

**Menarche and Emerging Female Identity:
The Messages Conveyed In Menstrual Product Advertisements**

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A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

Master of Science

Department of Family Studies

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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**MENARCHE AND EMERGING FEMALE IDENTITY:
THE MESSAGES CONVEYED IN MENSTRUAL PRODUCT ADVERTISEMENTS**

BY

MIKA R. SIMES

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the messages conveyed in menstrual product advertisements with specific concern given to the type of information that could be learned about menstruation and the female body by menarcheal girls. Over 200 advertisements from popular women's magazines comprised the data set. Using grounded theory methodology, these contemporary commercial advertisements were analyzed and tentative theory generated. The findings of this study show that the themes conveyed in menstrual product advertisements could function to heighten insecurities in the female adolescent reader. Among the messages conveyed in the advertisements is the assertion that the menstruating state must always be concealed, the suggestion that physical distress is a normal part of menstruation, and the idea that menstruation is unclean and inherently problematic. The findings also revealed that the advertisements are a reflection of the negative societal views of menstruation and, because the advertisements function to heighten insecurities, they also function to perpetuate and maintain the silence and shame which surrounds menstruation in our society.

Acknowledgments

There are many people I would like to thank for their contributions and support during the writing of this document.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Dale Berg for his continued support, encouragement, enthusiasm, and friendship.

Natasha, the brainstorming sessions and the frequent laughter greatly assisted me over the last few years, thank you.

I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Karen Duncan and Dr. Dawne McCance for their insight and their time.

Dad, Mom, Tanya, Jeff, John, Marty, and Trevor, thank you for everything. I am grateful and feel very blessed to be surrounded by such wonderful people.

This thesis is dedicated to my niece Chelsea and my nephew Taylor.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a feminist researcher, I believe that it is important to discuss the goals of this research. Feminist research has been asserted to be research that is done *on women for women* (Duffy, 1985). It seeks to transcend traditional theoretical approaches in an attempt to study the experiences of women from the viewpoint of, and for the benefit of, women. This orientation allows for issues to be studied that have been largely ignored in the past. It also re-examines previous studies done about women and does this outside the spectrum of the traditional theoretical approaches which may not adequately account for the unique life experiences of women.

A feminist study done on the portrayal of menarche in advertisements allows for an examination conducted from a female perspective on an often tabooed topic. This type of study allows feminist scholars to uncover the female experience, as depicted in advertisements, and to question whether or not this is the type of information that should be conveyed to adolescent females. This research was done in order to draw attention to the societal beliefs and messages held, and internalized, about both menarche and, even more importantly, the female body.

An analysis of menstrual product advertisements was done in order to examine the messages conveyed through forums which appear as though they break the silence that surrounds menstruation in our society. The topic of menstruation is often not openly talked about in our society, therefore I felt it necessary to critically examine the mediums which appear to break the silence surrounding it. It is critical that we not accept messages simply based on the notion that some information is better than no information at all. If these messages do nothing more than maintain the social silence surrounding menstruation then their value and their possible negative implications for an

adolescent audience must be considered. The text of these advertisements certainly functions to break the silence which surrounds this tabooed topic, but the discourse of these advertisements was analyzed in order to uncover the messages that are being conveyed.

While feminist theories are available as frames of reference within which I could have done this type of research, it was important for me to allow the findings to emerge from my data rather than have them circumscribed by an established theoretical framework. Through grounded theory methodology, which is "a highly systematic research approach for the collection and analysis of qualitative data for the purpose of generating explanatory theory that furthers the understanding of social and psychological phenomena" (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p.3), I attempted to discover theory grounded in the data about the portrayal of menarche in advertisements.

I believe that it is important for all researchers that are concerned with the well-being of women, to closely examine the theories and methods with which they are studying women. If understanding of the female experience is the goal, studying women from the perspective of the traditional theories may not be sufficient as they often do not account for the unique life experiences of women. Menstruation, especially as currently defined, is a feminist concern. Understanding how values are fostered and perpetuated in advertising is a first step in effecting change where required. This research is one component of this process of change.

Women's Health

Women's health issues are moving to the forefront of feminist research as it becomes evident that many of these issues have been virtually ignored throughout history. While progress is being made in research on women's physical health, I believe that it is also important to focus attention on women's

mental health. Because there has not been an abundance of this type of research in the past, I feel that it is important to analyze female mental health issues and experiences. While menstruation is a physiological event for women, there are mental health issues that may impact self-esteem if negative social definitions of the menstruating female body are internalized. I feel that this is particularly important when dealing with adolescent girls. Mary Pipher discusses the lack of research on adolescent girls when she states, "Psychology has a long history of ignoring girls this age. Until recently adolescent girls haven't been studied by academics, and they have long baffled therapists. Because they are secretive with adults and full of contradictions, they are difficult to study" (Pipher, 1994, p.21). Given lack of knowledge on adolescent females, I feel it is imperative that we begin to understand the messages conveyed to adolescent girls through popular culture while also considering the implications of these messages on self-esteem.

Research Goals

This project, like much feminist research, had as one of its goals the betterment of women's lives. Another goal of this project was to reveal and evaluate the themes of the menstrual product advertisements aimed at adolescent girls with regards to their changing bodies and their menstrual cycles. Yet another goal was to make possible a deeper understanding of societal beliefs about the female body and the menstrual cycle that are embodied in these advertisements. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to the initiation of change where appropriate.

Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded theory research "makes its greatest contribution in areas in which little research has been done" (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 7). As such, it is an ideal method to use when examining the portrayal of women, and the

menarcheal experience, in advertisements. Feminist research needs both exploratory research and research which generates theory regarding the experiences of the women under study. While much of what follows is descriptive, theory grounded in the data is also generated. Grounded theory methodology is ideal for this type of work as "the specific focus of grounded theory on theory generation adds an important dimension to data analysis" (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p.7). From a feminist perspective, a grounded theory approach seemed the most suitable for this project as it allowed for the exploration and description of the menstrual experience as portrayed in advertising, a topic which has been virtually ignored in social science research.

Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature

This research operated under the assumption that adolescent girls, because of the silence that surrounds the topic of menstruation in our society, are typically quite ignorant about their menstrual cycles. As adolescent girls internalize the social message that menstruation is not a topic that is openly discussed, they may of necessity seek out informal sources, such as magazine advertisements, to obtain information about their menstrual cycles. Working under this assumption, this research investigated the messages being conveyed to adolescent girls about their bodies and their periods in these advertisements. The research reviewed in this section provides a background for the reader to understand why there is a need to further explore the portrayal of women and menarche in menstrual product advertisements. The topics explored in this chapter include the inadequate preparation of adolescent girls entering menarche, the lack of education given these girls, the myths, taboos and the silence surrounding menstruation, the potential shift from eager anticipation of the first menses to dreading menstruation, the ignorance of adolescent girls approaching menarche, the accessibility of menstrual information for adolescent girls, the lack of social support given to menarcheal girls, the reasons for exploring print advertisements from magazines, and an outline of the research question. Studies which support or refute the findings of this study are incorporated in the results section.

Inadequate Preparation

As the average age for girls entering into menarche continues to drop in Western society (Brumberg, 1993), closer attention must be given to whether or not young girls are being adequately prepared for this stage of their development. Preparing a twelve-year-old girl for the onset of menarche would be quite different from preparing a seventeen-year-old girl for this event as "the

younger the girl is, and the less anticipated her menarche, the more shocking and frightening the experience" (Koff, Rierdan, & Sheingold, 1982, p.7). The steadily dropping age of girls beginning their menstrual cycle in Western society from seventeen in 1780 to twelve and a half today (Brumberg, 1993) would indicate that age appropriate preparation for the much younger adolescent girl entering menarche is necessary.

Lack of Education

While it is important to educate adolescent girls about menstruation, such education, unfortunately, rarely occurs. "Menarcheal girls are expected to cope with minimal instruction, often obtained from a pamphlet, film, short discussion, or whispered information from peers" (Morse & Doan, 1987, p. 385). As a result, many adolescent girls are often inadequately prepared for the onset of their periods and may need to seek out menstrual cycle and product information on their own. Thus, "adolescent girls may not be as prepared as they could be for such an important life event" (Janes & Morse, 1990, p.47).

I believe that the importance of properly preparing adolescent girls for menarche cannot be overstated. Research indicates "that being well-prepared for menarche may lead to a more positive experience" (Janes & Morse, 1990, p.57), and "that more adequate preparation is associated with a more positive experience of menarche" (Koff, Rierdan, & Sheingold, 1982, p.6). Conversely, "such themes as fear of dying or of dire illness; of shame, guilt, and concealment; and of being somehow abnormal are not inappropriate under the circumstances, and underlie the potential for menarche to be a painful and disruptive experience if there is no preparation" (Koff, Rierdan, & Sheingold, 1982, p.7).

It has been argued that "a woman's sense of her body and herself as female has parallels with her reaction to menarche" (Rierdan, Koff, & Flaherty,

1983, p.486). If this is the case, and the experience of menarche does play a role in the shaping of the future female identity, then the preparation of the pre-menarcheal girl for her first period would seem imperative and crucial.

Whereas parents and school health education are often assumed to be providing requisite menstrual information and education for adolescent girls, this is typically not the case. One research study indicated that "the girls felt that the school program was inadequate" (Morse & Doan, 1987, p. 389). Another noted that "parents often have difficulty teaching their children about sexual matters such as menstruation. It is not uncommon for parents to feel embarrassed as well as unprepared to carry out this task effectively" (Cumming, Cumming, & Kieren, 1991, p. 474). The lack of information and preparation is forcing these girls to look elsewhere for needed information. Since "in our culture menstruation is considered private and embarrassing, and communication about the topic is limited" (Janes & Morse, 1990, p.47), adolescent girls are likely seeking out information from more private and secretly accessible sources. A private source would be one that a girl could access without having to admit she has her period.

Magazine advertisements are among the more informal information sources available to adolescent girls. To the extent that menarche has been seen as "a developmental milestone with psychological as well as physiological significance" (Pillemer, Koff, Rhinehart, & Rierdan, 1987, p.187), it would seem worthwhile to investigate these less formal sources of information such as advertisements, particularly those found in print media used by adolescent girls. Havens and Swenson (1988) point out that these advertisements often depict menstruation as a 'hygienic crisis' that is best managed by an effective 'security system.' My research attempted to discover what information about

menstruation, the management of menstruation, and the meanings associated with menstruation, adolescent girls could get from these print advertisements.

Myths, Taboos, and the Silence Surrounding Menstruation

There are numerous myths and taboos which may contribute to the silence that often surrounds the topic of menstruation in our culture. Throughout history, the menstruating woman has been seen as unclean and tabooed (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1988). "In many primitive societies, the menstruating woman was excluded from the most ordinary life of her tribe for four or five days every month" (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1988, p.9). These women were often relegated to 'menstrual huts' located outside of the village where the rest of the tribe would not be at risk of contamination. Although this type of formal exclusion of the menstruating woman does not currently take place in our society, many of these old myths and taboos continue to shape our views of menstruation. It is clear that menstruation is not a topic that is openly discussed and that women often go to great lengths to hide the fact that they are menstruating. Menstruation is shrouded by a veil of silence in Western society and young adolescent girls learn quite quickly that this is not a topic that is to be openly discussed. The silence that surrounds menstruation likely forces girls to seek less formal sources of information, such as advertisements, when they need tangible and practical 'how to' advice on how to respond to this new developmental stage in their lives.

The negative stereotypes embedded in our social and cultural beliefs regarding menstruation also create an environment of secrecy and embarrassment. A very common myth holds that menstruating women are not capable of functioning normally. It is argued that "practitioners of menstrual politics have one basic tenet in common: They are convinced that women are

naturally and irrevocably limited by the menstrual function" (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1988, p.55). As a result, normal mood fluctuations are often attributed to 'being on the rag' or 'it's that time of the month.' The stigmatization and negative attributions further contribute to the maintenance of silence concerning menstruation. The context of silence unwittingly places the adolescent girl in the position of needing information on, at the very least, the management of her period while also implying to her that it is improper to ask anyone for information.

Despite the fact that menstruation is an important 'rite of passage' and an integral physiological event in a girl's life, our culture continues to define menstruation as dirty and shameful. Perhaps even more harmful is the message that the silence sends to the adolescent girl about her own body. Nancy Friday writes that "this silence that surrounds our bleeding also cuts into our vocal cords, making articulate twelve-and thirteen-year olds mute, embarrassed by our bodies, which we no longer trust" (Friday, 1996, pp. 196-197). The adolescent girl is too embarrassed to even feel comfortable in asking anyone about the changes going on with her body. The dilemma that faces her is that at the onset of menarche she is acutely aware of the negative imagery surrounding menstruation, but she knows little else about this developmental stage she has just entered or will enter soon. She has, however, internalized the perspective that this is not a socially acceptable topic to openly inquire about.

The very powerful socially constructed silence surrounding menstruation, which is largely based on discredited myths and taboos, works in such a way that "the 'natural' phenomenon of menstruation then, remains secret, somehow shameful and something about which people are silent" (McKeever, 1984, p.34). Unfortunately, this silence can often prevent adolescent girls from communicating with people close to them such as their mothers, older sisters, teachers or friends about their periods. It is this silence which leaves the

menarcheal girl with little choice but to turn to accessible and 'secret' sources of information like advertisements in magazines. It is this silence that leaves the adolescent girl ignorant, scared and even ashamed of her menstruating body. It is this silence that makes the unprepared menarcheal girl view the onset of her menstrual cycle as a crisis that must be managed with no clear direction from others.

With the exception of the occasional article in a teen magazine and the advertisements that bombard every aspect of popular media, there is little information conveyed about menstruation in print media. It does not seem appropriate to depend on an occasional article to prepare the menarcheal girl for her period when it is known that this is such an important developmental stage in her life. Relying on 'the chance' that girls will see such articles is clearly not an appropriate response to their very real needs at the time of menarche.

Eager Anticipation to Dread

The process accounting for how a young girl's eager anticipation of her first period turns to the dreading of menstruation following menarche is of particular interest to me. There are several explanations for why the pre-menarcheal girl would be excited about getting her first period. A sense of belonging is important to an adolescent and this could contribute to the anticipation of menstruation because she does not want to feel that she is the only one who does not have 'it.' The feeling that 'once I start my period I will be a mature woman' may also explain the eager anticipation as "the girls looking forward to menarche sensed that it would signal 'being really grown up'" (Whisnant & Zegans, 1975, p.812). Judy Blume (1970), writes extensively on the excitement and anticipation of adolescent girls awaiting their first period in Are You There God It's Me Margaret and truly conveys the message that this is an exciting and important experience for the adolescent girls. In this book the

anticipation and excitement of menarche is evident in one of the private talks Margaret has with God: "Gretchen, my friend, got her period. I'm so jealous God. I hate myself for being so jealous, but I am....if I'm the last I don't know what I'll do. Oh please God. I just want to be normal" (Blume, 1970, p.97). The existence of eager anticipation amongst many pre-menarcheal girls in sharp contrast to the negative impressions of many post-menarcheal girls would indicate that a shift in perception does take place.

Ignorance

Ignorance about menstruation is widespread among adolescent girls approaching menarche. "It appears that female children commonly approach puberty in a disadvantageous position. They usually have little or no knowledge about menstruation"(McKeever, 1984, p.36). In some cases the pre-menarcheal girl may hold a wealth of information with regard to the biological and physiological aspects of menstruation, but know very little about the practical aspects of managing her first period. Adolescent girls may be ignorant about menstruation because of the fact that many of them have simply not been given the practical information that they desire and obviously need for the onset of menarche. In this state of ignorance, girls may not even know what needs to be known. One group of researchers reported that many of the concerns of adolescent girls "did not center about the psychological meaning of menstruation, why it takes place, or about the anatomy involved, but on the practical issue of 'What do I do when I get my period?'" (Whisnant & Zegans, 1975, p.811). Practical information such as frequency of changing pads, how to wear the menstrual products, and even what products they should buy are among the unanswered questions for adolescent girls. While mothers and teachers may provide information at puberty on 'the facts of life,' the actual practical information has often been omitted forcing the girls to look elsewhere

for this information. The girl may feel that this is simply not a topic that she can talk about with her mother. In some cases a mother may also not feel that she is comfortable in talking about menstruation with her daughter as "talking about menstruation with children seems to evoke particular anxiety in mothers" (McKeever, 1984, p.35). The findings of one group of researchers revealed that "most adult daughters believe their mothers provided an inadequate sexuality education. When their mothers were able to talk at all about sexuality, the talk largely consisted of warnings and rules" (Brock & Jennings, 1993, p.65). While the warnings and rules may have been the only messages the mother felt that she could comfortably convey, they do not provide the adolescent girl with the appropriate and necessary information she needs about her changing body.

