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**The construction of menstrual product advertisements from a feminist perspective:**

**A study of content and processes.**

by

Christine M. Power

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, MB

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**The construction of menstrual product advertisements from a feminist perspective:  
A study of content and processes.**

**BY**

**Christine M. Power**

**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

This project was designed to follow five years of ongoing research pertaining to the study of the portrayal of women in menstrual product advertising. Previous research has concluded that most menstrual product advertisements portray women negatively. The purpose of this study was to evaluate if women could suggest the contents for menstrual product advertisements that affirmed women and menstruation. Focus groups with five participants were used as the primary method of research. During focus group discussions, women were reminded that the goal of advertising is to sell the product. The findings of the study indicate that women can suggest ideas for menstrual product advertisements that affirm women and menstruation. The women in the focus groups would like to see truthful and responsible advertisements that contain a lifelike representation of women. The information that the women deemed to be necessary in order to accomplish this goal included: factual information about the product and its usage, honest information depicting how menstruation is actually experienced, the inclusion of men in the advertisements actively participating in the menstrual experience, as well as the portrayal of lifelike women whose femininity is not threatened by menstruation. Ultimately, by providing ideas and justification for these propositions for advertisements that portray women--and the very essence of what makes a women--in a positive light, we may have embarked on the first step toward breaking down the negative effects of patriarchy and the way women are viewed in society

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To my mom and brother for *everything*...but most of all your love, faith and encouragement.

To Joel.... I could not have done this without you. Thank you for your love. Thank you for always being there.

***This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Dad.***

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Some feminist writers have observed that the fact that women menstruate has been used for the devaluation and degradation of women in Western society so as to maintain social gender stratification (Cooksey & Imle, 1997). Menstruation has long been defined as a 'woman's problem' and subjected to strong taboos and sanctions. Even today, in our sexually open and liberated society, silence and shame continue to surround menstruation (Simes, 1998). As a consequence of these contemporary taboos, women continue to be embarrassed by their periods and sensitive to being socially defined as unclean when menstruating. Some contemporary feminists, rejecting such demeaning portrayals of a perfectly normal physiological event, are encouraging women to celebrate their periods (Martin, 1987; Owen, 1998). Rather than continuing to engage in denial behaviors, women are being urged to claim their periods as a positive attribute that signifies entrance into womanhood (Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Conference, 1997).

Over the last five years there has been ongoing research in the Department of Family Studies at the University of Manitoba concerning how women are portrayed in menstrual product advertisements. Carvalho (1997) and Simes (1998) have recently completed research in this area. Carvalho's (1997) research systematically sampled over seven hundred menstrual product advertisements from Good Housekeeping and Chatelaine magazines beginning in 1914. Simes (1998) also analyzed advertisements from Good Housekeeping and Chatelaine. However, she was more concerned with menstrual product advertisements that appeared to be targeted at adolescent girls. Their studies concluded that a patriarchal perspective negatively shapes the female experience

of menstruation portrayed in menstrual product advertising. These findings have been presented at the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research annual conference. It was at this particular conference in June of 1997 that an executive from Tambrands (now Johnson & Johnson) posed the question about their research that inspired this project. The executive from Tambrands wanted to know how you could portray women more positively in menstrual product advertisements, yet still sell the product.

As a feminist researcher I am particularly interested in women's issues and concerned about women's position in society. I believe that it is important to expose women to the research that is being conducted on their behalf. Attempting to answer the question posed by the executive from Tambrands meant presenting the past five years of research to focus groups of women. Thus, the purpose of this research project was to determine if it was possible for these women to suggest the contents for menstrual product advertisements that would portray women and menstruation in a more positive manner. This study seeks to investigate the possibility of affirming women and menstruation in menstrual product advertising.

In order for the women in the focus groups to succeed in suggesting ideas for the content of menstrual product advertisement that overcome the negative portrayal of women in current advertisements, it was necessary for the women to recognize that some advertisements are shaped by a patriarchal perspective. A patriarchal perspective accounts for the "totality of male domination and its persuasiveness in women's lives" (Mackie, 1991, p. 199). In other words, women's beliefs about themselves and their bodies have been shaped by how men view the female body and mind. Women may not recognize the influences of patriarchy because they are living under false

consciousness (Mackie, 1991). Under false consciousness, women accept pervasive patriarchal definitions about their bodies and positions in society as reality: the 'way things are.' Therefore women accept that menstruation is an event that they are to be ashamed of, as well as an event that is to be hidden from society, particularly males. False consciousness occurs when "the subordinate group accepts as valid and authoritative the ideology of the dominant group" (Mackie, 1985, p. 35). Under false consciousness women have been influenced and manipulated by men's power to define women and their actions in ways that ensures male superiority. Thus, contemporary menstrual management suggests that women must act as if they are not menstruating, even when they do have their periods. This theme is also projected in many of the current advertisements pertaining to menstrual management (Carvalho, 1997; Simes 1998).

I do not think it is fair, nor representative of women, to suggest that they are merely puppets of patriarchy. Consequently, I thought it was necessary for women to have a voice in this research. I was curious to know if the women in the focus groups thought that women were being negatively portrayed in menstrual product advertisements. If these women believed women were portrayed negatively in the advertisements, what would they do to change how they were depicted? If women did not think that they were being negatively portrayed in menstrual product advertisements, I wanted to know why they were comfortable with these advertisements. I think that these findings may offer explanations for how women think of themselves. By asking women for their opinions and ideas, I avoided the simple conclusion that society's obsessions with how women should behave, look or participate was "predominately a

product of pernicious media influence” (Brown & Jasper, 1993, p. 11). I agree that “such a perspective degrades women by falsely assuming their passivity and inevitable victimization” (Brown & Jasper, 1993, p. 11). For this reason, I believed that it was important to present women with the research findings from the University of Manitoba (Berg & Coutts, 1994; Coutts & Berg, 1993; Carvalho, 1997; Simes, 1998) that have been conducted on their behalf and field their comments and suggestions.

### Research Goals

There are many things that I hoped to accomplish with this research. First and foremost, I believe that it is important to give women a voice and hear their comments on previous research that has been conducted on the portrayal of women in menstrual product advertising. Not only does this tie together five years of research, but is also exercises Duffy’s (1985) assertion that feminist research should be done *on* women and *for* women.

The main goal of this study was to determine if it was possible for women to construct advertisements for menstrual products that affirm women and menstruation. To accomplish this goal, I proposed to use focus groups to identify what women would include in the advertisements. The use of focus groups also enabled me, the researcher, to identify the context of how the ideas were generated and agreed upon. Therefore, it was possible to see some evidence of the presence of patriarchy as it exists in society today.

### Significance of this Study

It was my hope that this research would find that it was possible for women to identify ideas for menstrual product advertisements that portrayed women and menstruation positively, yet could still sell the product. It is my belief that menstrual

product advertising is only a fraction of the information that is detrimental to women, and, more specifically, teenagers. While I do want to be cautious not to imply women's passivity when it comes to the media, I think that many researchers would agree that the messages that the media are sending are not healthy, yet we see many women accepting the messages at face value.

This research holds exciting implications for the way both women and menstruation are viewed in our society. It is my belief that by presenting women and their bodies in a more positive and truthful light in menstrual product advertisements, it may be possible to improve the way women feel about themselves. Advertisers may also learn that it is not necessary to attack the female body in order to sell products. Affirmation may also attract the consumer. Ultimately, by providing ideas and justification for these propositions for advertisements that portray women--and the very essence of what makes a women--in a positive light, we may have embarked on the first step toward breaking down the negative effects of patriarchy and the way women are viewed in society.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This research was conducted using previous research concerning the portrayal of women in menstrual product advertisements as a foundation. Previous research findings not only served as the premise for the formation of my research question, but also provided the tool to ensure that all women in the focus groups possessed the same basic information. The following review of relevant literature and research provides insight into how menstrual product advertisements are negative and what the advertisements communicate about women and menstruation.

### Women as Other

Patriarchy defines women and dictates roles for them. The roles that women occupy are typically subordinate to men and frequently based on their physical characteristics. These roles are often based on the fact that men are typically stronger than women and that women have reproductive capabilities. Traditionally, men were in the public sphere earning wages, while women were wives and mothers in the private, domestic sphere (Martin, 1988). The fact that women remained in the private sphere, out of the public eye and unthreatening to men, established their role as the “Other” sex (de Beauvoir, 1952). As the Other sex women are less valued and subordinate members of society.

Throughout history there are many phenomena that can be seen as contributing to women’s designation as Other. Mackie (1991) notes that until recently most research has been conducted “primarily by males (and females who had been socialized to accept the masculine ruling ideas) on topics that interested men, using methods congenial to men” (p. 20). Women were only privy to information that men wanted them to have and to

information that ensured their continued subordination. In reference to the nineteenth century, Martin (1987) observed “medical images of menstruation as pathological were remarkably vivid by the end of the century” (p. 35). She observed that in the twentieth century, little has changed relative to the use of metaphors to describe menstruation. Indeed, medical texts continue to view menstruation as “failed (re) production” (Martin, 1987, p. 105). The information that women have had access to during the twentieth century about their bodies was limited, fraught with male biases and frequently inaccurate. Women, under false consciousness, assumed that this information about their bodies was correct and accepted that their weak bodies prevented them from participating in most public activities.

The denial of the vote to women is another example of women’s ascribed Otherness. In the past, it was believed that women were “too weak to participate in the excitement of elections...if women used their brains excessively, they would impair their fertility by draining off blood cells needed to support the menstrual cycle” (Mackie, 1991, p. 254). Denying women a vote because it may impair their reproductive abilities reiterates women’s defined weakness in comparison to men. During the early twentieth century it was also widely believed that women did not have the mental capacity to understand political problems or the physical ability to fight to defend their country. Menstruation was believed to drain blood and strength from the brain and the body. Women were culturally defined then as ‘the weaker sex.’

It is evident from these examples that a woman’s minor position, or involvement, in society was linked to biology, specifically to her reproductive cycle. While raising children, serving her husband, and ensuring that the home was well run were important to

women, these domestic duties failed to bring them recognition, status and power in society (Mackie, 1991). Being encumbered with domestic and child responsibilities ensured women would not have the opportunity to become involved in the public sphere.

Biology was, and possibly continues to be, the pervasive factor defining women. Under definitions provided by patriarchy, women are the weaker sex. Their weakness is variously linked to assumed emotional volatility, their periods, their 'need' to bear children, and other defining beliefs (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1988). As a consequence, women have not participated equally in society. Since they could not participate in society on male terms, participation was discouraged, even denied.

Women's weakness, as defined by patriarchy, was further supported by the practice of withdrawing from social participation during their periods. This is a practice that seemed to be strictly adhered to until around the time when women gained the vote (Delaney et al., 1988). Women were considered to be weakened, unable and incapable of functioning in society, during their periods (Delaney et al., 1988). In a patriarchal society, a woman's retreat from activity due to menstruation confirmed that she could not meet the standards of societal participation as set by men. This, in turn, cast women as 'Other'; confirming that they were indeed different from men.

### Women as Other in Advertisements

Until the advent of commercial menstrual products during the 1950's, menstruation management was the 'secret' of women; contained in the female world (Brumberg, 1997). Menstruation, shrouded in silence and concealment, was truly a matter exclusive to women. Indeed, the very euphemisms, 'way of women' or 'female troubles' well illustrate the nature of the silence (Delaney et al., 1988). Yet in this

context of silence and hiddenness, women could be quite public about their periods in the sense that they were free to withdraw from activities for the duration of their menstruation. Everyone understood that women withdrew during 'that time.' In the past, even medical opinion discouraged women from taking part in strenuous activities during menstruation. It is noteworthy that strenuous activities often included activities such as work, school or social gatherings, which would hardly be classified as such in contemporary society (Brumberg, 1997).

Curiously, closer examination of today's menstrual management reveals that women are expected to be even more secretive about their periods than they were in the past (Carvalho, 1997). Contemporary women must engage in, rather than withdraw from, activities that insure denial of their menstruation. Withdrawal from activity, even when her period is particularly troublesome, has become unacceptable. Contemporary menstrual management requires that women conceal, even deny, their periods by ensuring that they do nothing, including withdrawal, that would reveal the fact that they are menstruating. Some writers have even suggested that this total denial of menstruation is linked to women having to perform 'exactly as men' in order to have a chance at equality (Mackie, 1991). It would seem that in a patriarchal society, women who seek equal participation cannot at the same time claim menstruation as a basis for reduced participation. Patriarchal definitions clearly continue to influence menstrual management. Menstrual product advertising mirrors how women and periods have been portrayed over the years. The following historical survey demonstrates how menstruation has become increasingly more private, even though the ads appear to send the message that menstruation is no longer shrouded in silence. This historical overview of menstrual

product advertising also serves as an illustration of women's Otherness because of menstruation.

The history of women in menstrual product advertising The emergence of disposable pads in the 1920's was the start of the advertiser's involvement in suggesting how women should or should not act while they had their periods. The advertisement of disposable pads not only conveyed that the pads existed, but also suggested how women should use them. Advertising for the product portrayed women as "weak, frail, elegant and demure creatures" (Carvalho, 1997, p. 36). Women at this time had always reduced their activities during their period and had the option of withdrawing from society if necessary. The majority of women were accustomed to using menstrual rags, which were washed and reused. With the advent of disposable pads, menstrual rags were deemed to be dangerous, as they were contaminated with menstrual blood (Brumberg, 1997). The menstruating woman also became associated with contamination and dirtiness.

In the 1930's, women in menstrual product advertisements were shown as being concerned with participating in activities while hiding the fact that they are menstruating. A March 1937 advertisement in *Chatelaine* magazine (as cited in Carvalho, 1997) illustrates this point.

She has no time for the discomfort and worries associated with her menstrual protection and wants to feel secure while pursuing other activities what a piece of mind that moisture proof backing brings-especially when you are traveling (p.37).

Women were portrayed as fearing embarrassment if they were unable to conceal their menstrual status. Consequently, women learned that if they participated in activities they had less chance of being discovered as having their periods. The fact that women were told that they have to hide a natural body function from society also helped to define women as Other.

In the 1940's, due to the advent of World War II, the language and assumptions of menstrual product advertising changed dramatically (Carvalho, 1997). Women were portrayed as being active, smart, and involved in the war effort. Menstruation was no longer an acceptable reason to withdraw from society.

In the 1950's, the messages in menstrual product advertisements once again changed dramatically. When the war ended, many women were replaced by men in the factories. Women were urged to concentrate on the family and home and were thus relegated back to their subordinate position of wife and mother.

Kotex introduced a new focus which was to be in "the know" (Carvalho, 1997, p. 40). Women were told that they had to know the proper social etiquette, as well as the suitable sanitary protection for each occasion. More than ever, women in the 1950's were encouraged to keep their menstrual status hidden. Knowing about proper menstrual management meant that women knew what sanitary protection was suitable for each occasion. At this time, while it was important to be aware of the proper sanitary protection, it was also important to know what "dress" would best hide the menstrual pad. The proper sanitary protection combined with the proper dress ensured that women did not have to miss out on the fun. It is worthy of note that the advertisements of the 1950's encouraged women to use various menstrual products so as not to miss out on social

activities, not work. The ads, of course, reflect a decade in which most women were not in the labour force.

By the 1960's, women were urged to be even more concerned with the protection their menstrual products provided. Advertisements focused on the need for reliable protection that allowed women to feel fresh and carefree at all times (Carvalho, 1997). Women were also encouraged to participate in all activities. New products, such as tampons, made activities such as swimming possible. In the past, the unavailability of internal protection made swimming a prohibited activity during menstruation. Of note, swimming was previously considered to be among those activities that might be too strenuous for 'that time of the month.'

Advertisements of the 1970's told women that they could wear whatever they wanted and do whatever they wanted during their periods as long as they were wearing the proper pad or tampon. It is important to keep in mind that the woman's movement was in process and that women were advocating for equal rights and more opportunities in society during this decade. According to the advertisements, women demanded the right to participate equally in society regardless of whether or not they were menstruating (Carvalho, 1997).

In the 1980's there was another shift in the messages the advertisements were sending to women. It seems as if the ads went from suggesting that women *can* use these products and participate in activities if they want, suggesting that they *must* use these products and participate in these activities at all times. In effect, the theme of convenience, which was present in the advertisements, seems to shift to a theme that stresses the necessity of the specialized products (Carvalho, 1997).

In the 1980's the panty liner was introduced. Advertisements of the 1980's portrayed women as wanting to be fun loving, fresh, and clean at all times. The advertisements suggested that women should be concerned about their personal hygiene all of the time, whether or not they are menstruating. Women were told that they could achieve piece of mind about their personal hygiene if they used the specific products designed for each phase of their menstrual cycle (Carvalho, 1997). The new panty liners could be used between periods to ensure freshness, as well as in combination with a tampon for extra protection. Since the advertisements suggested that women must appear as if they were not menstruating, an event that signifies womanhood, women were still defined as Other. To appear as always 'not menstruating' is to define normal in male terms.

The advertisements of the 1990's appear to convey the view that women's various menstrual problems can be alleviated by the use of certain products. For example, there are tampons for light, regular, medium, and heavy menstrual flow days. As well, there are pads for daytime and nighttime use, as well as for different levels of menstrual flow. The advertisements depict which types of protection are best for certain activities. Some advertisements also suggest that women in the 1990's should use sanitary protection every day of the month to ensure freshness and confidence (Carvalho, 1997).

One begins to wonder why it has become so complicated to be female. Almost sixty-five years after the first disposable pads came on the market, periods have become a complex series of monthly problems which require a massive undercover effort (Treneman, 1989). We are dealing with the same problem as we were sixty-five years

ago. Periods have not suddenly become different. Why has managing menstruation become such an issue?

While the ads may seem to break the silence that surrounds menstruation, ironically, they insure female subordination. The advertisements are designed and constructed in a manner that the silence that they are intending to break ultimately remains intact (Treneman, 1989). The products themselves are an attempt to maintain the silence and hiddenness that surrounds menstruation by providing women with a method of concealing their periods. A good example of this concealment effort is the pretty packages in which some sanitary supplies are wrapped. The pretty cover is designed to camouflage what is actually in the package. Thus, it is thought that a woman should be able to carry this product without others, particularly men, knowing what is inside the package.

The “dirty, bloody menstrual problem” that women are to be ashamed of lies within the roots of our patriarchal society (Treneman, 1989, p. 157). It is important to remember that the goal of patriarchy is to ensure that women do not threaten men’s position in society. The organizational and social requirements of patriarchy were (and possibly still are) that women be represented as “filthy, sick, unbalanced, ritually impure” (Nicolson, 1995, p. 780) to ensure their designation as Other.

#### Common Themes in Menstrual Product Advertisements

This section will identify the common themes that have been identified in previous research conducted on the portrayal of women in menstrual product advertising. The common themes found in menstrual product advertisements include: menstrual management technology, silence and shame, menstrual etiquette, femininity and dirtiness.

