Menstruation Goes Public: Aspects of Women's Menstrual Experience in Montreal, 1920-1975

by

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is all at once a cultural, social, historical, and biological process. Intertwined, these forces create menstrual experiences which are neither fixed nor universal, but rather adaptable and transformable not only between cultures, but from within cultures as well. How these factors interrelate, what menstrual discourse they create, and how that translates into women's everyday lives, becomes the focus of this research. Structured around the relationship between prescription and reality, this study examines the interplay of those who defined the menstrual discourse: doctors, mothers, and the sanitary napkin industry, and those who experienced it.

Listening to the lives of twenty-four women, born between 1910 and 1965, a complex and ambiguous tale of the menstrual experience emerges. Through their narratives, we learn the importance of early instruction by mothers; the emphasis placed on hygiene and concealment; the effect menstruation had on women's sexual, feminine, and (re)productive identity. Once women's voices are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the dynamic between prescription deeming menstruation as unclean or deviant and women's reality is not straightforward. Women reacted to the menstrual discourse, at times they rejected it, other times adhered to it, but for the most part, simply transformed it to meet their daily needs.

EXTRAIT

La menstruation est à la fois un processus culturel, social, historique et biologique. Ces forces mutuellement liées créent des expériences menstruelles qui ne sont ni fixes ni universelles, mais adaptables et transformables non seulement d'une culture à l'autre mais également au sein d'une culture. La relation existant entre ces facteurs; le discours sur la menstruation créé par ces derniers; et la place qu'ils tiennent dans la vie quotidienne des femmes sont les intérêts principaux de la présente recherche. Cette étude, fondée sur la relation existant entre ce que la société prescrit aux femmes et la réalité, examine le rôle joué par ceux qui ont défini le discours sur la menstruation, c'est-à-dire, les médecins, les mères, l'industrie des serviettes sanitaires et les personnes ayant vécu ce processus.

Un conte complexe et ambigu portant sur l'expérience menstruelle émerge du discours tenu par vingt-quatre femmes nées entre 1910 et 1965. À travers leurs histoires, elles nous enseignent l'importance d'une instruction faite par les mères dès la jeunesse; nous expliquent combien l'hygiène et la dissimulation étaient de rigueur; et racontent l'effet de la menstruation sur la vie féminine et sexuelle des femmes ainsi que sur leur identité en tant qu'êtres (re)productifs. Lorsque l'on tient compte de l'opinion des femmes, il devient clair que la dynamique existant entre la prescription de la société--voulant que les menstrues soient malpropres et anormales--et la réalité des femmes est confuse. Les femmes ont réagi au discours sur la menstruation quelques fois en le rejetant, d'autres fois en y adhérant mais, le plus souvent, simplement en le transformant afin qu'il réponde à leurs besoins quotidiens.

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IN MEMORY OF VIRGINIA (1921-1996)

INTRODUCTION

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES, VOICE VERSUS RHETORIC

While menstruation may appear as nothing more than a natural, physiological process experienced monthly by most women, its meaning is derived from a particular cultural, historical and social context which is impossible to ignore. From the moment a pubescent girl first witnesses the display of stained menstrual blood, she is enveloped by and becomes part of a much larger set of cultural criteria defining and shaping her own perceptions of herself and her place within society. Her experience becomes entangled by a complex web of factors including not only her own body but also by family, friends, schooling, economic forces, industry, and values at work in larger society.

There exists a broad grouping of historical and feminist writings which examines how the female body - menstruation playing a large part - has been described and defined within a framework of gendered normatives. Historians such as Londa Schiebinger, Wendy Mitchinson, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, have convincingly illuminated the ways in which the female body, presented as a deviation from the male norm, has been used as a basis for women's secondary and marginal position within larger society.[1] Together they have shown how from Aristotle and Galen to the rise of the scientific medical rational of the nineteenth century, women's reproductive organs have been viewed as leaving women vulnerable to illness, incapable of intellectual endeavors,

and innately weaker. This, in turn, serves as a justification for women's relegation to the home, for it is only as mother and wife that a woman could ever hope to maintain any balance of health and happiness. Her body, and more specifically, her reproductive cycle, it seems, defines, controls, and directs her.