Ignorance and silence surrounding menstruation perpetuates the negative imagery associated with menstruation. The girl who has no idea how to deal with her period, but knows it has to be hidden at all costs would quickly learn to dread this new cycle of her life. I believe that the negative social imagery surrounding menstruation, coupled with the ignorance of adolescent girls on how to deal with their periods, leads to girls feeling 'scared', 'upset' or 'ashamed' about the onset of menarche (Woods, Dery, & Most, 1982).

The negative put-downs she may encounter from her male peers and the derogatory menstrual euphemisms such as 'she is on the rag,' also encourage feelings of shame and discreditation. The very "existence of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of menstrual euphemisms indicates that the topic is still an embarrassing one" (Ernster, 1975, p.3). These menstrual euphemisms draw attention to the veil of silence that surrounds menstruation. They prevent people from even speaking of menstruation without the use of crude slang or secret code words such as 'Aunt Sylvia is visiting me', or 'Charlie just came to the door' (Ernster, 1975). The use of such expressions, whether they are overtly negative

or simply used to hide a menstruating state, reveals that silence or concealment continues to surround the topic of menstruation. It is silence that precipitates ignorance and prevents and prohibits the adolescent from openly obtaining the necessary information on menstruation.

Accessibility of Information

Although there are a great number of books on menstruation and puberty, the accessibility of this information for an adolescent must be considered. Despite numerous books, I contend that they are not readily available to an adolescent girl. I argue that attitudes regarding menstruation teach the girl that to openly inquire about her period is not acceptable. She is embarrassed to inquire about her period and this embarrassment leads her to privately seek out the needed information. To obtain information from someone else, she would have to admit to possibly having her period which is a state that she knows is not regarded positively in our society. She is in a conflicted position where she wants to be a menstruator, but does not want to be known as menstruating. She would also have to admit that she does not know about menstruation which could be very embarrassing, especially in front of her peers. Her fear of exposing her 'secret' would likely prevent her from seeking out the information that is available. The argument is not that information on menstruation is not available, but rather that it is not accessible to the adolescent girl because of social conditions and therefore, in effect, is not really available.

Support

It appears that adolescent girls are not only ill-prepared for menstruation, but that they are also not receiving the social support that usually accompanies major developmental stages in a person's life. This is problematic as "the menarcheal girl is left without the socially established support which could help her integrate the emotional aspects of menarche and menstruation into her self-

image" (Logan, Calder, & Cohen, 1980, p.263). Without social support girls are forced to face the many changes that occur at menarche on their own. Our society, for the most part, does not celebrate the onset of menarche or even recognize it in a fashion that would positively acknowledge and support the fact that this is a special and important time in a young girl's life. Without support, or some type of menstrual tradition or ritual to mark the onset of menarche, the veil of silence surrounding menstruation is perpetuated. I believe that the celebration of, or even the acknowledgment of, a girl's first period would foster the feeling that this is an important developmental stage and, as a result, a girl would feel more comfortable seeking out information from those close to her rather than turning to less formal sources of information such as magazine advertisements.

Why Magazine Advertisements?

I suspect that adolescent girls turn to magazine advertisements as a possible source of practical information because advertisements are discreet, privately accessible, subject specific, and readily available. Advertisements potentially hold all the desirable qualities for girls discreetly seeking out menstrual product information and practical menstrual advice. A girl could easily take her mother's magazines to her room without anyone suspecting that she may have gotten her first period or that she was seeking information about menstruation. She would not have to leave her home or in any way disclose or admit to the fact that she is seeking out information on her period. This could be seen as one solution to the silence surrounding the topic of menstruation.

Given that print advertisements are a potential source of information for adolescent girls, I feel it is important to take a closer look at what adolescent girls could be learning from these advertisements. Research in this area has shown that "advertisements may convey attitudes about sexuality that we may

not want young people to assume...as advertisements for menstrual products on television and in the media in general tend to convey the attitude that managing this body event is a monthly crisis of hygiene" (Cumming, Cumming, & Kieren, 1991, p.475). Berg and Coutts (1994), argued that some contemporary menstrual product advertisements have extended the dirtiness' and femininity threatening definitions associated with menstruation so as to encourage women to constantly use feminine hygiene products. This research is about these attitudes and definitions especially as they are incorporated into menstrual product advertising aimed specifically at menarcheal girls and young women.

As a feminist, I believe that it is important to take a close look at the messages that these advertisements are sending to adolescent girls about their menstrual cycles and their emerging female identities. I am concerned that the male-defined 'menstrual etiquette' (Laws, 1990) procedures that are prescribed in these advertisements are inappropriate and that they have the potential to convey messages about the female body, and the menstrual cycle, that may be harmful to adolescent girls. "The etiquette of menstruation emphasizes to women that their ordinary existence can have effects upon men independently of their intentions" (Laws, 1990, p. 19). For example, girls at menarche learn that others, especially men, must not know! Not knowing involves such things as making sure that menstrual products are always concealed and that one's menstrual status is not revealed. The point is cogently made by Laws; "Women are discredited by any behaviour which draws attention to menstruation, while men may more freely refer to it if they choose to. Thus the etiquette expresses and reinforces status distinctions" (Laws, 1990, p. 211).

The Research Question

I looked at menstrual product advertisements in an attempt to discover what the adolescent girl could learn about menstruation and her female identity from these advertisements. This included general, technical product information, general information on the menstrual cycle itself and menstrual management, menstrual attitudes, and the menstrual values conveyed in these advertisements. Implicit to this research was the assumption that menstrual information found in menstrual product advertisements is enveloped by values about menstruation and what it means to be a menstruating woman.

Chapter Three: Method

I looked at contemporary menstrual product advertisements from 1985 to the present. The advertisements were primarily taken from Chatelaine and Good Housekeeping magazines on the assumption that these are the types of magazines that would likely be accessible to the adolescent girl in her home. The 1995 paid circulation of Chatelaine was 850,866 (Colombo, 1996, p. 625). The 1996 paid circulation of Good Housekeeping was 4,951,240 (Wright, 1997, p. 403). Using purposive sampling, I looked primarily at the advertisements that appeared to be targeted to adolescent girls, although all menstrual product advertisements were included in the analysis.

Theoretical Sampling

The initial analysis of the advertisements from Chatelaine and Good Housekeeping revealed that there was a need to analyze advertisements from other magazines. This was done in order to obtain advertisements which contained messages specifically directed at adolescent girls or that provided answers to the questions emerging from the initial analysis of the data. In order to answer the question of 'What is going on here?' (Charmaz, 1983), and to capture the messages being conveyed to menarcheal girls, I needed to do more intentional, theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to seek out data from any relevant source which potentially addresses questions or concerns emerging from the data (Hutchinson, 1986). In order to do this, I expanded the data set to include an analysis of advertisements specifically directed at teens and found in such publications as YM and Seventeen. Any magazine containing ads for menstrual products could potentially be a source of menstrual information for an inquiring girl. Thus advertisements were also analyzed from Glamour, Mademoiselle, Flare, Cosmopolitan, Vogue, Shape, and Elle to name a few. In qualitative research "one gathers information from any

group that may be a source of relevant data. Relevance is determined by the requirements for generating, delimiting, and saturating the theoretical codes" (Hutchinson, 1986, p.124). As in grounded theory research "sampling decisions are made theoretically during the entire research process" (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 124), I felt it was important to expand the data set so as to include more advertisements that were specifically directed at the teen population and that addressed the themes that were emerging from the data.

Systematic Data Collection

During the initial data collection of the advertisements from Chatelaine and Good Housekeeping, the sampling was done very systematically. The advertisements used for this project were a sub-set of a larger data set, where data collection began with the first menstrual product advertisement found, which was in 1914. From this point, the advertisements were taken from the magazines every three months, in three year segments. Within every three year segment, the months were also staggered. For example, if in 1914 the advertisements were taken from the January, April, July and October editions, then in 1917 the advertisements were taken from the February, May, August and November editions of the magazines.

A sub-set of these data was used for the purpose of this project. I analyzed advertisements from the larger collection covering a ten-year period, from 1985 to 1995. As previously indicated, there were also advertisements included in the analysis which were gathered in accord with theoretical sampling. Several advertisements (1985 through 1997) were gathered to answer specific emerging questions, a process congruent with theoretical sampling. These advertisements were intentionally sought out for analysis because they were specifically aimed at adolescent girls or because they answered questions that were emerging from the existing data.

Constant Comparative Analysis

The texts of the advertisements were analyzed using constant comparative analysis to discover theory grounded in the data. "The constant comparative method is the fundamental method of data analysis in grounded theory generation" (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 122). Constant comparative analysis is unique to grounded theory research as it allows the researcher to work in a back and forth manner between data collection and data analysis. Key concepts can be fleshed out by alternating between data analysis and the constant search for new data which addresses the emerging questions. "The aim of this method is the generation of theoretical constructs that, along with substantive codes and categories and their properties, form a theory that encompasses as much behavioral variation as possible" (Hutchinson, 1986, p. 122). This process is dynamic and requires that an audit trail, documenting what the researcher has done, is maintained. The main goal at this stage of the analysis is to look for patterns and themes (Hutchinson, 1986) that emerge from the data between different codes and the emerging code categories. Throughout this process, I continually searched for an understanding of the portrayal of menarche as depicted in menstrual product advertisements and when the existing data raised new questions, I gathered additional advertisements for the answers to the questions that emerged. Examples of the questions that emerged, noted in memos, concerned issues such as 'Where is the information regarding how to use the product?' and 'How do the advertisements convey the need for the use of an entire system of products, throughout the entire month, when the menstrual period usually only lasts a few days of the month?' As each new question was raised, answers from within the data were sought.

Coding

Over 200 advertisements were analyzed for this research. The advertisements were transcribed into text form to facilitate coding and constant comparative analysis. The initial analysis of these advertisements began by conducting line-by-line coding of the text of the advertisements. These first level codes were often very literal. Such literal analysis at this initial stage "prevents the researcher from the imposition of preconceived impressions" (Hutchinson, 1986, p.120). At this initial stage I went through the data set numerous times coding and re-coding the material as an entire text. The initial codes took the form of a label or an idea, in other words, open coding. Open coding involves liberally coding in an attempt to code each sentence and each incident. By using as many codes as possible, it is hoped that complete theoretical coverage occurs (Hutchinson, 1986). This open coding stage was very broad and left me with data that needed to be re-organized into a state that would facilitate the formation of code categories. These code categories were later analyzed for broad themes or linkages that existed between the categories.

Memoing

Throughout the entire research process, I kept memos. Memoing is a paper trail for the researcher which allows her to track her research and thought processes throughout her data collection and analysis. It was through memoing, and consultation with my thesis advisor, that I formulated the method to organize the many codes and themes that had begun to emerge from the initial coding. It is important throughout this analysis to recall that there is no recipe for grounded theory analysis, just basic principles. Memos are an important element in the audit trail. As Hutchinson (1986) notes, "In order to generate a quality theory, the descriptions of empirical events must be elevated to a theoretical level. Memoing is a vital part of this process" (p.123). Memoing was used as a means

to keep track of the conceptual processes that supported the generation of the emerging theory. The basic decisions that were necessary throughout the project regarding data organization were also made based on the memos that were compiled throughout the analysis.

Examples of memoing in this research. During the initial reading and coding of the advertisements, I noticed that the words slim and thin were used frequently in many of the advertisements. I made a memo on this which later led me to take a closer look at the actual names given to each of the products. Later I decided that it would be important to compile a list of the product names and trademarks. The examination of product names allowed me to examine the messages that might be conveyed in a single word or product trademark. Memoing, and the production of an audit trail, allowed me to later explore many leads in the data, some which yielded tangible results and others that were 'dead ends.' In either case, memoing was essential in gaining an understanding of the messages conveyed in the advertisements.

Memo clustering. Memo clustering is an important process for concept development in the grounded theory process. It is through the process of linking memos that conceptual analysis and schemes become enriched (Stern, 1980). Memos are integral to the development of the grounded theory and it is through the sorting and grouping of memos that conceptual analysis occurs. Through the clustering of memos and code categorization I was able to form broader concepts and themes within the existing data in an attempt to gain understanding and generate basic social process which ultimately explained the theory that is grounded in the data and offered understanding of the depiction of menarche in menstrual product advertising.

Data Organization

Following the initial stage of coding, I organized the data into four lists. The line by line coding that I had undertaken earlier assisted me in generating these lists and gave me a familiarity with the data necessary for this organization. These initial lists allowed me to organize the data into a state which would facilitate the development of larger, conceptual code categories as the themes of the data emerged.

The four initial lists were titled; 1) product names, 2) product information, 3) physiological/body facts and 4) other. The 'product names list' was simply a running list of the product names, or trademark names, used in these advertisements. I was interested in this type of compilation as many of the advertisements contained very little written text and, as a result, the information taken from the advertisements may come from the messages covertly conveyed by the actual product names. The 'product facts list' was strictly information that could be learned from the advertisements about each specific product from each advertisement. The 'physiological/body facts' list dealt with the physiological aspects of menstruation as presented by the menstrual product advertisements. The 'other' list was made up of information in the advertisements that I felt was important, but did not fit into one of the other three categories. As it turned out, this list was made up of very conceptual information which often helped explain some of the messages conveyed in the other categories. Messages regarding the necessity to conceal menstruation made up much of this list. This initial analysis allowed me to summarize and categorize my data and facilitated increased familiarity with the content of the advertisements.

Conceptual Development

Initially the codes and lists were comprised of words taken from the texts of the feminine hygiene advertisements. However, as the process continued,

and I continued to go back and forth between the advertisements and the data lists, code categories began to emerge as broader themes and linkages were uncovered. At this stage, concept formation began as I worked with the data to modify and integrate my thoughts such that they began to answer the questions that I had set out to examine. As I searched for common linkages between the lists and codes, my analysis became more conceptual and less descriptive.

Code Categories

I began to conceptually 'flesh out' the messages that these advertisements could send to a menarcheal girl. Constant comparative analysis allowed me to continuously compare and contrast the messages and themes throughout the data. I began to uncover similarities within the code categories. These eventually emerged as conceptual themes. Through a series of defining, grouping, categorizing, linkage formation, and the discovery of interrelationships between the code categories, I was able to reduce the code categories into a tentative conceptual framework. This process of analysis further reduced the codes into conceptual categories. By reducing substantive codes into categories and gathering code categories into concepts, I began to move closer to identifying the core variable.

Core Variable

The core variable is the singular phrase that brings all the conceptual categories together and answers succinctly the question, of 'What is going on here?' (Charmaz, 1983).

A core variable simply means a central theme or concept that holds all the data together....To be credible, the core variables, or theory, must be well integrated, easy to understand, relevant to the empirical world, and must explain the major variation in the process or phenomena studied (Stern & Pyles, 1986, p.15).

It is the core variable which accounts for and explains the linkages between the other variables or code categories that were formulated during the initial stage of the analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Many themes emerged from the analysis of this data. From the analysis of the messages conveyed in the advertisements, the following themes emerged: silence and shame about menstruation, embarrassment about menstruation as implied by the messages, the many ways that a female could 'get caught' menstruating, the many ways she can avoid 'getting caught' menstruating, the ways that the advertisements could potentially invoke fear of specific products, and the message that the 'always dirty' female body requires constant use of menstrual products. A concomitant learning section is also included in this chapter as well as a list of the potentially valuable menstrual information that was conveyed in the advertisements.