The work of Berg and Coutts (1994), Coutts and Berg (1993), Laws (1990), Simes (1998) and Treneman (1989) will be used to illustrate these common themes.

### Menstrual Management 'Technology'

In the case of menstruation, advertisers play into, and create, needs to increase sales of their products. Advertisements that focus on the female body being dirty and shameful function to heighten insecurities about the female body. Suggesting that the female body is dirty contributes to women learning to fear their own bodies. Ironically, the parts of a woman's body that the ads target are probably some of the cleanest, as they have natural cleansing methods.

Advertisers use an expanded definition of menstruation, the implication that sanitary protection is always needed, as a method for selling more products. The advertisements suggest a complex system of menstrual products that need to be used whether or not a woman is menstruating. Ads encourage women to use panty liners, even though they are not menstruating, to ensure cleanliness and freshness. Freshness, it is suggested, is a major component of femininity. It is implied in the ads that a woman's confidence is enhanced as a consequence of always being protected. One has to wonder what the panty liner is actually doing. In the past, women did not seem to be concerned about being protected between periods. Berg and Coutts (1994) explain that "subtly, products designed for managing menstruation, the curse, become necessary for everyday use: The duration of the curse is extended" (p. 12). The 'necessity' of feminine protection everyday is clearly a created need to increase sales of panty liners.

### Silence and Shame

One of the ironies of menstrual product advertising is that it seeks to instill a desire to erase the very thing (menstruation) that the product is designed to service (Treneman, 1989). One would think that the very existence of the advertisements breaks the silence that surrounds menstruation. However, the consistent message in the ads is that it is necessary to conceal menstruation (Simes, 1998). This implies that women are to be ashamed of menstruation and thus do everything possible to keep their periods hidden. As I have mentioned previously, this is very different from the past when women could withdraw and everyone knew why. Although the 'silence' surrounding menstruation was maintained, others understood, and accepted the fact, that a woman may retreat from public activities because of her period.

The advertising of menstrual products, which occurs almost exclusively in women's magazines, exemplifies the themes of silence and shame. Placing these advertisements in women's magazines restricts the ads to the female gaze and reiterates the societal belief that menstruation is for women's eyes only (Treneman, 1989). However, at the same time the advertisements seem to reflect the concerns of a male gaze.

### Menstrual Etiquette

For women in the 1990's, proper hygiene has become more than just managing their periods for a week each month. Today, menstrual product advertisements suggest that women have to manage their bodies all the time. Advertisements for menstrual products prescribe what a woman should do during her period in terms of products and activities, as well as feminine hygiene products to be used when she is not menstruating.

The advertisements explain what each product does and why it is better than other products on the market. Simes (1998) explains that advertisers are able to instill the idea that some type of feminine hygiene product is necessary every day, of each month. The advertisers suggest that if a woman is conscious of her hygiene throughout the month “getting caught will not take place” (p. 65). Feminine hygiene in the 1990’s has thus become a complex issue, throughout the month.

Although women in the past did not discuss their periods, their option to withdraw did make menstruation relatively more visible than it is today. In the past, when women retreated because of menstruation, it was culturally acceptable and ‘understood.’ Today, withdrawal from activities to deal with a troublesome period is not acceptable. Given the prohibition against ‘time off’ for menstruation women must provide ‘acceptable’ reasons for their absence such as having the flu, or having a virus. It should be noted that the acceptable excuses for absence are for ailments that males can and do experience (Martin, 1987). Menstrual product advertisements also prescribe acceptable behavior during menstruation. The advertisements assume a female audience, while the patriarchal voice within the advertisement instructs women on what may be said in public about menstruation, as well as the best ways women can conceal their periods (Laws, 1990). The advertisements, therefore, play off the patriarchal culture that surrounds women. Consequently, most of the meanings surrounding menstruation and femininity are strongly related to the social rules in society which are governed by patriarchy (Laws, 1990).

“Etiquette” or “the rules of behavior governing social relations among people of distinct social status or classes” is evident in relation to menstruation (Laws, 1990 p. 42).

Laws (1990) refers to these patriarchal rules surrounding menstruation as 'menstrual etiquette.' Menstrual etiquette is important because it supports, defines and preserves the social status of men and women in society. Proper menstrual etiquette includes the way a woman should manage her period and also the activities in which she should participate. Failing to participate in the suggested activities violates the menstrual etiquette. Consequently, a woman risks being discovered having her period. Why is such knowledge a taboo? After all, menstruation is part of being a woman.

In a patriarchal world, males have enforced the 'etiquette' that men must not know that a woman is menstruating (Laws, 1990). Most of this etiquette stems from the fact that many people, men and women, regard the site of blood as something that is dirty and contaminated. A good example of this menstrual etiquette is seen in a woman's decision to go swimming. If a woman chooses not to swim she sends the message that she has her period, whether or not she is actually menstruating. Laws (1990) further explains that menstrual etiquette is enforced not by the fear of reprisals, but by "social sanctions, such as adverse comment, criticism, ridicule and ostracism" (p. 43).

Women are conscious of the social rules that are implied in proper menstrual etiquette (Laws, 1990). They understand that being discovered as having one's period is not acceptable. Not only must women not speak of their periods, they must also insure that anything related to their periods is not seen. Menstrual management products must be hidden at all times. For example, if a purse spills, a typical woman rushes to pick up the contents, particularly if there are menstrual products among the articles. Another person walking by may see the contents of the purse, including the menstrual products, but will not stop and help pick up the contents. The person whose purse spilled knows the

other person saw the contents of her purse on the floor, including the menstrual products. The person who walked by also knows that the person whose purse spilt saw them and that the passerby is aware of the menstrual products on the floor. However, neither person says a word. By picking up the products in a quick and secretive manner, the woman is following the proper menstrual etiquette. The other person who walked by and did not offer to help is also following menstrual etiquette. Such behavior is a perfect illustration of what Goffman (1959) called “tactful inattention” (p. 230). Tactful inattention refers to the situation in which the passerby clearly saw the contents of the purse, however discretion, menstrual etiquette in this case, requires that the observer should feign not having seen the contents on the ground. To assist in collecting the contents of the purse would be to necessarily acknowledge seeing the products that ought to be hidden.

Menstrual product advertisements also portray ways that women can manage their periods that will not draw attention to, or uncover the fact, that they are menstruating; particularly to men. Menstrual product advertisements convey many complex menstrual management systems consisting of different tampons, pads, and panty liners for different times of the month and menstrual flow. The advertisements seem to convey the message that if a woman uses the advertised menstrual products she will not be discovered. Advertisements also advise women on what they should wear, where they should go, and in which activities they should participate. However, at the same time, contemporary ads also place unreasonable expectations on women (Simes, 1998). There are times when women cannot comply with the menstrual etiquette suggested by the ads. For example, some women find themselves in extreme pain during their periods. Current menstrual

etiquette mandates that these women should take the appropriate medicine and continue functioning normally. Instead of the abundance of menstrual products liberating women, they in fact may restrict women. Women of history were able to withdraw when their cramps were bad, contemporary women must grin and bear their pain.

### Femininity

According to current advertisements, women are almost obsessed with trying to achieve an unachievable ideal state. The ideal woman of advertising 'does not menstruate.' Women are concerned that men, in particular, are looking for this ideal woman and thus they will do whatever is necessary to meet the ideal. Menstrual product advertising also perpetuates the practice of creating an ideal woman. Menstrual product advertising portrays menstruation as something that is dirty and shameful and therefore an event that threatens femininity. Coutts and Berg (1993), in their analysis of the portrayal of women in menstrual product advertising, concluded that the femininity that is threatened by menstruation is a kind of "ultra-femininity" as portrayed in fashion magazines (p. 182). The ideal woman portrayed in the magazines is the professional runway model, the playgirl or movie star whose only concern appears to be her perfect looks. This femininity or "FEM" is composed of the following qualities: "fun-lovingness, lack of inhibition, style, glamour, youthfulness, playfulness, irrationality and above all freshness" (Coutts & Berg, 1993, p. 182). Consequently, this ultra feminine woman must always appear not to be menstruating because menstruating women are not 'fresh.' Such are the women typically portrayed in menstrual product advertisements.

In the scheme that Berg and Coutts (1994) have designed, the opposite of the ideal type FEM is the ideal type "WOMAN" (p. 15). Most women can relate to

WOMAN as an ideal type. WOMAN's concerns revolve around family, career and economic issues. WOMAN is not always fun, carefree or sexually stimulating.

WOMAN accepts the fact that she menstruates. WOMAN is not the typical female portrayed in menstrual product advertisements (Berg & Coutts, 1994).

Menstrual product advertisements communicate to women that if they are going to have any chance of coming close to the ideal type FEM, they must use the products advertised. The products are necessary to conceal menstruation and therefore leave a woman no excuses for not participating in all activities. The advertisements also appear to say that if women are going to meet the ideal they must wear short, tight, white skirts, go swimming, and be with their men all the time. Menstruation must never interfere with an active life. Women must always appear to be not menstruating. Consequently, the advertisements depict that if a woman buys the advertised product she can be like the woman in the advertisement: FEM.

### Dirtiness

More than ever, menstrual product advertisements today focus on how women should manage their periods to not only conceal the fact that they are menstruating, but also to insure that they are always fresh and clean. All one has to do is look at the shelves of menstrual products in a drug store or grocery store. Many of these products are to protect a woman even when she is not menstruating. The theme associated with most of these products is that their use will ensure a woman's freshness, even when she is not menstruating (Simes, 1998). Treneman (1989) states that the belief pushed by menstrual product advertising is that menstruation is only "dirty" if it is not concealed through the use of the correct products (p. 162).

Advertisements today also suggest that women should use feminine protection everyday to ensure their cleanliness. The advertisements suggest that any female discharge is contaminating. Consequently, women have come to be defined as “always dirty” and there is an implied need for more feminine hygiene products. For example, an advertisement for Always Alldays suggests that women should use this product all the time, everyday (Carvalho, 1997; Simes, 1998). This advertisement implies that women are always dirty, even when not menstruating, and can only be clean and confident if they use Always Alldays.

Creating the concern that women need to use menstrual protection everyday of the month has provided advertisers and manufacturers with new opportunities for product creation. Suggesting that women need to use protection everyday has also presented advertisers with another reason for suggesting, or implying, the subordination of women. The advertisements’ implication that women are always dirty suggests that women are truly Other.

### Construction of Advertisements

This section seeks to explain why menstrual product advertisements are effective. The major issues in this section include the role that shame plays in the promotion of menstrual products and how advertisers succeed in masquerading shame as the liberation of women.

### Success of Advertisements

Menstrual product advertisements create needs and fears in women surrounding menstruation and then offer solutions to these contrived needs and fears (Simes, 1998). As previously noted, the advertisements suggest that women need many different

products to deal with and conceal their menstrual state. The ads also suggest that without the correct product women will not be fresh, and that they risk being discovered. This fear of discovery is a product of our culture. The fear and shame that surrounds menstruation is presented to a young woman when she is first introduced to the subject of menstruation (Simes, 1998). Young girls learn about menstruation through whispers. They are taught by example that the only way they can talk about menstruation is in whispers and only to other females. This secrecy builds upon the shame that is already present in our culture (Treneman, 1989).

Over the years menstrual product advertisements have continued to build upon the maxim that “shame sells” (Treneman, 1989, p. 163). While it is common knowledge that women menstruate, menstrual product advertisements continually suggest that by using particular products women can act like they are not menstruating. As Treneman (1989) explains, using shame as a selling point has become so well understood that the women portrayed in the ads no longer need to show shame. Instead, it is understood that shame, like periods, has become hidden in reality (Treneman, 1989). The advertisers of menstrual products themselves combine the advanced advertising techniques of the day with the ancient taboos that exist around the menstruating woman to sell the products.

Menstrual product advertisements rely on prior knowledge that women have about menstruation and how they are conditioned to deal with the situation (Treneman, 1989). Take, for example, every woman’s worst fear, that of having an unexpected period start or their protection fail. Advertisers take advantage of these fears and even heighten them. There are countless advertisements for tampons and pads that propose to ease any worries that may be associated with menstruation. Advertisers claim that panty

liners are the best method of protection and should be used everyday. Panty liners are said to be the best method of protection to guard against an unexpected start of a period, discharge or in combination with a tampon to add protection. Further, the panty liner can be used when a woman is not menstruating to keep her fresh.

It is important to acknowledge that the goal of menstrual product advertisements, or any advertisement for that matter, is to sell the product. For a menstrual product advertisement to be successful the ad must also carry a familiar referent system. In other words, a reader of the advertisement must be able to fill in the gaps in the ad with the proper information (Treneman, 1989). In order to do this, the reader must know the rules of the game, or proper "menstrual etiquette." Advertisements trigger the stock of information that is assumed to be present in a woman by using familiar objects and concepts in "order to allow their constructed meanings to flow effortlessly into our thoughts" (Treneman, 1989, p. 156). Consequently, the concealed meanings within the advertisements are readily understood. It is only necessary to examine the names of specific menstrual products such as liners to understand this point. New Freedom, Carefree and Security suggest liberation for women if they use the particular product (Carvalho, 1997). Since women of the 1990's strive for freedom, simplification of their busy lives and security, women are understandably drawn to these products.

The trick of modern menstrual product ad campaigns is to masquerade shame as liberation (Treneman, 1989). I have already discussed many ways that advertisements of today actually suggest more restrictive methods than in the past for dealing with menstruation. The fact that women must remain in active society and find methods for concealing menstruation from everyone does not liberate women. The advertisements

borrow the ideas behind the modern woman's liberation movement such as "freedom" and "liberation" and use them with a meaning that is constrictive (Treneman, 1989, p. 158).

While the multitude of pads, tampons and liners may help women manage their periods, the only freedom women realize is the choice of which brand to use for the type of protection they feel they require. Women cannot be liberated if they are expected to use products all the time. Treneman (1989) further explains that the advertisements have the goal of seducing women into thinking that there is "a ready-made individual cure to what is a societal curse" (p. 158). Thus, the advertisements endeavor to make a woman believe that if she uses the advertised products she will truly be liberated and less restricted by womanhood whereas in reality she may be more restricted.

### Feminist Criticism

Previous analysis of menstrual product advertisements reveals that the ads portray women in a very negative manner (Carvalho, 1997; Coutts & Berg, 1993; Simes 1998). The advertisements play on the fear, shame, embarrassment, and guilt that surrounds menstruation in our culture and which reflect a patriarchal picture of menstruation and women (Carvalho, 1997, Coutts & Berg, 1993; Simes, 1998). The advertisements also appear to suggest that women are dirty because they menstruate, which in turn degrades women.

The most common questions and concerns that arise from the research concerning menstrual product advertisements center on how menstrual product advertisements could be constructed in a way that affirms women. This is best exemplified by the question posed to Simes (1998) at a research conference by a representative of Tambrands Inc.

who agreed with Simes' (1998) research finding but wanted to know how menstrual products could be presented in an affirming manner, yet still sell the product. The greatest challenge to attempting to present advertisements in a manner that would convey accurate, positive information about menstruation and women is that we are immersed in a patriarchal society. We see the world through patriarchal glasses. In order to accomplish the goal of constructing more positive advertisements about women and menstruation we would figuratively have to take off the patriarchal glasses.

### The Research Question

I proposed to have women construct magazine advertisements that deal with menstrual products in a women-affirming manner. The overriding question of this research was: Could women write advertisements for menstrual products that affirm menstruation and women, keeping in mind that the goal of advertising is to sell? If they could create such advertisements, what would women-affirming ads look like? What is it that the women in the focus groups would like to convey to other women about menstruation? By examining the group discussions I could also explore what women saw as women-affirming advertisements and what they would like to convey about menstruation. In addition, identifying what the women deemed to be women-affirming advertisements I was also able to see how their advertisements differed from a patriarchal perspective.

Part of the process of constructing the advertisements concerned identifying what information should be included in the advertisements. It was interesting to note if the women included technical information about menstrual products, information about the menstrual cycle and how menstruation should be managed. An important consideration

when constructing the text of the advertisements was to insure that the ads affirmed women and the fact that they do menstruate. It was also important for the women to consider that the advertisements needed to reflect the ultimate goal of selling the menstrual product.

## Chapter 3: Method

This chapter will describe the methodology of the study. Within this section I will explain why I elected to use focus groups, describe the two distinct phases of my research, and discuss the analysis process.

### Focus Groups

By definition, a focus group is “group discussions organized to explore a specific set of issues” (Kitzinger, 1994, p.103). The use of focus groups for the purpose of uncovering ideas for menstrual product advertisements is a natural fit. Focus groups are utilized as a market research technique and market research is essentially what was occurring within my focus groups. Focus groups allow for the natural clustering of people which may represent the same resources in which a person may draw information and advice (Kitzinger, 1994). For the purposes of this project, I was interested in learning what information women would like conveyed in menstrual product advertisements. In addition, it was of interest to see what information women considered to be women-affirming.

The only barrier that I could identify to using focus groups, especially with a potentially embarrassing topic such as menstruation, is related to the fact that a group may censor any deviation from group standards (Kitzinger, 1994). It is possible that the group may have inhibited some women in the group from talking about certain aspects of menstruation and advertising.

My data source consisted of five focus groups. The first four groups formed the main source of data. These groups were all given the same initial presentation and asked the same questions about menstrual product magazine advertisements in order to generate

ideas. The fifth group allowed me to pose some questions about my data, my analysis, and provided a means to confirm some of my findings and ‘hunches.’ The fifth focus group was not presented with the same initial presentation. I simply used to the collection of current menstrual product advertisements as a reference point when asking these women questions about some of the other focus group’s ideas.

Each focus group consisted of five women. The age of the women ranged from 21 to 40. Participants for the focus groups were sought from among women’s studies courses, peers, and acquaintances. No specific personal characteristics delimited eligibility for participation other than that the participants were female and at least 18 years of age. Since the study was about issues of concern to women and about the processes involved in developing women-affirming menstrual product advertisements, further demographic and personal information (including cultural background) was not considered.

### Ethics

Participants were given a letter informing them of the details of their role in the research. Each participant was then asked to complete an “Assent to Participate” form (see Appendix A). At no time were participants asked to reveal any personal information. Each focus group met for about of two hours to complete the two distinct phases of research.

### Data Collection

There were two distinct phases within each focus group. The first phase was an education phase to ensure that each group was presented with the same information. The

second phase, data collection, consisted of the exploration of ideas for the creation of women-affirming menstrual product advertisements.

Phase I-Education The first phase, the education phase, consisted of a presentation of contemporary menstrual product advertisements (see Appendix B). The educational phase was administered to each focus group separately. The women were presented with a summary of the research (Berg & Coutts, 1994; Carvalho, 1997; Coutts & Berg, 1993; Simes, 1998) leading up to this project. The presentation consisted of a discussion of various menstrual product magazine advertisements as well as the patriarchal nature of these advertisements. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and engage in discussion at any point during the presentation of the research findings.

