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Menstruation Regulation:

A Feminist Critique of Menstrual Product Brands on Instagram

By

Max Faust

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

University Honors Scholars Program

Honors College

College of Arts and Sciences

East Tennessee State University

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### **Abstract**

Much research about advertisements for menstrual products reveals the ways in which such advertising perpetuates shame and reinforces unrealistic ideals of femininity and womanhood. This study aims to examine the content of Instagram posts by four different menstrual product brands in hopes of understanding how these functions may or may not be carried out by social media posts by these brands as well. Building on the body of research about menstrual shame and advertising, I specifically ask: How do the Instagram pages for four menstrual product brands dissuade individuality; how do they prescribe femininity; and how do these functions differ across brands? From a liberal feminist perspective, the examined media exhibits some signs of progress—such as better racial representation—but overall maintains the status quo as to who should be using which products, what womanhood means, and what menstruation entails. These findings indicate that within menstrual product advertising, harmful gender, ability, race, class, and wealth stereotypes continue. Further research of a broader scope is needed to investigate changes on a larger scale, such as within advertising on other platforms and by more brands.

*Key words: menstrual products, menstrual shame, advertising, liberal feminism*

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### **Chapter One: Background and Literature**

There are few bodily functions that will cause as much shock and controversy as menstruation in social situations. Defecation is the crux of jokes for toddlers and (some) grown adults alike (e.g., “I almost s\*\*\* my pants!”); urination is an accepted fact of reality (e.g., “Hold on a second, I have to pee.”). While perhaps not the most polite topic of conversation, in a casual and friendly situation, neither of these statements would fall outside of social norms. Imagine a world where a person interrupts a friendly chat to say, “I have to run to the bathroom, my tampon is slipping out,” or “I laughed so hard I gushed blood!” I find it unlikely that these interjections would be received quite so humorously or gracefully. The shame and stigma that surrounds this particular function is a special case.

That the female body is the source of controversy is neither new nor surprising. In a largely patriarchal, male-run society, the female body exists as a spectacle as often as it is one of mystery and marvel: its unique functions, chiefly menstruation, are even more so (Chrisler, 2010; Bobel, 2010). The men who cannot comprehend a female reality yet exist alongside it then, knowingly or unknowingly, build a system of institutions (read: society) that normalizes their own perspectives; as mass media grows from the male viewpoint, it yields a value system that perpetuates the othering, subjugation, and shaming of the female (Bobel, 2010; Chrisler, 2010; Del-Saz Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). This work seeks first to explore how advertisements dissuade individuality and autonomy; second, its goal is to discover how advertisements prescribe femininity and womanhood; and finally, how different types of products may (or may not) differ in their methods of advertising or in their target audiences. This analysis necessitates an understanding of the current literature and relevant histories regarding advertisements, menstrual products, and menstrual shame as well as the intersection of all three.

## Advertisements

The media that we consume serves as a means of co-constructing reality. In other words, media is a reflection of culture, and culture is also a reflection of media; therefore, media messages that the female body and its functions are inherently flawed, disturbing, and disruptive exist because of a culture that holds these beliefs, and the culture holds these beliefs, at least in part, because those within it consume these messages via media (Del-Saz Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009).

Gerbner's (1998) cultivation theory in its original form proposes that the cumulative effect of television consumption is that it shapes the beliefs and values of those who consume it (Gerbner, 1998; Mosharafa, 2015; Sellnow, 2010). Television, Gerbner argued, provides society with a new way of learning cultural beliefs and values from infancy, since television had become such an integral piece of everyday US American life (1998). Its ability to "[transcend] historic barriers of literacy and mobility" began a process of homogenizing "otherwise heterogenous populations" (pg. 177). In other words, the near omnipresence of the TV in US American households and lifestyle exposed diverse groups to a mainstream media, bottlenecking the US American identity, along with its cultural beliefs and values, down to a more uniform state.

As Gerbner (1998) astutely noted, the majority of human history was spent exchanging stories on a small scale, individual to individual. Very little was written, let alone disseminated on a large scale. The industrial revolution began "the industrialization of storytelling," wherein the printing press allowed narratives to be promulgated beyond a single isolated culture (Gerbner, 1998, pg. 176). Following that, as people began to work in factories rather than on farms, there was an increase in leisure time as well as literacy. Group identities were strengthened by works such as the Christian Bible that united them. Then again nearly 200 years later, the boom of electronics such as radio and TV communication proliferated the exchange of

ideas, and of course, allowed for mass-produced media. This was to the benefit of companies; the more they could circulate “consistent and complementary messages,” the more convincing the messages became, and consequently, the more they stood to profit off convincing the viewers those messages were true (Gerbner, 1998, pg. 178).

The idea that this proliferation of a predominant mass media changed US American culture abounds in rhetorical research on advertising. Del-Saz Rubio and Pennock-Speck (2009) describe how mass media constructs meaning, which “help[s] reinforce and perpetuate power structures by reproducing idealized images or identities which lie at the core of existing social relationships” (pg. 2536). They add that when viewers buy into the portrayed norms, viewers also connect the advertised commodities with a desirable lifestyle (Del-Saz Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). In summation, when a company can convince its viewers that a particular lifestyle is preferential, and that buying their product contributes to having that lifestyle, they increase their revenue. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these functions of mass media apply to other, unforeseen medias, such as social media; likewise, the core assumption of cultivation theory that media shapes culture prevails (Mosharafa, 2015).

The breadth of media and advertisements we consume daily contain messages that affect us whether we realize it or not. Though we may visualize advertisements as TV commercials, currently a significant portion of the advertising we see comes from social media. Research has shown that social media, including YouTube, are more pervasive among younger generations than TV is. A 2018 study by Pew Research Center found that 35% of US American adults use Instagram, including 71% of young adults. The most commonly used social media site, YouTube, is used by 73% of US American adults. Though I analyze social media posts accepting the tenets of cultivation theory, which originally described TV, social media differs from TV in a

few key ways. Social media differs from traditional media in that it does not have to cater to a mainstream audience, as much of the content is user-created. For example, Tumblr relies on the art and creations of its users, and twitter is a collection of short statements or pieces from its users. Much in the same way individuals may subscribe to certain TV channels, they also follow certain accounts or “hashtags” for their content and block others.

That social media are so pervasive and somewhat different from traditional media matters because research suggests that frequent social media use correlates with lower self-esteem, higher body dissatisfaction, increased self-objectifying behaviors, and lower mood (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). After exposure to social media, young women were found to be more self-objectifying and, as a result, had more body shame than their male counterparts (Salomon & Brown, 2019). Similarly, people exposed to “media depictions of the thin-ideal” are more likely to internalize these ideals and measure themselves negatively against them, which becomes apparent in researching those who follow Instagram accounts and Facebook pages focused on “body surveillance” (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2017, pg. 183-184). Especially among teenaged women who are susceptible to media influence and body dysmorphia, exposure to unrealistic ideals in high amounts may be unhealthy, as shown by a positive correlation between time spent on social media and body dissatisfaction (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2017; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). In summary, the social media that teenagers engage may be indicative or even somewhat culpable for lowered self-esteem in young adults, especially women (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).



### **Menstrual Products: A History**

Before the late 19th century, sterile, mass-produced, disposable menstrual products were nonexistent; this may be the only undisputed fact about the history of “menstrual hygiene technology” (Vostral, 2008). Evidence exists that outside of Western tradition, Greek, Mesopotamian, Roman, and Indonesian menstruators all utilized a type of tampon, constructed from wool, cotton, horse hair, and/or other natural fibers available to them, though these tampons may have been used largely for uterine hemorrhaging more often than for the collection of menses (Kidd, 1994).