The findings of this study were evaluated in light of other research in this area in an attempt to compare and contrast my findings with those discussed in existing literature. In so doing, I was able to see whether or not my results were consistent with other studies that have explored menstruation as depicted in print advertisements. This process is an integral part of grounded theory methodology where "grounded theorists generate a theory based on observed patterns in the field, turning to the literature to support the emergent theory" (Huthchinson, 1986, p.126).

Silence and Shame

My analysis revealed that menstrual product advertisements perpetuate the silence and shame which surrounds menstruation in our society. Silence and shame are main themes of my research findings for two reasons. First, silence and shame about menstruation are suspected to place adolescent girls in the position of needing to seek out informal sources of information in order to learn about their periods and, second, within the text of the advertisements, the message to conceal one's period, thereby implying shame and perpetuating

silence, is pervasive. The following topics are addressed under the theme of silence and shame: silence as perpetuated by print advertisements, silence and the lack of requisite knowledge, the function of silence in advertising, silence and peers, and silence through concealment.

Silence as perpetuated by print advertisements. The theme of silence is pervasive in my findings, despite the fact that the very existence of these advertisements would seem to break the code of silence that surrounds menstruation. While a myriad of menstrual product advertisements are displayed on television and in various magazines, the messages conveyed in print advertisements continue to reinforce and perpetuate the idea that menstruation should not be openly discussed. My findings also address the concern regarding how the context of silence and shame which surrounds menstruation in our society contributes to adolescent girls being so ignorant about their menstrual cycles and their bodies that they likely lack the requisite knowledge to even read the advertisements from an informed perspective. It is an informed perspective which may prevent the negative messages conveyed in these advertisements from being internalized. Such a perspective often does not exist for adolescent girls.

Silence and the lack of requisite knowledge. It is my concern that many adolescent girls lack the requisite knowledge about menstruation to read the advertisements from an informed perspective that could keep them from feeling shameful, fearful, guilty, or embarrassed about their periods after reading these advertisements. If adolescent girls do not know very much about menstruation, they may understand the messages conveyed in these advertisements as being factual rather than as marketing techniques designed to sell menstrual products. I contend that adolescent girls typically approach these advertisements from an extremely uninformed perspective. It is this perspective which ignites concern

regarding the messages conveyed by advertisers about menstruation and the female body. In the past, menstrual product advertisements often used cryptic and euphemistic language to refer to menstruation and to their products. The reader of these advertisements would be required to have some knowledge about menstruation and menstrual products in order to understand the advertisements. This is well illustrated in the 'Modess because' campaign run more than ten years (1949 - 1960s) where women in glamorous gowns were depicted in the picture of the advertisement and the only text was 'Modess....because'. One would need some information about menstrual products to even know what this advertisement was selling.

The messages have not become much clearer over time, a point illustrated in advertisements of the 1990's that talk about the need for protection from accidents. While there is significantly more text in these advertisements, the reader would still need some knowledge about menstruation and menstrual products in order to understand the concept of protection needed for the types of accidents that the advertisements are addressing. Because of the silence in our society, adolescent girls likely lack the knowledge necessary to interpret these advertisements without being affected by the negative or inappropriate messages conveyed by the advertisements. The following advertisements illustrate how the reader of the text would require considerable knowledge about menstruation, and the socially constructed meanings which surround menstruation, in order to understand the language and messages conveyed. I have added italics in order to emphasize the terms which an adolescent would need to comprehend if she were to be able to 'read' the advertisements and understand them.

They call them *channels*. I call it better *protection*.

INTRODUCING ALWAYS WITH CHANNELS. Channels.

An incredible idea from Always. Channels actually designed to help prevent *accidents*. Because they help keep *moisture* in the center. Away from the sides where *accidents* usually happen.

While Dri-Weave helps keep the surface *cleaner* and *drier*. New Always with Channels. The maxi designed to *protect* you better. It's cleaner. It's drier. It Protects Even Better.

(Glamour, September 1995, p.133).

An extra strip for *peace of mind*. We call it the *Extra Absorbency Zone*. It's an extra strip on the New Freedom pad that actually draws *moisture* along the middle and away from the sides. So you get *protection* and *peace of mind*. It's the New Freedom difference!

(Chatelaine, July 1989, p. 143).

Silence and ignorance about menstruation can be maintained by these advertisements as little information about menstruation can be conveyed when adolescent girls are incapable of understanding the terminology that is used.

The function of silence in advertising. It appears as though silence and shame about menstruation in our society contributes to adolescent ignorance surrounding menstruation thereby permitting the advertisements to convey inappropriate and inaccurate information in an attempt to sell more products. Because adolescent girls are frequently uninformed, the advertisements can convey virtually any message that they want about menstruation, and the female body, without the adolescent girl knowing that these messages are frequently inappropriate or inaccurate. Shame is perpetuated when the advertisements

convey negative messages about menstruation and the female body as a means to sell products.

Silence and peers. Many of the advertisements suggest that adolescent girls discuss their menstrual periods with same sex and age peers or girls who are slightly older, such as a sister. At first glance this seemed to be one way that the silence surrounding menstruation was broken. Closer analysis revealed that these discussions would only serve to maintain the traditional negative messages that surround the menstrual cycle. The nature of the discussions in these advertisements concerns sharing information on the best ways to hide and conceal one's menstrual cycle. So, while silence may not be portrayed in all of the advertisements, it is maintained as an important feature of concealment by the nature of the discussions occurring between the girls portrayed in these advertisements. The type of message that these advertisements convey is that the need to conceal is shared by all girls. It is seen as normal to hide the menstruating state and appropriate to talk to other women about menstruation provided the discussion centres around the many different ways that menstruation can be concealed. The advertisements do not convey that girls and women openly discuss the changes in their bodies and the joy of being a woman. Rather, advertisements reveal that the girls are willing to share with each other and other women the many different methods and products that are available to conceal their periods and prevent discreditation through discovery. Some examples of this include:

Sure twelve is old enough to try tampons. That's what my sister said when I asked her about using tampons...she told me that even though it is small, a Tampax, Compak tampon protects as well as a

pad. That's because it expands to fit the way I am inside, so I won't have to worry about leaks and stains.

(Chatelaine, April 1990, p.139).

So now when I get my period, I feel clean and totally comfortable. And I really like being free to do whatever I want. Christy, you really are a great friend for turning me on to tampons! ...Feel better about your period from the very first time.

(Chatelaine, June 1990, p.79).

Silence through concealment. As girls become more experienced and begin having regular periods, they will likely realize that the actual experience is not nearly as bad as the advertisements depict. However, they will not likely learn that the need to conceal one's period is an exaggeration. This is because concealing one's period is a central task in our culture. This belief is enforced throughout menstrual product advertisements. If concealment requires the use of many products, as conveyed in the advertisements, then it is likely girls will purchase more products than needed. The fear of discovery, which leads to concealment, is a message that exists within the context of silence and shame surrounding menstruation in our society and is understandably perpetuated and maintained by the advertisements. The language of the advertisements suggests that exposure would be, in their words, disastrous:

When some things don't fit, that's life. When your maxi doesn't fit, That's disaster. Who needs disaster? Always has a fitting solution.

(Mademoiselle, March 1992, p.73).

Adolescent girls are taught in menstrual product advertisements that no one must ever know when they have their periods. By stating that discovery is disastrous, the advertisements create a fear in adolescents that directly builds on the socially constructed definitions of menstruation. Because menstruation is a taboo in our society, the advertisements can sell their products as the means to securely hide this discrediting and embarrassing event. The advertisements directly discuss the embarrassment and secretiveness of menstruation. The following advertisements convey this message and, in so doing, maintain the silence and shame which surround menstruation in our society. It should be noted that these particular advertisements are targeted at first time users:

Tampax Comfort Shaped Applicator Tampons give you all the protection of a pad without the bulkiness that's so totally embarrassing and uncomfortable. And to make you even more comfortable, everything flushes away, even the applicator. Which means no one will ever know that you have your you-know-what. (YM, May 1992, p.93).

"Sure tampons are easy to use." When I first got my period, I used pads. But I never really liked that bulky feeling. I was always worried that people would know that I had my period. Then I talked to my best friend Christy. And she said, "Don't worry, you can use tampons —they're so much better." Then she told me that a tampon is worn inside of you. So you never feel it or see it. (Chatelaine, June 1990, p.79).

If you're old enough to get your period, you're old enough to forget your period. Because you're old enough to use a tampon. And coping with your period is a lot easier when you don't have the restrictions and embarrassment of pads to cope with, too. A tampon lets you wear what you want...do what you want...whenever you want to. So you'll hardly notice your period. And neither will anyone else.

(Flare, August 1989, p.89).

My analysis of contemporary menstrual products advertisements revealed that, although these ads may appear to break the silence which surrounds menstruation in our society, the messages conveyed in the advertisements suggest the necessity to conceal one's period at any cost. This pervasive message works to perpetuate silence and maintain the shame which surrounds menstruation in our society.

Embarrassment

The silence surrounding menstruation implies that there something shameful or wrong about menstruating. It is the context of silence and shame which contributes to the embarrassment that is associated with menstruation. The silence surrounding menstruation teaches girls that they cannot admit that they have begun menstruating or talk openly about it. To prevent embarrassment, the adolescent girl learns that she must be diligent to prevent discovery of her status as a menstruator. The advertisements teach her how this can be achieved. This can maintain and perpetuate the negative social views of menstruation. It can also heighten the existing insecurities which are beginning to be felt by the adolescent girl about her changing body. The insecurities exist because of the developmental stage of these girls. For them, "everything is

changing-body shape, hormones, skin and hair. Calmness is replaced by anxiety" (Pipher, 1994, p. 23). The advertisements for menstrual products typically play on this anxiety by heightening insecurities associated with changing bodies and menstrual cycles.

At the time of menarche, an adolescent girl becomes much more cognizant of her physical appearance and emerging sexuality. The potential for her to be embarrassed rises and she becomes increasingly self-conscious. The awareness of herself as sexual object, combined with the internalized cultural message that menstruation is shameful, contributes to embarrassment regarding her menstrual cycle. She becomes aware that being a menstruating woman can potentially detract from her physical attractiveness. Mary Pipher cogently describes the experience of adolescent girls when she states,

American culture has always smacked girls on the head in early adolescence. This is when they move into a broader culture that is rife with girl-hurting 'isms,' such as sexism, capitalism, and lookism, which is the evaluation of a person solely on the basis of appearance (Pipher, 1994, p. 23).

The advertisements convey the message that in order to maintain this appearance, their products must be used, so that total concealment of the menstrual cycle can be achieved. According to the advertisements, by using these products, embarrassment can be avoided.

Ways to 'Get Caught'

In order to prevent embarrassment the adolescent girl knows that she must not 'get caught' having her period. When she turns to the advertisements for information she learns that there are many ways that she can be discovered menstruating and become embarrassed. Since not being embarrassed and appearing 'normal' at all times are crucial for teenage girls, the advertisements

play on these insecurities, heightening them, to the end of selling more of their products. Throughout the text of the advertisements the adolescent girl is taught the many ways she can be exposed as menstruating. By exposing the ways she can reveal her menstruating state the advertisements can then offer their solutions for avoiding or preventing this from happening. The advertisements conveyed that a female's menstruating state could be exposed through physical symptoms of menstruation, not participating in 'normal' activities, hormonal responses or mood swings, menstrual odour, inadequate protection, product discovery, and male discovery of her state.

Physical symptoms. From menstrual product advertisements, a girl will learn that there are many physical symptoms that occur during the menstrual cycle. The advertisements focus on the multitude of physical symptoms associated with the menstrual cycle and they pay particular attention to teaching the adolescent girl what products she should use in order to 'cure' these symptoms. The advertisements do not teach that the symptoms are not part of the menstrual experience for all women. By not teaching what causes certain menstrual symptoms, the advertisements convey the message that these symptoms are a natural part of the menstrual cycle and are experienced by all menstruating women, all of the time. The following are examples:

Here's the first menstrual pain reliever specially formulated for the special needs of active teens: Teen Formula MIDOL. It relieves cramps, pain and (everybody's favorite) bloating...So you don't have to miss out on a thing. (YM, May 1992, p.57).

Your pain reliever has a menstrual problem. Pain relievers relieve pain. Nothing more. They can't do a thing for bloating. Or

tension. Or irritability. Multi-symptom Midol has a maximum strength formula that relieves cramps, headaches and backaches. But it doesn't stop there it has a combination of ingredients that help reduce bloating and relieve tension and irritability. Multi-symptom Midol. Because your period is more than a pain. (Cosmopolitan, February 1990, p.217).

Cramp Relief

No other brand works harder to relieve your painful monthly cramps. Pamprin's special formula acts right away to provide fast, reliable relief. Plus, Pamprin works to reduce bloating and relieve irritability. Pamprin clinically proven effective. (Chatelaine, July 1990, p. 64).

A girl could potentially expose herself as menstruating, and 'get caught,' if she were to discuss her physical symptoms, such as menstrual cramps, or if she were to appear as though she was experiencing any physical symptoms, such as bloating, due to water retention, at this time of the month. As such, the implication of these advertisements is that if the products are not used the symptoms of menstruation will not be controlled and the female could be exposed, or 'get caught,' menstruating.

The severity of the pain associated with menstruating portrayed in menstrual product advertisements varies. It is the suggestion that severe menstrual pain should be treated with over-the-counter pain relievers that I find questionable. The following advertisement portrays a woman 'doubled over' in pain once a month. I contend that severe menstrual pain may be a symptom

that should be given medical attention rather than treated with non-prescription pain relievers.

Portrait of a Menstrual Pain Sufferer, Stephanie Oakes, 30. Once a month I'm doubled over in pain...Nothing has shown me it works better or lasts longer than my Advil. Nothing. Advanced Medicine for Pain.

(Cosmopolitan, November 1996, p. 83).

Not participating. 'Getting caught' could also occur if she was not able to fully participate in all of the things that she would normally participate in if she were not menstruating. In turning to these advertisements for information about her period, the adolescent would learn that she must, at all costs, conceal her menstruating state. No one must know she has her period and she must be able to participate in all the events she normally would when it isn't 'that time of the month.' In so doing, she will prevent discreditation and will always appear 'normal.' Normal behaviour would constitute behaving exactly the same way she would if she were not menstruating. Not participating thus becomes a 'sign' of her menstrual status.

Being normal is very important to adolescent girls. Being seen as normal is part of preventing embarrassment. The concealment package offered by these advertisers reinforces and maintains the message that no one must know that she is 'on the rag.' Ann Treneman (1989), discusses how advertisements teach us that we must act 'normal' and normal, according to the advertisements, is the appearance of not menstruating. "We are under an advertising mandate to act 'normal' at all times - a state that evidently has nothing to do with our monthly cycles. We are to remain active; we must not show any pre-period bloat; we must guard against 'unfeminine' smells; and generally organize our lives so that

no one even suspects that periods exist" (Treneman, 1989, p.161). The following advertisement is an example of how, without the use of particular menstrual products, the young girl would need to change her plans:

Sure you can trust tampons. When I got my period on the day we went to the lake I just about died. That was when I'd really had it with pads. But luckily, my friend Patti was there, and when I told her what happened she said, " I never let my period stop me. I use Tampax Compak tampons"... "So you don't have to worry about leaks or stains."

(Chatelaine, July 1990, p.56).

The advertisements teach that one way to 'get caught' would be if someone could suggest that you are not able to participate because of your period. They assert that menstrual symptoms can be treated by their products such that a woman never has to miss an event because of her menstrual status. The message in these types of advertisements is that a girl can't miss out on any events due to her period because this could expose her and discredit her. If menstruation is a natural physiological event, with some symptoms that may affect the adolescent girl, our society should provide a context for her to choose not to participate, without embarrassment or risk of being discredited due to her menstrual status.

That time-of-the-month doesn't have to spoil your good times.
No product you can buy does more to help make your period less of a pain than MIDOL Maximum Strength Midol.
Midol helps it all go away.

(Good Housekeeping, August 1993, p. 169).

