



FROM BLUE TO RED

THE EVOLUTION AND FUTURE OF
MENSTRUATION ADVERTISING

From Blue to Red:
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Menstruation Advertising

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Design

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Abstract

This paper addresses menstruation advertising, its history and evolution taking into context the development of feminism, recounting the ideology's rise in popularity over the last decade. It confronts the subject of marketplace feminism and its place in menstruation advertising, calling into question its positive and negative effects. Browsing over a brief history of menstruation advertising, it then moves on to discuss notable themes in recent period product advertisements - blood, gender, reality, and activism - before looking to the future and thinking about the various platforms we can use when advertising and talking about menstruation products.

Keywords: advertising, menstruation, gender, equality, objectification, marketplace feminism, period products.

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¹ Green & Van Oort, 2013, p. 69
² Lin & Yeh, 2009, p. 61

Fig. 1
 Fig. 2

Advertisements have through the years portrayed women as passive or sexual objects conveniently there for the enjoyment and consumption of men. Only are they active when attempting to be more attractive to men by managing their bodies and appearances.¹ Because of this, advertising has reinforced an image of women from the male perspective.

Good advertisements find a creative way of mixing cultural contexts and technology, they blend together “cultural meaning, societal values, and personal dreams”² in order to depict and mirror the consumer’s individual wants and needs while at the same time being able to reach a large audience. This mixing of cultural context and

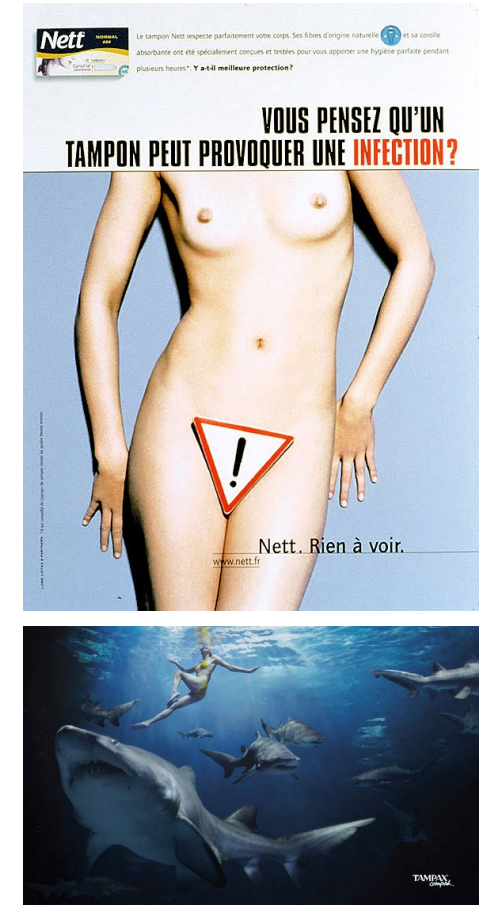




Fig. 3

³ Lin & Yeh, 2009, pp. 61-62

imagery is what pushes the notion of what we “need” and what is considered to be feminine or masculine, giving advertising a firm grip on society and culture. It is argued that portrayals of female roles in advertising are indicative of objectification and expressive of male desires for women.³

In recent years, there has been a shift in the advertising of menstruation products. With increased gender equality awareness, there has come a realization that periods are not all blue liquid, tight white trousers, and confidently laughing while horseback riding on a sandy beach at sunset. The discussion of gender and what it means to people, as well as the

implications of inflicting societal values on said gender, are all important when advertising for a new world. The representation of gender in advertising should be a joint responsibility, treated with empathy and respect, an issue that requires guidelines if we want to succeed in creating an equal world for all genders. If we are to evolve menstruation product advertising and pave the road ahead, we are going to have to understand where we have been and where we are now.

THE POWER OF ADVERTISING

To put it simply, advertising is the art of persuasion conveying a message from an advertiser or reinforcing the viewer's belief about the advertiser.⁴ In today's day and age, we are witnessing the evolution of advertising from being rooted in mass media, delivered in a uniformed way to many viewers, to individualized ads being targeted at people based on algorithms involving information about who they are, what they have been doing, and what they will do next.⁵ Advertising is no longer limited to television, radio, and magazines and other printed media; the sky is the limit when it comes to advertising channels.

As an important part of our culture, advertising

influences our behaviour offering us products and services in place of a real connection with the people in our lives. It encourages us to objectify each other and replaces passion for each other with products.⁶ Using gender

normative roles in advertising may increase advertising performance but it can lead to undesirable effects on society; furthermore, media images, idealized bodies and stereotypes, affect how individuals think about themselves.⁷ This results in a toxic environment for all people - men, women, children.