Though both formal and informal documentation of products used for capturing menses pre-1800 in the Western realm is scarce, it is likely that menstruators relied mostly on rags made of flannel or broadcloth which they had to wash and reuse (Kidd, 1994; Vostral, 2008). Most likely, wisdom for the management of menses was passed privately between menstruators since literacy rates were low (especially amongst women) and there were few if any publications that dealt with practical management of menstruation (Kidd, 1994; Erchull et. al, 2002). Further evidence suggests that as early as the 1800s, menstruators used a primitive garter belt-esque contraption with straps to be worn over the shoulders to hold a “diaper” in place (Kidd, 1994). Some historians assert it was likely that other menstruators, especially those in poverty, simply practiced what would today be called “free-bleeding”; that is, they bled into their clothing, using no product or contraption to capture or conceal menses (Kidd, 1994). It should be noted that this act would not have been one of social rebellion or political commentary, but likely of necessity. That is all to say, until the rise of mass-produced menstrual products, the issue of menstrual product design was not hygiene, rather secrecy, convenience, or access.

In the early days of advertising, however, the emphasis was indeed placed upon hygiene, promising women a sanitary option to prevent disease and infection (Park, 1996). At this time,

near the turn of the 20th century, menstruation was viewed as “blood resulting from a recurrent internal wound caused by ovulation” (Park, 1996, pg. 152). Therefore, rather than a “regular” bodily fluid, menses were an issue of hygiene, and improper collection and disposal of it was a risk to public health (Park, 1996). Advertisers began blatantly capitalizing on contemporary fears of influenza and disease to sell to the wealthy who wanted to quell their panic (Mandziuk, 2010). Advertisements for menstrual products vilified those who could not afford disposable products as unclean and sources of infection. These views coincided with a new medical paradigm that positioned the menstruating body as a factory, wherein menstruation is a filthy byproduct of the failed “production” of offspring (Martin, 2002).

After the crash of the stock market in 1929, wealth remained a forefront issue for menstruators (Park, 1996). Only the wealthiest of women could afford to continue buying products like Lysol and Kotex, the “only” products that allowed a woman to be as hygienic as their male counterpart would be (Park, 1996). Lysol disinfectant spray would be touted as the remedy to the “illness” of menstruation, enabling the “post-suffrage, post-WWI” woman to “compete with and for men” (Park, 1996, p. 154). In order to exist in the male sphere, the workforce, menstruators had to be able to suppress their periods and become as close to the male ideal as possible. Once again, only the wealthy white could afford these luxuries, and the ability to conceal menstruation allowed them a place at the privilege table.

By the 1960s, disposable pads and tampons were the most commonly used menstrual products; however, the 1970s brought a large increase in the use of the hormonal birth control pills as well as vaginal douches and sprays (Levine, 2002). The manufacturers of these products capitalized on the already-constructed Victorian ideas about sex and vaginas: that they are unclean, messy, and shameful (Levine, 2002). The rise of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) was

conducive to this rhetoric, construing periods as a mysterious, unfathomable source of illness and disease (Bobel, 2010). On the other hand, the 1960s brought about the Tassaway, a disposable menstrual cup, followed in the 1970s by the first reusable menstrual cup, called the Keeper (Bobel, 2010). This coincided with the publication of *Women & Their Bodies*, later re-named and republished as *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the first recognized publication to “openly and honestly” explore “unmentionable topics, including orgasm, the clitoris, the pill, and abortion” (Bobel, 2010, p. 44). Since the 1960s, the metrics of the usage of menstrual products remains about the same: Proctor & Gamble who make Tampax and Always, Kimberly-Clark who make Kotex and Poise, Johnson & Johnson who make OB and Stayfree, and Playtex who make Playtex products are the major players of the menstrual product industry (Bobel, 2010). Though DivaCup, GladRags, and other alternative products may be on some menstruators’ radars, they have remained “alternative” products and hold only a small piece of the market.

Today, I am unable to find any large-scale, reputable statistics about the demographics of menstrual product use in the United States; therefore, no definitive statements about what demographics are using which menstrual products could be made. However, menstrual cups and other “alternative” menstrual products are largely associated with a white, middle-class world and may be used more commonly in queer populations. Along the same line, queer individuals are already performing social transgressions and “are well positioned to extend their critique [of hegemonic discourses and practices] to any number of social norms, including the menstrual status quo” (Bobel, 2010, p. 149). Menstruators who do not identify as female may also choose to use menstrual cups because of the way they capture menses internally, eliminating the need for products such as menstrual pads which are more easily felt and may cause gender dysphoria due to their association with womanhood and femininity.

Bobel argues that because Blackness is equated with unruliness and lack of discipline and hygiene, Black menstruators are held to different standards in order to “deserve” respectability (2010). For example, as the vagina is seen as “dirty,” touching it is even more so. Black menstruators may avoid products that require more interaction with the vagina and menses (such as menstrual cups and reusable cloth pads) because of the strict social rules they must adhere to in order to be perceived as clean and respectable. By contrast, white menstruators do not risk their social status in the same way when they demonstrate social transgression (Bobel, 2010).

Divisions exist across class and ability lines as well. Homeless menstruators, for example, have spoken widely about the loss of dignity they feel when they are unable to afford menstrual products (Vora, 2016). Though reusable products may be more economical over time, some people cannot afford to pay an initial \$40 for a silicone menstrual cup or \$80 for a starter pack of reusable cloth pads, let alone have a way to launder them. Menstruators with disabilities likewise present a complicated issue. Conventional practice has been to “treat” these menstruators’ periods with hormonal birth control or even sterilization via hysterectomy to minimize the frequency and heaviness of menstruation, rather than attempt to teach basic hygiene practices of changing pads (Backeljauw, 2004; Klein et. al, 2015). In 2015, Altundağ and Çalbayram (2015) conducted a workshop with disabled menstruators and found many of them could learn how to use pads. Those with physical disabilities may have different menstrual needs as well. Someone with weak joints or muscles may avoid the menstrual cup because of the dexterity it requires to insert. Alternatively, someone in a wheelchair may choose a menstrual cup because they only have to change it twice a day, as opposed to a tampon or pad which would require them to maneuver to change more often. Reusable cloth menstrual pads may present a

difficulty for someone who struggles to do their own laundry, whether due to access to laundry machines, physical limitations, or both. These are only a few of the considerations that people of different demographics may consider when selecting menstrual products today.

### **A Culture of Shame and Stigma**

The celebrated sociologist, Goffman (1963), defines stigma as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (p. 11). In today’s climate, the circumstance of having a vagina alone is stigmatizing and prevents the possibility of full social acceptance (Jenkins, A., Crann, S., Money, D., & O’Doherty, K., 2017). Take, for example, the way in which the female body is uniquely demonized in various media. In our patriarchal society, built on thousands of years of patriarchal societies, the *othering* of the female body is a natural result (Bobel, 2010). Now, even women have so deeply internalized the male gaze that they self-objectify (Bobel, 2010; Grose & Grabe, 2014). In other words, women turn the male gaze upon themselves and use it to guide their own outward appearance and behaviors.

Previous studies have shown the consistent negative portrayals of women and menstruation in media (Erchull, 2011; Levine, 2002; Mandziuk, 2010; McMillan & Jenkins, 2016; Merskin, 1999; Park, 1996; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2005). First, these representations often include the narrative of illness; menstruation is a type of disability or illness, indicative of a health issue (Martin, 2001; Mandziuk, 2010). This can be seen in the mere existence of a whole line of medicine, Midol, to “cure” the pains of menstruation. By using nurses as spokespeople and targeting the average ailed homemaker, Kotex’s earliest ads were participating in this storytelling as well (Park, 1996). As recently as 2017, a vegan blogger went viral when she claimed that after going on a raw, vegan diet, she stopped having her period entirely, and she believed this was because she was no longer ingesting “toxins” which were

what her periods were expelling from her body (Sholl, 2017). A second frequent narrative is that menstruation presents some type of danger, and that menstruators are in need of protection, both from themselves and external threats (Bobel, 2010). De Waal Malefyt and McCabe (2016) note how this particular view relies on a culture which buys into a patriarchal binary gender system, reflecting gender ideologies beyond menstrual beliefs (though this is not unique of this narrative, it is most salient here). Third, menstrual advertisements especially posit menstruators as leaky, unruly, and disruptive (Mandziuk, 2010; Bobel, 2010; Kama & Barak-Brandes, 2013). The use of language such as “clean,” “fresh,” and “refreshing” in advertisements for menstrual products contributes to the social construction of vaginas as disgusting and in need of hygienic overhaul (Jenkins, Crann, Money, & O’Doherty, 2017). The advertising techniques that began in a society recently liberated from the Spanish Influenza remains potently hygiene-centric to this day. Finally, menstruation is portrayed as limiting; therefore, menstruators are in need of liberation. Even the brand name “Stayfree” alludes to this (Park, 1996).