The message is that the appearance of not having one's period, or never letting one's period spoil a good time, is the ideal state. A concurrent message is that the only way not to 'get caught' is to utilize the products that help 'it all go away.' Why it is that we teach adolescent girls the necessity of making a natural physiological function of their bodies 'all go away'?

Hormonal responses and mood swings. The hormonal changes that occur in the female body throughout the menstrual cycle are rarely mentioned in advertisements. When they are mentioned it is done only to sell the products which will help ease the mood swings and bodily changes that are associated with hormone changes. Mood swings and changes in the body may be evidence for others that the girl is menstruating. Discrediting comments about her personality may be attributed to being 'on the rag.' This would be a problem as even something as natural as being in a bad mood could lead others to believe that the individual is menstruating and, once again, the adolescent girl risks the embarrassment of 'getting caught.' Being accused of 'being on the rag' is always discrediting, even when the attribution is incorrect.

Similar to the messages conveyed regarding physical menstrual symptoms, hormones appear to be mentioned only because the discussion provides the advertisers with the opportunity to sell the products that will ease the menstrual problems that they suggest result from hormone changes. A classic example of this is seen in the following:

"Why do I get so emotional?" Every month, Premenstrual Syndrome raises this same nagging question. But, despite how it feels, PMS is not in your head. The tension, anxiety and irritability are caused by complex hormonal changes. And because they are biological in nature, they can be treated with the right medicine.

It's specially formulated to relieve those emotional symptoms as well as physical pain.

(Cosmopolitan, April 1990, p.93).

In this advertisement, the hormone changes are referred to, but only to draw attention to the menstrual medication that is available to 'cure' the physical and emotional symptoms that result from such hormonal changes. By curing these symptoms no one will know that the female is menstruating and she will be able to appear as though she is not in a discreditable condition. However, the adolescent girl will not learn anything about the hormone changes in her body, but will be left with the impression that over-the-counter medicines are necessary. If a product can contribute to the prevention of embarrassment for an adolescent girl than advertisers have achieved their goal.

Physical pain is one aspect of these advertisements that must be accounted for and, according to the advertisements, controlled. Emotional upheaval and mood issues are also portrayed as problems that occur for all women during each of their periods. This is dangerous for a number of reasons. It is this type of assertion that allows for the discreditation of women by suggesting that they are prone to be irrational and moody. This is a common theme that is portrayed in the advertisements and from these ads girls, and possibly boys, may learn that a woman is not rational or to be trusted during her pre-menstrual phase and throughout her menstrual period. That exact belief is beautifully illustrated in this quotation by the physician Dr. Edgar F. Berman:

If you had an investment in a bank, you wouldn't want the president of your bank making a loan under these raging hormonal influences at that particular period. Suppose we had a President in the White House, a menopausal woman President, who had to

make the decision of the Bay of Pigs...("Through History with the Curse," 1973, p. 44).

These types of beliefs can be detrimental to women of all ages because they reinforce the socially defined differences between women and men which dictate that being male is superior to being female. The danger in asserting that moodiness and irrationality is a consequence of menstruation lies in the perpetuation of the myth that all menstruating women are necessarily moody or irrational. This type of message suggests that irrational behaviour is typical of menstruating women. As men do not menstruate they are not at risk of being deemed moody or irrational as a result of the menstrual cycle. My concern about the portrayal of women as moody or irrational as a result of their menstrual cycles lies in the consequences of such messages being accepted as truth rather than being discounted as social constructs. Here are some advertisements that teach that one way to 'get caught' is to not control the irrational mood swings that advertisements suggest are a typical part of the menstrual cycle for all women:

Your pain reliever has a menstrual problem. Pain relievers relieve pain. Nothing more. They can't do a thing for bloating. Or tension. Or irritability...Multi-Symptom Midol. Because your period is more than just pain. Maximum Strength Midol. From the company that understands women.
(Cosmopolitan, February 1990, p.217).

Always comfortable with yourself. Up and Down? When I have my period, life's a roller coaster and I'm just along for the ride. it's crazy. Emotion.

Completely unpredictable. did you ever laugh and cry at the same time? That's when a little comfort goes a long way.

(Cosmopolitan, April 1990, p.78).

Always comfortable with yourself. Sometimes my mind says one thing and my body says another especially when I have my period.

My mind says "workout." My body says "chocolate." My mind thinks "dancing." My body goes to bed.

(Cosmopolitan, May 1990, p.98).

These advertisements suggest that the natural cycles of women influence their ability to control their emotions. They are taught that in order to control their moods and behave in a way that is socially acceptable they must control the mood swings that result from the menstrual period. Under false consciousness (Mackie, 1987), women are able to read these advertisements as solutions to their menstrual mood swings, rather than as an unnatural interference of their regular cycles. The advertisements suggest that all women need this type of medical regulation because they all experience menstrual mood shifts which need to be controlled in order that they are seen as socially acceptable and so that their menstrual state is not exposed.

The young woman who is actually experiencing difficulties with her period may learn from the advertisements that her symptoms are normal and experienced by all women. Once again, this is inaccurate and inappropriate information. At the very least, advertisements should present accurate information to young women. Advertisements could convey accurate information such that those girls who do not need menstrual medications do not use them,

while those that are experiencing some difficulties should not assume that this is natural for all women.

Odour. A message suggesting that there is something dirty and unclean about the menstruating female body is revealed in the numerous products available that offer specific protection against 'menstrual odour.' Odour is a very real concern for anyone who does not want to be known to be menstruating because the embarrassment of smelling as a result of menstruation would likely be overwhelming, especially for an adolescent girl. The advertisements imply that women would not need odour suppressing and odour absorbing products if there was not something inherently smelly and unclean about the state of the menstruating female body. The number of odour absorbing products is an excellent example of how the advertisers are able to play on the insecurities of women regarding 'getting caught' as a result of the odour asserted to be an inherent part of menstruation. Baking soda is currently the odour absorbing product of choice by menstrual product companies. This is evidenced by the number of advertisements in the 1990's that promote products with baking soda used as an odour absorbing agent. Here are a few examples:

We all know that baking soda absorbs odours. But did you expect it in a pantiliner? New from Kotex. New Freedom Panty Liners with baking soda. They're soft, absorbent and help protect you against odour, too. Only Kotex New Freedom pantliners offers you this kind of total protection. Our secret is odour-absorbing baking soda blended in the absorbent layers of the liner. A natural way to help absorb odour-not just cover it up!
(Flare, November 1990, p.131).

We must admit we didn't invent the revolutionary ingredient in new Stayfree. Amazing. It doesn't mask odours like perfumes do. Instead it actually absorbs them. pure, natural baking soda. Only Stayfree has it to give you even more protection. New Stayfree with odour-absorbing baking soda.
(Cosmopolitan, February 1990, p.72).

Want to feel fresh? Think Pink! Think Carefree. Because Carefree gives you more ways to feel fresh and clean all through your day. Easy-to-carry Carefree Original and carefree Unscented with baking soda to control odour.
(Vogue, February 1991, p.234).

The advertisement that follows outwardly suggests that the product can help 'control' odour. One way for a woman to 'get caught' would be to have menstrual odour so a product designed to keep this 'problem' 'under control' is offered:

Other pantliners just cover up the problem. We help control it. introducing Always Alldays odour-absorbing pantliners. now you can hold onto that clean feeling longer. Because now there's Alldays Pantliners from Always. Alldays don't mask odour with scents and fragrance. Their new Dri-Weave topsheet and unique odour absorbing core pull moisture and odour away from the surface. To help you keep that clean feeling longer.
(Cosmopolitan, September 1996, p.187).

'Getting caught' through inadequate protection. The advertisements convey the message that one way to 'get caught' menstruating would be to be inadequately 'protected.' The message of needing protection for one's period may be an excellent means to sell menstrual care however, this message is not necessarily one that should be emphasized to adolescent girls. The advertisements suggest repeatedly that a way to 'get caught' and risk embarrassment would be a consequence of not having proper 'protection'. Without 'protection', according to the advertisements, one could have an 'accident.' Such an 'accident' would expose the girl to embarrassment by revealing her menstruating state.

The impact of suggesting that an individual needs protection from a natural physiological event could lead to an active dislike and mistrust of one's body. It is frightening to think about reinforcing the dislike of the female body in advertisements, particularly when dealing with adolescent girls who have been known, at this age, to be dealing with some very serious self-esteem and body-image issues. Advertisements that stress that protection is needed from the natural functions of the female body in order to prevent embarrassment are potentially damaging to female self-esteem. The following are examples of the numerous advertisements which utilize the word 'protection' and have the potential to convince those that read them that the menstrual cycle is an event requiring extraordinary efforts to insure protection.

Protect. Regular length pantiliner. Protection. New Always Longs Pantiliner. In short, we're longer. New Always Longs Pantiliners. 20% longer for better protection than before.

(Flare, February 1992, p.69).

So when you need more protection than a pantiliner liner but less than a maxi, there's no question New Stayfree Maxi Liner gives you the right protection...Better protection by choice...not by chance. (Good Housekeeping, August 1993, p.27).

The only pantiliner with tabs for a more secure fit and better light protection. Kotex Lightdays WrapAround. For more secure pantiliner protection. Kotex understands. (Flare, April 1993, p.135).

"Tampons are worn inside of you," Patti said, "so you never see them or feel them." That sounded like the answer, but when she showed me a Tampax Compak tampon, I couldn't believe it. It was about the size of a lipstick. " So how is this little thing going to protect me?" I wanted to know. (Chatelaine, July 1990, p.56).

The advertisements widely embrace the theme of protection. Protection can be seen in the texts of most menstrual product advertisements. Protection primarily involves protection against accidents: leaks and stains. An all consuming concern with protection implies that there is little else in the world more important for girls than to guard against a menstrual stain on their clothing. In a society where 'getting caught' menstruating is extremely embarrassing, this is understandably an excellent way for the advertisers to market their products:

Discover...The new shape of freedom with New Freedom Slim unique protection system. New streamlined comfort. Now there's

a way to feel really free. With New Freedom Slim. No other 'thin' maxi-pad brings you this unique combination of protection and comfort.

(Chatelaine, May 1985, p. 99).

For the very young adolescent, the word accident may convey much more than a simple stain. Uniformed pre-adolescents may well believe that without these products they may be involved in some type of accident or may be inflicted with some type of personal harm. If this seems like an exaggerated contention, we must recall that the average age of the onset of menarche is now twelve years of age. As this is an average age, it should be noted that there will be girls who mature earlier and may be only ten or eleven when they begin their first period. These are girls who likely will not be able to 'read' the word 'accident' or 'protection' with discernment. As a result, having an 'accident' may be viewed as an event that will cause physical harm if it is not, as the advertisements suggest, avoided by protection.

I draw attention to this point as it was raised by an educator who was a participant at the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research conference in June of 1997 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. This participant openly addressed the fact that she was asked by ten year old girls what type of accident they would be involved in once they started their periods. This contention is one that may seem ridiculous for adults who have the vocabulary and the understanding of context required to decode the language of these advertisements. However, it could be a very real concern for young girls who do not have the requisite knowledge to 'read' the advertisements with discernment. The following advertisements give examples of how the term accident is used. They also show

how not protecting against accidents could lead to 'getting caught' and being embarrassed:

New, improved Ultimates give you cardboard applicator protection that's more comfortable than ever. Their improved, smoother, rounded-tip cardboard applicator is easier and more comfortable to insert than the leading brand. Their exclusive rolled design expands rapidly for dependable protection against accidents. (Glamour, January 1993, p. 101).

Most side pads don't help protect against side accidents. New Freedom does. Only New Freedom pads come with an absorbent patch protection strip that draws moisture along the center away from the sides to help prevent accidents. (Cosmopolitan, December 1990, p.263).

We just reduced the accident rate in North America. The Stayfree Ultra Plus Core absorbs better than anything...New Stayfree Ultra Plus Designed to stop accidents before they start. (Cosmopolitan, April 1992, p.67).

Stuck on this bus for 2 hours. Stuck on this bus for 2 hours...Stayfree absorbs your worries about accidents and odor...Only Stayfree protection is complete protection. Extra-thick middle traps moisture deep in the pad. Don't worry about accidents. (YM, March 1992, p.120-121).

The loaded language of the advertisements and the suggestion that discreditation, resulting from not being protected from accidents, are of concern.

'Getting caught' through product discovery. The advertisements teach that another way to 'get caught' is through the discovery of menstrual products in one's possession. Possession of the menstrual products functions as a sign or an indicator of menstruation. Signs of menstruation expose the menstruating female, menstruating or not, and, as a result, are potentially very embarrassing. Once again, the advertisers have capitalized on the notion that concealment, in order to not 'get caught,' is necessary right down to the packaging and the portability of the products. To ensure that embarrassment through product discovery does not occur, products which can be easily disguised or hidden are promoted for use by adolescent girls. Many of these marketing pitches are clearly directed at adolescent girls, which reveals that advertisers are acutely aware of how sensitive these girls are to 'getting caught.' The following are examples of advertisements which teach nothing about menstruation and the menstrual cycle, but still manage to deliver the message that the goal of each adolescent girl beginning her period is to conceal her status as menstruator.

Tampax Compak Tampons give you full-size protection in a plastic applicator small enough to tuck into your hand, your pocket, even your tiniest bag. Plastic applicators extends to full-size length. When you're ready to use one, the plastic applicator simply extends to its full-size length for easy insertion. It's trusted protection that's more comfortable than a pad and a whole lot neater. Keep your period strictly to yourself with Tampax Compak Tampons...

(Shape, May 1992, p.67).

Can you find the new Carefree Vanity Pak in this picture?
Discreet, isn't it? Introducing the new Carefree Panty Shields
Vanity Pak. Only Carefree has this convenient, elegant box to
blend in beautifully on your vanity or dresser. But then, only
Carefree Panty Shields give you such a soft, pretty way to stay
fresh all day. Altogether, it's the most feminine panty shield you
can buy.
(Flare, January 1990, p.26).

Introducing full Tampax tampon protection in the palm of your
hand. Tampax Compak. Introducing Tampax Compak Tampons.
The plastic applicator is itsy-bitsy. But the Tampax Tampon
protection is full-sized. The whole neater, discreeter idea is
nobody's business but your own.
(Glamour, November 1990, p.273).

Because o.b. has no applicator, it's the smallest and most discreet
tampon available. I can carry a whole day's protection in my
pocket and no one knows.
(Chatelaine, October 1990, p.28).

Some women really know how to take it easy. They're using New
Tampax Compak. Easy to use. Easy to carry. You see, the
smooth plastic applicator and gently rounded tip make it easy to
insert. Even for someone who has never tried to use a tampon
before. And the smaller, more compact size of the applicator

makes new Tampax Compak easier to carry. In your gym bag, your cosmetic case or even the back pocket of your favourite blue jeans.

(Chatelaine, April 1989, p.155).

Uniquely disguised. Is it some sort of crazy new compact? Perhaps an expandable rain hat? Whatever you think it is, it's been cleverly disguised to look exactly what it isn't. It's New Freedom Slim, not any ordinary maxi-pad, but a superbly absorbent thin maxi that's uniquely disguised in a colorful, durable, individual wrap. New Freedom Slim. The only thin maxi that refuses to look like one.

(Chatelaine, 1985, p.103)

'Getting caught' through exposure to males. The advertisements that I looked at were obviously directed at females. Men and boys rarely appear in any of the advertisements. The absence of the portrayal of men in menstrual product advertisements suggests that a way to 'get caught' would be to be exposed as menstruating to men or boys. The absence of men in the advertisements suggests that this is strictly a female topic. This reinforces the notion that this is a topic which is silenced in our society. It is silenced and kept from men because women view it as shameful. The lack of men in the advertisements suggests that menstruation is not to be discussed with men. This, however, is not to say that men or boys would not come in contact with these advertisements. The messages that the advertisements send to female adolescents about their bodies would also be sent to adolescent boys about the female body. As men and boys are often not talked to about menstruation much

of what they know about menstruation may come from advertisements and slang put-downs or euphemisms. Men and boys are thereby kept ignorant about menstruation and this functions to maintain and perpetuate the silence that surrounds the topic of menstruation in our society.