Following along similar lines, though from a much broader perspective is Janice Delaney's, Mary Jane Lupton's, and Emily Toth's *The Curse*. Studying North American twentieth-century literature, film, television, advertisement, industry, medicine and religion, Delaney *et al.* illustrate the many cultural and social forces which when combined, formulate and perpetuate a negative conceptualization of menstruation. North American views of menstruation are nothing short of what Delaney *et al.* believe to be a universal view of the "menstrual taboo". Drawing parallels from cross-cultural studies, they position North American women as being seen as physically and emotionally handicapped, if not polluted, by their bleeding bodies, and, as such, are persistently isolated and devalued.[2]

Certainly the rhetoric of women's difference, if not inferiority, looms heavily over North American views of menstruation, but it deserves certain qualifications. Though Joan Jacob Brumberg agrees with Delaney *et al.*'s notion that American society does have a set of beliefs - the encouragement for secrecy, privacy, and concealment - as being consistent with the notion of the 'menstrual taboo' - she warns her readers of its lack of universality.[3] Unlike the previous authors, Brumberg takes into

account the variances, be it historical, economical, generational, biological or cultural that make it difficult, if not impossible, to create any generalized theory of menstrual symbolism. According to Brumberg, "the trouble with a great deal of thinking on this subject is that it portrays our menstrual taboo - and menarche itself - as fixed and universal when, in fact, both are changeable, subject to reformulation, and highly specific to time and place."[4]

Anthropological studies have also recently begun to take appraisal of the limitations of past ethnographic reporting on menstrual practices. While the widespread occurrence of menstrual taboos and their cross-cultural similarities have tempted scholars in the past to establish a universal theoretical framework, anthropologists such as Thomas Buckley and Alma Gotlieb find the reductionist approach limiting. Not only has little been established by such a format, but it also falsely simplifies the diversity that does exist both cross-culturally and even within single cultures. According to Buckley and Gotlieb:

> the majority of ethnographic reports of menstrual customs and beliefs have been restricted to terse statements on 'the' meaning of menstrual blood - seen always as symbolically dangerous or otherwise defiling - and to normative accounts of the practices instituted to contain the perceived negative potency of the substance. These analyses have great predictability, for again and again they centre on the concepts of taboo (supernaturally sanctioned law) and pollution (symbolic contamination)... The anthropological study of menstruation has thus tended toward redundancy.[5]

Though such past works do possess a degree of relevancy and importance, anthropologists have now begun to look beyond them. The two most significant aspects of these recent anthropological

studies are, first, the rejection of the more traditional male-focused structure of ethnological inquiry (in recognizing the discrepancy that exists amongst men's and women's perceptions on menstrual beliefs, anthropologists have now recognized the relevancy in the participation of menstruating women themselves) and, second, the introduction of biocultural considerations in symbolic analysis (though in no means can this be regarded as biological determinism, anthropologists do recognize the affect biology has on cultural constructs surrounding menstruation). Together, these two shifts have opened the field for studies on the differences and ambiguities in menstrual symbolism, the interaction between biological and cultural factors, intragender variations, and the effects - both positive and negative - of menstrual systems on both women and men.[6]

Such recent anthropological studies have directed my inquiry to move beyond simply looking at prescription alone, and delve instead into the reality of women's experiences themselves. The Rosenbergs' and Mitchinson have convincingly proven the views presented by the medical field both reflected as well as perpetuated gendered normatives and, while Delaney *et al.*'s study may have had its weaknesses, it has been successful in showing that aspects of a menstrual taboo existed and that it affected women's status in society. Nonetheless, one remains unclear as to the degree this view has been internalized by women themselves. In fact, it has not even been made certain as to what women's views might be. Though more sensitive studies, such as Brumberg's, have

hinted at women's personal views and practices, they still, for the most part, have assumed that women blindly adhered to the social constructs defining menstruation. Indeed, while these studies have clearly illustrated the negative PRESCRIPTION of menstruation, they fail to acknowledge its daily lived experience.