Of course, the producers of these advertisements propose solutions to these “problems” by use of their products. The first proposed solution is secrecy, concealment, and/or discreetness. In other words, if a person must endure the indecency of menstruating, they should at least have the dignity of hiding it from everyone else, lest others should find out (Park, 1996; Chrisler, 2011). The second is the “in spite of” narrative, which asserts that the suppression of menstruation and its associated symptoms can allow menstruators to function “normally” *in spite of* their menstrual status, rather than interpreting menstruation as *a normal state of being* (Bobel, 2010; Merskin, 199; Mandziuk, 2012). That is, a person should pathologize their menstrual experience and medicate to treat related symptoms. And finally, the least often seen solution is to eschew shame and embrace menstruation. This final point highlights the issue that incites much

of this research: society and advertisements within society continue to treat menstruation as if it should be erased, rather than erasing the shame associated with it.

### **Menstruation and “the Female”**

In a society that conflates female with menstruation and menstruation with female, I would like to separate the two for a moment. Whether menstrual stigma causes female stigma or vice versa is certainly a valid question but not one I aim to answer here. Rather, I argue that whether we classify the group as female menstruators and menstruating females, both identities intersect to construct a social location (Bobel, 2010). Having acknowledged this, for the remainder of this paper, I use “female” when I mean “person who presents as and identifies as female” and “menstruator” when referring to the group of individuals who menstruate, regardless of gender. A female who menstruates is simultaneously more socially acceptable and less socially acceptable because of the state of being able to menstruate. Menstruation signifies sexual maturity, fertility, and—in more modern gynecological paradigms—health; it also elicits disgust and is a reminder that the menstruator does not have what society would call a male body. Menstruation is also a perceived weakness and ailment (Vostral, 2008); PMS and PMDD are both pathologizations of a condition that may be entirely natural, resulting from a society that refuses to acknowledge the female condition as “normal.” Conversely, a female who does not menstruate, regardless of reason, is not perceived as a full and complete woman (Martin, 2001); it is taken as an indication that this female cannot produce children and is unhealthy. Because this woman is not producing children, her empty womb causes her distress, and her lack of children borne by her own womb makes her a social pariah (Martin, 2001). Further, this female may be excluded from experiences such as sharing menarche stories, having baby showers, and asking friends for a tampon, which are culturally significant bonding experiences between

females. Likewise, a menstruator who is not or does not identify as female is restricted from other identities; we as a society do not yet seem ready to accept that non-women can have periods. That is all to say, even the ideal woman is not the ideal person. Androcentrism is the construction of a society around the belief in male normalcy and female “otherness” (Bem, 1993). This is why, for example, so many scientific studies and medicinal trials are conducted solely on men (Bem, 1993). This disenfranchisement of menstruators, both as women and as a category unto itself, is the focus of this research.

Controversy follows menstruation, as research has shown. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998) proposes that one reason this may be the case is that the public receives consistent messages about the female body as well as menstruation, and these messages often set unrealistic ideals of “cleanliness,” beauty, and the modern woman. Therefore, society has strong ideas about menstruation, such as how it should be concealed and contained and the products that should be used for such actions. Though researchers have conducted studies into rhetoric of menstruation in advertisements (Vostral, 2008; Chrisler, 2011; Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009; Erchull, 2013; Jenkins, Crann, Money, & O’Doherty, 2017; Kama & Barak-Brandes, 2013; Levine, 2002; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016; Mandziuk, 2010; McCartney, 2012; Merskin, 1999; Park, 1996; Weiner, 2004), there exists a gap in the research about advertisements on social media pages as well as comparing advertisements for different types of products (i.e., disposable tampons and pads versus reusable cups and menstrual sponges). For these reasons, I concentrate my thesis on examining the social media pages of menstrual product brands.



## **Chapter Two: Methods**

My main objective in this study is to examine how advertisements function to perpetuate menstrual stigma and the patriarchy with a focus on prescriptive femininity and the ideals social media imposes. Given that, I have decided that a primarily liberal feminist approach will best enable me to discuss the issues of menstruation, stigma, and their implications. The following outlines my understanding of liberal feminism, its relationship to other types of feminism, and how I will apply it in analysis.

### **Liberal Feminism**

To analyze my artifacts, I construct an analytical framework drawn from liberal feminism. Liberal feminism provides a perspective through which to view my artifacts, but, as every theoretical framework, does not encompass all things. Rather, it guides my viewpoint and allows me to focus on the issues of autonomy, femininity, masculism, and so forth.

More so than any other concept, autonomy is at the core of liberal feminism (Baehr, 2018). Liberal feminists believe that personal and political autonomy are both necessary for a life as a sovereign being, and that the current state of society fails in providing women with these tools (Baehr, 2018). According to certain liberal feminists, such as MacKenzie and Stoljar (2000), personal autonomy requires “certain enabling conditions,” including freedom from violence, freedom from patriarchal standards, and freedom of choice (Baehr, 2018). Furthermore, Stoljar (2011) argued that agency is the freedom to reject historically oppressive institutions (such as the woman as the involuntary domestic laborer in marriage) but also the freedom to choose to live within those institutions. It is not necessarily independence or self-sufficiency, Stoljar said, but the freedom to choose independence and self-sufficiency if desired. Liberal feminism rejects the notion that roles traditionally prescribed to women are inherently oppressive

or mutually exclusive with liberation; rather, these roles can be an empowering example of choice. This aside, Stoljar (2011) warned against de-contextualizing these choices and concluding that *all* women who, for example, rear children, are doing so entirely of their own volition and without the influence of a society that encourages this role from them. Therefore, from a liberal feminist perspective, feminist work should first concern itself with this psychological liberation and with the promotion of freedom of choice (Baehr, 2018). For example, does a woman see for herself viable alternatives to motherhood, and if she chooses motherhood, does she then question whether she has freely chosen this path?

Liberal feminism also critiques the masculinist structure of society and the workplace. For example, liberal feminism finds it problematic to prioritize the work men do (whatever that may be) and the expectation of a career trajectory that does not include significant time off for child-rearing (Baehr, 2018). Blair, Brown, and Baxter (1994) criticize an article that ranked female scholars within the Communication Studies field, noting that men were more likely to publish often early in their career, then plateau, whereas women were more likely to do the bulk of their research after achieving tenure. Drawing on the differing “temporal rhythm” between genders, the authors Blair, Brown, and Baxter (1994) described just one way that the ranking was constructed within a male paradigm and aggressive towards women. These types of “yardsticks,” fabricated in a society by men, *for* men, often devalue and belittle women and their work.

Here Marxist- and liberal feminisms intersect; Marxist-feminism highlights how a capitalist structure demands a highly regulated public workforce, including the suppression of those previously restricted to the domestic sphere: women (Park, 1996). For example, recalling my literature review, the popularity of disposable pads and tampons aligned with the increase of women in the workforce who were required to conceal all signs of menstruation in order to

conform to the standards of male bodies (Park, 1996). Capitalists, or those who controlled production and employment, viewed functions of the female body as a hindrance to production whilst unpaid domestic and reproductive labor went unseen, because it did not directly increase productivity (Armstrong, 2020). Correspondingly, liberal feminism calls for a fair landscape where *all* people are valued, where gender differences can be controlled for (not expected nor enforced, however), and where women, whose life experiences and socialization often vary from those of men, do not enter most every social domain at a disadvantage.