How to Avoid 'Getting Caught' According to the Advertisements

A naive adolescent girl can learn from menstrual product advertisements about the many ways she may risk exposure and embarrassment from 'getting caught' menstruating. She will also be informed about the many ways she can prevent embarrassment by using products that will reduce the risk of exposing her menstruating state. The advertisements teach that the appearance of not having one's period is the ideal feminine state. This perspective heightens her adolescent insecurities by drawing attention to the fact that she must conceal a natural physiological function of her body. One important way to reach this ideal state is to appear as a non-menstruator. Not 'getting caught,' or appearing as a non-menstruator, is an over-riding message of these advertisements and, for that matter, our society. How to appear as a non-menstruator, through the use of specified menstrual products, is also a central component of these advertisements. These advertisements teach how to appear as a non-menstruator through the concealment of the entire menstrual cycle.

The advertisements teach adolescent girls that the menstrual cycle, and the state of menstruating, should always be hidden. If she is successful in concealing her period, such that no one ever knows that she is menstruating, then she can successfully meet the standards of hygiene and cleanliness set out for women in the advertisements, and throughout society. She should also be proactive in preventing 'getting caught.' The message in almost every advertisement is this: no one can ever know that you have your period; you must actively conceal and deny menstruation! The following section outlines the ways

to successfully conceal menstruation as suggested by the menstrual product advertisements.

Being fresh. The advertisements stress the importance of making sure that one is clean and fresh all of the time. By always being clean and fresh one can prevent 'getting caught.' The implication is that in the absence of these feminine hygiene products, a woman will not be fresh or clean due to her menstruating body. Without the right menstrual products the menstruating female body is unclean and certainly not fresh. The following advertisements convey the message that through the use of the advertised product, a woman can become clean and/or fresh despite her menstrual status:

Fresh as the day is long. You take your shower. You get dressed. You feel great. But how will you feel by the end of your day? Just as fresh, just as feminine, with Carefree Panty Shields.
(Flare, October 1990, p.111).

Now New Freedom Anyday Pantliners bring you the freshness of baking soda. New Freedom Anyday. So you feel naturally clean, feminine, and fresher than before.
(Cosmopolitan, July 1990, p.225).

Want to feel fresh? Think pink! Think Carefree. Because Carefree gives you more ways to feel fresh and clean all through your day.
(Vogue, February 1991, p.234).

New! Carefree.

New Carefree is wrapped and ready to go. Introducing individually wrapped Carefree Party Shields. Women say they feel fresher with Carefree than with other panty shields. You will, too. After all only Carefree gives you three layers of freshness. And now each Carefree comes folded and wrapped so you can have that fresher feeling anytime, anywhere.

(Good Housekeeping, September 1987, p. 137)

The problem with these messages again is in what they imply. The covert message is that menstrual blood is dirty and that the very act of menstruating will make an individual unclean and not fresh. This assertion could lead an adolescent girl to believe that her body is unclean or not fresh in the absence of these products. The products become the savior to the young women who realize the importance and necessity of remaining clean and fresh all of the time. In order to fully appreciate the impact of this message, it must be viewed from the perspective of an adolescent girl. To be seen as being unclean, and thereby not fresh, would be a personal disaster. The advertisements offer the preventative hygiene measures that will ensure that 'getting caught' will not occur.

Being secure. A very interesting claim made in these advertisements is the suggestion that menstrual hygiene products can make a girl, or woman, secure. Being secure in one's menstrual management system allows a woman to act as though she is not menstruating. Once again, the ideal is to appear as non-menstruating. The adolescent girl, as a result of the many changes she is experiencing at this stage of her life, likely does not feel as though she has much of a sense of security. Mary Pipher writes of adolescent girls as 'saplings in the

storm' and suggests that their "wholeness is shattered by the chaos of adolescence" (Pipher, 1994, p.20). Security during the trying times is likely something that many adolescent girls would love to have. These advertisements offer security and teach that in order to prevent 'getting caught' the products, which provide the coveted security, must be used. Such advertisements clearly heighten the insecurities associated with menstruation. The goal, the sale of specialized products, is achieved as these products offer security for the insecurities that are associated with being a menstruating female.

Most teenage girls know about tampons but not exactly how they work. Comfort and security are the reasons most women give for using tampons instead of pads. That's because of the way tampons work...o.b. Simply natural.

(Chatelaine, January 1990, p.15).

Kotex understands what it means to be a woman. Presenting trusted Kotex protection in a tampon. Kotex Security Tampons. Expands in all directions for better fit and secure protection. Contoured Tip for easy insertion. Kotex Security. For protection that lets you enjoy everyday. Kotex understands.

(Good Housekeeping, August 1993, p.71).

Kotex understands what it means to be a woman. That's why Kotex makes such a wide range of feminine care products, from pantliners to maxis. So you can choose what meets your

protection needs best. And get on with what is really important in your life. For all you need to be secure. Kotex understands.
(Flare, September 1993, p.143).

Try Kotex Security tampons. A tampon that expands to fit in two directions for a better fit to protect your sleekest swimsuit and your beautiful backstroke. Try Security tampons from Kotex.
(Good Housekeeping, March 1989, p. 99).

Being discreet. The advertisements convey to adolescent girls that another sure way not to 'get caught' is to be very discreet about their menstrual status. Being discreet allows them to appear as if in a non-menstruating state. The objective is to ensure that no one will discover that they are menstruating through product discovery or bulky lines in clothing. Products are disposable so that there is no evidence that could suggest that they are menstruating.

I wouldn't compromise with towels. Would you? Especially when there are so many benefits of using Tampax tampons. Discreet as ever. For example, there must be at least a dozen items of clothing that, because they're too tight or fitting, are never worn unless I'm using Tampax. Because with Tampax there's absolutely nothing anyone can notice. No one will ever know I'm having my period so I feel free to wear whatever I want every day of the month.
(Elle, July 1993, p.36).

Between us.

"Sometimes you'd like to run home for a fresh change of clothes.
That'll be the day!" -Ella.

Fresh A.M. to P.M.

Carefree to go. Only Carefree To Go is individually wrapped so it goes where you go. Stays fresh, neat, discreet.

(Glamour, September 1996, p.241).

Keep your period strictly to yourself with Tampax Compak Tampons. There is nothing more neat and more discreet.

(Shape, May 1992, p.67).

The need to be discreet is recognized in the literature as a common theme that surrounds women's menstrual management system. Women "are cautioned against revealing their state of menstruation and are urged to be discreet" (Patterson & Hale, 1985, p.18). The products offer the necessary means to help women be discreet, and as a result, not 'get caught.' The advertisements imply that a woman needs these products if being discreet about her period is to be achieved. In other words, in the absence of these products she is unable to be discreet on her own and she would possibly 'get caught.'

Being confident. The advertisements also suggest that being confident is another way to prevent 'getting caught.' The advertisements heighten insecurities by asserting that without specific menstrual products confidence is diminished because 'getting caught' may occur. In order to be confident leaks and stains must not occur. The products offer the means to insure that this doesn't happen and this is how they suggest to be confident and thereby not 'get caught.'

...in terms of hygiene and safety, Confident Tampons leave you feeling totally confident. Confident Tampons. The tampons with the cover wrap.

(Elle, July 1993, p.154).

Only one pair of jeans has ever fit you so well. And one thin pad lets you feel confident enough to wear them. Thin maxis from Kotex...Protection you can count on from Kotex.

(Cosmopolitan, July 1990, p.215).

INTRODUCING ALWAYS SHEER CONFIDENCE.

Wearing a pantiliner everyday is great for feeling fresh. But not so great when you can feel the pantiliner. All that bunching and shifting. It's uncomfortable, right? that's why we've created a revolutionary new pantiliner. Always Sheer Confidence with Soft-Sorb...So try Always Sheer Confidence pantliners. You'll find that feeling practically nothing is really something.

(Cosmopolitan, April 1992, p. 199).

"Tampax is perfect for me. In the pool or out. Tampax tampons give me the confidence and freedom I need. After all, pads just hold you back. With all the practicing I do . I just can't afford to miss a day. Besides how I look and feel is important to me, in competition or anytime."

(Chatelaine, September 1985, p. 105).

Trusting the products. According to the advertisements, trusting menstrual management products will ensure not 'getting caught.' This message implies that all that is needed to prevent the exposure of the menstruating state is the 'right' products. One advertising campaign even went so far as to suggest that their product is synonymous with trust:

Trust. It's knowing that you can depend on Tampax tampons right from the start. Let's say that you've started your period, but you've never used a tampon. You may be wondering how a small tampon can do the job of a big pad. Well, although a tampon looks small, once it's in your body it expands to fit your natural shape. It absorbs as well as a pad...You'll feel freer and more comfortable using Tampax Tampons than you ever could with a pad. And right from the start, that's a nice way to feel.

TRUST IS TAMPAX Tampons.

(YM, May 1992, p.93).

TRUST

It's knowing that they work and that's a comforting feeling. Since a Tampax Tampon is worn internally, you never see it or feel it. That means you can do whatever you like with no worries...they're easy to insert and you get trusted Tampax Tampon protection more women count on. Trust is Tampax tampons.

(Flare, April 1992, p.150).

Managing one's body everyday. It is important to understand the way that menstrual product advertisements play on the lack of knowledge which

characterizes many adolescent girls with regards to their menstrual cycles. Under such conditions, the advertisers are able to instill the idea that the management of the menstrual cycle is necessary every day of every month. The advertisers suggest that if 'feminine hygiene' is practiced for the entire month, every month, 'getting caught' will not take place. My concern is, again, that adolescent girls may not have the requisite knowledge to realize that the use of menstrual products each day of the month is not necessary.

A girl who knows very little about her period is an easy target for advertisers who market these unnecessary products by stressing the message that girls need to manage their menstrual cycles and their bodies each day of the month. In order to be normal and not risk embarrassment, advertisements suggest that liners and feminine deodorant products are necessary everyday to insure that any vaginal discharge will not interfere with being fresh. Being normal (i.e. a fresh non-menstruator) is important every day of every month. Some of the advertisements that encourage the use of menstrual products each day of the month are highlighted below:

All in all, wearing one feels alot like wearing no liner at all, making it ideal for every day use. Always Contour. Protection so comfortable...Like it's not there at all.

(Flare, April 1995, p. 172).

New Generation Always Pantiliners. Fresh just got fresher. Always Pantiliners have always given you the confidence that comes with feeling fresh. Any day of the month.

(Elle, July 1993, p.157).

So if your body has any surprises for you, you'll be prepared. Like when your period shows up early. Or when you notice that uncomfortable feeling from occasional discharge. Carefree Teens are for all those times when a little layer of freshness can really make a difference.

(YM, August 1991, p.33).

Mondays, make every day a fresh day. Lightdays. Thursdays stay comfortably fresh every day. Lightdays Saturdays Put everyday freshness in your routine. Lightdays. Feel your freshest everyday.

(Flare, August 1991, p.69).

New Generation Always Pantiliners. Fresh just got fresher. Always Pantiliners have always given you the confidence that comes with feeling fresh. Any day of the month...Now they've been made to keep you even drier. So you'll feel fresher than with any other pantiliner.

(Elle, July 1993, p.157).

Always' Contour has edge-to-edge adhesive...so it stays in place better. All in all, wearing one feels a lot like wearing no liner at all, making it ideal for everyday use.

(Flare, April 1995, p.172).

Softly quilted, absorbs light flow and between-period moisture. Carefree to go. And of you go. Carefree Fresh Day. Every Day.

(Glamour, September 1996, p.241).

The adolescent learns from these advertisements that the female body must be managed everyday of the month and that every woman needs a system of menstrual technology to do this. This is problematic as it insinuates that there is something inherently wrong with the female body if it requires feminine hygiene products throughout the month in order to stay fresh and clean. These advertisements are also potentially confusing with some suggesting that the liner can be used during 'light days' and others suggesting that they be used all month 'except during periods.' The following advertisement illustrates when, according to this advertisement, a liner should be used:

- during light-flow days when you don't need a full size pad.
- when your tampon alone is not enough.
- for discharge in between periods or those just-in-case days; or
- if you just want one less thing to think about.

(Flare, 1988, p. 57).

This advertisement suggests that a liner be worn everyday of the month. If a woman needs protection everyday, then the implication is clear that the female body needs to be constantly protected from itself to ensure not 'getting caught.'

Using the plethora of available products. Girls can quickly learn from the advertisements that there are a vast number of products for menstrual management. This proliferation of products is certainly bolstered by the push to provide feminine hygiene products for use during the menstrual period and throughout the entire month. Even assuming that different menstrual products were necessary for the entire month, the number of available products is impressive. The problem lies in the potential inability of the adolescent girl to

distinguish which products are necessary. Young girls, who read the messages of these advertisements would likely believe that ALWAYS means 'always' and ALLDAYS means 'everyday.' The names themselves reveal that the menstrual cycle is to be controlled and attended to each day of the month in order to prevent 'getting caught.'

Discerning the real differences between the plethora of menstrual management products is virtually impossible. The very sources an adolescent girl seeks out for menstrual information will lead to more confusion about the products without providing her with very much useful menstrual information. As adolescent girls begin to make sense of the messages sent to them in menstrual product advertisements, they will discover that the upkeep of the female body, through the use of menstrual products all month, is now the core message.

The 'curse,' which used to refer to the few days of menstruation, has now become the 'extended curse' (Berg & Coutts, 1994), which forces a woman to attend to her bodily cycles the entire month. Liners guard against any vaginal discharge throughout the entire month, medications protect against pain and mood swings before and during the onset of menstruation, different tampon sizes offer different protection for each day of the actual menstrual period, panties protect during sleep, and the pads protect where the liners and tampons fail. The pads have wings, ridges, and channels to ensure that they are the perfect 'back-up' if the other products do not work. The following are examples from the data which convey the essence of what Berg & Coutts (1994), label the 'extended curse.' One way to prevent 'getting caught' would be to accept the proposition that feminine hygiene involves the management of the entire menstrual cycle.

Before your period, it's cramps, headaches, and bloating. During, you can add muscle aches and fatigue. And they are all very real. But Midol can take care of those symptoms. Midol PMS before, Midol Menstrual during.

(Elle, March 1996, p. 229).

Add Kotex Lightdays Pant liners to your daily freshness routine. Only Lightdays are both extra thin and designed to give you a personal choice: Lightdays Contour, shaped for a comfortable fit; Lightdays Long, for added protection; Lightdays Oval, for more coverage.

(Flare, August 1991, p.69).

Introducing Always Sheer Confidence. Wearing a pant liner everyday is great for feeling fresh. But not so great when you can feel the pant liner.

(Cosmopolitan, April 1992, p.199).

Are you using the right absorbency? Choosing the best tampon absorbency is a very personal matter. Each woman differs, and can have light, medium or heavy flow on different days. Recently, tampon manufacturers have adopted new industry standards for absorbency. This will make it easier for you to select the absorbency that best suits your needs...If you currently use a Super Tampax tampon, you may find that a Regular Tampax tampon is perfect for lighter flow days, that is when your period is just beginning or finishing. A Slender regular Tampax tampon is

another option. It's ideal for beginners because of its unique slim shape. But did you know that a Slender regular Tampax tampon protects as a Regular Tampax tampon? So it's perfect for anyone on a light to medium flow day.

(Flare, March 1991, p.123).

Does your period start before your period? Midol PMS. The Menstrual Specialist.

(Chatelaine, July 1989, p. 104).

Berg & Coutts (1994), discuss the phenomena of the extended curse with particular attention given to the need-creating tactic involved in the launch of pantliners as a product necessary for the maintenance of freshness for all women everyday. They argue that:

Even if the motive behind the advertisement is merely promotion of more extensive use of these products, the messages are not inconsequential. The implicit message that women are perpetually dirty and in constant need of physiological maintenance is, in the final analysis, offensive (Berg & Coutts, 1994, p. 20).