The educational phase was designed to insure that the women were informed of the patriarchal content of the menstrual product advertisements. The purpose of the educational session was to present current feminist criticisms of menstrual product advertisements to the focus groups. The women were encouraged to form their own opinions about current feminist criticisms. The feminist criticisms suggest that women are portrayed negatively in menstrual product advertisements. Issues such as perceived silence, shame, dirtiness, and proper menstrual etiquette all contribute to the negative portrayal of women in menstrual product advertisements. The presentation of this information was designed to provide the focus groups with a sense of the 'problem' to be addressed in the focus group in Phase II.

Phase II-Data Collection Each focus group was assigned the task of creating content for a menstrual product advertisement. The groups were presented with the following assignment: "A manufacturer asks you to create a menstrual product

advertisement that affirms women yet sells the product.” Through the use of discussion, each focus group was then asked to suggest the content that should appear in menstrual product advertisements and provide ideas for any visual components of the advertisements. Throughout this exercise, the women in the focus groups were consistently reminded that the advertisements were to be women-affirming and, of course, aimed at selling menstrual products.

My role in the focus groups was that of facilitator and moderator. I felt that I was successful in allowing members of the focus groups to identify the issues, the problems and the content for menstrual product advertisements. The women in the focus groups were not able to independently identify what they would include in a menstrual product advertisement. Consequently, the women used the advertisements I had used in the educational phase as a reference. By providing the women with a common reference they were able to make suggestions for menstrual product advertisements based on what they liked and disliked about the advertisements presented. The women appeared to have a sound understanding of what they liked and disliked about current menstrual product advertisements.

There was also a list of issues that I wanted the women to consider in the course of suggesting the content for the advertisements. I referred to this list when there was a lull in the discussion, and at the conclusion of each session, to ensure that all the questions had been covered. I also used this list as an assurance of consistency between the focus groups. I ensured that each group had discussed each of the issues. If a group had not raised the issue independently, I posed the issue to the group. The following is the list of questions that I wished each group to consider:

- What age groups do you think the advertisements should be directed towards?
- Do you want to discuss the technical features of the product?
- Would you want to show the product in the advertisement?
- What would you name the product---or does it matter?
- What images would you show in the ad? People? Cartoons? Only text?
- How would you propose to sell the product?
- What do you believe would sell the product?
- What would you put in the advertisement to make the product sell?
- How would you portray women in the advertisement? Do race and age matter?
- Do you feel the need to address the environment?
- Would you direct your advertisements at men and women, or just women?
- Would you have separate advertisements directed at adolescents?

Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and was tape-recorded. The discussions of each focus group, which included any discussions during Phase I, were analyzed using coding techniques developed for grounded theory analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative coding facilitated the identification of themes and concepts related to women, menstruation, and the advertising of menstrual products.

### Data Analysis

The first step in my data analysis was listening to the tape recordings of the focus groups and noting the women's likes and dislikes about current menstrual product advertisements which seemed to form the basis of their ideas for women-affirming

advertisements. As I noted a group's likes and dislikes, I also paid close attention to the women's explanations for their suggestions. This information formed my data.

### Constant Comparative Analysis

The notes of the focus group meetings were analyzed using constant comparative analysis. As I listened to the tapes, I paid close attention to the themes and ideas that the women deemed to be important components of women-affirming menstrual product advertisements. Using constant comparative analysis I worked back and forth between my original notes, those taken upon completion of each focus group, and my analysis notes, those taken when listening to the tapes. I was able to illuminate key concepts in my data analysis by continuously consulting my notes and important points that I had highlighted throughout my analysis. As new questions would form about concepts I had or had not identified, I would revisit the original tape recordings.

### Coding

After compiling notes from the tape recordings of the focus groups, I began to analyze the data by coding. Coding refers to the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through the use of coding, I was able to pick out words, or key phrases, that seemed to summarize intended meaning. In order to insure that the codes provided an adequate representation of the intended ideas, I was conscious of the context of the comments and ideas, referring to the original conversation if further clarification was needed.

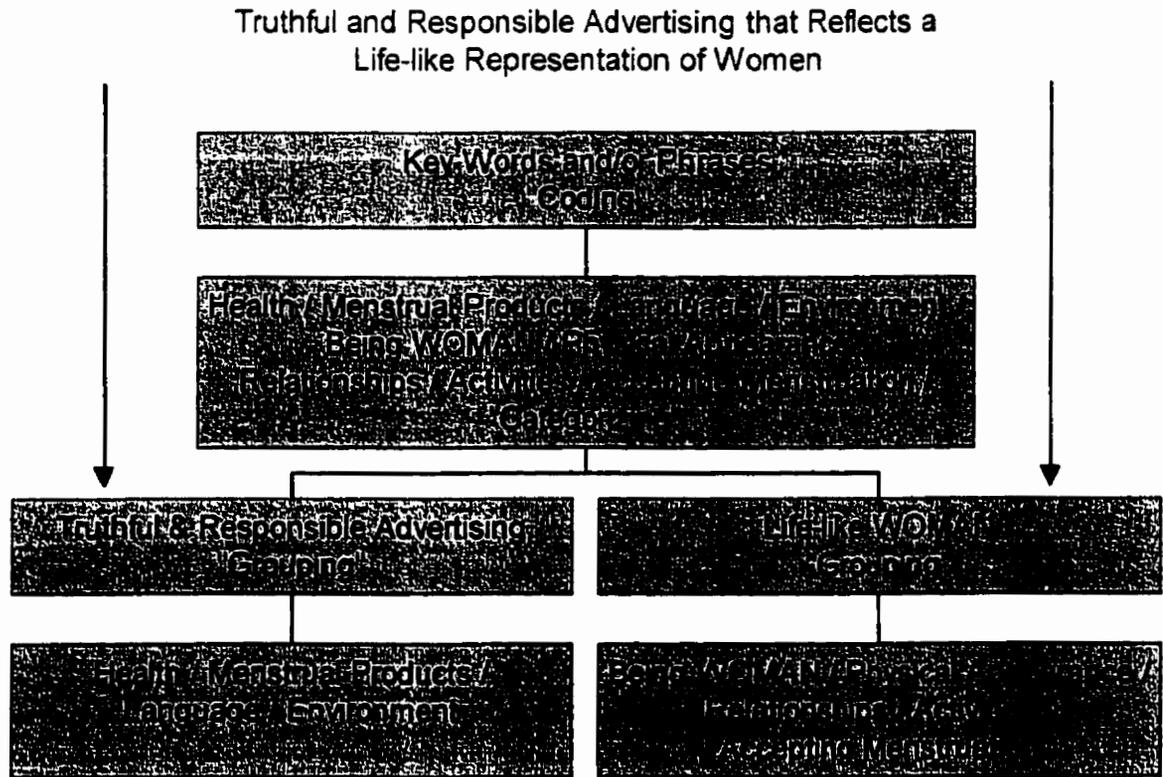
The second phase of data analysis involved categorizing like ideas and codes. This level of analysis involved constant reference to the original conversations to ensure that the ideas were properly represented by the codes. For instance, there were times

when the same code appeared more than once. I realized that the code of 'personal' had two different meanings. The coding of 'personal' appeared in relation to how each woman's menstrual flow was different and therefore personal. The coding of 'personal' also explained how menstruation is personal and that a woman does not necessarily want to share her experience with just anyone. Consequently, it was necessary to change, or rename, one of the codes to ensure proper categorization.

The third level of data analysis involved grouping the categories. While the categories described certain common phenomena, it was necessary to move to a higher level of analysis, or conceptualization, to reveal the ideas inherent within the categories. During this phase of analysis, I assigned names to groupings that I felt summarized the broader themes and ideas. The categories seemed to fall into two very distinct groups: those ideas related to truthful and responsible advertising and those that related to a life-like representation of women. Categories related to truthful and responsible advertisements included health, menstrual products, language, and environment. Categories acknowledging a lifelike representation of women included being WOMAN, physical appearance, relationships, activities, and accepting menstruation.

It was by piecing together the ideas evident in these two groupings that I was able to formulate conclusions about my research. My conclusions seek to explain what is going on within the data and ultimately what women would include in woman-affirming menstrual product advertisements. I concluded that the women would like to see *truthful and responsible advertising that reflects a life-like representation of women* (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



### Memoing

Memoing, or taking notes separate from the formal data analysis, is one of the most important processes that occurs in qualitative analysis. Through memoing I was able to track ideas, questions, and hunches that I was generating throughout the data analysis process. Answering the questions and constantly revisiting ideas and hunches about different relationships gave me a greater understanding of my data. A review of the memos ensured that I had thoroughly analyzed my data. This was evident when some questions could not be answered, whereas answering other questions revealed greater insight into what was going on in the data. In the end, it was the memos that helped me to link together concepts in order to understand what the women felt important to the advertising of menstrual products. It was through the memoing process that I concluded that a fifth focus group was necessary in order to clarify and confirm some of my ideas. Posing these questions to the fifth focus group helped to confirm my conclusions.

## Chapter 4: Findings<sup>1</sup>

When I started Phase II of this study I planned to simply ask the women in the focus groups what they would like to see in a menstrual product advertisement that they thought would affirm women and menstruation. The women were definitely challenged by the task of suggesting ideas for a menstrual product advertisement, as there was very limited discussion from the women. To facilitate the generation of ideas for an ideal advertisement, I found it necessary to use some of the advertisements I had presented to the women in the educational phase of this research (see Appendix B). I asked the women in the focus groups questions about the content of the advertisements used in the presentation. The women's reactions provided an indication of whether or not they would include or change the ideas that were present in current menstrual product advertisements. The themes that the women liked about current advertisements I accepted as ideas they would use for an advertisement. The ideas that the women disliked about current advertisements, I took as those they would not want included in advertisements targeted at the affirmation of women and menstruation. I frequently asked the women to explain their ideas to ensure a clear elaboration of their opinions. I found that by using the current advertisements as a reference point the women were then able to generate their own ideas for women-affirming advertisements.

The women's inability to suggest ideas for the advertisements without a reference point suggests that women today are still influenced by patriarchy. Mackie (1991) explains that women may not recognize the influences of patriarchy because they are living false consciously. Under false consciousness women accept pervasive patriarchal

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<sup>1</sup> The third focus group did not tape record. My notes taken immediately upon completion of the group and

definitions about their bodies and positions in society as reality: as 'the way things are.' The women involved in this research were not aware of the patriarchal themes portrayed in the advertisements until instances of these themes were pointed out. The women did not recognize the patriarchal nature and basis of the things they did not like about the advertisements. However, it was clear from the women's reactions that some advertisements generated negative feelings. Once I identified the patriarchal nature of some of the advertisements, the women were able to make comments and suggestions to improve upon the existing advertisements.

The advertisements that I had originally selected for the educational phase of my research were representative of many of the common patriarchal themes in menstrual product advertisements identified in previous research (Berg & Coutts, 1994; Coutts & Berg, 1993; Laws, 1990; Simes, 1998; Treneman, 1989). The patriarchal themes included menstrual management technology, silence and shame, menstrual etiquette, femininity, and dirtiness. Presenting the women with the advertisements provided an effective reference point for generating alternative ideas.

Initially, the data generated by this project appeared to suggest that the women in the focus groups were able to break free from patriarchal influences simply because they were able to make suggestions for alternative advertisements. It seemed that if the women were able to make alternative suggestions for the advertisements that they must recognize the patriarchal influence inherent in current advertisements. Further analysis of the data revealed that there were many instances when the women's ideas contradicted each other. At other times the women's ideas espoused the values of patriarchy. The

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consultation with my thesis advisor, indicate that no crucial information was lost.

following example illustrates that the women in the focus groups were influenced by patriarchy.

The members of one focus group talked about how they had no problem talking about menstruation at the office. The women explained to me that “there are no men in the office therefore we can and do talk about PMS” (Focus groups #4). The women also discussed how they would like to see the expression on a man’s face if they did talk about menstruation around him. Reflecting on the conversation, one woman pointed out that “we talk about menstruation around women, we do not talk about menstruation in mixed company” (Focus group #4). One woman then explained that she would talk about PMS in front of men if she were not afraid of being labeled a “bitch.” This conversation illustrates that women are influenced by patriarchy, which defines women and dictates roles for them. Labeling a woman as a “bitch” because she menstruates and may be affected by PMS is one way that men attempt to subordinate women. This example also serves to explain how women immersed in a patriarchal society could recognize some influences of patriarchy. The fact these women were still immersed in a patriarchal society helps to explain why the women needed to be shown the patriarchal menstrual product advertisements in order to recognize the patriarchy within the advertisement. Once the women recognized the patriarchy depicted in the advertisement they were able to make “informed” suggestions for menstrual product advertisements that would depict women and menstruation more positively. The preceding conversation also provides insight into the basis for some of the patriarchal messages that menstrual product advertisements seem to suggest.

Further analysis of this conversation points to the fact that there is specific conduct that women are expected to follow when they are menstruating. For example, the women participating in the discussion about menstruation in the office understood that they should not discuss menstruation in the presence of males. Laws (1990) refers to this conduct as “patriarchal menstrual etiquette.” Following proper patriarchal menstrual etiquette requires women to hide their menstrual status at all times. Complying with menstrual etiquette includes buying, storing and using menstrual products without men knowing (Laws 1990). It is evident that the context of patriarchy does not accept or acknowledge the fact that women menstruate. This idea was also present in many of the advertisements that I presented to the focus groups.

Interestingly, this idea of not accepting or acknowledging the fact that women menstruate was one that was rejected by the women in the focus groups. Many of the suggestions that the women had for menstrual product advertisements acknowledged that women do menstruate, suggesting that society should become more accepting of menstruation.

Analysis of my data indicates that the key concepts identified by the women in the focus groups, which would help menstrual product advertisements to be more women-affirming, were *truthful and responsible advertisements that contain a life-like representation of women*. There were two distinct features that the women in the focus groups perceived to be absent in the advertisements that they were presented: truth and responsibility and a life-like representation of women.

### Truthful and Responsible Advertising

The women frequently referred to the advertisements presented to them in the introductory phase of the groups when making their recommendations for new advertisements. There were four areas identified by the women in the focus groups that would contribute to more truthful and responsible advertising of menstrual products. First, the advertisements needed to reflect health as it relates to women, menstruation, and the use of menstrual products. Secondly, the women agreed that the advertising pertaining to menstrual products should include the difference between, and the features of, the many products on the market. Thirdly, the women discussed the language used in menstrual product advertising. Finally, the women wanted some advertisements to recognize the importance of the environment, in terms of menstrual product composition and disposal.

#### Health

One of the most common similarities between the focus groups was their concern for women's health. The women agreed that messages conveyed in current menstrual product advertisements fail to make the connection between health and menstruation. Most menstrual product advertisements play on the idea that menstruation is a crisis or a sickness, an event that really hampers a woman's life. Very few of the current menstrual product advertisements actually acknowledge that it is healthy and normal for a woman to menstruate. The women in the focus groups felt that menstrual product advertisements would be improved significantly if they relayed the importance of menstruation as an indication of a healthy body. Comments from women in one focus group supporting this position were as follows:

Who cares when you have your period...it is an indication of a healthy body  
Menstruation is healthy...it promotes healthiness (Focus group #1)

The women in this particular focus group also recognized that there are “disorders associated with not having a period” (Focus group #1). Women who have had normal periods that stop for six months or more and who are not pregnant have a health problem known as amenorrhea, or the absence of menstruation (The PDR Guide to Women’s Health and Prescription Drugs, 1994). *The PDR Family Guide to Women’s Health and Prescription Drugs* (1994) explains that a variety of factors can cause menstruation to cease, including problems with hormones that regulate menstruation, vigorous exercise, obesity, chronic nonalcoholic liver disease, any chronic illness, tuberculosis and some medications. The women in the focus groups were obviously aware of the importance of menstruation to a woman’s health. Therefore, they felt it was desirable for advertisements to affirm that menstruation is an important aspect of a healthy woman’s life.

The women suggested that the advertisements could reflect the importance of menstruation by relaying the importance of each woman “knowing her body” (Focus group #1). The rationale for suggesting that women know their bodies seemed to be that if women recognize when their bodies are functioning normally, they would also recognize when their bodies are in need of attention. One clear example of this idea is the importance of a woman being aware of any vaginal discharge. A change in color, texture, smell or amount may be an indication of health problems. There are

advertisements for panty liners that suggest the use of a panty liner everyday, even when a woman is not menstruating. However, it is important that women recognize that these advertisements are purely in the interest of marketing. A healthy woman's discharge should not warrant the use of a panty liner when a woman is not menstruating.

The use of the panty liner is also suggested as a remedy for vaginal odor. However, masking the smell of vaginal odor is potentially unhealthy. There are many vaginal infections which cite discharge and a foul odor as indicators of infection. Trichomoniasis, bacterial vaginosis and yeast infections all cite abnormal vaginal discharge and odor as common symptoms. Interestingly, many of the self-help treatments for the disorders associated with vaginal odor and/or discharge mentioned earlier discourage the use of "tampons, powders, deodorants, douches and vaginal sprays to avoid reoccurrence" (The Boston Women's Health Collective, 1992). While this list does not specifically mention panty liners, it is obvious that they would fall under the same category. These facts also provide support to the focus group women's assertion that menstrual product advertisements need to be more affirming of women's health.

Many of the liner advertisements also seemed to play on the fact that women's bodies are inherently dirty and therefore need assistance to ensure freshness. While some vaginal discharge is normal, it does not mean a woman is dirty. In fact, healthy discharge is the body's natural cleansing system. Most women in the focus groups agreed that women's bodies are already clean and were not dirty, as implied in some of the advertisements I had presented to the focus groups. This point is illustrated in two commentaries on an Always panty liner advertisement (see Appendix B14):

An advertisement with fruits and flowers directed at odor does the opposite. It does not make me want to buy the product because I do not want to smell like these examples. This is an unhealthy product for the vagina to be in contact with. This needs to be in the ad. Ads need to warn women of this (Focus group #2). Flowers imply that women are smelly. This is not good implying that we stink. The ads that are focused on smell, which are flower-centered are better than ads that talk about controlling odor (Focus group #4).

Essentially the ads try to create fear in women that they may have, or at least have the potential, to emit an odor. Most of the advertisements imply that this odor is caused by menstruation; more specifically, menstrual blood. The advertisements then proceed to offer a remedy for the problem that they have created. The advertisements suggest that if a woman uses a particular product she will be able to control or mask her bodily odor.

In the preceding conversation the women mentioned that advertisements should warn women of the health dangers of putting the vagina in contact with the perfumes in some products. However, it is important to recognize that the women did not mention that a manufacturer or an advertiser would never include this warning about their product. The inclusion of this type of information would ultimately deter women from buying the product. This information would also suggest that the product is unsafe and thus unhealthy.

The women in the focus groups also discussed the safety of menstrual products as they relate to a woman's health. The women in one focus group in particular recognized that menstrual products need to be sanitary to keep the body healthy. A product enclosed

in a wrapper suggests that it is sanitary and thus safe for use. The following comments illustrate this concern:

...do not want to get the inside (of the body) dirty...