Some iterations of liberal feminism also believe in the fairness of relationships; that is, a “give and take” that are distributed between relationship partners in a way that both (or all) partners see as equitable (Baehr, 2018). For my analysis, the key piece is the empowerment and dignity within relationships; a menstruator should not feel shamed or afraid to experience their bodily functions, especially within an intimate relationship (Hampton, 1993). They should not feel pressured to hide or conceal their experiences as a means of currency, in order to “make up for” the inherent shortcomings associated with being a menstruator. Furthermore, they should not feel the need to ascribe to the use of more “traditional” menstrual products, such as cotton tampons and disposable pads, for the sake of avoiding their partner’s disgust.

Martha Nussbaum (1999), another notable liberal feminist, further argued that flourishing is a human right. According to Nussbaum, flourishing for a human being includes bodily health, integrity, and political participation (Baehr, 2018). Rather than experiencing directly all of these functions, however, the importance is having the ability or freedom to do so if desired (Baehr, 2018). In a system that suppresses women and menstruators, pathologizes their bodily functions, and impresses unrealistic and often unhealthy standards upon them, this

viewpoint becomes increasingly relevant. Without the freedom to be healthy and empowered, we do not live in an equal society.

Through this liberal feminist lens, we must also note how every action done of one's own volition becomes a form of feminist rhetorical action (Stone, 2019). For example, a woman walking down the street to a coffee shop alone would normally be motivated by a desire for a coffee, or maybe even to meet a friend; but through this perspective, one might argue that the woman is exercising her freedom to walk alone, her freedom to make choices about where to go, and her ability to spend capital as strong political statements. Further, the line between body and identity becomes blurred in a culture concerned heavily with appearance, which in turn causes bodily actions to become political statements, especially within the heavily politicized female body (Budgeon, 2003). For example, a woman might choose to undergo breast augmentation surgery and see it as a statement of believing herself worthy of investment and desire to "improve"; another woman may refuse breast augmentation surgery despite others' criticisms of her body and see it as an assertion of self-acceptance and unwillingness to conform to societal expectations. In a capitalist system, therefore, the use of a product can become political as well. To illustrate, the use of Thinx panties, underwear which claims to be able to catch menses with the same effectiveness as a traditional pad or tampon, is a presentation of self as well and a statement about identity.

While this liberal feminist view may empower some, it also removes some of the agency it—ironically—intends to highlight. In the context of this research, a menstruator's choice in menstrual products becomes a political statement rather than a personal decision determined by private factors, such as heaviness of flow, comfort with or sensitivity to certain materials, and desired discreteness. Further, we must call into question the inherent oppressiveness of these

products in how they suppress and conceal menstruation, considering the possibility that in a matriarchal society, suppression and concealment of menses may not be expected, let alone required. A matriarchal world may view fabric dyed (as opposed to stained) with menstrual blood as a sign of power rather than shame; a menstruator might be proud of the fluctuations their body makes and its flexibility shifting through hormonal cycles, rather than ashamed of how their so-called unbalanced hormones make them especially emotional.

A particular reason why a liberal feminist perspective for this research offers value is that it does not staunchly exclude other branches of feminism. My analysis also contains elements of Marxist-feminism, which addresses the inequities and oppressions of capitalism (Armstrong, 2020); radical feminism, which proposes that the current system is so thoroughly flawed that it must be rebuilt from the ground-up (Bobel, 2010); and cultural feminism, which values that which makes women unique and solicits the creation of a culture, or perhaps even a salient subculture, where women are celebrated (Bobel, 2010).

Again, I note that while these frameworks afford the ability to critique artifacts, they do not capture nor strive to capture every angle from which a given artifact may be critiqued. Likewise, my own feminism reflects my life experiences; my interpretation of feminism and of artifacts is filtered through a lens of my personal perspective. Nonetheless, this framework proves crucial to a contemporary and systematic review of any given material. The landscape it describes and underscores demands us to turn a critical eye to the media we consume.

### **Artifacts**

In the interest of analyzing recent media, I chose to gather the entire cumulation of posts on four menstrual product brands' Instagram pages over a four-week period, from mid-September of 2019 until mid-October of 2019. During this period, all posts from each brand on

each day were archived for study. The particular months were chosen only because of recency, but I chose to analyze half of two months rather than one complete calendar month in an attempt to control for some month-long projects that some of the brands, particularly Saaltco, were running at the time (namely, a menstrual cup giveaway). Two of the brands that I analyzed were for more traditional, disposable products: UByKotex and Tampax cotton tampons. I chose the two brands The DivaCup and Saaltco because they produce the “alternative” products of menstrual cups, as has already been discussed, and they are two of the most prolific menstrual cup producers and post on Instagram more often than comparable companies, providing me with more material for my analysis. Because the two types of products often represent different demographic interests, I want to consider potential differences in how they market themselves to consumers. In total, the amount of posts from all four companies over this four-week period was 80. The below table, *Table 1*, gives specifics about the quantity and medium of advertisement.

Table 1			
<i>Artifacts by Brand and Format</i>			
		Format	
Brand	Total Artifacts	Images	Videos
The DivaCup	15	11	4
UByKotex	8	8	0
Saaltco	42	42 (in 32 posts)	0
Tampax	13	13 (in 7 posts)	0

Total	78	74	4
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The advertisements are a variety of posts including posts containing images of the products, posts about women and/or menstruators who use the products, and more. Some are blatant advertisements while others are more subtle, including endorsements from users.

To code these artifacts, I took color-coded notes about each advertisement on paper. Information such as dates were written in blue, quotes from the advertisements and their captions were in red, descriptions in green, visual descriptions in orange, and other notes (such as patterns I noticed, spontaneous thoughts, and possibly insignificant details) were written in pink. This allowed me to easily scan for patterns while reviewing notes while ensuring I was consistently noting analogous details from different posts throughout my coding of different artifacts.

With these artifacts, I examine how menstrual product brands on social media market their products in a way which sets boundaries for femininity, stigmatizes menstruation, and reinforces a masculinist-structured society.

### Chapter Three: Analysis

Given the problems of restrictive standards for femininity and dissuasion of individuality in menstrual product marketing, I turn my attention to menstrual product brands UByKotex, The DivaCup, Saaltco, and Tampax. Specifically, I explore here three main questions: how menstrual product brands market their products in ways that discourage individual thinking; how menstrual product brands market their products in ways that prescribe a particular, “correct” femininity and womanhood; and how different brands market themselves to different audiences.

#### Individuality and Autonomy

Underscoring first the issues of suppressed individuality and limited autonomy in menstrual product advertising, I explored the messages conveyed menstrual product brands in their Instagram posts. Specifically, I focused on how these artifacts did (or did not) discourage individual choice.

First, advertisers must position themselves as the source of knowledge. Most blatantly, in late September, The DivaCup launched a new website, which is advertised as having How-Tos, videos, stories, and FAQs about menstrual cups where viewers can learn more about their bodies and menstrual cups. “You have questions, we have answers,” it reads, positioning itself as a helpful, neutral resource rather than the extended advertising tool it is. The other brands were not innocent in this regard, using phrases like “We are all neighbors” (Saaltco, 2019a), “We support you” (Saaltco, 2019c), “With U, She Can” (UByKotex, 2019f), and “It takes a community” (Saaltco, 2019e) in order to sell themselves as a friend and member of the community of menstruators rather than a *brand*, there to sell a product. Here marketers capitalize on a knowledge gap, the same gap which past foundational publications such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* have filled (Bobel, 2010). The shame perpetuated surrounding the issue of



menstruation in our culture allows for this gap, creating a barrier for those with questions to find answers. When parents, guardians, schools, and other grown figures in a menstruator's life fail to provide them with accurate information and reliable resources for that information, they leave the individual vulnerable to potential misinformation and marketing that may not always prioritize the wellbeing of its consumers.