Eisend, Dens, and De Pelsmacker, reference more than one source when discussing negative effects stereotypes

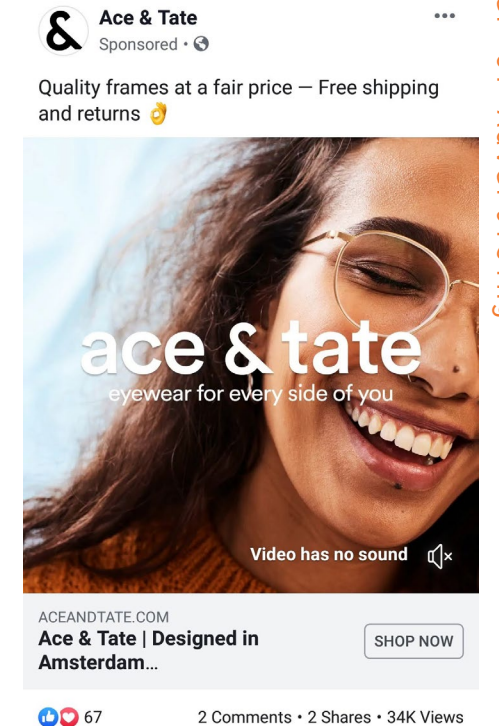
⁴ Duff, Faber, & Nan, 2019, pp. 27-28

⁵ Thorson & Rodgers, 2019, pp. 3-4

⁶ Kilbourne, 1999, pp. 26-27

⁷ Eisend, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2019, pp. 187-188

Fig. 4



can have on society, particularly women: “gender stereotypes erode gender equality and advertisers are criticized for lacking sensitivity to reflect the societal changes in gender roles.”⁸ Ads constantly need to maintain a dialogue with society, and women in advertising are there to make sales of products and services possible.⁹ This mainly refers to cis-gendered, straight, white, able-bodied women as “women of colour, lesbians, [and] women with disabilities are primarily invisible in this world.”¹⁰

The people we see in ads are never accurate representations of real people and real situations; ads are constantly telling us who we are and who we

⁸ Eisend, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2019, p. 188

⁹ Rocha, 2013, p. 1

¹⁰ Kilbourne, 1999, p. 31

¹¹ Cortese, 2004, pp. 13-14

should be and projecting what is appropriate behaviour for men and women, boys and girls - between which there is a great divide. Men should be dominant and powerful, whereas women should be passive and subordinate.

Ads are not just selling us products, they are selling us “moral values and cultural images, such as concepts of success, love, and sexuality.”¹¹

Since advertising has more or less developed alongside consumer culture it may be difficult to say which has more control over the other - which came first, the chicken or the egg. But one thing is for sure, advertising objectifies women and

imposes cultural stereotypes and attributes on them telling them that they can never be perfectly beautiful, be fulfilled in their lives, be skinny enough, have the right skin tone, have the right size of boobs, etc. Women are simply not enough as they are. They are constantly objectified and with objectification come severe consequences, as Jean Kilbourne addresses in her TEDx Talk The dangerous ways ads see women:

“When women are objectified there’s always the threat of sexual violence. There’s always intimidation. There’s always the possibility of danger. And women live in a world defined by that threat, whereas men simply do not.”

¹²

Ads are powerful, they paint an image of society which viewers then attempt to imitate as they believe it to be a mirror of what society should look like. It's not just about products and services; it holds human beings to an impossible standard and shames us when we can't obtain it. Therefore, we must become more self-aware. As creators of media, we must hold ourselves accountable for our actions and understand the weight of the responsibility that is given to us; as consumers, we must understand that we also have power and that we can use our voices and actions to make waves.

¹² TEDx Talks,
2014

MARKETPLACE FEMINISM

The cofounder and creative director of Bitch Media, Andi Zeisler, recounts the rise, fall, and resurrection of the term feminist as it has gained popularity in recent years, exploding onto the pop culture scene with celebrities like Beyoncé at the 2014 VMAs. In her performance, an audio recording was played of author Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie’s paraphrasing of the dictionary’s definition of feminist: “The person who believes in social, political, and economic equality of

the sexes.” Beyoncé stood on the stage, announcing to the world with backlit giant letters that it was okay now to be “FEMINIST”. Other celebrities soon followed, jumping onto the “feminism bandwagon” and all of a sudden feminism was hot. “And, perhaps most important, it was sellable.”