Women's historian, Andrée Lévesque, has consistently reiterated throughout her teachings and her studies that there are differences between prescribed and actual behaviour. Levésque, interested in the study of the extent to which personal practice conforms to the ideal and how far it departs from it, asks if women always conformed to the model imposed on them as well as questions the reasons behind those who violated the rules and conventions.[7] Motivated by similar questions myself, I have directed my own study by examining not so much the prescriptions of menstruation in twentieth-century Canada, but rather how these prescriptions were adopted and transformed to fit women's realities. I believe once women's own voices are given recognition and place, the menstrual story will become a far more complex tale - one that will recognize the full force of such factors as information mediums (friends, school, parents, or advertisement), age, physical experience, hygienic practices, sexuality, femininity, and productivity.

Uncovering women's experiences is not an easy task, especially when dealing with the very private nature of menstruation. Though there exists an abundant source of literature by (mostly male) doctors, psychologists, and educators expressing their own opinions and views on the experience, little can be found written by women

themselves.[8] Diaries, autobiographies, and fiction have been of some use, but remain limited since they rarely illuminate more than a moment of what is truly a complex occurrence.[9] Left with more questions than answers, I realized a useful approach in learning about women's views on menstruation was to ask the women themselves.

Oral history is all at once an issue of politics, culture and communication - not only in the material it engages, but in "in the very method of engagement, in the altered relationship between historian and 'source', between academic and public discourse, and between dominant cultural forms, assumptions, and institutions and the alternatives that practitioners of these methods so often hope to empower."[10] These traits, though the strength of the oral historical method, lie contrary to conservative, traditional academic practice and, as such, hinder oral history's complete acceptance as a 'serious' method of historical inquiry.[11] With its objects of study being also its subjects; with its sources as living memories being both subjective and partial; and with its dialogue between the historian and his 'evidence' being personal and interactive, oral history is unable to coincide with traditional forms of investigation and interpretation. Simply, oral history cannot work within a format which emphasizes objective historical research as a non-personal and non-implicating relationship between the historian, his/her 'evidence', and his/her historical account.

Nor should it. While these tensions have prohibited oral

history's complete acceptance into mainstream history, they have also served to highlight its uniqueness and its strengths. Rooted deeply in the process of proof and justification, oral history has, from such difficulties, developed an extensive theoretical framework which goes beyond scientific 'objectivity' and instead finds credibility in its subjectivity, shared interpretive authority (as coined by Michael Frisch), and politicized nature.[12] Indeed, from its defense, oral historians have developed a theoretical framework which challenges the more traditional views of history making. Oral historians have come to realize that in the potential to change the content of historical writing, lies the potential to change the process as well.

A pioneer study in the introduction of the oral history method is Paul Thompson's authoritative work, *The Voice of the Past*. According to Thompson, oral history proves itself a transformative socialist practice in terms of its purpose, content, and the social relations of its production. History, argues Thompson, should be a method and tool for change, a challenge towards traditional forms of understanding history, rather than simply a 'celebration' of marginalized pasts.[13] For Thompson, this challenge emerges out of the oral history method. Indeed, unlike traditional sources which are primarily authoritative and administrative in nature, oral history makes possible, so Thompson claims, "a much fairer trial", for "witnesses can now also be called from the underclasses, the underprivileged, and the defeated."[14] Not only does this provide a challenge to the established elitist-based account, but it also

demands the historian an altogether different mode of working. The historian, working with a living source, has the chance to "sit at the feet of others" and learn and understand their experiences.[15] Simply, oral history, according to Thompson, is to give history back to the people - a history, in fact, written "from below."[16] It is in this way that Thompson proclaims oral history to be democratic.

While Thompson's work highlights the promises of oral history, weaknesses still exist in his overall theory. The main problem with Thomspon's work is that he ignores, in fact enhances, the relations of power that enter into the method itself. By defending the quality of his source - or more specifically the quality of memory - Thompson introduces a conservative orthodox historical method.[17] This includes a whole barrage of methods such as: cross-referencing of sources, an understanding of the link between memory and age, proper interview techniques so as not to lead the interviewee, testing of memory fallibility, the adoption of norm of 'representativeness' drawn from the sampling of methods of quantitative sociology, and the adequate classification of the statistical population. The danger to this approach is that it reproduces the very divisions of power oral history supposedly eradicated. Indeed, this traditional oral history practice, places ultimate control in the hands of the historian. Not only is it she/he who directs the interview process, determines the value of answers, and determines the subject of the conversation, but she/he does so under the pretence of equality and democracy. This false

rapport, as feminist sociologist Ann Oakley writes, in turn becomes far more exploitive and manipulative than any other method for what it does in fact is it tempts, under the illusion of 'democracy', the source to share his/her personal and often private past experiences, feelings, and beliefs, while all the while using, manipulating and controlling its sources.[18]