...want sanitary products to go inside...

...products are clean, the body is clean there is not deodorant needed...

...sanitary product for inside the body...

...the body cleans itself...

...the packaging is not to hide the product, but to keep it clean...(Focus group #1)

It is interesting to note that some menstrual product manufacturers do recognize the importance of keeping a product 'clean.' For example, the inserts in many tampon boxes remind a woman to wash her hands before inserting a tampon. A woman may also find other warnings pertaining to the use of tampons discouraging their use if the package is open or the applicator looks damaged in any way. These warnings are precautions for women to ensure safe tampon use and thus a healthy body.

Another issue that follows closely with this group's discussion of safe product use is the risk of toxic shock syndrome (TSS) when using a tampon. Many women commented on the necessity to include the risks of and specific instructions on how to avoid TSS in menstrual product advertisements. These women seem to be advocating for a health warning to be included in menstrual product advertisements similar to those found in cigarette ads warning of potential harm to the body.

A majority of the women in all the focus groups also agreed that a listing of the components of menstrual products should also be available in a menstrual product advertisement. This type of information would help women make informed decisions about their health, specifically as it related to menstrual product use. Tampons and other related products often contain additives, synthetic fibers and dioxins (Maloney, 1997). Not only are these material associated with TSS, but they also have the potential to cause allergic reactions in women. In addition, there is research suggesting that these dioxins, synthetic fibers and other additives may be linked to infertility and cervical, ovarian and breast cancers.

### Menstrual Products

Carvalho (1997) noted how the management of menstruation has become increasing complex over the years because of the wide range of product choices available to a woman. As she traced the advertising of menstrual products from the advent of disposable pads to the present, she noted that the variety of products on the market continued to increase. Today, there are specific menstrual products suggested for each of the many different phases of the menstrual cycle.

Today, menstrual product companies have developed systems of products that claim to allow a woman to manage her period more efficiently and effectively, especially if she uses the whole system of products offered. Using a 'system' implies the use of at least four products typically by the same manufacturer: one for light days, one for heavy days, one for nighttime, and one when a woman is not menstruating. Interestingly, the women in the focus groups were not affected by the suggestion that they should be using a system of products. In fact, the women did not appear to recognize the many products

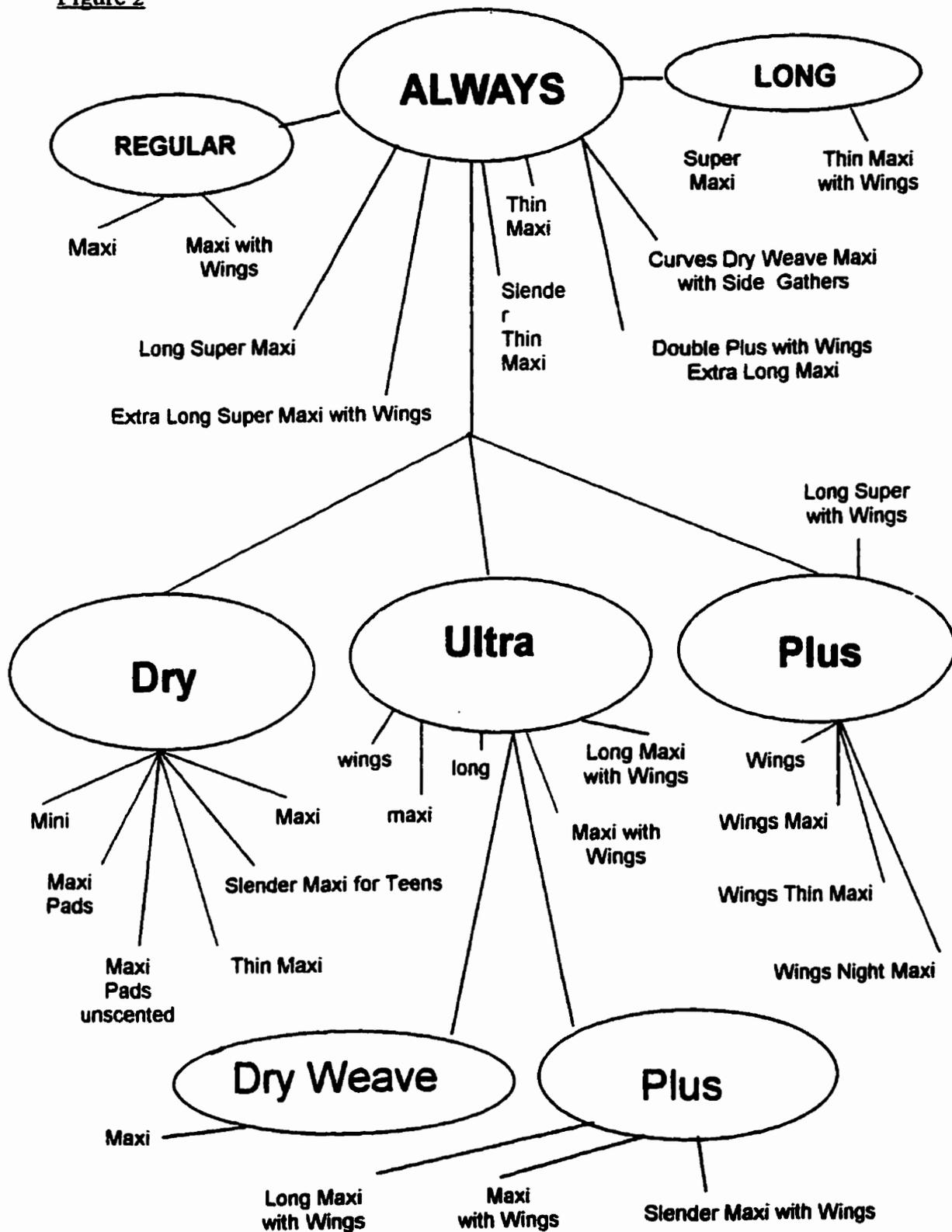
designed by one manufacturer for different aspects of the menstrual cycle as a 'system.' Instead, the women in the focus groups agreed that this choice, or variety, of products should be an important component of a menstrual product advertisement. However, the choice that the women were referring to was narrowed considerably by the fact that most women did not actually use a system of menstrual products. The choice that most women were referring to was in fact the choice of a variety of one type of menstrual product, such as maxi pads. For example, if a woman likes or needs to use a maxi pad, the women in the focus groups seemed to be saying that they would like the choice of maxi pads designed by Always, Stayfree, New Freedom, Sure and Natural, and Kotex.

There were two advertisements in the sample of advertisements that I presented to the focus groups that the women consistently referred to when talking about a choice or variety of products. The Always pad advertisement (see Appendix B5) illustrates exactly what each pad looks like and its relative length and shape. One woman explained that she liked this ad because "she wants to see what a product looks like...like a shopping guide" (Focus group #4). Without the visual aid in the advertisement this woman said that she did not know what the difference was between products advertised by Always and products advertised by other companies. Another woman explained that she is attracted to these advertisements because they "show what the product looks like...this is information that a woman needs to know" (Focus group #4). It seems that the women would like a visual picture of a product so they can compare it with the picture of a product in another advertisement of a different brand of product that claims to perform the same function.

The other advertisement that was consistently mentioned during the discussion of the many menstrual products on the market was the advertisement for Tampax tampon Multi-Pack (see Appendix B8). The Tampax tampon Multi-Pack includes light, regular, and heavy absorbency tampons. The key to the apparent success of this product is that a woman can find a meaningful variety of products in one box; she does not have to purchase three different boxes. A woman in the first focus group suggested that “women’s cycles vary and therefore one box with many products is a practical solution to the need to buy many products.” One woman also explained that this idea was good because a “woman may change flow during her period...there are too many small tampons in a box...I’ve had boxes for years ” (Focus group #4).

A comparison of these two advertisements reveals a contradiction. In the first example the women seem to be talking about the need to see the product in order to choose the right brand. The women suggest empowerment by the availability and choice of many brands of menstrual products. The women seem to imply that they only need one type of product to deal with their periods. In the second example, the women seem to be adopting a ‘system’ of tampons by alluding to the fact their menstrual flow changes during their periods. It appears that the contradiction lies in the fact that the women in the focus groups are using the word ‘system’ differently than the advertisers. In the advertisements a system refers to all the products related to a specific brand (See Figure 2). For example, the Always advertisement (see Appendix B5) contains all the products that Always produces.

Figure 2



In this advertisement you would find thick pads, thin pads, long pads, short pads, pads with and without wings as well as overnight pads, and panty liners. The advertisements suggest that women can employ the use of many of these pads, as each pad has a different quality. The women in the focus groups seem to be implying that the one quality of absorbency, even though there are different absorbent strengths in the Tampax tampon multi-pack, is a system. The advertiser's idea of a system, which is far more extensive than three levels of absorbency, is lost to the women, indicating that the need for a menstrual management system may be unnecessary.

What is clear from the examples given by the women is that they are not questioning the wide variety of products on the market. The women want to be able to choose between brands and want to know how different products function. By failing to question some of the advertisements that suggest the availability, and thus the use, of up to twelve different menstrual products, the women miss the patriarchal influence present in the advertisement. The women view this array of products simply as choice. The women in the groups are implying that this choice of menstrual products is liberating. The advertisements attempt to communicate that there is a need for many products during menstruation. In reality, this created need for many menstrual products functions as a way of restricting women. The suggested use of many products is the only way of ensuring that a woman's menstrual status can be hidden at all times. It would seem that having to ensure the hiddenness of one's menstrual status by figuring out, and then using, the adequate combination of products would be restricting. A woman following the advice of the advertisements would be concerned about using the proper products, as the use of the wrong product may foster the discovery of her menstrual status. This may be

revealed through the appearance of pad lines showing through a woman's clothing or even more obviously in the form of leakage.

These advertisements suggest that by using many different products a woman is liberated. The woman who has a system of products is deemed to be able to participate in all activities without being discovered as a menstruator. While the women in the focus groups did not necessarily acknowledge the need for a whole system of products, they viewed the availability, or choice, of many products as liberating. Treneman (1989) explains that the trick of menstrual product advertising is to mask the shame associated with the need to hide menstruation as liberation in the advertisements by co-opting the ideas behind the modern woman's liberation movement, while undercutting them with a meaning that is constrictive...ads prey upon the first-hand knowledge and exploit such concepts as 'liberation' and 'freedom'...seduce us into thinking that there is a ready-made individual cure to what is a societal curse (pp. 157-158).

In light of Treneman's (1989) observations it seems that the women in the focus groups had bought into the belief that there is a need for the wide variety, a system, of products advertisers have promoted. However, the women in the focus groups do recognize that a woman does not need a menstrual management system. In other words, the women recognized that not all women would benefit from buying the Tampax tampon Multi Pack, as not every woman requires the absorbency of a super absorbent tampon. Conversely, there are also women who have such heavy menstrual flow that the use of a slender tampon is inadequate. The women of one focus group agreed that advertisements "should not imply that a system of products is needed" (Focus group #1). It seems that the women in this focus group agreed that advertisements should focus on

the importance of a woman knowing her body and choosing products that are appropriate to her body's needs.

In order to choose the product best suited to one's needs, the women in the focus groups wanted to receive information about the products in menstrual product advertisements. One woman gave a list of the points she felt should be present in an advertisement that would give her the confidence that the product offered adequate protection. This woman wanted to know who had designed the product. (Focus group #4). The o.b. tampon advertisement (not contained in Appendix B) was recognized on numerous occasions as an advertisement that provided this information. This advertisement claims that the o.b. tampon was designed by a female gynecologist. The women interpreted the fact that the product had been designed by a female as providing confidence that the product is going to work and that it was designed better than other products. The women agreed that a woman would know the type of protection that women need and were not prepared to question the information contained in the advertisement. Using a female gynecologist to endorse a product is probably a marketing strategy. In reality, it really does not matter if a male or female designed the product as long as females test it. Generally, the women in the focus groups seemed to trust advertisers and were convinced that indeed a woman did design the o.b. tampon. The women in the focus groups consistently mentioned the need to know that a product is going to work. The women explained that:

No one wants leakage...it is inconvenient...this needs to be in ads, but not in a getting caught mode (Focus group #1).

**Want to know that the product protects...I do not want to wreck clothing**

**(Focus group #2).**

**Want to know that the product works don't want to worry about stains**

**(Focus group #4).**

The comments related to the importance of knowing that the product is going to work center around the practical issue that the women did not want to damage their clothing. Current advertisements focus on how well a product can hide a woman's menstrual status. The women in one focus group agreed that they "would be embarrassed if their period did show...it would imply that one could not or did not understand their bodily functions" (Focus group #2). The women interpreted the use of a menstrual product as a technique for controlling the blood. After a few menstrual periods it was felt that a woman learns how long she can go before she must change her pad or tampon. Consequently, the women agreed that an accident (leakage of menstrual blood) could suggest that a woman erred in knowing her body or menstrual tendencies.

The implication of this group's discussion is not that they were embarrassed because they have been caught or that they have failed to hide their menstrual status, but rather that they would be sending a message that they "cannot control their body" (Focus group #2). Simes (1998) explained that current advertisements suggest that "no one can ever know you have your period; you must actively conceal and deny menstruation" (p. 57). The women in the focus groups did not seem concerned with hiding menstruation in a manner that suggested denying menstruation. The hiddenness that these women seemed more concerned about is one that has to do with being in control of one's body.

The women in one focus group viewed menstrual products as an aid for controlling menstruation. The effective use of the product provides a woman with a sense of assurance and security that the menstrual blood is going to be collected and will not leak onto the clothing. One woman's comments illustrate this point:

Do we really need to hide it? Say if you were somewhere in white pants and using a menstrual product and you stood up and there was blood all over someone's furniture and all over your pants. Would you be more upset about the pants and the furniture or that everyone saw you wreck your pants...that you couldn't take care of your self (Focus group #2).

If information explaining the way a product works is included in an advertisement, then women may be better able to choose the product that best suits their needs. A good example of an advertisement that does provide information about the features of a product are the Always with wings advertisements (see Appendix B5). The diagrams of the pad explain to women that the sides of the pad, known as wings, fit under the panty to provide additional protection for blood that may leak over. The wings also help to keep the pad in place, which will further ensure that no blood seeps on to clothing. Advertising the technical aspects of this product was seen to be effective and was desired. After taking into account her menstrual flow, a woman is able to decide if a product with wings would be appropriate and beneficial for her menstrual needs. By focusing on the technical aspects of a product, the advertisements do not suggest that the possibility of a catastrophe exists if the product is not used.

The women referred to an Always advertisement that portrayed a woman of color wearing a white dress who is portrayed as using the Always thin pad (see Appendix B20) as an example of an advertisement that did not communicate practical or honest information. The information presented in this advertisement did not represent how women act when they are menstruating. It was therefore not a truthful advertisement. While one woman suggested that this was smart advertising in terms of demonstrating the protection that the product offered, it was agreed that the advertisement itself was not realistic (Focus group #2). A menstruating woman who is wearing a white dress and using a pad would naturally concern herself with the outline of her pad and the possibility of menstrual blood leaking. But as one woman commented: “who is going to chance their protection and wear white...who is going to wear a white dress anyway” (Focus group #4). A woman in the second focus group explained that she might wear a white dress, but only if she used a tampon. These women agreed that this advertisement was stretching reality. Very few women were going to chance wearing a tight white dress while they were menstruating. These comments suggest that the women would like to see a realistic and practical representation of how and when to use a particular product.

Advertisements that demonstrate exactly how the product works by using blue dye to show absorbency were also deemed to be inappropriate by the women (see Appendix B12). Many times the women commented that using blue dye was unrealistic in the sense that menstrual blood is not blue. It would appear that the women are rejecting the advertisers attempt to cover up menstruation. However, when I proposed the use of red dye in the advertisements, the women seemed very uncomfortable. It would seem that the use of red dye would be too realistic. In fact, many people, men and

women, are uncomfortable with the sight of blood (Delaney et al., 1988). Therefore, using red dye in a menstrual product advertisement would likely turn women off the advertisement and maybe even the product. Consequently, it becomes unclear if the women would like to see the technical or practical feature of a product presented in menstrual product advertisements.

As I have mentioned previously, the women seemed to accept the Always advertisement that explained the technical features of the all the pads Always had to offer (see Appendix B5). Some of the Always pads come with wings to protect clothing and other Always pads do not. With this information women are able to make decisions on what type of pad they need. The advertisement does not suggest which pad is the best; the purchaser is able to form her own opinion. However, the women in the focus groups have also expressed that they want to see the practical uses of a particular product demonstrated in an advertisement. The women in the focus groups rejected the advertisement that depicted a woman wearing a white dress and using a thin pad (see Appendix B20). Most of the women agreed that if they were going to wear a tight white dress that it would be more practical to use a tampon. I think that it is safe to conclude from this information that unrealistic and impractical advertising has the potential to turn women away from the advertisements and possibly the product. In order to attract as many women as possible it may be most beneficial for a menstrual product advertiser to incorporate both technical and practical information in their advertisements.

There were other contradictions in terms of how the women in the focus groups would like menstrual products advertised. Among these was that most women claimed that they are loyal to one product acknowledging that “women are not experimenting

every month” (Focus group #1). However, at the same time, the women were in favor of knowing that there are a variety of menstrual products from which to choose. In the preceding paragraphs, I explained that the women wanted to use the advertisements as a way of knowing about the variety of products available to women. But, a majority of the women in my focus groups also claimed that they did not read menstrual product advertisements. Therefore, there seems to be a contradiction between how the women acted and what they claimed to be the desired components of a menstrual product advertisement. The women claimed to be loyal to one product and therefore had no need to read menstrual product advertisements. Yet the women felt that having a wide variety of menstrual products for women to choose from was important.

While I acknowledge that generally the women were not experimenting with new menstrual products each month, I do think that the women were aware of the many menstrual products on the market. However, I would question if the women were actually aware of the plethora of products that line the supermarket and drugstore aisles. The women became aware of the variety of products on the market through the media; one method being magazine advertisements. The women probably did not take the time to ‘read’ every advertisement, however, I believe that they did pay visual attention to the product advertised. Therefore, I believe that experimentation may take place if a woman believes an advertised product will meet her needs better than the product she currently uses.

### Language

A third area that was recognized by the focus groups as a component of responsible advertising of menstrual products was language. I asked the women in the

focus groups if they were concerned about words like 'accident,' 'protection,' 'disaster,' 'grossed out,' and 'messy' which appeared in some of the advertisements that I presented. The women gave no indication that they were bothered by the use of these words. For example, one focus group agreed that the use of the words 'grossed out' and 'messy' which appear in the following text of a Tampax advertisement directed at teens (see Appendix B21) was an example of "using language directed at teenagers to get their attention" (Focus group #2).