¹³

Thus, the idea of marketplace feminism was born - when people understood that even an ideology like feminism could



¹³ Zeisler, 2016, pp. xi-xii

Fig. 5

¹⁴ Zeisler, 2016, p. xiii

be marketed and sold to the masses. It is a mainstream that places feminism as something fun and cool that anyone can adopt into their identity, sometimes also referred to as “white feminism”. ¹⁴

To better understand where marketplace feminism comes from it is necessary to understand the three waves of feminism that have been identified. Each wave was triggered by something specific and each has had its own minor goal, even though the entire movement is working towards the singular goal of a world in which the sexes are equal on all levels.

THE WAVES OF FEMINISM

The first wave is placed in the mid-19th century and found women demanding the right to vote, equal opportunities of education, and equal rights in marriage. Granted, these women were, for the most part, white, educated, middle-class women. The wave lasted until the 1920s when most of westernized countries had granted women the right to vote.¹⁵

The second wave came gained momentum in the 1960s after the conclusion of the Second World War. During the war, many women had left their homes and entered the workforce to support their families whilst their husbands,



¹⁵ Mangan, 2019, pp. 14-15

Fig. 5

¹⁶ Mangan, 2019, pp. 14-15
¹⁷ intersectionality | Definition of intersectionality in English by Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.

fathers, and brothers were off fighting. Once the war was over, some of them returned to their previous roles as housewives, whilst others chose to keep their careers. With that came the realization that the first wave had not changed as much as they'd hoped. The second wave tackled causes like women's rights over their own bodies in childbirth, the legalisation of abortion, and the discussion of physical assault. By the time the 1980s rolled around, the second wave was slowly dying down due to a progressively conservative political climate. However, the 80s also saw the development of black feminism and the idea that women of colour faced even more barriers than their

white counterparts. This was something that the white women of the first wave had completely overlooked, the idea of intersectionality¹⁶ - "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage."¹⁷

The brings us to the third wave of feminism. Brought on in the 1990s, by the voices of women who had been physically and sexually abused, the upsurge called for justice for women that had been victimized because of their gender, regardless of whether they were cisgender or transgender. It

called for sexual liberation and freedom, and for the eradication of slut shaming culture. The wave gained momentum through the spread of the internet via blogs and social media. ¹⁸

The third wave seems to overlap with the fourth wave as it is referenced that the fourth began in the late noughties (2000s) and that we are still experiencing its rise with discussions about gender

diversity, body positivity, and sex positivity. To sum up the fourth wave, “it’s safe to say we will learn more about egalitarianism and inclusiveness for all.”

¹⁹ This brings up questions about whether feminism is an attainable goal in a capitalist culture, bringing us back to the issue of marketplace feminism.



¹⁸ Mangan, 2019, pp. 14-15

¹⁹ Fortman, 2017

Fig. 7

WHY IS MARKETPLACE FEMINISM PROBLEMATIC?

More and more people seem to be starting to come around to the idea that equality makes things better for everyone, but stereotypes, precomposed ideas, and fears prevent people from being able to fully embrace the ideology of feminism. This is perhaps where marketplace feminism can have minor positive effects. It allows people the space to be introduced to the idea of feminism and equality at a very basic level. It gives feminism the appearance of being colourful and cool with its kooky feminist merchandise;



Fig. 8

24 it is a shinier and less-scary image.

Feminism has morphed over the years from a social movement to the modern understanding that feminism is “hegemonically constructed as a set of personal beliefs”.

²⁰ Even Kim Kardashian West, when questioned about her being a feminist icon during her 2017 interview with Harper’s Bazaar, stated: “I feel in my soul I’m a feminist. I just don’t need labels to make me feel or know what I am inside.” ²¹ Despite aligning herself with feminist views, she seems to contribute to a system where feminism is a bad word and where normal bodies aren’t normal, with her most recent product - skin foundation. The product, sold at \$45, is meant to “blur imperfections, enhance skin tone and provide a flawless finish” ²² and should be applied to legs, arms, and décolletages, everywhere but the face. It implies that bodies with pores, hair, scars, and veins, are imperfect and require fixing to look “naturally flawless”. ²³ This simple example illustrates just one of the problems that come with the adaption of marketplace feminism, and yet it is just one of its nearly insurmountable number of symptoms.

Using an ideology as a tool of marketing may be at times very tempting as it seems to be in the case of marketplace feminism, but marketplace feminism isn’t about equality. It is about selling products or services.

²⁰ Mendes, 2012, p. 565

²¹ Harper’s Bazaar Arabia, 2017

²² KKW Beauty, n.d.

²³ KKW Beauty, n.d.