After establishing their own credibility, the advertisements dictate what the concerns of menstruators should be when it comes to selecting menstrual products. Among the four brands studied, all emphasized in some way wellness, protection, and access. Wellness was discussed as a state of being healthy in mind and body, such as the yoga teachers and vegans found in Saaltco posts (Saaltco, 2019j), to the UByKotex post of a woman exercising at the gym (UByKotex, 2019d), to Tampax “[striving] to give the people the choices they want when it comes to their wellness routines” (2019b). Similarly, The DivaCup celebrates—or perhaps exploits—World Mental Health day by proclaiming, “Feeling good inside goes beyond what you put inside your body” (The DivaCup, 2019k). Through this, advertisers tell the audience that they need to pay attention to wellness, and that their product is an essential way to achieve wellness.

Protection is a central yet ambiguous term, understood as a measure or object which serves to minimize suffering. In terms of protection, the idea reverberates through menstrual advertising from the days of its conception (Park, 1996). Menstrual cup advertisers tout the 12 hours of “protection” wearing a cup provides, while tampon advertisers claim, for example, they can provide “the trusted protection you expect” (Tampax, 2019a). These products provide protection for their users; therefore, protection must be something consumers should care about. Of note is that the advertisers neglect to include necessary details when saying their products offer “protection.” What are menstruators being protected from? From the embarrassment of

leaking menses through their clothes? From having to get stains out of their clothes? From interacting with their own menses? From their own bodies in general? What type of “24/7 protection” are these products offering? The implication here is that menses is something to be guarded from, furthering the stigma of the menstruating body. This reiterates the terrifying unnamed threat of menstruation. Additionally, the rhetoric of “protection” reinforces women as helpless damsels, needing the assistance of some greater *thing* beyond and above their gender or sex to protect them.

Where wellness and protection were more personal concerns, access is where the advertisements begin to get political. In addition to honing in on “protection” as an essential piece of menstrual products, advertisers also propose that menstruators should be socially responsible consumers and beings. Many of the analyzed posts convey that menstruators should be concerned with whether other menstruators worldwide have access to menstrual products. Saaltco donates to women in African countries while UByKotex wants to give US Americans in need access to “period supplies” (UByKotex, 2019a; UByKotex, 2019f). The DivaCup also mentions “period poverty,” or the inability of women and other menstruators, particularly in the global south, to access necessary supplies and facilities for the management of menses which often results in lost education (Day, 2018). Another issue The DivaCup raises is abolishing the “pink tax,” or money spent by women on products such as makeup and razors with artificially-inflated costs that assist them in appealing to socially-prescribed feminine ideals (Lafferty, 2019). Tampax brings forth the issue of body-unsafe materials as well as ethical sourcing of raw materials, touting their “PUREandEasy” tampons, “free of dyes, fragrances, and chlorine bleaching” and “responsibly sourced” (Tampax, 2019a; Tampax, 2019c). Thus, the product is not

only about the physical experience of using it, but also the political statement it makes when consumers buy and use it.

In addition to enforcing the priorities of menstruators, menstrual advertising companies also reinforce hegemonic stereotypes about menstruation. As one might expect, there is the stigma of periods being messy and dirty; “Stay protected all night,” says DivaCup (2019f). Further, periods are annoying and disruptive, as illustrated by Tampax’s quote: “Being a woman is all fun and games until that time of the month!” (2019a). They are also naturally painful and inhibitive, especially without special products like UByKotex, with which “she can” presumably do anything, as this product empowers her (2019f). Saalt Cup reminds consumers that periods are shameful, too, and using a discreet product like a menstrual cup is like “getting away with something” (Saaltco, 2019ee). Euphemisms must be used as well, such as in the lighthearted video of menstruators of different ages giggle about the silly names they use for their vulvas, vaginas, and menstruation—everything from “the pink canoe [riding] the crimson wave” to “beef curtains” (The DivaCup, 2019d). This both infantilizes menstruators and discourages honest, clear communication about their bodies and its functions. While it may be an attempt to bring humor to menstruation and thus decrease the shame that surrounds it, it conveys that menstruation is the “Thing-Which-Must-Not-Be-Named” of our society, so vile that the mere mention of it elicits fear and disgust. The state of menstruation is also a transformation—menstruators are unlike themselves, an entirely new monster while menstruating, which excuses and enables them to “misbehave,” such as the apparent author of an article on DivaCup’s (2019g) new website whose headline reads: “My period made me eat it!” above a picture of a decadent cupcake. These stereotypes perpetuate the pathologization and stigmatization of

menstruation. They tell the audience falsehoods about who has periods and what the experience of having a period should be, and that it should largely be undesirable.

The culmination of these messages is that menstruation is shameful as are those who menstruate, but by using the correct product one can atone for some of this shame. Regardless of what is most comfortable or convenient for a menstruator, they should choose the product that allows them to be well, protected, and empowered. Individual choice based on personal preference be damned, more important issues are at the forefront of a person's choice in menstrual products.

### **Femininity and Womanhood**

The themes of femininity and womanhood abound in these advertisements. In addition to presenting particular types of womanhood, advertisers also treat menstruation as a central part of womanhood and vice-versa. Cumulatively, two major portrayals of women emerged: one was the modern, empowered woman, and the second was the global-south, in-need-of-a-hero woman. To the first of these themes, the Saaltco Instagram page, for example, highlighted 14 different women during the four weeks of study. These women were largely white or white-passing, attractive, thin, and embodied wealth and education through expensive clothing as luxurious settings (Saaltco, 2019c; Saaltco, 2019d; Saaltco, 2019f; Saaltco, 2019h; Saaltco, 2019j; Saaltco, 2019l; Saaltco, 2019n; Saaltco, 2019p; Saaltco, 2019q; UByKotex, 2019a; UByKotex, 2019e; The DivaCup, 2019b; Tampax, 2019a; Tampax, 2019g; Tampax, 2019i). For example, in one (Tampax, 2019a), the subject of the photograph sits with her legs crossed in an oval-shaped wicker hanging chair on a modern-style-decorated porch, reading a book barefoot in "boyfriend" jeans and an expensive watch. Captions on these posts further such a narrative: "Kelsey is a First Grade [sic] teacher, writer, and newlywed," reads one post (SaaltCup, 2019h). Another reads,

“[Emily] loves making women feel beautiful and empowered through her work” (SaaltCup, 2019n). This highlight reel of exceptional women does provide the audience with potential feminist role models, but doing so also conveys that these women are the right type of women whose lives are worthy of portrayal. By being fit, young, empowered, open-minded activists, these women embody the ideal US American woman.

Despite the prominence of young and ambitious women, other types of women also appeared. The women who defied the expectations of race, class, education, and Westernization were in five of Saaltco’s posts: they are brown, from places such as Nepal and Darfur, but also placed in a position inferior to the modern, enlightened woman (Saaltco, 2019k; Saaltco, 2019n). While in two of these five posts, the women are active (playing soccer and strolling on the beach), others are not so engaged, instead sitting at worn wooden desks in a large outdoor classroom wearing matching school uniforms while receiving instructions (Saaltco, 2019aa). I also feel it necessary to note that the aforementioned post containing images of brown women strolling on the beach only includes the women from their thighs down, enough to show their garments without showing their faces; another post contains the image of two arms, one appearing brown, holding menstrual cups (Saaltco, 2019q). This contributes to the trope of dismembered, faceless women, a trope which most commonly appears in the form of sexualization of women of color (Conley & Ramsey, 2011). This dismemberment tends to limit especially women who are largely absent in much of our media, including in menstrual product advertisements. While this particular post is hardly sexual, I do argue it fetishized the women as a spectacle. It is not intended to showcase the skills or interesting lives of women of color; it is intended to invoke a self-congratulatory sense of “do-gooderism” with the (surfacial) inclusivity and diversity of this brand. The majority of the posts depict them as recipients of education and

donations, being acted upon as the beneficiaries of the good grace of their counterpart, the ideal modern feminist.