Understanding and using menstrual technology. The many systems of products including pads, liners and tampons are all marketed as the necessary paraphernalia that every woman needs in order to be adequately protected so as to prevent 'getting caught.' These advertisements state that every woman needs a protection system. By proposing that the female body is dirty, and requires on-going daily protection, advertising campaigns are able to promote the use of entire systems of products. The messages conveyed in these advertisements

imply that women's bodies need to be managed through menstrual technology systems. One advertisement asserts:

Every woman has a system. Always with dry weave makes it cleaner and drier. Why so many kinds of Always with dry weave? If all women were the same each day like the next, and day no different from night, we'd only have to make one kind of Always with Dry Weave. Instead, we give women more choice than any other brand, so you can find the combination of Always products that gives you the best clean, dry protection for your needs. (Chatelaine, November 1993, p.109).

This advertisement proceeds to show, in chart form, fifteen different types of products that will assist women in being properly protected. The tampon advertisements also suggest that one type of tampon is simply not enough to prevent 'getting caught' and that a system is also available for these products:

Different days. Different needs. Tampax has you covered. When you're having your period, each day is different from the next. That's why we make Tampax Tampons with a range of absorbencies. For medium to heavy flow days, there's Super absorbency. For very heavy flow, try Super Plus absorbency. On days when flow is light to medium, Regular absorbency is ideal. (Chatelaine, July 1993, p.11).

The following advertisement shows a system which has eight different types of pads to use as determined by different type of levels of flow on any given day:

Introducing the Personalized Protection System from Stayfree. It's fool-proof. because it's a system where you choose the level of protection you need: light, medium, heavy or overnight. And then choose the style that you prefer: Classic with baking soda for added freshness, or Ultra Thin with panty shaping for extra coverage. (Good Housekeeping, August 1993, p.26).

It should also be pointed out that many of these companies make pads, tampons and liners such that the system can be all inclusive. The advertisers would like women to believe that these systems in some way liberate women by offering choice and convenience which bestow freedom. Ann Treneman speaks to the assertion that these systems are somehow liberating for women and discusses the complex nature of managing the menstrual cycle according to advertisers. "Fifty-five years after the first towels came on the market, our periods have become a complex series of monthly problems requiring a massive undercover effort" (Treneman, 1989, p.161). It would appear that the advertisers are doing an excellent job in teaching young girls, and women, the necessity of preventing 'getting caught' through the use of elaborate precautions.

These findings are consistent with past research which found that commercial advertisements often depict "failure of the protection system or failure to choose the correct one places a woman at risk of soiling, staining, embarrassment, and odor" (Havens & Swenson, p.95, 1988). In other words, if young girls do not treat their changing bodies to the type of regimen described

as necessary in these advertisements one's secret may be exposed and discreditation may result. By focusing in on what could result if the girl does not choose the proper protection, fear of discovery is emphasized and the message to conceal at all costs is hammered home. Once again previous research confirms these findings and notes that this message "is especially dominant in the pantyliner ads, where protection every day is advocated in order to feel confident and clean" (Havens & Swenson, p.95, 1988). The message in almost all of the advertisements is one that implies both overtly and covertly that both confidence and cleanliness are diminished and at risk without the use of the plethora of products that are deemed necessary.

Fear

Another theme that emerged from the data that could potentially be learned by an adolescent reading menstrual product advertisements is fear. An adolescent girl who is operating from a position of ignorance about menstruation, and menstrual products, may learn to be fearful of some of the products that are available on the market. I contend that this is an intentional ploy of the advertisers. It allows the advertisers to assert that their product is better than the other products because they need not be feared. This is a very serious concern because I believe that adolescent girls, without adequate education about menstruation and menstrual products, may learn that some products need to be feared because of these advertisements.

Fear of products. Tampon advertisers found a unique way to use fear and scare tactics to compete with each other for increased tampon sales. Adolescent girls who know nothing about tampons may be scared about inserting tampons. The advertisers play on these fears, but also contend that their product is not a problem and is safe. Some suggest that it is only their revolutionary new product which makes the use of tampons safe. They dispel

the fear regarding the use of their own products, but they imply that it is only their specific product design which prevents any problems with tampon use:

There is one fact about tampons that you may not be aware of. They can actually shed fibers inside you. That's why all Confident tampons come with a finely woven Coverwrap surrounding the body of the tampon itself. This unique feature helps the tampon retain its shape and makes it more comfortable to remove. More importantly it's been specifically designed to reduce fiber shedding. And to prevent the tampon from breaking apart.
(Elle, July 1993, p. 154).

I find this advertisement particularly offensive as it also states that these fibers are actually not harmful and 'your body eventually flushes them away.' If this is the case I see no reason to even raise the issue of fiber shedding. I contend that it is a scare tactic used by the advertisers in order to assert that their tampon is superior to others. The use of fear as a selling mechanism is of particular concern to me as the young girls reading the advertisements are often lacking the knowledge required to dispel such suggestions regarding what might happen if they do not use a specific product.

Another area which has the potential to invoke fear for an inexperienced menarcheal girl concerns the tampon applicator. Girls who are frightened about using tampons because they are worn internally may have these fears confirmed by the assertion that without a particular type of applicator the process may be uncomfortable. The many different types of applicators requires that advertisers promote their product as being better than any other. With regard to tampons, advertisers often suggest that the difference which makes their tampon better

lies in 'the comfort of the applicator.' The implied message in these advertisements is that the applicators sold by the competition are not comfortable or easy to insert. This potentially plays on the fear of the adolescent regarding wearing internal menstrual protection:

Hardware. Software. It's a fact: When it comes to comfort, the choice is obviously Playtex. Unlike flat tip cardboard, Playtex has a Gentle Glide plastic applicator with a smooth, rounded tip. Sure beats cardboard for comfort. And you get great Playtex protection. (YM, October 1991, p. 151).

Now you can keep the comfort, not the plastic. new Satin Touch Tampons give you all the comfort and they're flushable and biodegradable. New Satin Touch Tampons from Tampax. They're all comfort and no plastic. Satin Touch Tampons have a unique Satinboard applicator that's incredible smooth and sleek. Their slim design and rounded tip make them extremely comfortable to insert while giving you maximum protection. (Chatelaine, October 1993 p.91).

The Playtex Gentle Glide plastic applicator was always more comfortable than cardboard. Now it has even more rounder, more contoured petals, so it's more comfortable than ever to insert. (Chatelaine, June 1985, p. 72).

'Always Dirty'

Menstrual product advertisements clearly teach about the ways to 'get caught' and the ways to prevent 'getting caught.' While these messages are presented overtly, many covert messages also exist in the advertisements. "The menstruating woman depicted in current advertisements is in a state of uncleanliness. Although advertisements do not explicitly state that menstruating women are dirty or unclean, they implicitly indicate that women are" (Coutts and Berg, 1993, p.185). Not only do the advertisements convey that menstruation is shameful, they also convey that there is, as a consequence, something dirty and shameful about the female body itself. While advertisements offer limited information about menstruation, they do convey messages about the female body. There are many examples throughout the advertisements which could heighten adolescent insecurities. Frequently the advertisements imply that the female body is dirty and inherently shameful and therefore must be managed every day, of every month. Such messages could function to heighten insecurities about the female body and are important because they do not convey any relevant or useful information related to the menstrual cycle.

Deodorant products. The promotion of deodorant menstrual products is an example of information in the advertisements that suggests that the female body itself is dirty. The advertisements do not discuss menstrual odor, but simply odor that needs to be controlled by women relative to their bodies. Odor is seemingly not restricted to the menstruating woman as there are a plethora of liner advertisements which boast the odor absorbing abilities of their products. If liners are marketed as products to be used only during light-period days or on non-menstrual days, then it must be assumed that the female body exudes odor everyday. The very production of an odor absorbing or deodorant liner, which is marketed for everyday use throughout the month, asserts that there is an odor

that comes from women that must be absorbed or negated. This assertion is similar to those of the feminine hygiene sprays (circa. 1960's and 1970's) which promised to cover this alleged female odor. The following gives an example of the deodorant liners which were new to the market in the early 1990's:

We all know baking soda absorbs odours. But did you expect it in a panty liner? New from Kotex. New Freedom Panty Liners with baking soda. They're soft, absorbent and help protect you against odour, too. Only Kotex New Freedom panty liners offer you this kind of total protection.

(Chatelaine, January 1992, p.13).

Disposable underwear. The advent of disposable underwear also contributes to the message that the female body is dirty. The first impression that one receives about this product is that it is very similar to a diaper. It is designed to 'protect' and I feel that the message conveyed by this product is, once again, that the female body is dirty. Pervasive dirtiness is the only justification for an adult sized diaper that is allegedly necessary to manage menstruation. Most of these advertisements suggest that this type of product is ideal for protecting night clothes and bed sheets. While some women may find this product comforting, the message is again that the female body and menstruation is so dirty that a product, such as disposable underwear, is necessary in order to protect oneself. The advertisement even asserts that once this product has been tried 'you won't know how you managed without it.' The following is taken from the Personal Panty advertisement:

Kotex introduces guaranteed protection. The panty guaranteed to work perfectly when your pad or tampon doesn't. Kotex understands there are times even the best pad or tampon could use some help. So Kotex developed the Personals protective Panty. Personals fit you beautifully, and is completely disposable. But, best of all, Personals backs up your pad or tampon with its extra protection barrier. So you feel more safe and secure, even on your heaviest days. We guarantee it. Try Kotex Personals. You won't know how you managed without it.
(Cosmopolitan, November 1995, p.151).

The hygiene of tampon applicators. The premise that the female body is dirty is also evident in the presentations used to market new or improved tampon applicators. The selling point of applicators is frequently that with the right applicator a woman will never have to touch herself. This suggestion can only to serve to promote the idea that the female body is so dirty during menstruation that a woman would not even want to touch herself to put in a tampon. The following is an advertisement for non-applicator tampons which teach how, despite the lack of applicator, one can prevent getting dirty by touching their own body:

Keep your finger clean as you insert o.b. place your finger in the widened tampon base to keep it clean and protected as you insert o.b.
(Flare, September 1995, p. 155).

If this advertisement does not suggest that the female body is dirty then why would a woman need protection for her finger when inserting a tampon?

Pad hygiene. Yet another example portraying menstrual blood as dirty occurs when pads are marketed as having a special layer which pulls the 'moisture' (i.e. menstrual blood and/or discharge), away from the surface of the product so that it will not touch the wearer. Menstrual discharge is depicted as being so dirty that it must be immediately pulled away from the body and 'trapped' such that the woman is not contaminated by the menstrual blood. Here is an example of this argument:

Women who use Always know there's a way for you to feel comfortable during your period. That's because only Always has Dri-Weave. An incredible topsheet that pulls moisture through, into the pad. Then it locks it away from you, so you can feel clean, dry...comfortable with yourself. Always a clean dry feeling.
(Cosmopolitan, May 1990, p. 98).

The assertion that a woman should be protected from her own menstrual blood clearly carries the message that menstruation is dirty and potentially contaminating.

I found that menstrual product advertisements continually attack the essence of being female. Here is an example which not only attacks the female menstrual cycle, but also the female body, and the very essence of what it means to be female. It suggests that while there is nothing that can be done to prevent this problematic aspect of the female body, the use of specific products may make it somewhat more tolerable:

You can't think. You're retaining so much water you feel like a baby beluga. You call home and ask your mom for a little sympathy. You get it. You ask for a little cash. You don't. On top of it all, your pad is somewhere between your belly button and your tailbone. Womanhood. What a concept. Ugh. It's that time of the month again and nothing's going your way. Well we'd like to offer you a little more sympathy. We'd like to offer you a pad that works...New freedom. As good as it gets until it's gone.
(Glamour, May 1994, p. 297).

Concomitant Learning

In many instances I found information conveyed in the advertisements which should be noted because of the negative connotations that may be conveyed to the adolescent reader. This is discussed as concomitant learning because the information conveyed falls outside of the realm of information concerning menstruation.

Patronizing nature of the advertisements. Once I began to examine the incidental messages conveyed by the advertisements it was impossible not to be impressed with the overall patronizing nature of many of the ads. The messages were frequently patronizing and condescending. In many cases, the advertisements played upon previously established stereotypes about women. These stereotypes assume and maintain distinct differences between men and women which have very little, if anything, to do with biology. Such differences reflect socialization processes that exist in a society influenced by patriarchy. Here are some examples of advertisements which teach very little about menstruation while maintaining gender stereotypes. The patronizing tone of these advertisements is very clear:

You've probably heard that diamonds are a girl's best friend. But today, more and more women are discovering another valuable companion. Because diamonds may be pretty. But when it comes to menstrual pain, Advil really is a girl's best friend. (Chatelaine, March 1990, p.31).

Carefree Teens are for all of those times when a little layer of freshness can make a difference. They have cool designs and are wrapped in tiny packages even smaller than your blush. So they go where you go, in your bag or your pocket. Now no matter what plans your body has, they won't interfere with yours. (YM, August 1991, p.33).

Handy packs are so neat! Just take off the wrapper and you've got two cute little boxes that don't say a word. There is nothing to hide... o.b. tampons... my little secret. (Chatelaine, January 1991, p. 119).

In the above advertisements the message is that girls or women have very little else to think about than the most inane or ridiculous issues. Diamond rings and menstrual pain relievers are presented as the two items that are considered to be a girl's best friend. In the advertisement directed at the teen girls, the message is that the young girl should have very little in her life that could take precedence over the concern of the shape and color of her menstrual products. It conveniently mentions that the product size is no bigger than a blush. This is both patronizing and condescending as though the only frame of

reference that the teen girl could compare the size of the product with is her make-up. The message in these patronizing advertisements is that women have very few, if any, legitimate concerns that go much beyond their menstrual products.

The importance of being slim and thin. An area that is implicitly evidenced in the menstrual product advertisements has to do with the use of the words 'slim' and 'thin.' As a society, we all are aware of the pressures that are on teenage girls to be thin and slim. While it is obvious that the advertisements are using these terms to sell their menstrual products, one may wonder why we are so culturally impressed by that which is slim and thin. The products are marketed as perfect, because they are so thin: this is what makes them ideal. The reasons why the products need to be slim and thin are often not explicitly stated in the advertisements. Because of this, the reader is required to draw their own conclusions with regard to why this makes them ideal. Building on the assumption that some adolescent girls are not able to interpret the appropriate messages from the advertisements, a young girl reading the advertisements may only get the message that, once again, the social ideal is thin and slim. While this may seem like begging the point, one must understand that many of these advertisements are loaded with terminology that refers to the how ideal their slim and thin products are, particularly in contrast to the big and bulky products. The following examples will illustrate how often these words are utilized within the text of the advertisements and marketed as the ideal way to be:

Panty liners, thin maxi pads, and Thin Super Maxi pads. The ideas so right...Vania. The stroke of genius.

(Flare, October 1990, p.66).

Only one pair of jeans has ever fit you so well. And one thin pad lets you feel confident enough to wear them. Thin maxis from Kotex.

(Cosmopolitan, July 1990, p.215).

You prefer their comfort and protection...now discover their new convenience. Stayfree maxi-pad thins. Now Stayfree Thins are folded and wrapped for more discretion, more carrying convenience. New individually wrapped Stayfree Thins.

(Chatelaine, December 1985, p.126).

The advertisements for menstrual pain relievers also boast the ability of their products to keep females feeling slim and trim regardless of menstrual bloat:

Pamprin is effective because it contains two special ingredients that have been clinically tested in relieving cramps. Pamprin also offers temporary relief from headaches and irritability. And because Pamprin contains a diuretic to reduce water in your system, you feel comfortable wearing slimming outfits too.

(Good Housekeeping, August 1985, p. 84).

The message implies that being able to wear slimming outfits by being slim and thin is the feminine ideal.

Useful Information that Can be Learned

The following reveals what potentially valuable or useful information is conveyed in the advertisements analyzed for this study. The list is notably short

considering over 200 advertisements were analyzed. In many cases the information is vague but was included in this list if at least some menstrual information was conveyed. It is important to note that even in advertisements where menstrual information is included it is always done as a means to sell more products and the information conveyed is often shrouded by the negative messages which are an inherent part of the advertisements. It should be also noted that much of the menstrual information that is present in the advertisements would require prior knowledge about menstruation in order to be understood by an adolescent reader. For example, the warnings about TSS (Toxic Shock Syndrome), which are in most of the Playtex Tampon advertisements, do not convey any information about the nature of this problem.