²⁴ Zeisler, 2016, p. 237

²⁵ Mendes, 2012, p. 564

Fig. 9
Fig. 10



Feminism only works for companies insofar as it can create revenue for them. It operates on the illusion that feminism is about choice - “the choice offered by the market” ²⁴. The freedom to choose to wear makeup, to get a bikini wax, to wear high heels, to look sexy, to look feminine, etc. However, the act of making decisions and being a woman, does not a feminist make.

It results in a bit of a paradox in which women are encouraged to be both feminine objects and powerful feminist agents; it demands no real investment in social change but instead focuses on the improvement of one’s appearance. ²⁵

25

If companies are going to adopt an ideology like feminism into their brand image, it has to happen on every level, whether it be in their sourcing of materials, the company's structure, its employee care, or its product production process. Not just in its marketing strategies. It must be all-encompassing. The corporate world seems to want only one type of feminism: one that's in favour of them. We must remember that progress has rarely been made gently, but that it has been fought for and earned by the grit of people's teeth. True equality will never come easily, it has to be demanded.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MENSTRUATION ADVERTISING

The modern-day tampon was patented in 1931 by Earle Haas and lead to the founding of one of the oldest period product companies, Tampax, in 1933. Up until that time, reusable sanitary belts had mostly been used. It was also in the 1930s that the first menstrual cup was patented and produced by Lenora Chalmers.²⁶ With the increased product selection, advertising for these products became more prominent and soon, the industry had created its own language and its own world.

Early ads for period products placed their focus on the scientific when presenting the convenience and value of their products. Ads were constructed so as to avoid offending anyone. By the 1920s the focus had shifted more to the relationship between mothers and daughters. Ads reminded women and girls that menstruation should be kept secret as it was a reminder of their sexuality; any indication that a woman was menstruating was the ultimate humiliation.²⁷ In the decades following the end of WWII

advertising changed, it was no longer about information or science, they now sold an idealized dream, free of reality. The models grew younger and younger and there wasn't so much as a tinge of anything but



²⁶ Kim & Stein, 2009, p. 88
²⁷ Merskin, 1999, pp. 946-947

Fig. 11



²⁸ Kim & Stein, 2009, pp. 95-97
²⁹ Merskin, 1999, p. 947
³⁰ Kim & Stein, 2009, pp. 97-98

Fig. 12

Caucasian skin. Menstrual advertising did not show people of colour, but one thing they did show, and that was water. Women were swimming, sailing, surfing, splashing in a pool. The message was simple: women who had their periods needed to be cleansed.²⁸

The 1960s and 1970s came with different products, the pads were now thinner than before and did not need to be pinned to sanitary pad belts because they had glue that stuck to the inside of underwear. Consequently, the ads took a slight turn and the focus was shifted to the pads being thin, invisible, discreet. Through the use of euphemisms, they played on the fears of young girls being outed in front of, or by, their peers for having “that time of the month” and “not feeling fresh”.²⁹ Menstrual blood was represented by a blue liquid and ads had a clinical setting, using buzzwords and soft images. It wasn't until 1985 that the word “period” was spoken in a tampon ad resulting in a national outrage in the US.³⁰

In the conclusion of her 1999 study about menstrual advertising in a teen magazine over a ten-year period, Debra Merskin noted that ads were evolving. It was her understanding that they

30 were beginning to address young women's fears in a more direct manner. That periods can be messy, they can be uncomfortable, that it is embarrassing when someone finds out, and that period blood is not a clear blue liquid. She suggested that this enabled girls to see themselves and their changing bodies in a more positive light which would make them feel more secure within their social systems. ³¹ However, over a decade passed before the world saw its first menstrual ad that showed blood. ³² Despite improvement in attitudes towards menstruation and product development, the message stayed the same throughout the noughties: periods were still something that above all needed to be

kept secret. Reinforcing this notion of secrecy underlined that periods were something that was shameful and that hasn't changed much to this day. ³³

³¹ Merskin, 1999, p. 955
³² Zanger, 2018
³³ Kim & Stein, 2009, p. 101

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MENSTRUATION

Girls and women are meant to control and manage their menstruation in secrecy, their natural bodies and bodily functions deemed out-of-control and disruptive.³⁴ A 2013 study by Jackson and Falmagne, collecting and analysing information from interviews with women in the US about their bodies and menstruation, reported that their subjects appeared uncomfortable when talking about their menstruation and deflected questions by using humour. They weren't even able to use the words blood, period, or menstruation without struggle. They instead used "it" when referencing their menarche³⁵ as if their menstruation was a foreign entity, infringing upon their daily lives.