To eradicate this problem, Alessandro Portelli argues that the starting point of oral history's integration and acceptance lies in the recognition that "the credibility of oral sources is a different credibility."[19] Searching out ways of extrapolating fact from bias and truth from distortion only weakens oral history's possibilities and potentialities. The utility of oral testimony, argues Portelli, lies not in its adherence to objectivity, but rather in its divergence from it, where imagination, symbolism, and desire enter. Through the witnesses narrative, the historian learns not just of what people did, but "what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did."[20] It provides the nuance, ambience, and personality of an event and, in so doing, facilitates, an entirely new level of meaning. Our understanding of the past, to put it simply, no longer exists in a clear linear progressive fashion, but rather lives as a more complex and multi-layered tale of events, impressions, and motivations.

Portelli describes one of the most adhering qualities of oral history: its ability to breathe life into any account, however, there are weaknesses to this simplistic view. To proclaim that the

strength of oral history lies primarily on the level of context, risks the chance of reducing the accounts to mere anecdotes, useful only for their personable 'real life' quality. As Frisch criticizes, this approach consequently slots the witnesses' stories into the category of personal experience, without recognizing their authority in offering historical judgements of a broader nature.[21] This perspective is a dangerous one for not only does it treat people's memories as mere commodities, but it also follows closely along the lines of class and power. "Tell us what happened and what you feel," Frisch finds the message to be, "and our readers will worry about what it means and how to think about it."[22] Accordingly, this traditional use of oral history views it as functioning primarily as a source used to gain new information and insights. In this sense, while the oral history method challenges the masculinist, classist, eurocentric bias in history by illuminating histories which have long been ignored and silenced, it still assumes a more traditional sense of the object and nature of explanation.

Recognizing the inadequacies of such a viewpoint, radical historians have taken a complete opposite direction. Desiring to avoid all elitist and contextual dangers, radical historians use oral history to bypass historical interpretation itself.[23] The narrative, so the argument goes, stands as history - as though it were somehow a direct representation of the past, and, as such, able to provide a truer clearer image. In this sense all authority is returned to the speakers themselves; the historian voluntarily

remains silent, keeping all comments to him/herself. Not only does this allow the interviewees the opportunity to describe the past as they saw it, but, in so doing, it is believed that the narrators will recognize and understand the roots of their own exploitation and, in turn, find their own solutions. Indeed according to many radical oral historians, "once the people can be put in touch with their own history, the hegemonic dominant culture will be undermined and false consciousness dispelled."[24]

Unfortunately, as Frisch shows through his experience at a radical symposium in the strikes of the 1930s, the matter is hardly that straightforward:

> The radical historians present heard in the tapes, evidence of pervasive class conflict and a call to militancy based on labour's proud heritage of struggle. But many of the trade unionists present came away with a very different message: remembrance of the 'bad old days' of strikes and measured by their current no-strike contracts, grievance arbitration, and pension benefits - they had made since the 1930s.[25]

Significantly, continues Frisch, the program offered no opportunity for collectively discussing, contrasting, and evaluating these different interpretations and, consequently, the political content in the history was lost. Frisch argues that the approach does little to break down the levels of power - if anything, the structures are encouraged. As with earlier more traditional approaches to oral history, the radical approach continues to encourage witnesses to regard their history from a safe distance, a distance where the harsher more difficult aspects of the past - and its meaning with the present - have been blurred. By discouraging the interviewee any place in critical judgement of his

own understanding of the past, she/he remains blinded by the very structures of domination she/he is discussing.

