United States, 1900-1940,” 531.

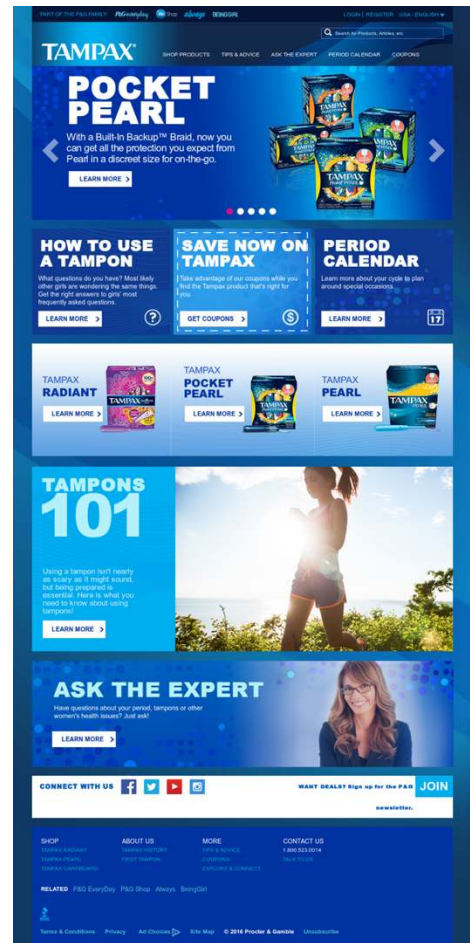


## Tampax Website

In this section, I will be draw on Tampax’s website that I started this chapter with. This website not only served to sell its products from menstrual cups to tampons but it also had many sections that were dedicated to different purposes such as education and training.

Although the feature that I planned to discuss has been recently disabled, I provided a screenshot of the homepage that showed the existence of the website’s feature. Having a tab and section entitled “Ask the Expert” illustrated how Tampax both fashioned and thought of itself as the expert in menstrual education.<sup>204</sup>

However, this tab was not the only portion of the website that illustrated how the organization had created this title for itself.



“Ask the Expert”

Tampax used communication resources as well as media education to not only illustrate its knowledge to the female community but to also disseminate the information to this targeted population. The website used media education to teach its viewers “how to insert a tampon” and “the benefits of Tampax pearl plastic tampons.”<sup>205</sup> There was a video for practically everything an pubescent female may need to answer her questions about menstruation. However, if her questions could

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204. “Ask the Expert.”

205. Ibid.

not be answered from the plethora of videos or articles, she could “Ask the Expert” the remaining questions she had. The expert appeared to not only be friendly with her bright white smile but also looked knowledgeable with her glasses and the caption her right which read the following: “Have questions about your period, tampons, or other women’s health issues? Just Ask!”<sup>206</sup> Tampax gained support from the female population by stating how it cared about the environment, all women, and *your* safety.<sup>207</sup> They played into gaining women’s trust by stating that they wanted to empower women through menstrual education.<sup>208</sup>

Menstrual product manufacturers incorporated different strategies to gain the status of expert in menstrual education. The Tampax website illustrated how menstrual product manufactures used knowledge as a tool to become the expert. On the other hand, the pamphlets illustrated how these manufacturers needed to maintain taboos and the air of secrecy surround menstruation to advance its position in the “menstrual education hierarchy.” By maintain taboos Tampax and Kotex were the default for girls to learn about menstruation which reinforced the idea that these corporations were knowledgeable about this subject matter.

Menstrual product manufacturers became the experts due to three tactics: (1) they leveraged their status as experts by rebranding information from physicians in a practical way for women; (2) they empowered women by providing menstrual hygiene products to ensure their “passing” as a non-menstruator while menstruating; and (3) they manipulated the rise of media and advertisement to their advantage. This information illustrates how knowledge does not define expertise, but sometimes the application of knowledge and rebranding in desired forms

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206. Ibid.

207. Ibid.

208. Ibid.

and mediums can allow for an entity to gain the credibility of an expert. Here menstrual product manufacturers gained this role in mensural education by using taboos, products, and available information to their advantage. By becoming the experts manufacturers also—in a weird way—promoted female empowerment to their audience.

## Conclusion

Although it may be 2018, menstrual product manufactures still have a huge presence in menstrual education. I eluded to this fact with the discussion of Tampax's "Ask the Expert" feature previously on their website. My thesis showed how the seemingly odd fact that menstrual product manufactures educated women about menstruation is not out-of-the-ordinary. In fact, it makes sense that menstrual product manufacturers fashioned themselves as the experts in menstrual education. I set out to see why society "allowed" this to happen, but that is not how we should look at these situations. Instead, I want the reader to understand how corporations not only mobilized the taboo and societal silence that surrounded women's bodies and expectations in order to fashion themselves as experts in women's health and menstrual education but also utilized menstrual education to depict norms, "ideals", and standards for women.

The time frame of this thesis ranged from the 1920s to 2013. However, there are many instances, prior, where expertise is coming into question pertaining to menstruation and its intersection with women's bodies. Although this project focused on the concept of expertise in menstrual education, it is evident from Chapter Three, and even Chapter Two, that the concepts of women empowerment and feminism are vital components in this discussion.

In the mid-twentieth century women empowerment mirrored a woman's ability to "pass." Menstruation was taboo, so in order to be the ideal women, said woman must appear as if she was not menstruating which were illustrated with the tips in the pamphlets, the goals in the movie, as well as the different advertisements that circulated during this period. However, the idea of women empowerment nowadays does not reflect this same message. In fact, brands such as Cora and Sustain Natural illustrate how menstrual product manufacturers still entertain a component of empowerment for the female body.

Recently, I viewed an ad from Sustain Natural appear on Snap Chat with the following: “And now, a letter from your vagina. Read by this grandma. . . wouldn’t you treat your vagina better than your face?”<sup>209</sup> This advertisement along with many other newly surfacing organic menstrual product manufacturers urge women to “think with [thei]r vagina.”<sup>210</sup> This new campaign berates the old feminine hygiene products created predominately by men and encourage women to take initiative to care about their health.

“A women’s body is a powerful thing, so we [, Cora,] created a powerful pad. Engineered by women for the badass women who wear them.”<sup>211</sup>

Cora makes sure to promote and celebrate the strong women that will be wearing these feminine hygiene products. Not only do these new companies ensure that their products are comfortable and safe but they also create a component of possibility for these women. In Cora’s advertisement, the women are doing high, martial art kicks and jumping around. This shows a new idea women empowerment from the previous versions shown in the pamphlets and movies. It is evident that although standards might have changed that menstrual product manufacturers still keep up with these changes to influence the changing female population’s wishes.

I believe that the conversation I deciphered with my own goals has a bigger conversation to uncover. Looking into current commercialization of organic and women-made menstrual hygiene products provide insight to where this conversation might go. My intent was to uncover the reasons how companies such as Kotex and Tampax were the de facto experts, but it could easily be asked how these corporations have stood strong in the twenty-first century with the new

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209. Sustain Natural, advertisement, 2018.

210. Ibid.

211. Cora, advertisement, 2018.

emergence of smaller menstrual product manufacturers. There is something to be said about the social context of media education and the multiple waves of feminism that occurred in a time where talking about sex education—let alone menstrual education—was a silenced topic among schools and homes.

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