³⁴ Jackson & Falmagne, 2013, p. 380

³⁵ Jackson & Falmagne, 2013, p. 390

³⁶ Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, & Pyszczynski, 2002, pp. 135-136

Another US study, published in 2002, addressed how menstruation affects how women are perceived. The participants of the study were interviewed after having completed a task with a partner, a woman who during the task either dropped a hair clip or a tampon from her bag. The interviews revealed that the subjects that saw her drop a tampon rated her competence as a partner much lower than the group that saw her drop a hair clip. They also

reported liking her less and their answers were much more objectifying towards her than the hair clip group. The gender of the subjects did not seem to influence their answers as women and men alike seemed to have similar views of the woman.

³⁶ This does suggest that perhaps women are somewhat justified in hiding their periods from society, not just from men but also other menstruation individuals.

RECENT CAMPAIGNS FOR PERIOD PRODUCTS

BLOOD IS RED, NOT BLUE

In 2015, Libresse (also known as Bodyform) stepped into the spotlight with an ambitious and creative campaign, an honest take on periods and, in particular, the stigma surrounding blood. The first to tackle the issue and show menstrual blood, as well as a bloody pad in underwear, #BloodNormal was awarded the Cannes Glass Lion: The Lion for Change Grand Prix in

2018.³⁷

Libresse launched another campaign in 2019 called “Viva La Vulva” for which it was honoured with a Black Pencil award London’s D&AD festival. In an interview with AdWeek, Nadja Lossgott, creative partner at AMV BBDO, the agency responsible for the campaign, was quoted: “The way that we treated the idea was to treat it the same way that you would get a tissue to blow your nose. Half the world’s

³⁷ Zanger, 2018

Fig. 13



**PERIODS ARE NORMAL.
SHOWING THEM SHOULD BE TOO.**



population goes through that every month.” Libresse’s global brand communications manager, Martina Pouopati, reflected on previous ad campaigns for period products as a “completely fake world” that had nothing to do with the reality of periods. She admitted that ads were all about amplifying the shame women feel regarding menstruation by making them self-conscious about leaks or smells, all in order to sell the product.³⁸

Libresse does still subscribe to some of the old ways period product companies talk about menstruation, using the same old terms - fresh, discreet, feminine - but there appears to be more going on under the surface. On Libresse’s UK website (there, known as Bodyform) they have a video

showing teenagers of different genders discussing period education and societal attitudes among their peers. Their discussion reveals that they are all concerned that there is a lack of education leading to a lack of understanding among peers which contributes to the culture of period shaming.³⁹ Libresse offers an insight into the thoughts young people have about periods but it doesn’t provide a solution, instead it comes across as an attempt to make the brand appear more forward-thinking without any real commitment. The message of the video is still a positive one, and is definitely a step in the right direction, but in unison with Libresse’s overall brand image, it seems be rather thinned out and lacking in substance.

³⁸ Griner, 2019

³⁹ Bodyform, n.d.

Fig. 14
Fig. 15
Fig. 16

BEING A GIRL ISN'T A BAD THING

In the 2010s there seems to have been an upsurge in unison with the rise of the fourth wave of feminism. Always, run by Procter & Gamble, released their campaign #LikeAGirl in 2014 showing that girls understood that the phrase “like a girl” had very negative connotations - run like a girl, throw like a girl, fight like a girl. In an interview with the Louisiana Museum in Denmark, Lauren Greenfield, the filmmaker behind #LikeAGirl, said: “we saw that this happens through society, that the young girls didn’t know what this was, but at a certain age, around