I really hated pads. They felt messy. And bulky. And I was grossed out to think everyone knew I had my period. But I wasn't sure about tampons (Tambrands, 1987, October, p. 112)

The women in group #2 believed that the use of these words were not in reference to menstruation. The women in this focus groups explained that these words were used to attract young girls to the advertisement because they are common in a teenager's vocabulary. These women did not believe that these words were intended to negatively portray menstruation. They believed these words were used to make young women more comfortable because the advertisement was speaking their language. For example, when the Tampax advertisement used the word "grossed out" it seems that the advertisers were really referring to how the teenager felt about people knowing she had her period, not how she felt about her period. However, insisting that the word 'messy' is not in reference to menstruation is a stretch. I would think that the word is a direct reference to the presence of menstrual blood.

While some of these words may not be in reference to menstruation one would not know this unless they were to read the advertisement closely. The words “grossed out” are in bold and underlined in the advertisement. A young girl just glancing at the advertisement may think this word was in reference to menstruation. Even though this word may not be directly aimed at menstruation, the fact that this word appears highlighted in a menstrual product advertisement, it has the potential to negatively affect young women.

The words “messy” and “grossed out” are words that have very negative connotations. These are also words that represent the patriarchal influences that are associated with menstruation. The fact that the women in the focus groups did not recognize the patriarchal connotations of some of the language in the advertisements gives strength to my earlier conclusion that these women were still influenced by patriarchy.

There was some language in the advertisements that did receive attention from the focus groups. The Always advertisement (see Appendix B5) promoting the many products available to women contains the caption “Who needs disaster?” implying the failing of menstrual products. All the groups agreed that the use of the word ‘disaster’ to describe the failing of a woman’s menstrual product was inappropriate, because it sends a negative connotation about menstruation and instills fear in women. Most of the women were of the opinion that menstruation is not a negative experience. However, the women did not allude to patriarchy as the basis of the negativity present in many advertisements.

A woman in one focus group explained why the use of the word 'accident' to describe the same event would be more appropriate. She said that when a product does fail:

You don't mean to do it...It is not done on purpose... You would like to avoid it...Life is not over if there is leakage...Did not intend to do it...They (accidents) do happen (Focus group #2).

There was also some disagreement among the focus groups regarding the use of the word 'protection' in menstrual product advertisements. One group discussed the fact that women have "bigger concerns than their period...they need to protect themselves from getting raped, STD's and getting violated" (Focus group #1). This group seemed to agree that the use of the word 'protection' implied that a woman had to protect herself from something and interpreted it to mean that "you shouldn't have to protect yourself from being a woman" (Focus group #1). It seemed that the women were alluding to the fact that menstruation is a natural feminine occurrence. Why would women have to protect themselves from something natural?

Another focus group agreed that the seeing the word 'protection' in an advertisement meant that they would "not worry" when using this product (Focus group #4). For example, advertisements for Always wings often use the word 'protection' to describe the claimed effectiveness of the product. Women are told that if they use the Always pad with wings they will 'protect' their clothing and eliminate the chance that leakage could show through. This group suggested that women are concerned about the

effectiveness of their product explaining that “the last thing women need to worry about is protection working.” (Focus group #4).

Due to the patriarchal nature of many of the advertisements, it was a difficult task not only for the women involved in the focus groups, but also for those involved in this research (Carvalho, 1997, Simes, 1998) to agree upon words to replace words like ‘accident’ and ‘protection’. Simes (1998) explained that advertisements use words like ‘protection’ and ‘accident’ to sell their products because the subject of menstruation is maintained as taboo in our society. The ads imply that if women use the proper products, they will be able to confidently hide their menstrual status.

Generally, the focus groups agreed that women have more important concerns than their periods. Truthful advertising could use language that captures how women describe the menstrual experience. I imagine that this language would take on a more positive tone in the menstrual product advertisements.

It is also interesting to note the use of the language of women in the focus groups. The following comments pertained to the importance of products that are safe for the body (emphasis added).

...do not want to get the inside (of the body) dirty

...want sanitary products to go inside

...products are clean, the body is clean there is no deodorant needed

...sanitary product for inside the body

...the body cleans itself

...the packaging is not to hide the product but to keep it clean (Focus group #1)

It is interesting to note the women's use of the word 'sanitary' and 'clean' during these particular comments. Berg and Coutts (1994) refer to a shift in terminology from 'sanitary protection' to 'feminine hygiene' in menstrual product advertising. Berg and Coutts (1994) explained that this shift in terminology can be attributed to a woman's acquired need to avoid menstrual discovery "which was a manifestation of tainted femininity" (p. 13). Referring to the quotations above, there seems to be comfort with the use of the term sanitary. By using the word 'sanitary' the women seemed to be communicating that they want to use products that are safe and healthy for the body. The women were more concerned about how a product deals with menstruation, not the assurance of femininity. It is important to note that the women's use of the word sanitary is different from the advertiser's implied use of the word sanitary. It would seem that the advertisers are focusing more on a woman's need to be clean, implying that this is only possible with the use of particular menstrual products.

It seems that there are some words that are abused in menstrual product advertising. For example, the word protection is used in conjunction with the words sanitary and feminine. Possibly, 'sanitary protection' suggests that the pad or tampon will ensure that menstrual blood is collected. The pad also ensures that a woman's clothing is not stained with blood and is thus sanitary. But what is the meaning of feminine protection? Does feminine protection imply that femininity needs to be protected because of menstruation? What exactly is being protected? It becomes obvious that the meaning of feminine protection is ambiguous. The two words individually carry meaning, but when used together the resulting phrase is uncertain. I

appreciate, however, that most women are not going to concern themselves with analyzing the meaning of words used in menstrual product advertisements.

### Environment

Some of the women in the focus groups voiced their concerns about the potential adverse environmental effects associated with menstrual products, including: their inability to degrade, the bleaching processes associated with their manufacture and the synthetic products used in their construction. These women seemed to agree that menstrual product advertisements should alert women to these environmental issues.

Some women in the focus groups wanted to know that their product was unbleached and composed of natural fibers. Dioxins, synthetic fibers and some other additives in menstrual products are known to be harmful to the environment (Houppert, 1999). One woman explained that the dyes and acids that can typically be found in some menstrual products are “horrible” for the environment (Focus group #4). The harmful products enter the environment in relatively large quantities (Armstrong & Scott, 1992). One can observe the large volume of waste created by menstrual products by observing the bar screens at a wastewater treatment plant.

Another concern relating to the environment that several women did touch on was the disposal of menstrual products. This concern was voiced most clearly when I posed the question to the focus groups about the individual packaging of menstrual products. Instead of commenting on the shame and hiddenness that such packaging implies, the women mentioned the effect that these wrappers have on the environment (Focus group #4). Many pads and all tampons come wrapped in plastic. One would think this packaging exists to keep products clean, however, there are more environmentally

friendly ways to achieve this. For example, I wonder if it would be possible to package groups of tampons in what would replicate a zip-lock bag? Not only would this bag be reusable, but it would also keep the product clean. These women were more focused on practical concerns, such as the environment, instead of an obsession with hiding menstruation.

### Summary

In conclusion, there were some discrepancies in the ideas generated by the women in the focus groups. I have mentioned the discrepancy that existed pertaining to the need for practical or technical advertising and concluded that perhaps a combination of the two would be the most effective. There also seemed to be some confusion about whether women wanted to see a system of products advertised or whether a meaningful variety of menstrual products would surface. Finally, there were questions raised regarding the use of some language in menstrual product advertisements. The common theme that binds these ideas together is that they are concerned about the responsible and truthful advertising of menstrual products.

### Life-like WOMAN

In Phase I of my research I presented the women in the focus groups with many menstrual product advertisements that portrayed women. Berg and Coutts (1994) refer to the women frequently portrayed in menstrual product advertisements as FEM. FEM possesses the following characteristics:

she is sexually free, uninhibited, fun-loving, and most desirable. FEM likes stylish, glamorous expensive clothing. She can be found adorning the pages of

most fashion magazines...FEM does not, can not menstruate (Berg & Coutts, 1994, p. 15).

The women in the focus groups could not relate to the type of women portrayed in these current menstrual product advertisements. More importantly, the women did not feel that this type of woman represented what they felt was the experience of the majority of women.

A more realistic, portrayal of women is "WOMAN" (Berg & Coutts, 1994). The ideal type WOMAN stands for the opposite of FEM. WOMAN has adult responsibilities that she is more concerned about than her looks. WOMAN's responsibilities revolve around career or vocation issues, family and childcare issues, and/or economic issues. She is not always the fun, carefree, sexually stimulating companion that is FEM (Berg & Coutts, 1994).

Most importantly, for the purposes of this project, WOMAN accepts the fact that she menstruates and accepts menstruation as a fact of life. The women in the focus groups were presented with many advertisements that contained examples of FEM. All of the women rejected FEM, the women depicted in many contemporary menstrual product advertisements, in favor of WOMAN, a more realistic representation of women in society. The following sections seek to explain the components of a life-like woman whom the focus groups felt should be depicted in menstrual product advertisement. The ideas suggested by the women in the focus groups fall into the categories of being WOMAN, physical appearance, relationships, activities, and accepting menstruation.

## Being WOMAN

As I have explained in the preceding paragraphs, the women often portrayed in current menstrual product advertisements are narrowly defined. It seemed that for the women in the focus groups it was important to be able to relate to the women in the advertisements. Unfortunately, the women portrayed in current menstrual product advertisements are defined so specifically that they appear unrealistic or unnatural to the focus group women. The women in the focus groups agreed with this point and clearly expressed that they wanted to see “normal people in ads” as “people in ads are not representative of women today” (Focus group #1). To the women in the focus groups ‘normal’ implies the way women are everyday.

The women in one focus group agreed that it was not necessary for women to wear different clothing to hide menstruation (Focus group #1). The women recognized that in some of the menstrual product advertisements that were presented the women attempted to hide menstruation by dressing overly femininely. This overly feminine look reflects an extra effort to dress like a woman who is not menstruating. While a woman would not intentionally dress down if it were not appropriate, a woman is certainly not going to expend the extra effort to dress-up just because she is menstruating. Furthermore, close-fitting clothing is not comfortable if a woman is prone to painful periods.

The clothing that women wear in current menstrual product advertisements accentuates femininity. In one Carefree advertisement (see Appendix B18) the woman is shown in a short black skirt with heels and in the background there is a picture of her lingerie. The message contained in this advertisement is that feminine qualities are threatened by menstruation and thus it is necessary to insure one’s femininity with

recognizably feminine clothing, such as tight shirts, short skirts, and sexy lingerie. The women in one focus group argued that the attire of this woman was inappropriate for the advertising of menstrual products. The women in this focus group agreed that “no frills” and “no perfect stuff” would make this woman, and thus the advertisement, more realistic (Focus group #1). It seems that the women may have been hinting that present advertisements are based on fantasy. Real women would dress in everyday, comfortable clothing. Thus, clothing should not be the focal point of a menstrual product advertisement.

To improve the representation of women in menstrual product advertisements, the women in one focus group suggested that advertisements should “not categorize women” (Focus group #1). These women believed that current menstrual product advertisements seem to imply that there are two types of women: women depicted in the advertisements and women not good enough to be in advertisements. This is likely the case with the majority of advertisements. Those women included in the advertisements are implied to be socially accepted, while the other women are not. To avoid this classification the women in the focus groups suggested that many different types of women should be represented in the advertisements. One woman’s reasoning for this was that “every body is different...everybody is different” and therefore only one type of woman depicted throughout all menstrual product advertisements is not realistic (Focus group #2).

### Physical Appearance

The women in the focus groups wanted the average woman to be represented in menstrual product advertisements. The woman that is currently depicted in menstrual product advertisements possesses the body of a ‘girl’ or a female who has not fully

developed. Most of the women in the advertisements have no breasts to speak of and lack the shapely hips that accompany menstruation and the ability to bear children. One woman pointed out that the advertisement for Stayfree Silhouettes (see Appendix B11) is a good advertisement because it “recognizes that there is shape to a woman’s body” (Focus group #4). In this advertisement the silhouette of woman having hips and breasts is portrayed. Looking at this woman, even though there is no depiction of the face, it is obvious that it is the body of a mature woman, not a girl. The women in the focus groups wanted mature women represented in the advertisements.

The women in one focus group suggested that women should appear empowered by menstruation and womanhood in the advertisements: “A woman should not want to be a girl forever” (Focus group #1). The women further explained that “being a girl is only a stage... it is powerless” (Focus group #1). The women seemed to be suggesting that womanhood, typically marked on by the onset menstruation, should signify independence and empowerment. Portraying women as girls, dependent and powerless, is the work of patriarchy. Patriarchy works to subordinate women in society. Laws (1990) explains that being a woman, menstruating and thus having the capacity to bear children, threatens males because they are unable to have children. Theoretically, if women are depicted as girls they do not have the capacity to menstruate and bear children. Consequently, men remain more powerful in society as breadwinners and decision-makers because women portrayed as girls are not a threat. This idea supports Berg and Coutts’ (1994) suggestion that the women portrayed in menstrual product advertisements are experiences of the ideal type FEM. FEM is able to appear as if she is not menstruating, if she uses the right product.

Most women in the focus groups suggested that women depicted in menstrual product advertisement should look healthy, sporty or athletic. The women in a couple of focus groups also suggested having recognized women or athletes in the menstrual product advertisements (Focus groups #2 and #4). While this may take women away from the image of the child, it still does not represent all women or the average woman, which the women also said were important to depict in the advertisements. The average woman in society does not possess the body of an athlete and is not an athlete. It appears that the women in these focus groups do not possess a clear picture of the women they would like portrayed in menstrual product advertisements.

The physical appearance of a woman was a difficult issue for the women. The women in the focus groups recognized that women portrayed in menstrual product advertisements are typically models. However, the women in the focus groups also recognized that depicting women with less than attractive bodies would not sell the product (Focus group #2). These ideas contradict each other, acknowledging once again that the women in the focus groups are unclear as to how to portray lifelike women in menstrual product advertisements, in order to represent as many different women as possible and still sell the product.

### Relationships

Women in all the focus groups mentioned the importance of including men and women in the advertisements. This does not simply mean including both sexes in the advertisements, but instead it involves including the men in the menstrual experience. Including men in the advertisements, and the menstrual experience, would help dissolve the secretiveness associated with menstruation. One focus group talked about how

including men and women in the advertisements would “take away from the secrecy and embarrassment... in a nutshell it’s (menstruation) a natural part of living” (Focus group #4). Men have typically been excluded in menstrual product advertisements because “sanitary wear must be hidden from men” (Laws, 1990, p. 43). This is part of the proper menstrual etiquette that women are accustomed to and follow closely. Women are supposed to act the same everyday, whether they are menstruating or not. Laws (1990) explains that as part of this menstrual etiquette, women are expected to buy, store, and use menstrual products without men noticing. Consequently, having a male present in an advertisement implies that men are aware of menstruation and the practices associated with it.

Current menstrual product advertisements that do include men typically depict them in a way that insures that they are not associated with menstruation. The first example that comes to mind is a Tampax advertisement that includes a male, but the woman in the advertisement is covering his eyes (see Appendix B6). At first glance this ad may seem progressive simply because it included a male; however, closer examination suggests that by covering the man’s eyes he is almost not there. The second example is an o.b. advertisement directed at adolescents (see Appendix B22). This advertisement features a young man and woman with bikes. In this advertisement it is clear that the young girl has successfully managed to hide her menstrual status and the young man is comfortable associating with her. While the idea behind this advertisement may be positive, the male depicted in this advertisement is basically half off the page, implying once again that men should not be, or cannot be directly associated with menstruation. With a quick glance, one may not recognize that the person in the advertisement is a man.

**This advertisement would be improved if the male was at least recognizably male: someone with a more masculine body, clothing or colors. Exaggerating masculinity may be appropriate as neither men nor women are accustomed to seeing men in menstrual product advertisements. Within the advertisement it is also imperative that the male be aware of menstruation and not ashamed to be seen with a menstruating woman.**

**One focus group suggested components for an advertisement that would show men directly associated with menstrual products. This group's idea for an advertisement was to show a man shopping for his partner's menstrual products. In the advertisement, the male would be portrayed as comfortable shopping for these products (Focus group #1). It seems that the women in this focus group wanted to convey in the advertisement that men should be able to shop for menstrual products because it is a way to communicate that they are in a relationship. A woman in one focus group explained that placing men and women in advertisements and thereby associating men with menstruating women would be a "step toward breaking down the barriers that exist between men and women" (Focus group #5).**

**The inclusion of men in menstrual product advertisements would be a positive step toward more open awareness of women and menstruation. However, it would be imperative for the men in menstrual product advertisements to be obviously actively participating in the female menstrual experience. This participation could include activities such as shopping for menstrual products, as mentioned previously, or possibly a simple dialogue between a male and female about menstrual products.**

**The other relationship that one focus group mentioned as important to include in advertisements is the family. More specifically, the family that includes a young woman**

moving toward, or just reaching menarche. This focus group thought that it was important to portray “open discussion” and “communication between family members” about menstruation (Focus group #1). There are no advertisements that suggest a brother or a father’s role in the menstrual experience. For the most part, it is just accepted that the males (men of the house) are not involved in or aware of menstruation. Knowledge of a daughter/sister or wife/mother’s period is kept secret.

Treneman (1989) explains that in our society young girls learn about menstruation through whispered rumors. These whispers function to “pass along our invisible taboo as surely as menstrual huts define it in other cultures” (Treneman, 1989, p. 155). Showing families engaged in conversation about menstruation may be one way of combating the secretiveness that exists in families around the topic of menstruation. Depicting men with some knowledge about menstruation or menstrual products could be a way to empower men instead of shaming them for being educated about menstruation. In addition, showing families in an advertisement for menstrual products would be a way of suggesting the introduction of menstruation to adolescent boys. This may be a small step toward improving the way society views and reacts to menstruation.

### Activities

The women in the focus groups also thought it was important to portray women “engaging in normal daily activities” (Focus group #4). The women in this focus group agreed that the o.b. advertisement with two women bike riding was an affirming advertisement as the tone of the advertisement suggested that women do not have to give up their freedom because they are menstruating. This advertisement may represent the

medium that women are looking for when it comes to participating in activities during menstruation.

The o.b. advertisement of the two women on the bikes (see Appendix B19) was recognized as a positive advertisement by all of the focus groups because it specifically worked to “dispel old myths” that women are unable to participate in certain activities during menstruation (Focus group #2). The text of the o.b. advertisement states that:

Your period does not have to stop you from doing anything you want to do.

Like sports, swimming or dancing (Johnson & Johnson, 1988, July, p. 35).

I feel that this advertisement fails to acknowledge that there are painful periods, however, that may be asking too much of a good advertisement. Unfortunately, painful menstruation is a monthly reality for some women and does cost them some freedom. Therefore, to be an “honest” advertisement it is important that the advertisers downplay the fact that women ‘never’ have to give up their freedom.