In addition to contributing to the social construction of limited “types” of women, the advertisements also conflated menstruation with womanhood. In these advertisements, menstruation is an essential part of womanhood, and womanhood is necessary for menstruation. Phrases like “As a woman” (Tampax, 2019c) as well as the use of the word “Diva—broadly understood as a reference to women—in the product, The DivaCup, suggest that it is womanhood, not experiencing menstruation, that makes one a target of this advertising and gives a person authority to speak about menstruation. Additionally, in my perusal, I found no examples of openly/obviously non-cisgender female individuals displayed in these brands’ posts, despite that fact that non-binary individuals with uteruses and trans men can also menstruate. By this, the advertisers are asserting that menstruators *are* women, and that non-women menstruators do not exist.

With one exception, wealth was only mentioned explicitly to compare price of products with a condescending tone; that is, rather than speaking to those who may not be able to afford menstrual products, they were spoken about and acted upon (The DivaCup, 2019a; The DivaCup, 2019l; Saaltco, 2019e; Saaltco, 2019g, Saaltco, 2019l). These pages were meant to be seen by menstruators who are wealthy enough to donate, not by those who may be in need of donations. Imagine a post such as, “Is the budget too tight for menstrual products this month? Send us an email and we will help you get the resources you need.” Instead, the posts target wealthier individuals who can feel good that they are supporting a cause (even if it is simply in the form of buying a product they already need anyway), turning the so-called “less fortunate” into objects of their goodwill (Luck, 2015). This not only erases the existence of menstruators

who need donations, but it implies that menstruators who need donations are “less than,” not worthy of being addressed. This relates back to the ideal woman: one who is both wealthy enough to give to others and one who does so, either in spirit or reality.

This rhetoric also perpetuates the idea that it is an individual’s responsibility to screen everything they buy, and only buy the most ethical products sourced from the most ethical places. This false presentation of locus of control removes the obligation of ethical practice from corporations and endows that burden on all consumers: those without education, those without fiscal resources, those without knowledge, and those without time. It furthers the self-righteousness of the wealthy white who can afford to spend their time researching whether Tampax tampons decompose naturally or whether a The DivaCup menstrual cup is made with medical-grade silicone so they can weaponize this knowledge against those who use the accessible and affordable disposable options (often, again, those in minority groups who have been deprived of education, deprived of opportunities for wealth, and deprived of choices).

The portrayal of the “right” type of woman in these advertisements and posts polarizes women and menstruators and illustrates how a particular product is the solution to this rift. Intentionally or unintentionally, by enforcing standards of womanhood, marketers alienate those who do not fit the standards. Past research has shown how unrealistic portrayals of particularly women in media affect self-esteem (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Salomon & Brown, 2019; Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2017). Along with portraying these perfect people in their advertisements, advertisers suggest that by using their product, consumers can become more like the idealized people in their advertisements.

### **Differences Across Companies**

Though my research uncovered more similarities than differences among the four analyzed brands, a few key differences emerged.

First, Saaltco produced a higher volume of posts, at 46 in a four-week period. The DivaCup and Tampax both posted 13 times, while UByKotex posted eight times. I theorize that Saaltco, being a lesser-known company, attempts to engage an audience via social media because they lack a significant presence elsewhere (such as in print media or on TV).

Second, though all four brands mentioned social responsibility in some regard, it seemed a higher focus for Saaltco. Saaltco referenced this social awareness most often, including regular mentions of donations and giveaways, sustainability, and poverty (Saaltco, 2019e; Saaltco, 2019i). UByKotex and The DivaCup were comparable in their mention of social responsibility, having around half of their posts each concern issues of period poverty. Tampax only referred to consumer responsibility in terms of marketing their newest PURE tampons, responsibly-sourced and free of bleaches and dyes, which could be for the benefit of the consumer concerned about chemical consumption as much as it could be for the “responsibly-sourced” portion (Tampax, 2019a; Tampax, 2019b; Tampax, 2019c).

Third, advertisements on all brand pages were not meant for the mainstream audience. An intentional effort to include minorities—such as Saaltco’s inclusion of a woman married to another woman (2019l) and the common inclusion of women of color in UByKotex advertisements (2019c; 2019g)—indicates that these companies know their audience: the people who visit the social media pages of menstrual product brands are not likely to be those offended by “political-correctness culture,” and their advertisements show it. The advertisements play to an educated, young, and socially aware audience, though this social awareness may be superficial.



### Discussion & Conclusion

My research aligns with much of the literature that exists about menstrual product advertising, particularly how notions of antiquated hegemonic dogma about menstruation persists even through a shifting culture. Merskin (1999) found superficial changes in menstrual advertising from the 1920s until the 1990s, but she observed a lack of diversity in advertisements as well as prevailing sentiments of menstruation as shameful; similarly, I found that rather than hygiene (a theme of 1920s ads) or secrecy (a theme of 1980s-1990s ads), the focus has shifted to social responsibility, liberation, and being empowered “despite” menstruation (Merskin, 1999). Encouraging changes in racial representation may indicate other positive changes to come, such as representation of disabled individuals, transgender individuals, and those with lower incomes—not as objects of activism, but as active participants in their own lives and choices.

Ultimately, consumers generally understand that brands do not have consumers’ best interests in mind, instead chasing profits, but this fact does not absolve marketers of their responsibility for the effects their products have on consumers—not just physically, but emotionally and mentally. The hegemonic ideals espoused by these brands, regardless of prevalence, harm consumers by excluding a great majority of the population. They police and sanction gender expression and restrictive sex roles. The brands exchange self-confidence and empowerment of unwitting consumers for the guarantee that those same consumers will continue buying the product (their product) that offers solutions for contrived issues.

In terms of physical health, these brands may not always heed the wellness of consumers. The Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) scare of the 1980s exhibits exactly how brands may prioritize cheap and convenient solutions rather than the health of those who use their products (Bobel, 2010). The Dalkon Shield, an intra-uterine birth control device sold in the 1970s despite safety issues *known* to the manufacturer, and the myriad of deaths, pain, fertility issues, and other

problems it caused showcase the problem with brands' negligence towards female health from yet another angle (Bobel, 2010). The popularity of harmful products like douches, deodorant sprays, and scented washes further illustrates this issue (Jenkins, Crann, Money, & O'Doherty, 2017): largely, brands are more concerned with selling a product and turning a profit than they are the wellbeing of consumers. Though many brands today seem concerned with consumers' health, claiming to use body-safe materials, the reality is that almost everything related to the female body is under-researched, and it is hard to guarantee with complete confidence that any product geared towards females is entirely safe (Bobel, 2010; Jenkins, Crann, Money, & O'Doherty, 2017). Though the political and social climates surrounding menstruation continue to transform, progress remains a slow, painful process.

My methodology provided unique insight into the hidden messages and implications of these posts, particularly with regards to issues of autonomy and womanhood. However, further research would be useful in shedding light onto issues of class, race, and ability. Though I incorporated these issues, no single analysis can encompass and describe the layers of meaning in such loaded content. Furthermore, a broader study could compare Instagram and other social media content with content from other media types, such as on TV, and examining more brands would perhaps reveal patterns across types of brands that my research could not.

A prevailing sentiment with which I am left at the conclusion of this research is that I, too, am a consumer. No amount of education or research can diminish my susceptibility to skillful marketing techniques, and it would be misleading to pretend that I was not swayed by some of these advertisements. Moreover, just because a brand's marketing is problematic on some levels does not make the brand inherently bad or evil. Furthermore, change is on the horizon, and brands are beginning to realize that women and/or menstruators demand better.