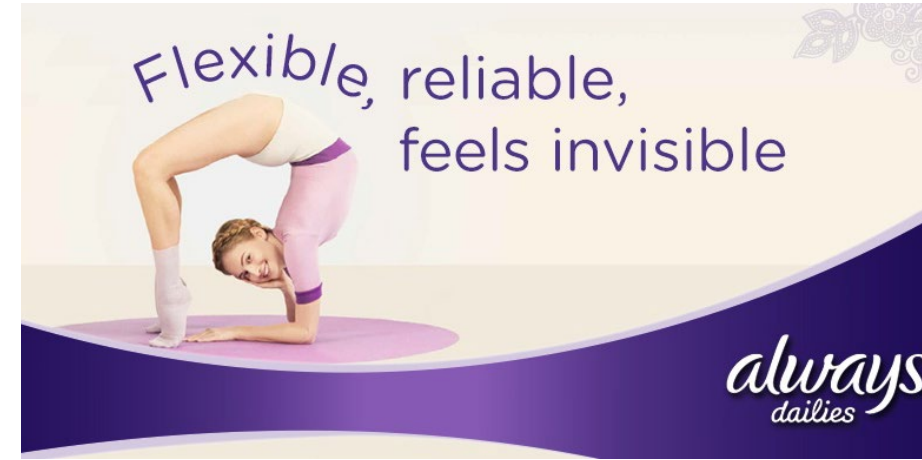


puberty, the girls start to understand that being a girl means something bad.”⁴⁰

The campaign attempted to change those connotations, that being a girl and acting like a girl wasn’t bad. It held a mirror to society, imploring it to take a hard look at itself. It looked like a period product company had finally figured out that they didn’t have to make women feel awful about themselves in order to reach them. The campaign caught a lot

⁴⁰ Louisiana Channel, 2019

Fig. 17



of media attention for its empowering message and even received a D&AD Black Pencil award.⁴¹

Despite #LikeAGirl’s powerful message, Always does not seem to have relinquished its old ways. Take one look at their website, and you are exposed to the same old language - fresh, discreet, radiant, pure⁴² - and even the same old ads that claim their liners will allow women to keep that “shower fresh feeling”⁴³ Their message to empower women and girls, although great and inspiring, is left almost worthless as it appears as if Always can’t let go of the notion that menstruation is something dirty. Always still contributes to the same system that shows menstruation and being a woman as shameful, and then it takes that lack of confidence it has created in these women and repackages it in an empowering message to be sold back to them. They are breaking them in order to sell them something to fix what has been broken, and

⁴¹ D&AD, n.d.

⁴² Always, n.d.

⁴³ Always, 2015

Fig. 18

then they try to sell it to them again by telling them that they were never really broken in the first place. You can't deny that there is hypocrisy in Always' tactics. It really is capitalism at its finest. Author Sarah Banet-Weiser, a professor of media and communication at the London School of Economics, reminds us that we can't forget that **"advertising wants a certain kind of feminism, not a feminism that actually challenges capitalism or patriarchy."**⁴⁰



⁴⁰ Jennings, 2018

Fig. 19
Fig. 20

REALITY IS THE NEW NORMAL

Easy. is a Canada-based brand that delivers organic tampons and pads right to your door. It's a relatively new company that also started the campaign #NOSHAME who's main intake is to remove the shame around periods. The campaign consisted of four images showing menstruating women in realistic situations: holding a hot water bottle, bathing while menstruating, going skinny dipping with a tampon, and changing blood-stained sheets.⁴¹ What also makes these images interesting is that they show active partners supporting the women, helping her change the sheets or spooning with her

in bed when she has cramps. It shows that even though they may not be menstruating themselves, that they still play an active role in the experience. These situations are all realities that menstruating people are familiar with and showing them normalises them and aids in removing the stigma surrounded. What also gives the images a stronger link to reality is the lack of photoshopping and details such as wrinkled sheets, bruises, stretchmarks,

42 and a dirty windowsill - it's not a perfect world, but it is realistic. Alyssa Bertram, the founder of Easy., acknowledged in an interview that the ads might make some people uncomfortable, but "sometimes we need to question the things we're uncomfortable with and why".⁴²

Easy.'s approach to advertising and projecting its brand's image is mostly done online since their customer base is mainly women who shop for period products online and are comfortable with using the internet. They keep the conversation going on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, as well as having a blog where they write and interview others about various topics related to

menstruation.⁴³ The only thing lacking in online media presence is that their focus is very much placed on the women as menstruators and does not seem to be aware of the existence of trans people, for example. The brand is very minimal in appearances and barely uses any colour, with their packaging being a simple cardboard box. It offers a nice contrast to the heavily purple, lilac, and seafoam green colours popular with brands like Always.

⁴² Harris, 2016

⁴³ Easy., 2019

Fig. 21
Fig. 22
Fig. 23
Fig. 24

NO SHAME



NO SHAME



NO SHAME



NO SHAME



IT'S NOT JUST WOMEN WHO MENSTRUATE

As of late, period product companies seem to be awakening to the fact that not everyone who menstruates is female. We are finally starting to understand that gender cannot be split into two; gender is a spectrum. The period underwear company Thinx explored this in their 2016 New York City Subway ads, making a point of showing a trans man in one of their ads. Ad Week quoted Miki Agrawal's, Thinx's co-founder's, statement on the matter:

"We thought it was high time that people see a menstruating trans man 10 feet tall in the subway.