The women in a couple of focus groups also suggested the idea that women should be portrayed in menstrual product advertisements “doing a male thing” or being able to participate in different activities (Focus group #1). The reasoning behind this idea seemed to be that many women in society are now venturing into roles that typically have been associated with, and accepted for, men. A woman in focus group #2 explained that “there are historical examples of things that women cannot do while men can do them...things are changing.” This woman believes that there are activities typically reserved for men, which women were not involved in or could not physically perform.

Although the women in these focus groups did not specifically mention the things that they felt had changed; examples, such as career paths, sports, and social activities come to mind.

One member of a focus group had a particularly interesting idea for the theme of a menstrual product advertisement that would portray “women doing a male thing” (Focus group #1). This woman pictured “women in top hats and canes holding a cigar and a martini” (Focus group #1). This woman did not give any reasoning for this image, other than she really wanted to alert women to women’s ability to do things that have been reserved for men. However, the premise for this advertisement was that if “men can talk about sex over a martini why can’t we talk about our periods” (Focus group #1). Once again it becomes apparent that the women in the focus groups would like to see the topic of menstruation open for public discussion and acknowledgement. Further exploration of this idea by the women in this first focus group yielded what they thought was an even better idea of a man and a woman sharing a drink with the topic of conversation being a woman’s painful period. While this idea may not surface in a magazine in the near future, it brings home the point that the women in the focus group wanted to see women participating in, and acknowledged by, society even when they were menstruating. This idea also communicated that the women in the focus group did not think that menstruation in any way limits or hampers a woman’s ability to participate in activities that have historically been reserved for men. Typically, sharing a drink after work has been reserved for executives, men, in high power positions, who need an opportunity to ‘unwind’ before going home to the wife and children. More importantly, this idea “honestly” recognizes that menstruation can be a difficult experience and may require

understanding. This understanding is only possible if there is more openness associated with menstruation.

### Accepting Menstruation

Women in the groups focused on the need to accept menstruation and move on to things more important in life. One focus group member agreed that:

Menstruation is part of being a woman, a small part...periods do not define a woman, there is more to being a woman than having or not having a period... we need to minimize the event of menstruation, it is part of being a woman, but not the only thing (Focus group #2).

The women concluded that society places importance on women being able to procreate which in turn reinforces the importance that is placed on menstruation. I think the point that these women were trying to convey is that menstruation may be the function necessary for bearing children, which in reality distinguishes men from women. However, women have proven that they are capable of doing much more than bearing children. It is necessary to move away from identifying menstruation as an event that inhibits women from accomplishing goals other than having children and maintaining families. One woman explained that it is necessary for society to “accept menstruation and move on, it is not the be all and the end all” (Focus group #2). In other words, menstruation is not a detrimental experience, nor is it the only thing women experience. The women agreed that menstruation occurs and therefore you take the necessary actions to deal with it in order to get on with other responsibilities.

Many of the women in the focus groups agreed that with whom they choose to share menstruation is a personal issue. There did not seem to be any steadfast rule suggesting with whom women typically do and do not share menstrual experiences. The women in one focus group suggested that:

menstruation is a personal experience...you can pick how you handle it...it is personal, it is no one's business...you can share menstruation with who you want (Focus group #2).

This discussion about the need to accept menstruation as a natural part of life and pay more attention to more important things in life was contradicted by the focus group's need to advertise the vast array of menstrual products. In my mind, advertising many products, used for relatively the same purposes, suggests that menstruation is a huge event that must be handled carefully. The women appear to be suggesting that menstruation does not occupy as much time or consume as much energy as current advertisements imply. The current advertisements suggest that failure to follow the proper menstrual etiquette may result in embarrassment and discovery. Something that is a natural event should have a natural solution, not a complex system. Further, a natural event should not have adverse consequences that force a woman to hide and/or be ashamed.

A few women in the focus groups also mentioned that accepting menstruation also meant dealing with periods that are difficult. Some women have periods that are painful or have an extremely heavy menstrual flow. The women in one group explained

that the pain that some women feel because of menstruation is also a personal and a relative issue because “it is not possible to measure pain” (Focus group #2). The pain that causes one woman to withdraw from society may allow another woman to function normally. While showing women having trouble with menstruation may not be a positive representation of women, the women in one focus group thought that “the women in current advertisements look fake, they all look so happy” (Focus group #4). As I have mentioned previously, there are times when menstruation does negatively affect how a woman feels. Bloating, cramping, nausea and extreme blood loss are all common symptoms that women may experience. One woman suggested that “advertisements should address that women do not always feel their best when they have their period” (Focus group #4). However, there would be a fine line between showing a woman not at her best while at the same time trying to maintain the image that menstruation does not limit or hamper a woman’s performance. It would be very difficult to show a woman doubled over in pain or weak from extreme blood loss and expect to sell menstrual products that collect blood. Dealing with the severe pain that may be associated with menstruation may be more appropriately reserved for advertisements for products that treat menstrual pain.

A current advertisement that the women in all the focus groups agreed to be an example of a positive advertisement was the Kotex advertisement that depicted a woman holding her child (see Appendix B4). The text of the advertisement suggested that menstruation is only a small fraction of what women deal with in a day by saying that:

**Kotex understands what it means to be a woman.**

**That's why Kotex makes such a wide range of feminine care products.**

**So you can choose what meets your protection needs best.**

**And get on with what's really important in your life (Kimberly-Clark Canada Inc., 1995, February, p. 89).**

**The women in the focus groups were attracted to this ad because:**

**The woman is busy being a mom...hugging the child is more important than worrying about a leak (Focus group #4).**

**This ad represents reality...an ordinary person, a mom comfortable dealing with stuff, having choices...what it is like to be a woman, women should have choices (Focus group #2).**

**I think this last comment adequately summarizes what the women in all the focus groups were expressing that they would like to see represented in menstrual product advertisements. I think that women in the focus groups want the advertisements to depict that women accept that fact that they do menstruate once a month. Further, I think that the women also wanted to communicate that they do not necessarily want to hide the fact that they are menstruating. While these women are not ready to announce to the world that they are menstruating, they are suggesting that they would share their menstrual experiences with those they deemed appropriate.**

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This research produced two main findings. First, the results suggested that women would like to see more affirming representations of women in menstrual product advertisements. Affirming women entails a truthful representation of issues such as the safety and technical features of products, as well as the language presented in the advertisements, genuinely related to menstruation and menstrual products. Second, the results of this research suggest the emerging rejection of patriarchy, or at the very least, patriarchal menstrual etiquette.

As part of this discussion section I will try to bring some meaning to what is involved in truthful and responsible advertising as well as a life-like representation of women in the advertisements. Using those ideas as a backdrop, I will discuss the women's apparent rejection of some of the patriarchal definitions of the menstrual experience. Finally, I will discuss how the results of this study relate to the original research question, as well as some limitations to the research study.

### Truthful and Responsible Advertising

The analysis of the data collected in this research project suggests that the women participating in the focus groups would like to see truthful and responsible advertisements that contain a life-like representation of women. I think the women were implying that that they would like advertisements to tell it like it really is; that is, capture how women, real women, experience menstruation and how they choose menstrual products. The advertisements need to contain factual information that women would find valuable when selecting a menstrual product. Factual information includes information about a product and its composition, as well as potential safety concerns about a product.

**Factual information** Factual information about a menstrual product and its composition was important to some of the women when they discussed selection of a menstrual product. Current menstrual product advertisements may contain some of this information, but more frequently it is overshadowed by other issues. For example, for women who may have experienced an allergic reaction to some menstrual products knowing a product's make-up is an important issue. An advertisement such as Tampax Naturals (see Appendix B9) does contain information about the product. In this advertisement the reader is told that the tampon is made of 100% cotton. Generally, when something is cotton people think of white, however in order to get something as pure white as a tampon it is necessary to bleach the product. The bleaching of the product eliminates any environmental friendliness that the product may have had and one also has to wonder how the bleaching of the product would affect someone with allergies. This information is not, and likely will not be, found in the advertisement.

The women in the focus groups were also concerned about knowing who designed the menstrual product. The women thought that the designers of the product should be included or exposed in an advertisement for the product. The most frequently cited advertisement that adheres to this idea is an o.b. Tampon advertisement that claims the product is designed by a woman gynecologist (not contained in Appendix B). One has to wonder how important it really is that a woman designed the menstrual product. In most cases there is a person who initially designed the product, women who test it and then make their recommendations for improvements. Therefore, does it really matter if a man or a woman designed the product if women do the testing? Women who test the

product would make suggestions to the designer, male or female. No designer would put a product on the market without having it tested.

The women in the focus groups did not question if the product was actually designed by a woman gynecologist. In reality, a woman gynecologist may not have designed this product and it may just be a marketing ploy to attract women. Armstrong and Scott (1992) report that in 1990 only one of the four leading menstrual product manufacturers had a woman in a position of power. While Armstrong and Scott (1992) do not elaborate on this woman's position within the company it is clear that women are generally not active decision makers in the marketing or design of menstrual products. Consequently, I would question if a women gynecologist actually designed the o.b. tampon. I am inclined to believe that suggesting a women gynecologist designed the tampon is likely a marketing tool. Furthermore, with women testing the menstrual products it should not matter who designed the product.

The women in the focus groups also mentioned the safety issues that should be addressed in menstrual product advertisements. The women specifically referred to concerns about TSS and products that contain deodorants. Toxic shock is a rare bacterial illness that is associated with tampon use. Dioxins that are present in tampons have been implicated as the cause of toxic shock. These dioxins are potentially harmful to a woman's health and can even be fatal. Although most tampon boxes come with pamphlets warning of TSS and even display warnings on the outside of the boxes, the focus group members felt that advertisements should also play a role in educating women about the risks of these dioxins. I think that the manufacturers of tampons would be fooling themselves if they actually believed that women read the inserts in a tampon box.

In fact, as long as the information warning of the risks of TSS is included somewhere in the box, the manufacturers are not liable. Some of the women in the focus groups claimed not to read menstrual product advertisements. But, they felt it was important for information that concerns women's health to be visibly displayed, even if women do not read it. As long as the information is there, a woman could refer to it if she had questions.

I have to wonder if it is reasonable to expect, or even suggest, that advertisers will include this kind of information in advertisements. Advertisements are for promoting the sale of a product. If concerns about the product were to be advertised it would be difficult to sell the product. Important warnings and safety concerns about the product are probably more effective if they are included with the product.

The other safety concern that was mentioned during the focus groups was the potential implications of deodorants used in some menstrual products, particularly panty liners. Current advertisements suggest that women should be using some type of 'protection' everyday of the month. When women are not menstruating these advertisements suggest that women should use panty liners. Panty liners are supposed to collect any vaginal discharge and mask the odor often emitted from a woman's body. Essentially, the suggested use of panty liners implies that a woman's body is unclean or dirty. The panty liner is promoted as an aid that a woman cannot do without. The women in the focus groups concluded that the use of a panty liner was unnecessary.

The women in the focus groups agreed that the female body is equipped with its own cleansing system. Therefore it is natural for the body to have some discharge through the varying stages of the menstrual cycle. If the body is producing discharge that does warrant the use of a panty liner to either collect the fluid or mask the odor, may be

an indication that there is a medical problem. Promoting the use of panty liners to hide discharge or odor may, therefore, be dangerous. For example, trichomoniasis, bacterial vaginosis and yeast infections are all medical disorders where vaginal discharge and/or odor is a cause for concern (The Boston Women's Health Collective, 1992).

Consequently, if menstrual product advertisements are promoting the use of panty liners to hide discharge or odor, they may be putting a woman's health at risk. Implying that a panty liner is used for this purpose suggests that all vaginal odor and discharge are normal when in fact they are not.

Honesty The fact that the current advertisements suggest that women should use panty liners brings forth the issue of the need for honest advertising. While some women may choose to use panty liners everyday, it is not something that is absolutely necessary. It is important that these distinctions are evident in the advertisements. Without honest information about the use of panty liners, advertisers are free to create needs. The need communicated in the advertisements for panty liners tries to convince women that without the product they may discovered as a menstruator. Consequently, the advertiser successfully communicates what is in fact a created need.

While I do recognize that the purpose of an advertisement is to sell a product it is also important to provide truthful information in the advertisement. The women in the focus groups seemed to have concluded that menstruation is a health issue. Therefore, failure to provide factual information about a menstrual product could ultimately be detrimental to a woman's health. For example, a 1994 report by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) suggested a connection between the dioxin in tampons and ovarian, cervical and breast cancers (as cited in Maloney, 1997). Further,

the EPA has concluded that “people with high exposure to dioxins may be at risk for other effects that could suppress the immune system, increase the risk of pelvic inflammatory disease, reduce fertility and possibly interfere with normal fetal and childhood development” (as cited in Maloney, 1997, p. 2). It is time for menstrual product advertisements to make the connection between menstruation and a woman’s health.

One way of pushing advertisers to make the connection between menstruation and women’s health may be to advocate for the United States Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) approval of menstrual products. Currently, the FDA trusts the manufacturers themselves to test and monitor dioxin levels of menstrual products (Maloney, 1997). The manufacturers are not obligated to provide the contents of a tampon or pad as is required by other manufacturers. Obviously, manufacturers are going to insist that products meet the standards and are therefore safe for use. Having FDA approval for menstrual products would ensure that women’s health is truly being taken into consideration.

Although in Canada we have yet to hear of a push for formal legislation pertaining to the testing of the safety of menstrual products there has been a bill introduced in the United States Congress. In November 1997, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (Democrat, New York) introduced the Tampon Safety and Research Act of 1997. This bill would have directed the National Institutes of Health to determine the extent to which dioxins, synthetic fibers and other additives in menstrual products pose risks to the health of women. The passage of this bill would have provided women with evidence from independent research on the risks of menstrual products to women’s health

instead of only the manufacturer's test results. To date, this bill has not been passed. In a letter to the editor of *Glamour* magazine dated January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1999, (published in the March 1999 *Glamour* edition) Congresswoman Maloney promised to reintroduce this bill to Congress in the near future and has since followed through on this promise. The Tampon Research and Safety Act of 1999 was reintroduced in the House of Representatives on March 1, 1999 and was then referred to the Committee on Commerce.

It would seem that the potential risks associated with menstrual product manufacturing should be a concern to legislators. Menstruating women really do not have a choice when it comes to the need to use menstrual products, therefore, it would seem that a bill such as the one put forth by Congresswoman Maloney should be a priority. The fact that there has been considerable delay in attracting the needed and deserved attention to this bill in the United States and virtually no attention to this matter in Canada, leads me to suggest that women's health issues are still relatively invisible. Martin (1989) explained that in the past women's health issues were not recognized in medical journals as nearly all the researchers were male. Recently, probably with the increase of females entering the medical profession, there has been more research conducted on women's health. However, the reintroduction of the Tampon Research and Safety Act of 1999 may be an indication that women's health issues are finally breaking society's patriarchal habits.

Providing truthful advertisements also means accurately portraying the way women act. For example, women do not wear ultra feminine clothing just to hide menstruation. For some women, the thought of wearing panty hose during menstruation is torture. Having something tight around the waist is potentially uncomfortable for

women who experience bloating or cramping during menstruation. Showing a woman in a comfortable outfit, like her favorite sweatsuit, would be more representative of how menstruating women feel and dress.

Honestly portraying how menstruating women feel also means recognizing that a woman may not always feel her best. Depicting a woman in an undesirable state would not help to alleviate the 'bitch' label that is so often associated with menstruating women. However, advertisements that only depict happy, overly active women are not representative of women or comforting to those women who do experience problems.

Practical The women in the focus groups also seemed focused on advertising the practical features menstrual products. Generally, the women were interested in knowing what products really worked and why. The women seemed to either read through, or simply ignore, the problems created by the advertisers in order to sell the product. One of the problems created by the advertisers was that a woman needs a whole system of products in order to effectively deal with menstruation. The women in the focus groups did not acknowledge the advertisers definition of system. Most of the women were practical in their rational for not wanting to use many products for menstruation. The women simply wanted the most cost-effective product that was going to work for them.

Men One of the most interesting suggestions that came from the women in the focus groups was the need to have men appear in the advertisements participating in the menstrual experience. This suggestion has many potential repercussions. First and foremost, including men in the advertisements and thus publicly in the menstrual experience would remove the shame and secrecy that is presently still associated with menstruation. This shame and secrecy has forced women to go to great lengths to hide

the fact that they are menstruating from men. Second, the inclusion of men in menstrual product advertisements acknowledging the menstrual experience helps to break patriarchal menstrual etiquette. This patriarchal menstrual etiquette has protected men from menstruation by insisting that women hide menstruation (from men) at all costs. Consequently, more open association of men, women and menstruation would also function as a method for dissolving this patriarchal menstrual etiquette.

Many women in the focus groups seemed to have already taken an initiative in breaking down patriarchal menstrual etiquette. When discussing the need to include men in the female menstrual experience, many women cited that they were not ashamed to send their boyfriend, husband or father to the store to buy their particular menstrual product. While we do not know how men really feel about purchasing menstrual products, including them actively participating in menstruation in menstrual product advertisements would be a step toward openly accepting and promoting male menstrual participation.

Including men in the menstrual experience may also have other positive outcomes. Including men participating in the menstrual experience in menstrual product advertisements suggests that there is open communication between the man and woman. As I have previously mentioned, patriarchal menstrual etiquette insists that men do not want to know about menstruation. Having a man actively participating in the menstrual experience suggests that there is communication about menstruation within the relationship.

Increased open communication between men and women about menstruation would likely help to diminish the put-downs that exist about women and menstruation.

Negative euphemisms like 'she is on the rag' used when a woman is in a bad mood, or 'the red flag is up' to deter a man from having sexual relations with a menstruating woman, exist because men are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with menstruation (Delaney et al., 1987).

More open communication about menstruation would also acknowledge menstruation as a natural occurrence, instead of an undercover event. One day, young boys could grow up thinking about menstruation as a natural part of life, not a dirty gross female thing. Exposing young boys to the naturalness of menstruation may also remove the ridicule, smut, and laughter that young girls are often subjected to because they menstruate. Presently, young girls are forced to hide their menstrual status to avoid this negative commentary (Simes, 1998).

Open communication would allow women who experienced menstrual cramps to be comfortable admitting that they are in pain. Including men in the menstrual experience would help them to understand that a woman was not faking menstrual cramps and encourage men to offer sincere sympathy, instead of insults or put-downs.

Including men in the menstrual experience in menstrual product advertisements also suggests that it is possible for men and women to be equal. Women and men will never be physiologically equal, but they can have equal rights and opportunities. For many years it was thought that menstruation prohibited a woman from being an equal player in society. Some myths went as far as to suggested that menstrual blood loss affected a woman's brain or made her weak and incapable of functioning in society. Actively portraying a man who obviously has knowledge of a woman's menstrual status would show that there is not a need to treat a menstruating woman any differently than

when she is not menstruating. More importantly, menstruation could be used to actually help to put men and women on the same level, instead of as a tool for the subordination of women. However, this equalization would only be possible if put downs and euphemisms about menstruation were no longer seen as appropriate or necessary by men. Men and women might then be comfortable discussing the menstrual experience.