Arguing against this, Frisch reasserts that 'allowing' the 'inarticulate' to speak for themselves is not enough. Oral historians must share the responsibility in interpretation, in analysis, and in explanation. Frisch's notion of 'shared authority' does not relinquish completely the traditional uses of oral history, but rather combines the two into an entirely new and provocative methodological structure. Frisch finds a balance between what he considers to be "more history" (the historian owns complete authority over his/her 'source' - in this way, two pieces of information run hierarchically against one another - the oral witness' narrative as the subordinate and the historian's narrative as the dominant) and "no history" (in which the historian grants complete authority to the witness' words - which is not history, but simply memory) by acknowledging that both the narrator and the historian play a role in judging, re-imagining, and explaining the past.[26] The former's role exists on the original level - memory - while the latter's exists on the final level - interpretation of memory. According to Frisch, not only might this dialogue from different bases of authority create a more complex and well-rounded historical account, but it also, through its very practice, promotes a more democratized historical process.[27] The consequences of such a methodology are positive, for it allows, in turn, broader participation in the discussion and writing of history; a discussion which allows for the incorporation of diverse

experiences and perspectives.[28]

Although Frisch's work serves as an important contribution, his methodological framework is not without its problems. As much as Frisch's basic notion of 'shared authority' is a good one, his approach is an impossible one. The method may appear to place the researcher and his/her informants in collective, reciprocal search for understanding; but, as feminist historians have recognized, the research process is ultimately that of the researcher, however modified or influenced by the informants.[29] Frisch may recognize the authority in the testimony of his witnesses, but that authority is not able to move beyond being simply a memory WITHOUT the help of the interpreter. It is the researcher who asks the questions (and, thus, directs the answers), who narrates, and who 'authors' the oral history. It is she/he who is responsible for extracting what parts of the memory are influenced by the present, what parts can influence the present, and what remain as simply part of the past. While Frisch believes the witness must share in the interpretation, it is truly the historian who creates the dialogue. In the last instance, oral history is a written document structured primarily for a researcher's purposes, offering a researcher's interpretation, and registered in a researcher's voice. The oral witness and the historian may have sincerely believed that the participation was one of shared authority, but, clearly, it is the historian who maintains the ultimate control. Bottom line, the notion of "involving people in exploring what it means to remember...to make [memories] active and alive as opposed to mere

objects of collection and classification" is a contradiction in terms.[30] The witnesses' stories are still viewed as sources, living or not, and it is the historian who maintains the ultimate control.

Feminist oral historians have over the past decade illuminated the essential dichotomy between oral history as source and oral history as method. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, discussion of feminist methodology had assaulted the hierarchal forms of traditional research, urging feminist researchers instead to take a more egalitarian democratic approach which stressed reciprocity between the researcher and her subject.[31] Oral history, with its experiential, subjective, and interpersonal method, was a tempting offer for feminists in search for women's agency and everyday experience ("personal is political"). However, through the years, as the oral historical method has been put into practice, feminists have come to recognize inherent weaknesses in its democratic theory. As Judith Stacey asserts "the field-worker's presence...represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships, a system of relationships that the researcher is far freer than the researched to leave."[32] Recognizing this dichotomy yet unwilling to discard the practice in its entirety, feminist oral historians have moved away from "a celebration of women's experience to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of doing feminist oral history" - one which attempts to balance the inequities, though all the while recognizing that they exist.[33]

Taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the oral history method, I approached my research with both excitement and caution. The distinct lives of twenty-four fascinating women, whose co-operation and openness has provided much insight into the realm of menstruation, became the boundary and focus of my research. The requirements for those chosen were based on two factors. First, to determine the existence of continuity and change over time, I divided the group into two cohorts - twelve women born between 1910-1925 and another twelve born between 1950-1965. The use of these two cohorts would ensure that all women would have begun menstruating between the earliest and latest years of my study. Though I could have interviewed any woman who had menstruated during the years chosen, I felt it important to specify and include the stages, pre-menarche and menarche, within my analysis, as I believed that it was during these early years that women's views on menstruation were most solidly shaped.

The years 1920 to 1975, were chosen as the boundary of my research for not only do they highlight such potentially transformative forces as the first successful introduction of a manufactured sanitary napkin, Kotex, in 1921, the development of the tampon in the 1930s, the rise of expert involvement in the education of young adolescents including the sanitary napkin industry, the distribution of pamphlets as early as 1932 and film beginning in 1946, and the first adhesive pad introduced in 1971, but it also provided the greatest potential source of interviewees. To find a large enough group of women who were born earlier than

1910, would have been next to impossible.