One of Thinx's key goals is education, and there is so much education to be done with the general public on the trans community, and what their needs are."⁴⁴

Although Thinx has taken positive steps into the direction of equality in their brand's marketing, it is not free of controversy. They do seem to be guilty of using marketplace feminism as a part of their image. Thinx is not a brand that is available to everyone, it especially caters to wealthy



⁴⁴ Monollos, 2016

Fig. 25

⁴⁵ Thinx, n.d.

⁴⁶ Mbadiwe, 2018

PERIOD (and the bodega
guy is srsly judging my midnight
snack choice) - **PROOF**
UNDERWEAR

hellothinx.com

THINX

women at the expense of the underprivileged. From its outdated use of language - neutralizes smells, all-day freshness and leak resistant (Thinx, n.d.) - to Thinx's lacking health coverage for their employees and mere two-week maternity leave, to Agrawal being forced to step down as CEO after ex-Thinx-employees accused her of sexual harassment and harbouring a hostile work environment.⁴⁶

PERIOD ACTIVISM

But Thinx isn’t the only brand that has embraced that not all of their customers are female; Berlin-based Einhorn is another one. At the end of April 2019, Einhorn shared a “Kleiner reminder” on their Instagram page ⁴⁷ of an image with the text: “Not all women menstruate, and not all people who menstruate are women.” This isn’t the first time they’ve addressed the existence of non-female menstruating individuals ⁴⁸ and it probably won’t be the last. Einhorn is quite active on Instagram and posts, nearly daily, material that breaks down stereotypes and myths, declaring that they are on “a mission is to unfuck



menstruation!” ⁴⁹ Einhorn was originally started in 2015 by two guys who wanted to create sustainable vegan condoms. Four years later, Einhorn’s period products reached the market with its colourful, bright, and



⁴⁷ (Einhorn, 2019)
⁴⁸ (Einhorn, 2019)
⁴⁹ (Einhorn, n.d.)

Fig. 26
Fig. 27



⁵⁰ Einhorn, n.d.
⁵¹ Einhorn, 2019

Fig. 28
Fig. 29

way forward, rather than utilizing the methods that have been used by the period product brands that have come before them. Their use of humour and directness comes across more genuine because they do not rely on old ideas and views of what menstruation is, and that is reflected throughout the brands identity.

humorous packaging. ⁵⁰ The products are not marketed in the conventional manner of using television ads or large costly campaigns. Instead, they use the power of social media - Instagram, YouTube, Facebook - to reach their customers. When they do campaign, it has been in the form of social media activism, tackling subjects like the 19% luxury tax placed on period products in Germany. ⁵¹

Einhorn seems to place more focus on using activism and ideology as a

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Gazing ahead, there seems to be a change happening in the world of period products. With discussion and concern for subjects such as equality and sustainability we enter a space in which we are able to call into question how we handle the topic of menstruation, and why we handle it that way. It seems obvious that there is a dire need to address that menstruation is not just a topic for women, it concerns us all, not to mention the fact that not all those who menstruate are women. It is a bodily function that is wholly normal and not something that should be seen as dirty or shameful. There is no need to feel “shower fresh all day” because you weren’t dirty or spoiled to begin with.

Therefore, I think it is safe to say that the term feminine hygiene is as good as dead.

Period ads are now tackling subjects that have previously been taboo, like sex and menstruation, cramps, and men buying pads and tampons. They are challenging stigma. Daniel Wolfe, the director behind Libresse’s #BloodNormal ad, expressed that one of the things that inspired the ad was the comment: “[I] can’t wait for the day when women no longer pass tampons to a friend like they are a Class A drug”.⁵² People need to see buying period products and using them as an act as normal as purchasing milk, toilet paper, or furniture. There is definitely room to change our language around

⁵² Jardine, 2019

50 the topic from feel fresh to feel bloody great.

There are so many new ways we can approach the topic, podcasts like The Period Podcast ⁵³ and Stay in the Room Podcast are contributing to the discussion around periods, education, and bringing men into the conversation. ⁵⁴ TV is also tackling the subject, with shows like Fleabag, written by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, showing the humorous side of menstruation. ⁵⁵ We can use humour to approach the subject, but we have to make sure it remains rooted in reality because the more mystical we make it, the more detached from reality it becomes.



⁵³ Clancy, n.d.

⁵⁴ George, 2019

⁵⁵ BBC Three, 2016

Fig. 30

Fig. 31

CONCEPT

Originally, my idea was to look into the world of advertising and explore the subject of advertising for teenage girls but after a talk with someone close to me about the topic of menstruation, I decided to focus my attention on menstruation products, mainly their advertising but also with a soft focus on their packaging. I felt that by creating my own version of a period product I would be able to utilize my skills as an illustrator and dive into what I am interested in, which is branding, drawing, packaging, and a bit of editorial and print design. My relationship with my family was a real driving force in the creation of this project, as well as my own

relationship with my body. Having been diagnosed with endometriosis several years ago, I have learned to understand the importance of having a good relationship with your body, with yourself.