#### Life-like Representation of Women

The results of this study overwhelmingly suggest that the women in the focus groups were not satisfied with the way women are portrayed in many current menstrual product advertisements. The women in the focus groups wanted to see real women in the menstrual product advertisements.

Real women The women who appear in current menstrual product advertisements are typically models who are not representative of the majority of women. While these women may be appealing, to look at they are very hard for focus group women to relate to. The women in the focus groups suggested that they would like to see women who are more representative of women in the advertisements. However, it was very difficult for the women in the focus groups to indicate the specific type of woman that they would like to see in menstrual product advertisements. I think the women in the focus groups would agree that they would like to see a woman in an advertisement that it was possible for them to model. In other words, the women wanted to see something in the advertisement that they could attain. It is important to recognize that this does not just mean the way a woman looks, but also what the woman does. For example, the women in the focus groups regarded current advertisements that included a mother or an athlete as advertisements that portrayed women positively and realistically.

**Femininity** The way in which women are portrayed in current menstrual product advertisements implies that menstruation is an event that threatens femininity. There are many ideas that come across in the analysis of this data which suggest that the women in the focus groups recognized that femininity is not diminished by menstruation. While the women did not make this connection individually, or as a group, some of their conclusions certainly hint at this idea. As I have previously discussed, the women in the focus groups did not like the way women are portrayed in menstrual product advertisements. Many times the women referred to the unnecessary frills and overly feminine styles and colors of clothing that the women in the advertisements wore. The overly feminine attire worn by the women in the advertisements was seen by the focus group women as a way to hide menstruation. Consequently, the audience is supposed to believe that because a woman menstruates she needs this clothing not only to hide her menstrual status, but also to affirm her femininity. The affirmation of femininity is necessary because menstruation is suggested to be a potentially dirty, unclean event.

This overly feminine dress raised the issue of practicality. Most women are not going to exert the effort to dress as the advertisements suggest just because they are menstruating. There is clothing that is much more comfortable and thus practical during menstruation. In fact, there is probably some 'feminine' clothing that women eliminate during their period. As I discovered in the focus groups, the woman wearing the white spandex dress during her period in the Always advertisement (see Appendix B20) is not exerting common sense. While the tight white dress may be feminine, it is definitely not practical.

The most obvious example of femininity present in the advertisements that comes to mind is the colors that are used in most menstrual product advertisements. Many women in the focus groups commented on the use of pink in the advertisements and agreed that its use was unnecessary. These women felt that the use of pink in the advertisements was condescending. It seems that the use of pink is supposed to compensate for the fact that in the eyes of the advertisers menstruation is an event that threatens femininity. Using pink in the advertisements gives the advertisement an overly feminine tone, which is intended to be associated with the product. The advertisement suggests that by purchasing the product in the advertisement a woman can ensure that she will not put her femininity at risk during menstruation.

The women in the focus groups also seemed to agree that there was no need to 'sugar coat' menstruation. These women viewed menstruation as a simple fact of life, one that is a normal and natural part of a woman's life. While some women may experience problems associated with menstruation, there are many women who do not and can therefore proceed with life as if they were not menstruating.

Current advertisements seem to suggest that effectively dealing with or managing menstruation requires a huge undercover effort. This undercover effort is not only to ensure that no one knows that a woman is menstruating, but also to ensure that her femininity is protected. Since menstruation is often thought to be dirty or to make a woman unclean it is easy to see how menstruation could be portrayed as an event that threatens femininity.

If menstrual product advertisements eliminated the need to hide menstruation this would suggest that menstruation is in fact a normal feminine occurrence. One way of

accomplishing this could be including men in menstrual product advertisements.

Including men in menstrual product advertisements would suggest that men are actually involved or participating in the menstrual experience. This would suggest that men are not turned off by menstruation. In turn, women would not feel the need to be ashamed and thus hide menstruation.

### Rejection of Patriarchy

When I asked the women to make suggestions for the content of menstrual product advertisements the women were able to make suggestions based on what they did and did not like about current menstrual product advertisements. When the women were given the advertisements used in Phase I of this study as a reference, they were able to make suggestions for an advertisement. The ideas that the women rejected in current advertisements were those that have been deemed to reflect a patriarchal picture of menstruation and women (Carvalho 1997; Coutts & Berg, 1993; Simes, 1998). For instance, the women agreed that the use of panty liners was unnecessary and that deodorized products were unsafe. The recognition of these ideas, present in the current advertisements, rejected the embedded patriarchal idea that women are unclean or dirty. The women also rejected the suggested need to hide menstruation at all costs. The recognition of this idea implies that the women also reject patriarchal menstrual etiquette. While the women in the focus groups knew what offended them about how advertisers portrayed women and their periods, they did not recognize patriarchy as the basis of these ideas.

It is also noteworthy at this point to revisit the fact that the women were unable to make suggestions for the content of the menstrual product advertisements without a

reference point. The women were able to identify what they liked and disliked about menstrual product advertisements with the original advertisements I had presented to them to critique. Their critique of the advertisements provided the content for menstrual product advertisements that the focus groups would consider to be women-affirming.

My initial plan for the data collection of this study was to ask the women to make suggestions for the content of menstrual product advertisements that would affirm women and menstruation. I asked the women for their suggestions after the education phase of the study in which I presented the women with the themes present in the current menstrual product advertisements that contributed to the negative portrayal of women. Without the reference point of the current advertisements the women were unable to make any suggestions. With the advertisements to critique, the women were able to identify what they liked and disliked about the advertisements thus suggesting what they would like to see in an advertisement that would affirm women and menstruation. The failure to make suggestions for the content of menstrual product advertisements without a reference point suggests that women are still influenced by a patriarchal perspective. If the women were not presented with the advertisements, which I told them portrayed women negatively, they would probably not have been offended by the advertisements. Figuratively, unless the women were shown how to take off their patriarchal glasses they were not aware that they had them on.

### The Research Question

The question that I proposed to answer with this study was: Can women write advertisements for menstrual product advertisements which affirm menstruation and women, keeping in mind that the goal of advertising is to sell? Part of the process of

constructing the advertisements would involve identifying what information should be included in the advertisements. The information that the women in the focus groups would include in menstrual product advertisements does affirm women and menstruation. The women would like to see truthful and responsible advertisements that contain a life-like representation of women. The information that the advertisements would contain in order to accomplish this goal include: factual information about the product and its usage, honest information depicting how menstruation is actually experienced, the inclusion of men in the advertisements actively participating in the menstrual experience as well as the portrayal of real women whose femininity is not threatened by menstruation.

Advertisements that contain these ideas suggested by the women in the focus groups would undoubtedly work toward affirming women and menstruation. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that women can, in relation to existing advertisements, compose advertisements for menstrual products which affirm women and menstruation.

I believe that the women were conscious of the fact that the goal of advertising is to sell. For example, the women in the focus groups recognized that the women that they portrayed in the advertisements had to be appealing in order to attract readers to the advertisements with the goal of convincing them to buy the product. However, I also believe that the fact that the women in the focus groups made a more important discovery in terms of an advertisement's goal of selling the product. The women in the focus groups felt that the connection between menstruation and health was also an important content area of an advertisement. The advertisements must not lose sight of menstruation as a health issue when they are trying to sell the product. The women recognized the

importance of truthful and responsible advertising as a selling feature of menstrual product advertisements.

### Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. This research was designed with two phases. The first phase was implemented to educate the women about the research conducted on menstrual product advertisement. The second phase of this research would discover if the women were able to compose women-affirming menstrual product advertisements. When I designed my research method I assumed that the women in the focus groups would be able to compose menstrual product advertisements after the education phase. I was forced to alter my research method when the women could not make suggestion for the advertisements. By providing the women with the advertisements I had used in the education phase as a reference, the women were able to make suggestions for women-affirming advertisements.

The fact that the women needed to use a reference to make suggestions for advertisements leads to the second limitation of this study. The women only made suggestions for women-affirming advertisements based on the advertisements I had selected for the education phase of this study to address the negativity present in some menstrual product advertisement. Consequently, some of the ideas that the women had for women-affirming advertisements actually exist in some of the current menstrual product advertisements. For example, there is a Midol advertisement that addresses women who do not feel their best during their periods. There are also Vania advertisements that show women as firefighters and welders, professions that have commonly been reserved for males. These advertisements would have fulfilled the

suggestion by the woman who wanted to see women doing typically male things in menstrual product advertisements. Finally, one of the most common suggestions provided by the women in the focus groups was the need to see real women in menstrual product advertisements. The women wanted to see women of all shapes and sizes depicted in menstrual product advertisements in order to make all women feel included. There are existing advertisements that portray the various sizes and shapes of women.

The existing advertisements mentioned above did not exist in my collection of advertisements. However, I did not think that the women would have to use advertisements as a reference in order to generate ideas for women-affirming advertisements. My collection of advertisements was only supposed to be a sample of advertisements that negatively portray women and menstruation.

A third limitation of this research was that all of the women who participated in the focus groups had high levels of education. It is possible that because all of the women in the focus groups have had post-secondary education that their opinions and feelings about menstruation may differ from those of other women.

### Conclusion

One of the objectives of this study was to present some of the research conducted on the portrayal of women in menstrual product advertising to women to see if they were aware of the patriarchal influence. The findings of my study would seem to suggest that women did not recognize all of the patriarchal ideas present in the advertisements. However, after continuous reflection on the results I would tend to conclude that there was really no need for the women to get the point of some of the patriarchal ideas in the advertisements. The women knew what they liked and disliked about the advertisements.

The ideas that the women disliked about the advertisements were those that I, as a researcher, would deem to be patriarchal.

The women in the focus groups were concerned about learning the important information about a product so they can decide if it is one they should consider buying. I think that these women definitely understand that there are still patriarchal influences in our society, but they are not going to spend time worrying about them. One point that illustrates this idea from this research is the women's misunderstanding of the advertisers' definition of 'system.' While the advertisements may have been trying to convince women that they need a plethora of products to effectively hide menstruation, the women in the focus groups were interested in learning what the products looked like so they could choose one or two products. The most logical reason that the women may not have acknowledged the advertisers' definition of 'system' is because of cost. These women seem to agree that the price of one type of menstrual product was high enough, never mind six or seven.

As I thought about the results revealed by this research, and continued to reflect on the women's conversations, I realized that it took me a long time to truly understand the nature of the patriarchal influences present in menstrual product advertisements. Until I actually dissected menstrual product advertisements, I did not have a grasp of the problems created by the advertisers in order to sell the products. Odor, or dirtiness, is one common problem that the advertisers use to sell products like panty liners. The women in the focus groups recognized that these products were not necessary, but they did not understand the patriarchal influence behind the advertisement. However, this leads to me to the point, did the women really need to understand that patriarchy was

responsible for those ideas? In my opinion, the important finding was that the women were not willing to buy into some of the created problems.

The results of the research indicate that we are still influenced by patriarchy. But, the results of this research also indicate that we are moving toward a redefinition of menstruation. On more than one occasion the women in the focus groups expressed that menstruation was “no big deal.” The women have their chosen menstrual products, they use them, and they get on with more important things. It seems that these women accept menstruation as a normal, natural, fact of life.

The women’s suggestion to include men actively participating in the menstrual product advertisements indicates that they would not be ashamed to include men in their own menstrual experiences, simply because it is a natural part of life. The inclusion of men in the menstrual experience would in turn help to combat the negative put downs that are commonly used by men because they do not understand menstruation. This would also help to promote that menstruation is ‘not a big deal.’

This research was intended to tie together research that has been completed by Berg and Coutts (1994), Coutts and Berg (1993), Carvalho (1997), and Simes (1998). This previous research concluded the menstrual product advertisements negatively shape the female experience of menstruation. While some of the advertisements do negatively portray women and menstruation I do not think that women in the focus group see menstruation as a negative experience. This is an important conclusion as it suggests that the women are not influenced by the advertisements as much as I had initially thought.

The previous research has called for change in the way women are portrayed in menstrual product advertisements with the hope that it would help the way women and

menstruation are viewed in society. While change does take time, I believe that we are slowly moving toward the affirmation of menstruating women.

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## Appendix A: Ethical Consent

## LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear potential participant:

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my graduate thesis research. The purpose of this research is to see if it is possible for women to construct advertisements that deal with menstrual products in a woman-affirming manner. The process of constructing the advertisements will concern identifying what information should be included in the advertisements for specific products. I am interested in finding out what information about menstruation and menstrual management women feel should be included or not included in such advertisements, keeping in mind that advertisements must also reflect the goal of selling the specific menstrual product.

Each working group, consisting of six to eight women will be asked to listen to an educational presentation concerning the findings of previous research on the portrayal of women in menstrual product advertisements. The presentation will focus on the messages inherent in current menstrual product advertisements. Each working group will then be asked to develop text for an advertisement for one of the following generic menstrual products: pads, tampons, panty liners or ads targeted at adolescents. The discussions of each working group will be tape-recorded. The tapes will be used as data in the analysis of the design process and in identifying content that women feel they would like to see in such advertisements. The time commitment will be approximately three hours on one evening.

The subject of menstruation is a potentially embarrassing topic. At no time, will you as a participant be asked to reveal any personal information about your own menstrual management. Your identity is not relevant to the research and so there will be no need, whatsoever, to have anyone identified in the actual working groups where the discussions will be tape-recorded. Your identity is not needed in the analysis and therefore will not be part of the final written report. If you consent to participate in this study, you have the choice to contribute to the discussion as you feel appropriate and, of course, you may at any time excuse yourself from the working group without explanation. It is important that you understand that what is being studied is the content of the constructed advertisements for specific menstrual products and the processes involved in each working groups as they make decisions as to what to include or not include in the respective ads.

---

I agree to take part in this study by attending the educational presentation and by being a participant in one of the working groups.

Yes:

No:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

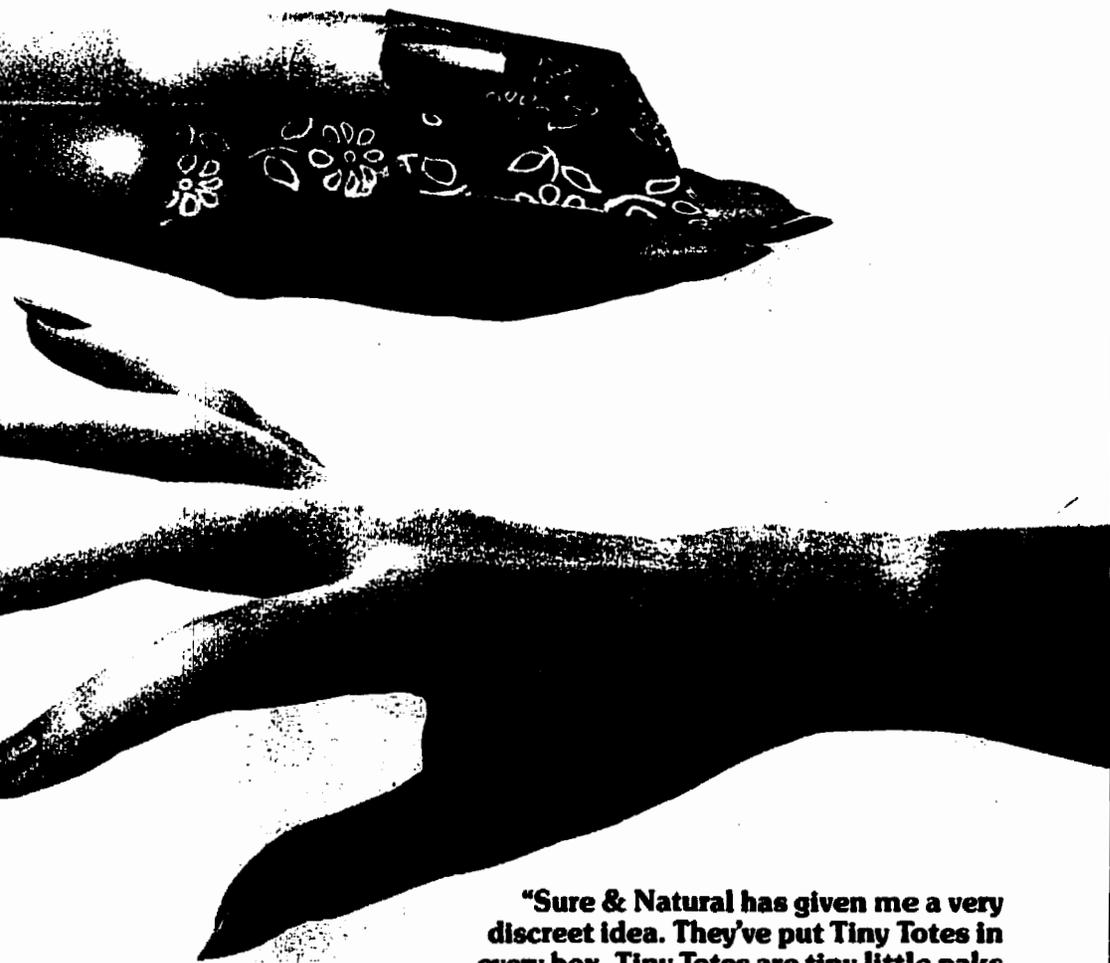
Two copies of this form are provided for you to complete, one of which you are expected to keep. The second copy will be kept by the principle investigator.

Thank you.

**Appendix B: Menstrual Product Advertisements**

# Sure & Natural. It tote it and toss it. Why, that's discreet!"

Appendix B1



"Sure & Natural has given me a very discreet idea. They've put Tiny Totes in every box. Tiny Totes are tiny little paks that make it extra easy to carry and dispose of each maxishield. I just tuck it... tote it...then toss it. And you can't get any more discreet than that!"



**Tiny Totes from Sure & Natural.  
For toting and tossing.**

# CAN YOU FIND THE NEW CAREFREE

*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.*

## VANTY PAK IN THIS PICTURE?

*SAVE 50¢ on the CAREFREE PANTY SHIELDS\* Vanty Pak.*

*To the Retailer: Upon receipt of this coupon toward the purchase of the specified product, we will reimburse you the face value plus handling. Applications for redemption on any other basis may constitute fraud and will, at our option, void coupon presented.*

*Applications for reimbursement accepted from principals only — mail to:  
JOHNSON & JOHNSON INC., Box 3000, Saint John, N.B. E2L 4E3.  
Limit one coupon per purchase. Expiration date: December 31, 1990.*



**CAREFREE PANTY SHIELDS\*. THE PRETTIEST WAY TO FEEL FRESH.**

*\*Trademark of Johnson & Johnson © JOHNSON & JOHNSON INC. 1989*

04301123



It's important to know that life can go on as usual even when I'm having my period. o.b.\* Slender tampons are so small I carry a whole day's

my body so I never worry about leakage. And it's so comfortable, I don't feel I'm wearing it.

With no applicator, o.b.\* tampons also mean less waste and a cleaner environment.

o.b.\* tampons... my little secret. With news this good, I just had to tell you!

o.b.\*... Simply natural.