...you have your menstrual period and that achy, crampy feeling in your abdomen and your lower back. Called dysmenorrhea, this discomfort results primarily from hormones called prostaglandin that cause contractions of the uterus.

(Advil, Cosmopolitan, May 1995, p.148).

When your tampon is correctly placed it can't be felt at all...During absorption, it expands to fit your body's natural contours.

(o.b., Chatelaine, January 1990, p.15).

Caution: Because of the believed association of Toxic Shock Syndrome with the use of menstrual tampons, Health & Welfare Canada and Playtex advise you to read the information enclosed in each package of tampons thoroughly before use. The reported

risks are higher to women under thirty years of age and teenage girls.

(Playtex, Chatelaine, June 1990, p.91).

When a tampon is properly inserted, the cord will remain outside of your body for easy removal of the tampon. All tampons are designed with strong cords that shouldn't break during removal. Before you first begin to menstruate, you may notice some signs. Your body and breasts will begin to grow and you will also grow pubic hair and hair under your arms. You may also notice a normal whitish discharge.

(Tampax, YM, August 1991, p.131).

A tampon should be changed every 4 to 8 hours.

(Tampax, Chatelaine, April 1993, p.9).

Just widen the base of the tampon with the string, then insert your index finger in the expanded base to allow for easy accurate placement.

(o.b., Flare, June 1993, p.79).

When you don't feel o.b. inside you at all, it's in the right place. If you do feel it, push a little farther. Don't worry, it's impossible to push too far.

(o.b., Flare, July 1993, p.61).

Contrary to superstitions, water won't harm you during your period and it can't interrupt or stop your menstrual flow.

(Tampax, YM, October 1991, p.10).

If you insert the tampon properly there should be no irritation to the vagina. The oil glands become very active during puberty. And hair that is normally oily may be aggravated by hormonal changes during your menstrual cycle. All this is quite normal for teenagers. As you get older, the oil glands will become less active and you'll notice a change.

(Tampax, YM, February 1992, p.21).

...some irregularity is common for the first few years after your first period.

(Tampax, YM, March 1992, p.113).

...tampons can be worn up to eight hours, over night.

(Tampax, Flare, July 1994, p.59).

Your flow is unpredictable and can go from light to heavy to anywhere in between.

(Sure & Natural, Glamour, October 1991, p.70).

As evidenced by the above list, there is very little practical information regarding menstruation conveyed in menstrual product advertisements. Perhaps this is the result of the primary objective of advertisers; which is to sell as many products as possible. The concern that I have with this type of goal is the need

creating tactics employed by the advertisers in order to reach it. The messages conveyed in the advertisements to adolescent girls, and all women, were the focus of this study and the findings indicate that the void in practical information conveyed in menstrual product advertisements is often filled with negative messages about menstruation and the female body. Accurate information about menstruation without overt or covert negative messages about menstruation and the female body is, in my opinion, the type of information that ought to be conveyed in menstrual product advertisements.

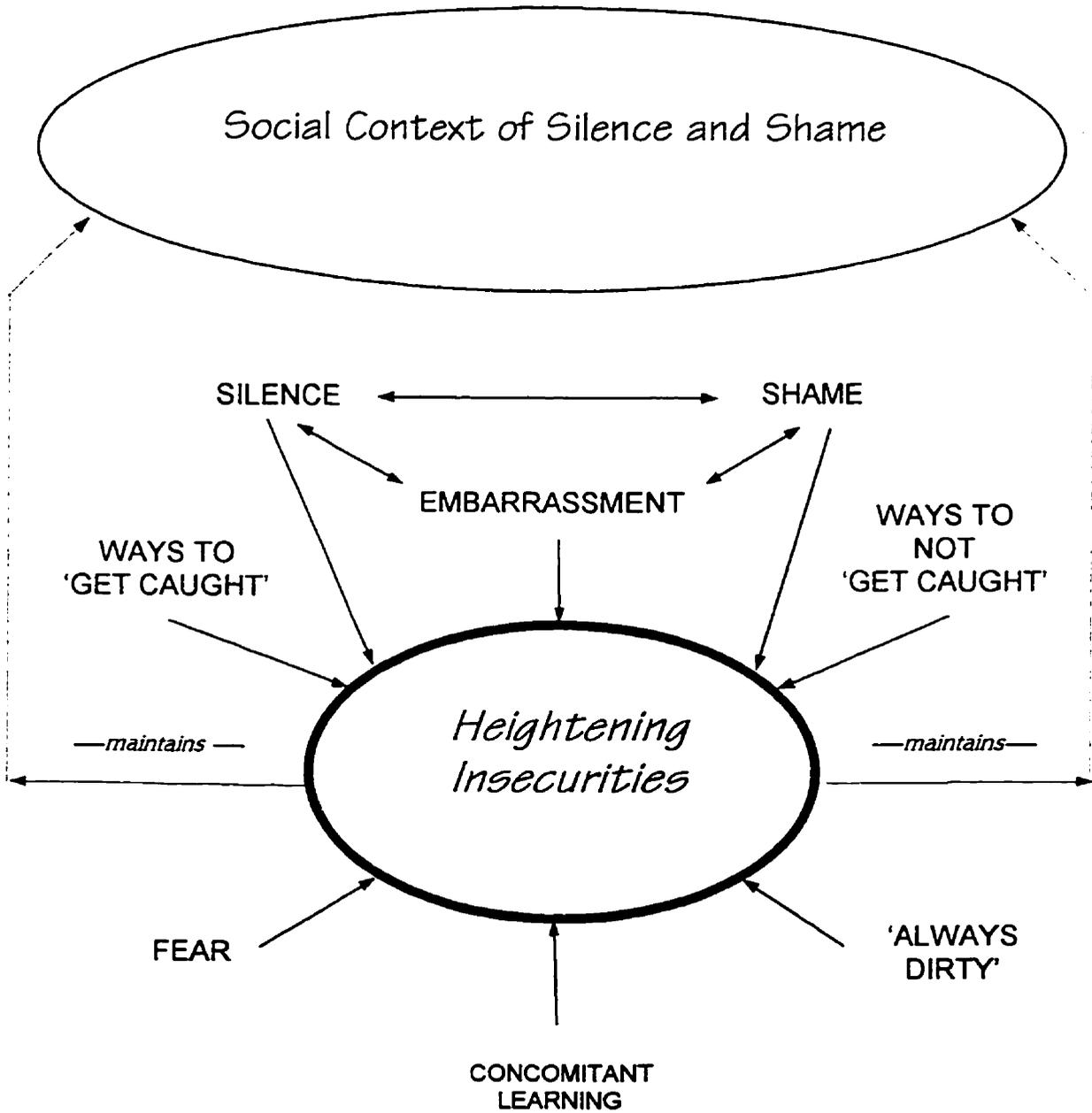
Core Variable

Menstrual product advertisements teach the multitude of ways an adolescent girl could 'get caught' menstruating. They also promote the plethora of products to be used, each day of the month, which they assert will assist in preventing women from 'getting caught.' They employ scare tactics by suggesting that certain menstrual products should not be used. These types of messages could invoke fear in girls and they are used to convey the message that women should only be comfortable using the specifically advertised product. The advertisements assert implicit messages that the female body is 'always dirty' and must be managed and controlled. The menstrual product advertisements also convey messages that have very little to do with menstruation, but are negative or condescending, as illustrated in the concomitant learning section. Practical menstrual information which can be learned from these advertisements is notably lacking. The tentative theory that explains what is going on in menstrual product advertisements that emerged from the analysis of this data was 'heightening insecurities.' Through the messages conveyed in them, these advertisements have the potential for the heightening of insecurities in the adolescent reader. These heightened insecurities maintain the silence and shame that surrounds the topic of

menstruation in our society. The cycle is thereby very difficult to break because it is continually maintained and perpetuated.

The core variable accounts for and explains the linkages between the main themes or code categories which emerged from the data. In this project, themes concerning what an adolescent girl can learn from the advertisements emerged. The themes identified from the advertisements exist within the context of silence and shame that surrounds menstruation in our society and are enhanced by the developmental stage of the adolescent girl at menarche, where everything is potentially embarrassing.

Figure 1
Core Variable Chart



The preceding diagram outlines how the core variable of 'heightening insecurities,' answers the question of 'What is going on here?' (Charmaz, 1983), with regard to what can be learned by adolescent girls from menstrual product advertisements. Within the social context of silence and shame, described as part of the environment which surrounds menstruation in our society, adolescent girls may be required to turn to advertisements for information regarding menstruation. The silence functions to prevent the adolescent girl from learning what is required about menstruation. The shame around menstruation functions to prevent her from feeling comfortable asking for information about menstruation.

Embarrassment exists for adolescent girls as a result of the context of silence and shame which surrounds menstruation. The advertisements function as a medium to convey that menstruation is embarrassing if it is not properly concealed by the use of menstrual products. Potential embarrassment functions as a means for 'heightening insecurities' for adolescent girls who learn that total concealment of menstruation is necessary if they do not want to risk being embarrassed.

Within the context of silence and shame, which contributes to adolescent embarrassment regarding menstruation, are the advertisements. The advertisements seemingly break the silence and shame which envelope menstruation in our society. The purpose of this study was to examine the messages conveyed in these media which, at first glance, seem to be breaking the code of silence surrounding menstruation. I have argued that the main themes conveyed in these advertisements function to heighten insecurities in adolescent girls and, in the final analysis, maintain the silence, shame, and embarrassment which surrounds this topic.

Within the advertisements, the message to conceal menstruation at any cost implies that this is an embarrassing and shameful event that should be silenced. The main themes that I discovered that adolescent girls could learn from menstrual product advertisements are; 1) ways to 'get caught', 2) ways to not 'get caught', 3) fear and, 4) being 'always dirty'. The themes of the advertisements function to heighten insecurities for adolescent girls.

'Heightening insecurities,' as opposed to 'creating insecurities,' is identified as the core variable as adolescent girls likely begin menstruating with existing insecurities about their bodies and menstrual cycles as a result of their developmental stage. Within each advertisement a girl could learn one or more of the identified themes. Regardless of which theme, or themes, she learns, each functions to heighten insecurities. The girl may also be exposed to non-menstrual information, as discussed in the concomitant learning section. The non-menstrual messages also have the potential to heighten insecurities for the adolescent as they are often negative or condescending.

I will briefly discuss how each theme functions to heighten insecurities for the adolescent girl. Many of the advertisements convey the message that there are a multitude of ways to 'get caught' having one's period. An example illustrated earlier in this document suggested that many advertisements convey the message that one way to 'get caught' would be to show any symptoms of menstruation. Mood swings are discussed as one indicator of menstruation that must be controlled if a girl does not want to 'get caught.' This message is 'heightening insecurities' for the adolescent girl because it suggests that natural physiological functions, and the possible symptoms of the functions, are potential ways with which she can 'get caught' menstruating. Insecurities about the female body and menstruation are heightened as the girl learns that concealment of natural body functions is required.

The advertisements which convey the many ways a woman or girl can 'get caught' menstruating, of course offer many suggestions as how to 'not to get caught.' Through the use of a plethora of menstrual products, the girl can prevent 'getting caught' and prevent discreditation or embarrassment. An example of how to 'not get caught' conveyed in the advertisements is the management of the menstrual cycle everyday. In order to never give any indication that one is menstruating, whether they are or not, the messages in the advertisements suggest that one must manage their menstrual cycle all month. The use of liners everyday of the month suggests that in order to 'not get caught' the woman must use feminine hygiene products throughout her entire cycle.

The theme of fear is present in some of the advertisements as a way to compete with other manufacturers that make similar products. It is easy to assert that tampons are better than pads, but somewhat more challenging for the advertisers to sell their tampon over the many other tampons on the market. I found that using fear, or scare tactics, is the way that the advertisers can compete with other similar products on the market. This functions to heighten insecurities because it can potentially make the girl even more fearful of her period and the menstrual products which she may know very little about. By playing on the lack of knowledge of adolescent girls advertisers can make assertions which may invoke fear about using any product other than the one they advertise. The messages are usually qualified in the advertisement; however, the qualification appears after the fearful message has already been conveyed. This was obvious in the tampon advertisements where tampon fragmenting was suggested as a possibility unless a product with a specific wrap around the tampon is used. The technique was also used in advertisements which boasted that a product had the most secure cord, ensuring that the cord will never break. Advertisements for tampons also focused on the comfort of the

applicator. They suggest that plastic is more comfortable than cardboard and 'Satinboard' is more comfortable than plastic. The assertions of these advertisements potentially heighten insecurities for adolescent girls by suggesting that by using any product other than the one advertised may result in discomfort.

The theme of the female body as 'always dirty' also functions to 'heighten insecurities' for adolescent girls. Advertisements which suggest that a product will pull menstrual blood or vaginal discharge away from the body so the blood or discharge won't touch the body convey the impression that there is something dirty about female menstruation and female discharge. A girl entering menarche will likely experience heightened insecurities as she is continually faced with the message that normal and natural physiological functions of the female body are dirty.

'Heightening insecurities' is identified as the core variable, but it is argued that these heightened insecurities maintain the social context of silence and shame which surrounds menstruation. This is asserted because, as the adolescent girl becomes more insecure about her body and her menstrual cycle, it is likely that she will continue to be shamed by this physiological event and thereby remain silent about menstruation. The messages that are quite pervasive throughout the advertisements function to heighten insecurities and, therefore, maintain and perpetuate the social context or environment of silence and shame which surrounds menstruation in our society. As seen in the diagram, as each theme functions to heighten insecurities, the heightened insecurities function to maintain the social context of silence and shame which surrounds menstruation.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The negative messages about women and their bodies in menstrual product advertisements do not exist in a vacuum. The negative messages and beliefs about menstruation do not only exist in popular culture and advertising. These are messages which are pervasive throughout society and reflected and perpetuated in popular culture, such as advertisements. If it were only advertisements which conveyed negative messages about menstruation and the female body than these messages would be less of a concern. The messages would not be supported by the larger society and, therefore, more easily discounted and disregarded. They would be seen solely as a means to sell products rather than regarded as conveyors of truth about the female body and menstruation. However, this is not the case. The adolescent girl is often very familiar with the beliefs surrounding menstruation and the menstruating woman. In her quest for knowledge about her period she would have likely already confronted the silence that surrounds this topic. As she turns to advertisements for needed information, she finds that these advertisements support existing negative assertions about menstruation. The advertisements confirm and perpetuate negative beliefs about menstruation and they are able to do so because of the negative connotations associated with menstruation and the menstruating female in our society.

From this research, I have deduced that negativity surrounding menstruation is maintained because women continue to subscribe to the socially prescribed 'menstrual etiquette' (Laws, 1990). When an adolescent girl turns to menstrual product advertisements she is already aware that menstruation is negatively defined. She is cognizant that concealment of menstruation is a necessity if she is to practice the appropriate 'menstrual etiquette' (Laws, 1990). It is not the advertisements which initiate the notion that menstruation is dirty

and needs to be hidden, the societal definitions of menstruation do this and the advertisements simply reinforce and maintain these beliefs. Before exposure to the advertisements, the adolescent girl will be aware that the topic of menstruation is viewed negatively and rarely openly discussed. From the whispers in the halls, the derogatory comments from boys regarding 'being on the rag,' the embarrassment of mothers and teachers concerning discussions about menstruation and, ultimately from the void in adequate menstrual preparation given to girls, she becomes aware that this natural physiological event of women is not defined positively in our society. When she turns to the advertisements she finds the social definitions of menstruation confirmed. By accepting the social definitions of menstruation, and concealing her menstrual status as prescribed in menstrual product advertisements, the adolescent girl begins to practice the socially constructed menstrual etiquette. Of course she is unaware that 'menstrual etiquette' is based on beliefs about the female body, and menstruation, which are negative and inaccurate.