IMPLEMENTATION

I began by researching the topic of menstruation and the advertising of menstruation products, reading articles, books, and watching videos. Once I felt I had accumulated some interesting information I conducted several interviews after which I analysed some themes and patterns. All of my interviewees had negative connotations linked to menstruation and reported negative

attributes in their relationships with their bodies. This made me think of my own family, my nieces in particular, and I dreaded the thought that this same experience awaited them.

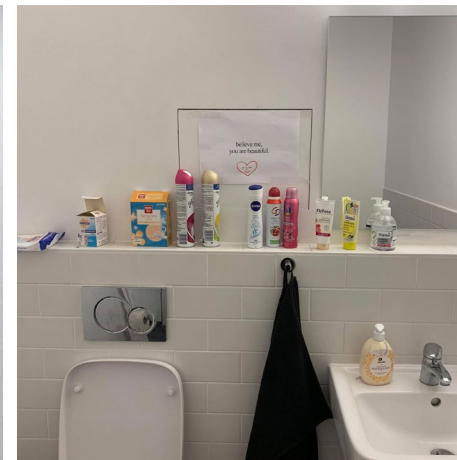
I felt that I needed to find a solution that did not include words like invisible, discreet, or fresh. I needed to create a brand that didn't alienate their own customer base and make them feel ashamed or dirty.

While working on my project, having been doing extensive research into menstruation products, I received a surprise. My own algorithm had changed, and I started seeing more material and advertisements about period products and everything related to them. Scrolling

through Instagram one day, I was presented with a post about the award-winning Tampon Book, created by the Scholz & Friends agency in Berlin. The 46-page contained stories and illustrations about menstruation but more importantly the book also contained 15 organic tampons inside - a rebellious act to defy the German Tax authorities who tax tampons and pads as a luxury product (19%).⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ (Sherwood, 2019; Smiley, 2019) This discovery spurred me even harder on in my project.

It took writing down HMW questions, a lot of procrastination, ideation, crazy 8's, so many coffees, mood boards, several Netflix shows, paper prototypes, and mock-ups to bring DÖGG

to life. The process was long and sometimes felt like treading water, but eventually I reached, what I believe to be, a satisfactory conclusion. DÖGG embraces that we are not all the same, that periods aren't something to hide or consider as a nuisance. It is a natural part of life, of being a human-being. DÖGG treats menstruation as the normal bodily function that it is and, above all and, celebrates the colour **RED**.



⁵⁶ Sherwood, 2019
⁵⁷ Smiley, 2019

Fig. 32
Fig. 33
Fig. 34
Fig. 35
Fig. 36

CONCLUSION

It is my understanding that the world of menstruation advertising going through a metamorphosis, platforms for discussion are being opened up and people seem to be actively working towards eradicating period shame. The popularisation of feminism has without a doubt contributed to this change. Letting brands and celebrities serve as leaders and icons for the ideology is not the way forward, just like feminism wasn't "done" when white women got the vote. It doesn't mean that their contribution is necessarily bad or not important, it simply means that a "some people" approach is not the key - we need to think in terms of "all people". It's not something that is supposed to be fun; it's supposed to be serious,

because demanding human rights is serious. Marketplace feminism makes equality appear sexy and fun but is just an illusion of equality in an unequal space that promises no foundational changes.

Looking at period products in this context, I see that there is still a lot of work to be done. Creating period products keeping in mind equality, representation, and the normalisation of periods is good and it's important. However, it is not just something to regard in advertising. Brands have an ethical responsibility to approach these topics on all levels of their image. We shouldn't settle for marketplace feminism but strive for a post-marketplace feminist world. It may not be as sexy but it's going to benefit more than just a handful of people.

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Sworn Statement

I, Arna Maríudóttir Auðunsdóttir,
born on November 10, 1989.

hereby declare that I have prepared this Bachelor's
thesis independently and without external assistance.
In doing so, I have not used any aids other than those
mentioned in the enclosed list of sources.

All points that have been taken from publications
literally or adapted form have been identified as such by
me.

_____	,	_____	_____
Place		Date	Signature

From Blue to Red:
The Evolution and Future of
Menstruation Advertising

Final paper for the
obtainment of the
Bachelor of Arts Degree in
Media and Communication
Design

First examiner:
Lars Grau

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