While these twenty-four women serve as the basis of my interpretation, I have included some interviews of women (which I had researched for an earlier paper) who began menstruating in the 1950s. I have also included one interview with a woman born in 1899 - to learn of her experiences, her attitudes, her beliefs have proven an irreplaceable value. Her narrative provides, though certainly from one unique perspective, some insight and context of an earlier time. While it was beyond the boundaries of my own study, it serves as an important bases in understanding issues of continuity and change in both the menstrual discourse and its lived experience.

Second, the women who were interviewed were chosen randomly without consideration of their class, cultural, ethnic, or sexual background. Dissatisfied with popular feminist works' emphasis on a universal taboo, my objective, instead, was to consider all aspects including how economic and cultural differences could alter and influence women's experience. Feminist historians have come to recognize that the notion of a 'woman's shared community' united under a common ideological oppression is misleading and incomplete. As historian Nancy A. Hewitt noted, "not only do the realities of social and material conditions affect women's experiences differently, but in many ways women have also participated in the subordination of their black, Native American, immigrant, and working-class sisters."[34] With this realization, feminist historians studying the experiences of ethnic or working-class

women have come to demand a renewed attention to the complexity of women's experience and recognition of the conflict that it engenders.[35]

While it is important to recognize the different forces influencing women's lives, there has over the past decade, been a tendency to emphasize one form of historical oppression over another. Joy Parr reminds us that women's lives are not disconnected, but rather a product of intertwining forces including class and gender. Historians cannot separate such social relations precisely because it is counter to the reality of women's lived experiences simultaneously.[36] It is from this holistic point of view that I approached my paper. Despite the transformation over the past fifteen years in feminist historical writings, there continues to exist within the realm of menstruation, notions of a universal experience. Hoping to move away from an 'essentialist' biological viewpoint, I decided not to limit my study to simply one group of women.

This decision, while I believe a solid one, nonetheless has its weaknesses. Despite the randomness of choice, the women interviewed were primarily brought up from a middle-class background, were, with the exception of two women, anglophone, all heterosexual, and of European descent. Among the number of women who represented different backgrounds were one respondent who came from an Italian home, two women from francophone homes, and four from working-class environments. These differences formed too small a sample to warrant any general conclusions regarding

possible diversity in experiences. As such, any evidence which may have suggested variances affected by class, education, and ethnicity, could only be implied or inferred. Had it truly been possible to construct an historical analysis which would allow class and ethnic comparisons within my narrative, a much larger selected and planned base of women would have been required.

The formal interviews were divided into two sessions, each lasting roughly forty-five minutes to an hour. The first interview served the purpose of introducing the respondent to the interview process, while allowing myself to get to know my respondent's background in greater detail. Questions were based on childhood upbringing, familial relations, schooling, work, and leisure activities. This first interview, I believe, was an important addition as it allowed the respondent and myself to get better acquainted and to become more comfortable with one another.[37] Women seemed to enjoy, as I did, 'walking down memory lane', often thinking of things that, as one women said, they "haven't thought of in more than thirty years."[38] The interview never lasted just one hour, for once the tape was turned off, conversations continued on well into the evening often over a cup of tea at the kitchen table. I often learned much more of the women then, than I had during the interview itself. With this introduction, women often informed me of their looking forward to the second interview, curious as to what I might ask and what they would be able to remember. She would "have to clear out the old cobwebs," one women told me over the telephone, but was enthusiastic at the prospect.[39]

With the first interview behind us, the second based solely on the topic of menstruation ran smoothly. The topic of menstruation is a personal and private affair, but with the positive experiences of the first interviews, the women were more comfortable throughout the entire process. There still existed areas of apprehension, though I can only speak of myself in this case, especially when discussing issues of sexuality. Nonetheless, overall, despite my own awkwardness in prying further than I felt necessary, the interviews seemed generally open and candid.

Indeed, though I had formulated a large range of questions spanning from educational sources to menstrual products (see Appendix B), the interviews more often developed into unstructured conversations, rather than a straightforward question-answer session.[40] Women provided all the information they felt to be important in a narrative they structured on their own. While I made certain that all questions, by the end of the interview, had been answered - to ensure uniformity - women were encouraged to speak freely of what they felt important. Not only did this often result in unexpected pieces of information (for instance, one women told me how she used to use sanitary napkins to wax her car, while another told me how, during the Second World War, women used the pads to buff their boots), but it also weakened the barrier of control and direction typically held by the historian. While in no way do I wish to portray this format of an interview as completely free of power structures, I hoped in some ways it may have weakened them. The women voiced what they felt essential to their own

experiences, and as such, have helped to shape their own history.