**o.b.**

16 Slender Tampons

protection around (and nobody knows). And the new o.b.\* 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.\* has a silky-smooth cover that makes it easier to insert, and o.b.\* expands widthwise so it conforms to

.....  
• For Free Booklet & Sample call 1-800-361-4233 toll-free,  
• or write to: Johnson & Johnson Inc., P.O. Box 937,  
• Station M, Montreal, Quebec H1V 9Z9

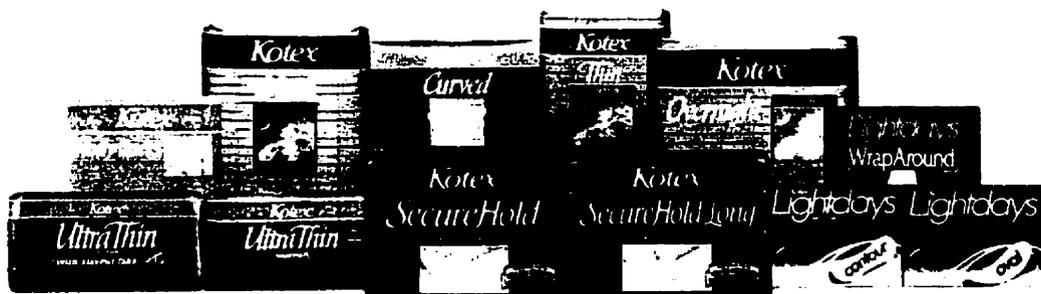
• Name \_\_\_\_\_  
• Address \_\_\_\_\_  
• City \_\_\_\_\_  
• Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
• Age \_\_\_\_\_

**o.b.**  
tampons FL 5/92



*Kotex understands what it means to be a woman.*

*That's why Kotex<sup>®</sup> makes such a wide range  
of feminine care products, from panty liners to maxis.  
So you can choose what meets your protection needs best.  
And get on with what's really important in your life.*



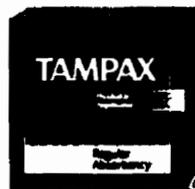
*For all you need to feel secure. **Kotex Understands.***

## Appendix B6



# Since your period is different from one day to the next shouldn't your protection be too?

Only Tampax tampons come in a full range of absorbencies. There's Super Plus for very heavy flow days; Super for medium to heavy flow days; Regular for light to medium flow days and Lites tampons, in an absorbency designed exclusively for your light flow days. You choose the combination of Tampax tampons that will give you the right protection. Isn't it nice to know there's an alternative to pads any day of your period?



TRUST IS **TAMPAX**  
tampons

# "WHY THE HECK DIDN'T I TRY THIS BEFORE?!"

THERE'S A  
REASON FOR  
ALL THOSE  
TAMPAX®  
ABSORBENCIES.

Chances are, your period starts off heavy and ends up kind of light. Well, if your flow changes, why shouldn't your tampon? Well, actually, it should.

DIFFERENT  
DAYS.

DIFFERENT ABSORBENCIES.  
HERE'S HOW IT WORKS.

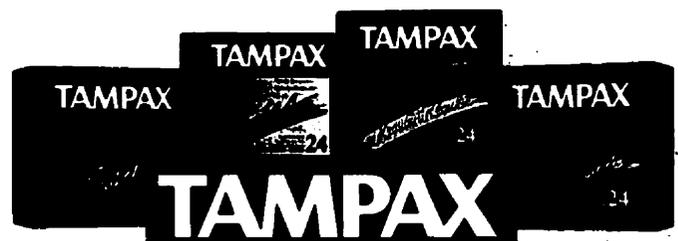
So simple, it's really kind of brilliant. You may start with Tampax Super or Super Plus absorbency tampons for your heavy days. Go to Tampax Regular



for medium days. And then Tampax Lites for your almost-over-but-not-quite-over days. They're smaller than other Tampax tampons and really comfortable. The idea is, you choose your absorbency based on your period.

THE RIGHT  
TAMPAX  
TAMPON  
AT THE  
RIGHT TIME.

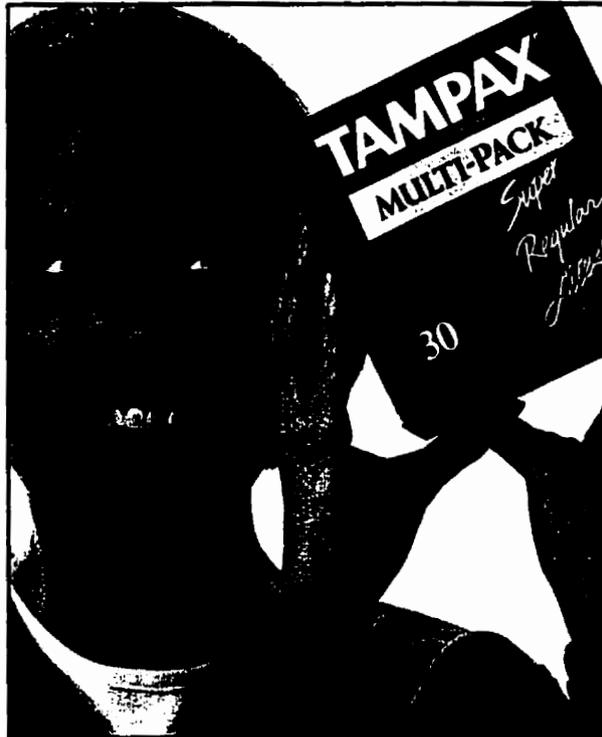
Protection that works for you every day of your period... now there's a concept!



# WHY THE HECK DIDN'T SOMEONE THINK OF THIS BEFORE?!

THE  
TAMPAX® TAMPON  
MULTI-PACK.  
SOMEONE'S LISTENING!

Chances are, your period starts off heavy and ends up kind of light. Well, if your flow changes, why shouldn't your tampon? Well, actually it should and we just made it easy.



And Tampax® Lites® tampons for your almost-over-but-not-quite-over days. They're smaller than other tampons and really comfortable. So now you can choose when to use a tampon instead of a pad.

PROTECTION.  
COMFORT.  
CONVENIENCE.  
HALLELUJAH!

DIFFERENT DAYS.  
DIFFERENT ABSORBENCIES.  
ALL IN ONE BOX.

Voilà! Exactly what you need when you need



it. Tampax Super absorbency tampons for your heavy days. Tampax Regular tampons for medium days.

Think of the Tampax Multi-Pack as tampons "tailored" to your flow. Guess you could say we're making periods more convenient, one box at a time.

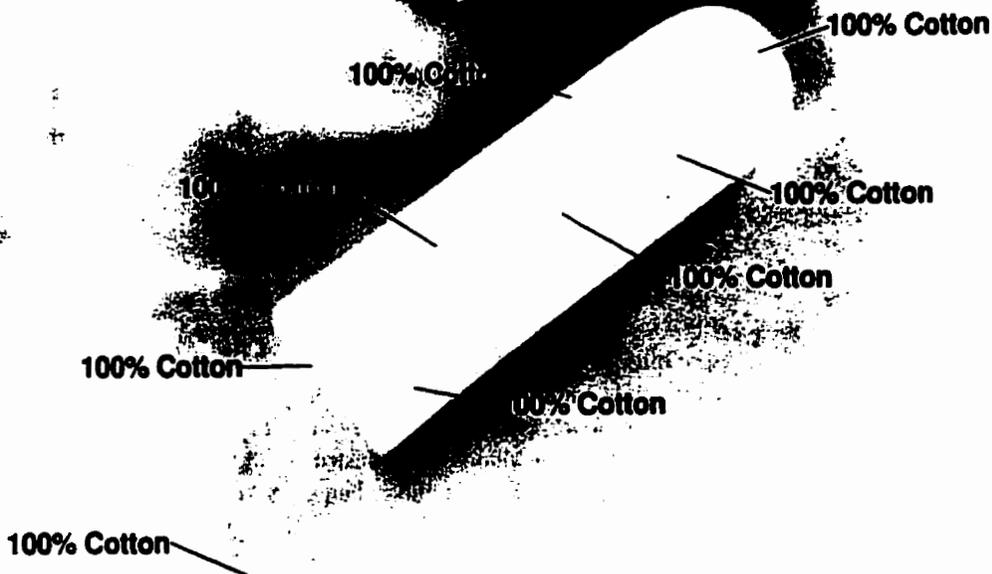
# TAMPAX

Visit the Tampax website at <http://www.tampax.com>

© 1998 Tampax Corp.

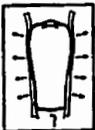
Introducing  
a non-applicator tampon that  
protects like nothing else.

Guess why?



**Tampax® Naturals™ Non-applicator tampons.**

New Tampax® Naturals™ tampons are the only leading tampons made completely of soft, naturally absorbent cotton. And they expand in all directions, fitting your



Expands all around



inner shape, to help protect from leakage.

So for natural protection try new Tampax® Naturals™ Non-applicator tampons.

Also available with an applicator.

**TRUST TAMPAX**

*My body's not like  
anyone else's.*

*So I want a tampon that  
adjusts to fit me -  
Playtex® Gentle Glide®*

*Only Playtex has a double-  
layer design that blooms to  
fit the contours of*



*nobody gives me  
protection like that.*

*And the comfort I've come  
to expect from Playtex.*

*I deserve that.*



*Comfortable protection for your body.*



Practically a stroke of genius.  
New Freedom<sup>®</sup> announces all new  
protection from side accidents.

*Here's where the maxi  
you're using now can  
run into trouble.*

*But the New Freedom maxi  
pad has a special peach strip  
designed to help protect you  
from side accidents.*

It's fresh, pretty, Absorbent. That special peach strip inside the New Freedom maxi pad actually helps draw moisture along the center, away from the sides.

It's the peachy new idea behind the best New Freedom ever.

A lot of protection in a little peach strip.



Available in thin, regular,  
thin super, and super maxis.

© 1989 Kimberly-Clark Corp.

**WE ALL KNOW  
BAKING SODA  
ABSORBS ODOURS.**



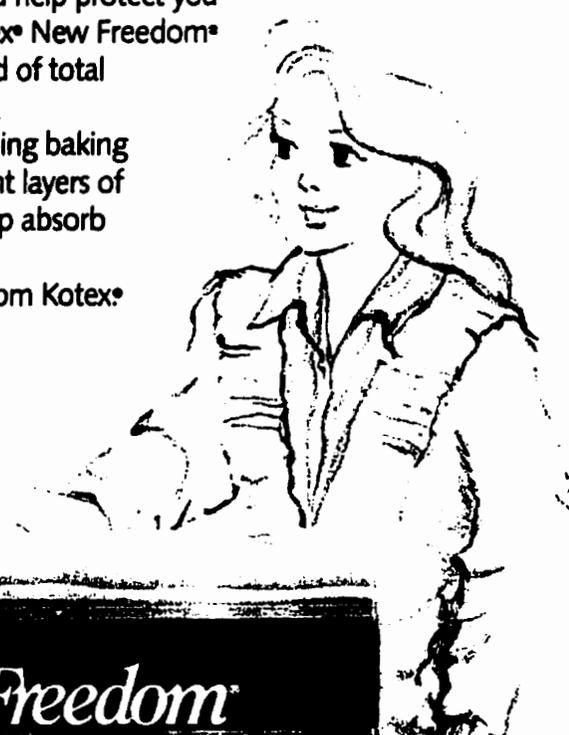
**But did you expect it in a panty liner?**

**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.

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!

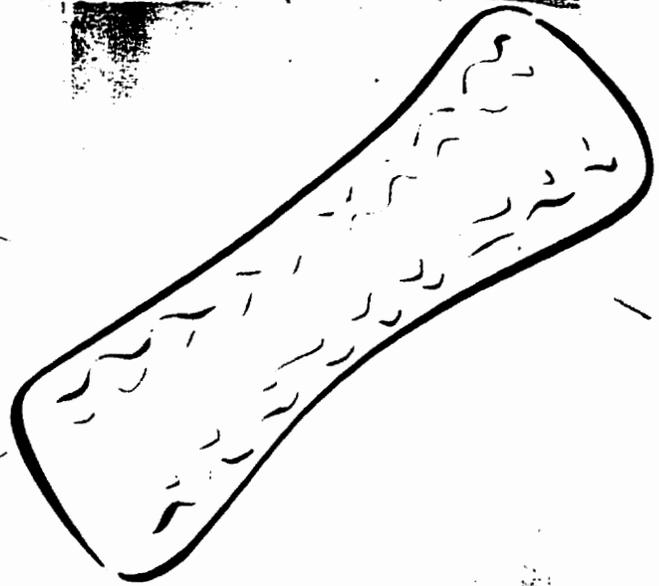
Another great new idea, from Kotex®



**Odour-absorbing baking soda, for your protection.**



Other pantliners just cover up the problem.



We help control it.

## Introducing Always Alldays odor-absorbing pantliners.

Now you can hold onto that clean morning feeling longer. Because now there's Alldays™ Pantliners from Always®. Alldays don't mask odor with scents and fragrance. Their new Dri-Weave topsheet and unique odor-absorbing core pull moisture and odor away from the surface. To help you keep that clean feeling longer.\*



\*vs. leading competitive regular pantliners. © P&G 1996

Keep that clean feeling longer.

# Why does real estate agent Bea Montague use Lightdays® Pantliners?



**"I like to feel  
just-showered fresh  
all day, every day."**

"For me, real estate has become a 24-hour lifestyle. I deal with as many clients at social gatherings and dinners as I do during office hours. And Lightdays help me keep that morning-shower freshness through the whole day, no matter how late it goes. Their shape is contoured so they're very comfortable.

Lightdays liners help me feel dry, fresh and comfortable. It's a good feeling that makes you more confident in yourself, and when you're talking to a client, that comes across."

*Bea Montague*

Kotex® Lightdays® Pantliners are designed with a special hourglass shape that curves where you curve. So they fit comfortably. They're also remarkably thin, with three adhesive strips to hold them firmly in place. Use Lightdays for extra protection during your period and to feel just-showered fresh, anytime.



**For just-showered  
freshness all day,  
every day.**

Appendix B17

FRESH AS THE



*Fresh Dressed Every Day  
Because You're A Woman  
Every Day.*

*Carefree*

Eventually, you're going to have to change.

The question is, will yours be?

With Dri-Weave, Always can.

absorbent pads so quickly, it will stand up to almost anything. Dri-Weave and a super-absorbent pad absorb moisture away faster than leading Ultra pads.\* For protection that stands up, even when you do.

\*vs. leading regular length Ultra with wings.



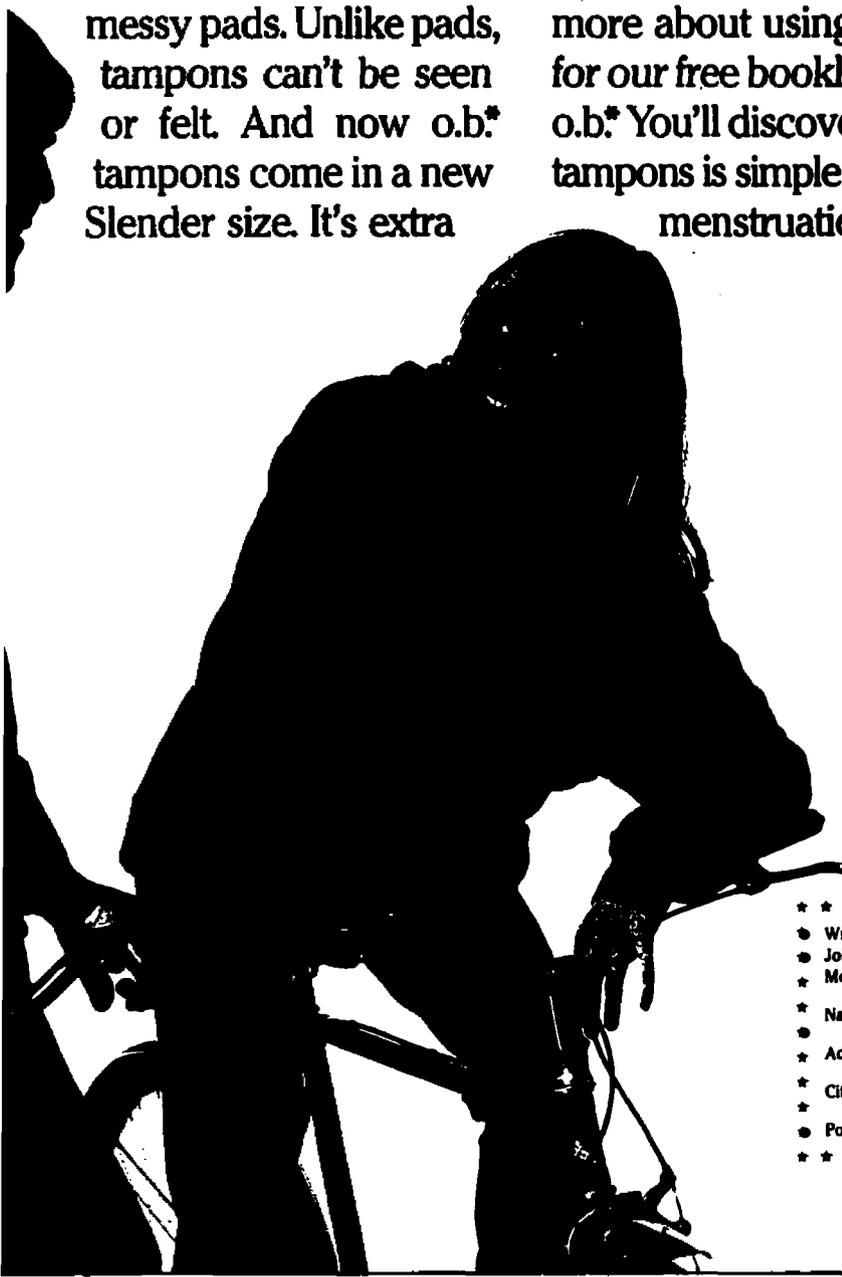
*Cleaner. Drier.\* always.\* Better Protection.\**



These days girls never have to give up their freedom.

Your period doesn't have to you from doing anything you to do. Like sports, swimming, dancing. Right from the first of your period you can use tampons instead of bulky, messy pads. Unlike pads, tampons can't be seen or felt. And now o.b.\* tampons come in a new Slender size. It's extra

slim but works the same way as our Regular, Super and Super Plus. So there's one just right for you. You'll feel comfortable and secure even in mini skirts, bikinis or tight jeans. If you want to know more about using tampons, write for our free booklet and sample of o.b.\* You'll discover why using o.b.\* tampons is simple and as natural as menstruation itself.



**o.b.**  
Simply natural.

\*\*\*\*\*  
● Write to: o.b.\* Information Director,  
● Johnson & Johnson, 2155 Pie IX Blvd.,  
★ Montréal, Québec H1V 2E4.  
★ Name \_\_\_\_\_  
★ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
★ City \_\_\_\_\_  
★ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ C.R. 5.  
\*\*\*\*\*

© Johnson & Johnson, 1988