The question arises, Why it should be the responsibility of the advertisers and product manufacturers to educate adolescent girls? At a presentation I gave at the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Conference in June of 1997, an executive of Tambrands Inc., raised this issue. One would have to reply that it is not their responsibility to educate or change societal views. However, I would contend that they should, at the very least, present their information in an accurate manner. The problem lies in whose definition of accurate should be the used when dealing with menstruation. If the advertisements are simply a reflection of our social beliefs on the topic of menstruation, whether they are appropriate or not, it is difficult to argue that they do not simply convey the values and beliefs that are understood and accepted about menstruation. Until our social meanings and definitions change it would be difficult to assume that

advertisers ought to present their products and menstruation in a different light than the way society actually views menstruation and the menstruating female.

Advertisers cannot be expected to initiate change in social views and beliefs regarding menstruation. Other possible methods for initiating proactive change must be examined. Educational programs for teens and adults may be one such method of initiating change in the negative beliefs that often surround menstruation and the female body. We have to discuss what the role of educators will be and if this is a role that we want filled by adults outside of the home. This debate resembles that of the debate concerning sex education with the concern that some adolescents receive this type of education at home, while others do not.

With regard to parents and teachers educating adolescent boys and girls about menstruation, it may be important to focus on their education regarding menstruation before they begin to educate adolescent girls or boys. Adults may not be aware that many adolescent girls do not feel adequately prepared for menarche and they also may be unaware of the types of messages that are being conveyed through advertisements. Perhaps parents and teachers ought to re-examine their own beliefs about menstruation before they educate adolescent and pre-adolescent boys and girls. If their own personal beliefs about menstruation are negative, this is likely the type of message that they will convey to adolescents. I feel that it is time for proactive change in the education of our youth with regard to menstruation.

At an individual level, we must all examine our own views on menstruation. It is very difficult to assume that we will be able to positively educate our adolescent girls and boys if these are not the beliefs that we ourselves hold. If we hold negative beliefs that reflect the social definitions of

menstruation and the functions of the female body, we may find ourselves incapable conveying appropriate and accurate information to adolescents.

I indicated earlier that in order for change to occur we must undo the current negative social definitions surrounding menstruation and the female body. It is important to note that, while this is necessary in order to initiate change, it is also very difficult. These beliefs are rooted in our patriarchal society. The negative messages and beliefs maintain status differences between men and women based on physiological differences. It would seem that the only solution to undoing the negative beliefs held about the female body and menstruation would be in undoing patriarchy. This is a utopian ideal and will likely not be achieved in the near future.

Instead, I believe that we must start with a more achievable goal. This is not to say that we cannot challenge both advertisers and any other media which reflect negative beliefs about the female body and menstruation. In fact, without changes on a small scale the negative images conveyed in the advertisements, and in our social beliefs about menstruation, will continue to be perpetuated. The types of change that we can make include lobbying advertisers and manufacturers with respect to changing their approach and sales tactics. Collectively boycotting the products that actively perpetuate and sell negative images of women and their natural physiological cycles is another method of initiating change. We can also initiate change by teaching adolescent girls that we come into contact with about their menstrual cycles while conveying positive messages about their changing female bodies which they should be encouraged to love and respect, not abhor or hate.

Perhaps one way to diffuse the negative impact on adolescent girls that may result from repeated exposure to advertisements that negatively portray the menstrual cycle and the natural functions of the female body would be to explore

these advertisements and their messages with adolescent girls. In so doing, attention can be given to both the explicit and implicit messages conveyed in the advertisements. The messages can be evaluated as positive or negative. From there, adults and adolescents could determine that which is important and accurate from that which is not. Information that serves no purpose other than to create needs and insecurities as a means to sell more products can be identified and discarded. This activity will serve many purposes. It will initiate open discussion about the topic of menstruation. It will allow educational information to be exchanged between adults and the adolescents. It will allow the identification of what is useful in these advertisements and what is potentially detrimental. Most importantly, this type of discussion will allow adults to convey information to offset the negative social definitions about menstruation, which is the first, and most necessary, step in initiating change. A discussion of this sort in a group would be ideal as it would teach adolescent girls, collectively, the positive aspects of being a woman. It could also begin to create a generation of young women who do not harbor self-images that are damaged by social definitions of the female body and the artificial ideals that society places on it. In establishing group discussions it is hoped that young girls will feel comfortable in speaking with each other about their menstrual cycles in a manner which transcends the whispers and secret discussions on the topic.

In addition to discussions with adolescent girls, I believe that it is necessary to educate adolescent boys about menstruation in a manner that does not convey the negative social beliefs that surround this topic. However, I do not feel that this is necessarily the first step in the cycle of change given the current social setting and beliefs around this topic. Until women and adolescent girls are comfortable about their own bodies it will be difficult to imagine that they will be comfortable with the inclusion of men in these discussions. Perhaps it would

be best to educate adolescent boys and girls about the negative portrayal of men and women in popular culture and to remove some of the myths surrounding all aspects of sexuality and the developing bodies of adolescents. In so doing we will provide adolescents with the skills to critically evaluate advertisements. Education regarding the portrayal of men and women in popular culture could likely take place with adolescent boys and girls together. Whether or not information about menstruation should be taught with boys and girls together depends on whether or not the information can be conveyed appropriately and accurately within the specific group that includes both boys and girls.

If we are able to teach adolescent boys and girls that the messages conveyed by advertisements are often self-serving, then we will teach them an important lesson about their abilities to influence the use of these sales tactics. I believe, and have had this belief confirmed from this research, that we need to provide our young people with the ability to look critically at advertisements and all forms of media. They should be taught that these media are not necessarily conveyors of truth, but rather subjective opinions or portrayals that are designed to carry or convey the message that the advertiser wants us to receive. I believe that this type of education will make it possible for young people to determine which messages are appropriate and which are commercially driven or self-serving.

Affirming Menstruation

It is not enough for me to simply unveil the negativity which surrounds menstruation and the menstruating female in advertising. Exposing societal beliefs and discovering how these beliefs are maintained and perpetuated in advertisements serves only to identify the problem. Changing the social definitions, such that there is no longer a place for the negative messages which

are currently conveyed in advertising, requires that we begin to create a society which affirms and celebrates the changes that take place in the female body at menarche. By affirming and celebrating menses adolescent girls will be exposed to beliefs about menstruation that are dramatically different from those held by the larger society and reflected in advertisements. This is the call to create a culture which acknowledges the first period as an important rite of passage for adolescent girls. At the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Conference in June of 1997, a performing arts group called on the participants of the conference to rise to the challenge of creating a 'menstruation affirmation culture.' I strongly believe that this is one way that societal change has the potential to occur; by re-defining menstruation as a positive, natural physiological event that should be celebrated rather than concealed and immersed in silence.

Importance of this Research

This research is important because it draws attention to the belief systems about women and their bodies that is entrenched within the social system in which we live. It makes us aware of certain patterns of beliefs that, while we may not agree with them, we continue to perpetuate by allowing them to be passed on to our youth. It is important not only because it uncovers the messages that are being sent through advertisements, but also because it calls us to become aware of our own beliefs on the topic of menstruation and the female body. It is one thing to fail in educating adolescent girls, it is yet another to perpetuate messages and beliefs that are negative and detrimental to the well-being of these adolescent girls.

Limitations of this Research

There are limitations to this type of research. The sole use of print advertisements when looking at menstruation is a limitation of the study of the

experience of menarche. While the goal of this project was the depiction of menarche in advertisements, this could be better achieved by incorporating adolescent girls in the analysis of the advertisements. This would give a more accurate account of what the girls could learn from these advertisements rather than relying on an adult analysis of the messages conveyed in the advertisements. Using menstrual product advertisements outside of print ads would also give a more complete portrayal of the messages conveyed in menstrual product advertisements.

Regarding the study of advertisements, I believe that one limitation of this work was my inability to compile a system within which I could analyze the picture component of the advertisement, rather than just the text of the advertisement. I believe that the entire advertisement, both the picture and the text, conveys a message that is not conveyed when you analyze just the text. I feel that if I had been able to come up with a systematic method to analyze the picture that I would have been able to attain a deeper analysis of these advertisements. A system within which one could analyze both the picture and the text of the advertisement would have made it possible for me to gain a better understanding of the portrayal of menarche in menstrual product advertising.

Future Studies

Given the nature of this topic—one in which both advertising and menarche were looked at simultaneously—I believe that research on both of the topics as separate areas is important. I have realized from this project that it is very difficult to look at menarche within the context of the world of advertising. The needs of the menarcheal girl are seemingly not the concern of the advertisers. I would like to continue to look at menarche and menarcheal girls, but focus my research on the girls themselves and let them speak of their

experiences and how they view their changing bodies and the messages that they are being sent about their changing bodies.

The role of advertising in the socialization of our young people is a very interesting area of study. I believe that a study that involved interviewing individuals about the messages that they get from these advertisements would assist in formulating tentative theory on the impact of advertising.

I believe that studies involving adolescent boys with regard to their knowledge of, and attitudes about, menstruation would allow researchers to get a sense about the opinions that are conveyed to males about menstruation and the female body in our society. I believe that an understanding of, and an awareness about, the negativity that surrounds menstruation is necessary in initiating change. Sophie Laws (1990), has done research concerning the opinions of men regarding menstruation in England. I feel that this is the type of study that ought to be replicated in North America with adolescent boys.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are important as they draw attention to the need for a re-examination of the messages that are being accepted as appropriate and conveyed through the media in advertisements. We must educate our youth to be critical viewers of media who are capable of questioning that which is presented to them as truth. The changes will not take place over night but, at the very least, we can teach our children to look at advertisements from an educated, critical position.

In my opinion, the most important finding of this study was that, in most cases, the advertisements were successful in creating needs and creating fears because they drew from the previously held, and widely established, feelings about menstruation and menstruating women in our society. This is an important revelation as it calls each of us to examine our own beliefs about menstruation

and the female body; beliefs that we continue to share and convey to adolescent girls and boys. Change at a societal level is imperative but, when dealing with deeply entrenched belief systems and meanings, the first step is clearly to examine our own personal beliefs and values about the female body.

With regards to how we, as concerned women who are not pleased with our portrayal, and the portrayal of our bodily functions in advertising, can make a difference in the portrayal of women in advertisements, Naomi Wolf offers the following reality check:

It is often said that we must make fashion and advertising images include us, but this is a dangerously optimistic misunderstanding of how the market works. Advertising aimed at women works by lowering our self-esteem. If it flatters our self-esteem, it is not effective. Let's abandon this hope of looking to the index to fully include us. It won't, because if it does, it has lost its function. As long as the definition of "beauty" comes from outside women, we will continue to be manipulated by it....The marketplace is not open to consciousness-raising. It is misplaced energy to attack the market's images themselves: Given recent history, they were bound to develop as they did. While we cannot directly affect the images, we can drain them of their power. We can turn away from them, look directly at one another, and find alternative images of beauty in a female subculture...(Wolf, 1991, pp. 276-277).

By attacking the essence of what is female, the advertisements create the need to conceal that which is a natural function of the female body, the menstrual cycle. Women themselves are taught to internalize that there is something wrong with them and that the menstrual cycle is problematic and not a normal, natural function. Men, who have also been exposed to these messages,

and the social definitions surrounding menstruation, also perceive that the female body and the menstrual cycle are problematic. By attacking the female body as a way to sell products, the advertisements attack women. Menstrual product advertisements send negative messages about what it means to menstruate and be female in our society. It ought to be a primary goal of feminists to ensure that these negative messages are changed.

This research is intended to be a component of change. It sought to describe and generate theory about the portrayal of menarche in menstrual product advertising. From these descriptions, and from this theory, the call is to create change through changed social definitions and meanings accorded to the female body and the natural functions of the female body. Change at a societal level can only take place following change at an individual level. This research is the call for initiating such change.

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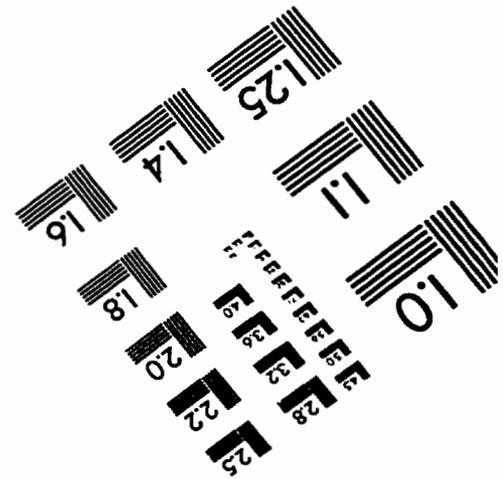
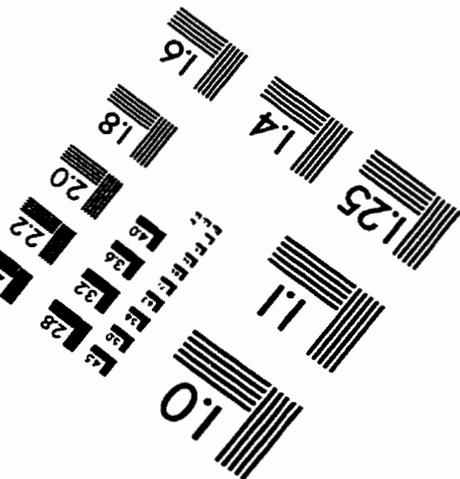
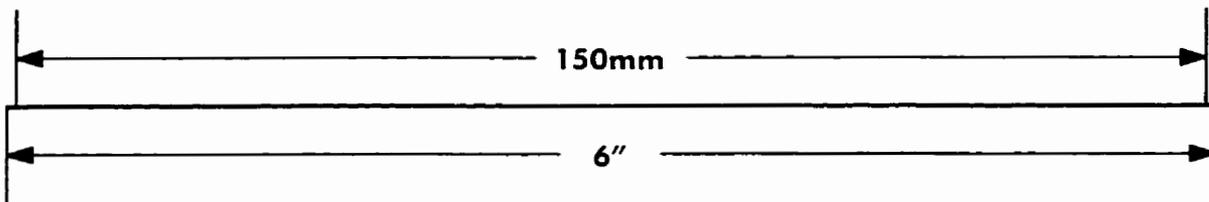
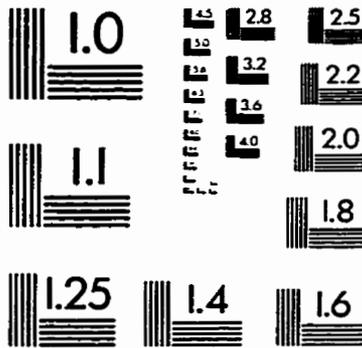
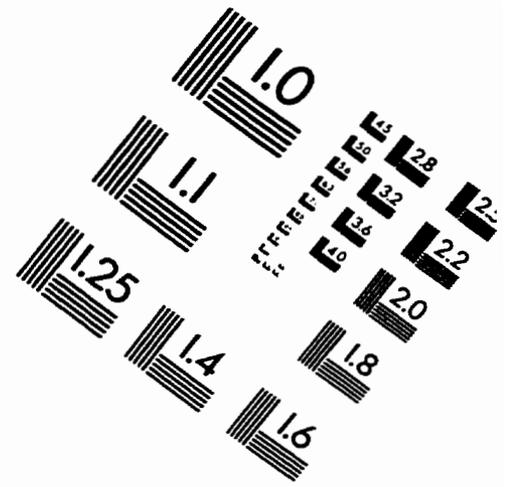
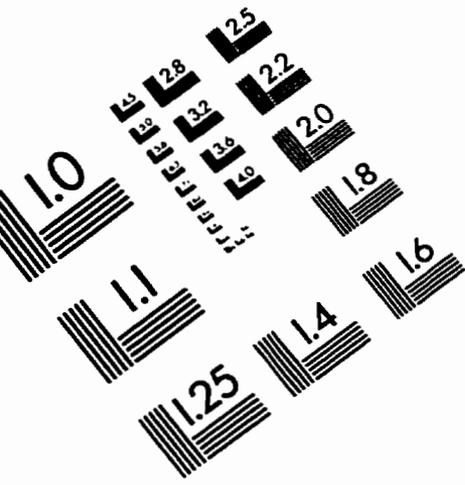
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