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- Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019b, September 15). Head to @bodybymommy for today's Back to School September giveaway ❤️ My name is Tessa Romero! I am a wife, mama to a 15 month old, pregnant with our second baby, Founder of Body By Mommy and a health

coach [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2cHwV6HSce/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2cHwV6HSce/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019bb, October 2). Wait... where's the cup? Off doing its job that's where!

🙏 Anyone using their trusty Saalt cup rn?! Can we get a hallelujah? (who can even spell that word!) 😊 PC: @lindseystewartphotography Style: @allisonbaddley [Instagram

photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3IadnXHcHq/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3IadnXHcHq/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019c, September 16). Simple. Natural. Elemental. Just like salt. Periods

don't have prejudices, we all have them. Currently menstruating? You rule. 🌸 We support you, no matter your race, gender, age, education, or economic standing.

#passthesaalt #cupsin #periodequality PC: @lindseystewartphotography STYLE:

@allisonbaddley [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2e03q-HH0h/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2e03q-HH0h/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019cc, October 4). Meet Sarah! @sarahinsunlight switched over to a cup to

make her dancing life easier. THEN she realized she was also saving the environment!

SHE IS, and YOU ARE TOO. In fact, swipe to the right to save the \_\_\_\_\_. Guess

[Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/B3NPzirn0h->

[/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3NPzirn0h-/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019d, September 16). Head to @yourjoyologist for today's Back to School

September cup giveaway ❤️ We are HUGE fans and believers in the work Tricia does to reframe how we see our lives and attitude. She was also a supporter of this campaign

[Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2fm2lbH4Ts/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2fm2lbH4Ts/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)



Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019dd, October 7). OMG THIS FACE!!! @realfoodology ♡♡ It's totally the "I have the best secret/ I'm getting away with something" face! And as cup users, WE ARE! 😊! Cups are life. What does your "I have a Saalt Cup face look like?" [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3VFQ8unmUf/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3VFQ8unmUf/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019e, September 17). Helping Mamas works with over a hundred agencies in the greater Atlanta area to donate and provide necessary baby items to moms that need them. While they are working hard to make sure the babies are taken care of, we [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2hXIDznHI5/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2hXIDznHI5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019ee, October 9). Do we have any UK cup users?!? Let's have a (tea) PARTY! We are coming your way in two weeks for @indiebeautyexpo London!!!! But really friends, where are your favorite London spots?! See you soon!!! #passthesaalt #ibeny2019 #cleanbeauty #cupuser #ibelondon2019 [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B3aLSnfnfiH/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3aLSnfnfiH/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019f, September 17). ❤️ Head to @\_maddiemartinn for today's Back to School September cup giveaway! ❤️ Maddie is a vivacious soul who can make anyone laugh. She is a social media and retail specialist (yes we snagged her / love her) AND she reviews products [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2iZG2yHJvZ/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2iZG2yHJvZ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019ff, October 10). Fall, a time for chunky sweaters, mugs of warm beverages, oh, and periods. Because they are a part of every season. 😊 #celebrate

- #passthesaalt #saaltco #cleanbeauty [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B3csbvUHHv5/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3csbvUHHv5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)
- Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019g, September 18). Period poverty isn't just in foreign countries. It's also in the US. @periodmovement is one of our partners and works to provide period care to those without it in the US. If you want to be a part of the [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B2kSD6LncHB/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2kSD6LncHB/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)
- Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019h, September 18). ❤️ Head to @kelseystacypearson for today's Back to School September Cup Giveaway ❤️ Kelsey is a First Grade teacher, writer, and newlywed. She's also vegan and passionate about sharing sustainable alternatives with her audience. She is an LGBTQIA+ activist, and wishes [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B2kXf3znSIIm/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2kXf3znSIIm/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)
- Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019i, September 19). Make a little time and space for yourself on your period. It's almost like a monthly appointment. Why hello again old friend 🤝📝👤 #passthesaalt PC: @lindseystewartphotography STYLE: @allisonbaddley [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B2mjMOAH8L0/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2mjMOAH8L0/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)
- Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019j, September 19). ❤️ Head over to @lilydiamond for today's Back to School September Cup Giveaway ❤️ Lily is a writer, podcast host, and a photographer providing creative solutions to democratize wellness for womxn everywhere. THANK YOU LILY!!! ❤️❤️❤️❤️ [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B2m2w9oH5J1/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2m2w9oH5J1/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019k, September 20). ❤️ Head over to @herinternational for today's Back to School September cup giveaway ❤️ Saalt users in Dang, Nepal reported a 95% rate of adopting the cup long-term and recommending it to friends. "Yes I will recommend it to everyone, as [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2p34iVnjfC/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2p34iVnjfC/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019l, September 21). ❤️ Head over to @heathermyriahpearson for today's Back to School September Cup Giveaway ❤️ Heather is a lifestyle, fashion, fitness, and food influencer. She and her wife @kelseystacypearson BOTH are supporting this campaign to bring awareness to period poverty and it [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved

from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B2ry01EHl7x/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2ry01EHl7x/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019m, September 23). In 2018, iACT listened to Darfuri refugee women and their aspirations to play, compete, and pave the way for a generation of girls in their community; and supported them in forming the first-ever Darfur United Women's Team. . . . We love @darfur\_united [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2wsdnTHeTn/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2wsdnTHeTn/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019n, September 23). ❤️ Head over to @frankelyphotography for today's Back to School September cup giveaway ❤️ Emily is an international wedding and boudoir photographer. She loves making women feel beautiful and empowered in her work. When she's not snapping photos, you can find [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved

from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B2x1qvOn-dD/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2x1qvOn-dD/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019o, September 24). -One additional year in school can increase a girl's lifetime earnings by as much as 25%. -For every 10 percent more girls that attend school, that country's GDP has an average increase of .03 percent. -Mothers with an education

have [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2zqmb4Hz3O/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2zqmb4Hz3O/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019p, September 24). ❤️ Head over to @sproutingvitality for today's Back

to School September cup giveaway ❤️ McKenzie is a private chef, holistic nutritionist

and life coach. She is passionate about creating easy, nutrient dense & full of flavor

recipes. It is super important to [Instagram post]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2zwNL1nTp5/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2zwNL1nTp5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019q, September 25). Do you love your Saalt Soft Cup?!?! ❤️❤️❤️❤️

We know Saalt soft has a BIG fan club, including us! We wanted to introduce you to

some of the brilliant minds behind the creation of Saalt Soft! Meet Kim & Amanda from

[Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B22SynUnCCx/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B22SynUnCCx/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019r, September 25). ❤️ Head over to @styleherempowered for today's

Back to School September cup giveaway ❤️ "S H E changed my life positively. First, S

H E taught me good manners, respect for others, the notion of time, and living together. S

[Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/B23DZsanx->

[9/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B23DZsanx-9/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019s, September 26). ❤️ In Uganda, period care delivered over two years

increased school attendance by 17%. ❤️ In Ghana, 97% of girls reported feeling more

confident after receiving better period care and absence rates dropped by 50%.

#passthesaalt [Instagram photograph].

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B24nUKenc9F/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B24nUKenc9F/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019t, September 26). ❤️ Head over to @brightgirlhealth for today's Back to School September cup giveaway ❤️ Demi has been one of our friends since Saalt began! She works in period and reproductive health education doing seminars at schools. She also has written [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B24oE9xnmdC/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B24oE9xnmdC/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019u, September 26). ❤️ Head to @itsmeladyg for A Back to School September cup giveaway ❤️ Tiffany "It's Me, Lady G" Stuart, (Owner and editor-in-chief of itsmeladyg.com ), is a mom of 2, internationally published blogger, recipe developer, wetness writer, YouTuber, public speaker, one [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B24x0gfnDl\\_/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B24x0gfnDl_/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019v, September 27). Saalt Soft - Small now back in stock! Come one, come all, come answer the Saalt Soft call! ❤️ Saalt Soft was designed with our friends at @putacupinit ❤️ PC: @lindseystewartphotography Style: @allisonbaddley [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B264YqqnMu0/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B264YqqnMu0/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019w, September 27). Remember every cup ordered from our site this month will come with "The Thinker" sticker. An ode to period progress in schools and our Back to School September campaign! Also if you've got one, take a pic of where you [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from [https://www.instagram.com/p/B265HlaHGdi/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B265HlaHGdi/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019x, September 27). One single use plastic tampon takes longer to decompose than the lifetime of the person who uses it! Thank you for your deliberate

choice to use a cup. Yes, there is a learning curve, but it's worth it! You are [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B26\\_BW1nokt/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B26_BW1nokt/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019y, September 28). ❤️ Head to @stylebyliv for today's Back to School September cup giveaway ❤️ Olivia is a nurse and super stylish one at that. Check out her blog for all things wellness + beauty + brains ♡! Thanks Olivia for supporting period care [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B28VXb1nePI/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B28VXb1nePI/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Saaltco [@saaltco]. (2019z, September 29). Back to School September has almost come to an end. YES! You can help! How? With your voice- Join Saalt in the conversations to break down period stigmas. Open up a conversation with your own friends or loved ones and [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3A1knynHpA/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3A1knynHpA/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

Salomon, I., & Brown, C. S. (2019). The selfie generation: Examining the relationship between social media use and early adolescent body image. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 39(4), 539-560.

Schooler, D., Ward, L. M., Merriwether, A., & Caruthers, A. S. (2005). Cycles of shame: Menstrual shame, body shame, and sexual decision-making. *Journal of sex research*, 42(4), 324-334.

Sellnow, D. D. (2017). *The rhetorical power of popular culture: Considering mediated texts*. Sage Publications.

Sholl, A. (2017, May 13). *The vegan diet bloggers who think periods are 'not natural'*. Vice.

Retrieved from [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/a3wez5/the-vegan-diet-bloggers-who-think-periods-are-not-natural](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/a3wez5/the-vegan-diet-bloggers-who-think-periods-are-not-natural).

Stoljar, N. (2011). Informed consent and relational conceptions of autonomy. *Journal of*

*Medicine and Philosophy*, 36(4), 375-384. Retrieved from

[https://academic.oup.com/jmp/article-](https://academic.oup.com/jmp/article-pdf/36/4/375/2741964/jhr029.pdf?casa_token=Na5_vCqSb6sAAAAA:pauWBB9Frmegb)

[pdf/36/4/375/2741964/jhr029.pdf?casa\\_token=Na5\\_vCqSb6sAAAAA:pauWBB9Frmegb](https://academic.oup.com/jmp/article-pdf/36/4/375/2741964/jhr029.pdf?casa_token=Na5_vCqSb6sAAAAA:pauWBB9Frmegb)

[sUaRCQd6yyx9FVg-QImcMzyrhV1m\\_cb7y5lGFML2maRUuOIlfYpOrviYU5P1FjW](https://academic.oup.com/jmp/article-pdf/36/4/375/2741964/jhr029.pdf?casa_token=Na5_vCqSb6sAAAAA:pauWBB9Frmegb)

Stone, M. (2019). “Like regular underwear, but so much better.”: How Thinx can create feminist

embodied subjects through the enduring legacy of OBOS. *Peitho: Journal of the*

*Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition*. Retrieved

from <http://peitho.cwshrc.org/21-3-like-regular-underwear-but-so-much-better/>

tampax [@tampax]. (2019a, September 19). Heading to @createcultivate this Saturday in San

Francisco?! See you there! Make sure to swing by our Tampax PURE pop-up to snap a

photo for a good cause and show us what you are not willing to compromise on in

[Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2mVSc1lUhg/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2mVSc1lUhg/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

tampax [@tampax]. (2019b, September 20). We’re super excited to partner with @thegoodfest

for #thegoodfest Philadelphia this Sunday as they work to expand the definition of

wellness. At Tampax, we always strive to give people the choices that they want when it

comes to their wellness [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2pZRD5FS9R/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2pZRD5FS9R/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

tampax [@tampax]. (2019c, September 25). You want choices. We're share the excitement with @xomisssdanielle about our Tampax PURE tampons that offer responsibly sourced cotton from the US that is free of chlorine bleaching, dyes & fragrances. It's the ingredients you want #PUREandEasy #repost @xomisssdanielle \*Menstrual Health [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B21z0poFVvk8/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B21z0poFVvk8/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

tampax [@tampax]. (2019d, September 27). Still thinking about the amazing weekend at #CreateCultivateSF ❤️ We met fabulous people like @jensinereyes who are not willing to compromise - especially when it comes to period protection. Tell us! What are you not willing to compromise? Comment below 🖱️ [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B27ZYeilxGQ/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B27ZYeilxGQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

tampax [@tampax]. (2019e, October 2). Choices, choices 🖱️. How do you decide what's right for you? Just like @hanwestby, we're thankful that we now have a choice when it comes to period care. With @tampax PURE free of chlorine bleaching, dyes, and fragrances, it's #PUREandEasy [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3IVAzBlgf7/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3IVAzBlgf7/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

tampax [@tampax]. (2019f, October 7). Are you with us and ready to try? @jesstrowiton\_ gave Tampax PURE a try 📦 Tampax's first 100% organic cotton core tampon with a 90% plant-based applicator #PUREandEasy #repost @jesstrowiton\_ NYFW + my monthly friend seems to be [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3VMfDkFzWi/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3VMfDkFzWi/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

tampax [@tampax]. (2019g, October 11). See all the places with your footprint in mind 🐾 @allegroaroseb doesn't have to compromise with Tampax PURE tampons which also





donates period products to those in need  #PUREandEasy #repost @allegroaroseb

There's so much to see of our beautiful [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3fRi8DFrVE/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3fRi8DFrVE/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019a, September 18). A study by @plancanada found that period poverty is a serious issue, affecting 1 in 3 people in Canada. DivaCares is a program that we started to help people around the world who are experiencing #periodpoverty.

#DivaCup #TheDivaCup #menstrualcup #periods [Instagram video]. Retrieved from  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2jv\\_fWH3Bb/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2jv_fWH3Bb/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019b, September 20). Fighting the pink tax. Bringing #periodequity to everyone. Not apologizing while she does it. Yeah, we definitely wanna be in the Jennifer Weiss-Wolf-pack.  : @jenniferweisswolf #DivaCup  
#TheDivaCup #menstrualcup #periods #period #menstruationmatters #periodpositive  
#periodsbelike #periodproblems #zerowaste #ecofriendly [Instagram photograph].

Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B2o5cgMgtKP/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B2o5cgMgtKP/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019c, September 25). The #DivaCup is unquestionably a better way to period. [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B211E0aAkw8/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B211E0aAkw8/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019d, September 26). Are you the kind of person whose pink canoe rides the crimson wave? Or do you prefer to simply say it like it is? What are your favourite (or most hated) euphemisms for vaginas and periods? [Instagram video].

Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B24c7GQAwmT/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B24c7GQAwmT/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019e, September 29). 20 tampons (on average) per cycle. 12 periods per year. 240 tampons saved from landfills. Switch to the DivaCup, it all adds up.

[Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3AEa\\_KDhMo/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3AEa_KDhMo/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019f, September 30). Not waking up at 4am to change your tampon is better than waking up at 4am to change your tampon. Stay protected all night with the DivaCup. [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3CwO4eAwJL/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3CwO4eAwJL/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019g, October 1). Friends don't let friends launch new websites without telling the world. Hit the link in bio to see our new site. [Instagram video].

Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3FNRkkAyXM/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3FNRkkAyXM/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

The DivaCup [@thedivacup]. (2019h, October 3). The new divacup.com is here. To celebrate, we're giving away three @welldotca gift cards. Hit up our link in bio to enter! Open to residents of the US and Canada. #divacup #giveaway [Instagram video]. Retrieved from

[https://www.instagram.com/p/B3K1R8XgD9V/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/B3K1R8XgD9V/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

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