Another way in which I hoped to deconstruct the level of control over the oral historical process was to involve women in the interpretation of their own experiences. This was often done throughout the interview itself, as women were asked to hypothesize reasons behind certain attitudes and behaviours as well as to why there often existed a discrepancy between the two. In addition, their participation was also included on the level of interpretation and analysis of the thesis production. Though not all women were involved in this, two women - one from each cohort - who had expressed interest in reading my findings, were asked to read a draft and include a critique of the treatment and representation of women's voices.

Despite all these attempts to increase women's participation in the making and writing of the history of the menstrual experience, to claim a co-operative, "equal sisterhood" (to coin Joan Sangster) in its making and writing of history would be false.[41] As historian Sangster asserts, though oral historians may presume to understand and present their respondents faithfully, this is not always possible. The process of historical writing demands judgement and critical analysis, even if this results in contradicting the voices of our 'living sources'. Oral historians, Sangster asserts, must recognize that the historians own views may not always coincide with that of the respondents who participated in the historical study - our analysis may contradict women's

words, just as our feminist perspectives may be rejected by the women themselves.[42] This certainly lies true with regards to my own study, for despite all attempts to present women's own opinions and beliefs without distortion, my own interpretation and development of the study, in the final count, took precedence - often in direct conflict with women's claims. As Joan Sangster reminded, their lies a strength and a necessity to recognize that while "we can honour our obligation never to...purposely...distort their lives,...in the last resort it is our responsibility as historians to convey the insights of our interviewees, using our own insight."[43] As such, I have chosen to approach oral historical research with the attempt to incorporate degrees of 'shared authority', without losing sight the impossibility, if not significance, of the historian's added word.

As important as women's own voice is to the narrative of menstruation, it must be preceded by some consideration and analysis of the existing prescriptions. Public discourse is a forceful influence upon personal views, and as such, plays an important role in the realities of women's experiences. That women themselves would adopt the social conventions established by men who controlled the Church, the law, the state, and the medical profession, should come as little surprise, since these women wish to survive in a society whose standards are defined and enforced by men. And yet, while the conventions and their enforcements are certainly strong forces in maintaining the social norm, women do not soak in these discourses like a sponge, unquestioning and all

accepting. There exists a negotiation between the menstrual prescription and women's realities. At times women accept it, other times seemingly reject it, but for the most part, simply transform it to meet their own needs and realities.

While oral history serves as a useful primary source for understanding women's position on menstrual norms, without any analysis of the prescriptions themselves this study would remain incomplete. Public discourse is a forceful influence upon personal views, and as such, plays an important role in the realities of women's experiences. As a way of gaining access into the realm of convention, I have chosen to focus on advertisements found in Montreal's leading magazines, *Chatelaine* and *La Revue Moderne*, and newspapers, *La Presse* and the *Montreal Star*, as well as the corporate materials supplied between the years 1946 and 1961 produced by Kimberly-Clark (Kotex).[44] The aforementioned were chosen for their wide readership in both the francophone and anglophone community in Montreal. From these sources, analysis on advertisements for products such as sanitary pads, tampons, and medication for menstrual discomfort was included. The content and ideology of the messages surveyed were fairly homogeneous, between French and English newspapers as well as between newspaper and magazine. A sampling of advertisements from the American magazine, *Ladies Home Journal*, suggests that advertisements were mostly American in origin. It appears that, by the early 1930s, companies adapted their advertising to the Canadian market by including "Made in Canada", where applicable, or by translating advertisements into

French for the francophone market. All advertisements were aimed at a female middle-class readership, specifically mothers, young women, and, by the 1940s, female adolescents. The educational materials supplied by Kimberly-Clark, the most important manufacturer of feminine hygiene products until it lost domination in the 1960s to Johnson's and Johnson's Modess brand, contained many of the same messages found within both the French and English advertisements. These pamphlets were particularly useful because of the important role they played in the interviewee's narratives.

Advertisements and educative materials, as sources of prescription, rather than written documents such as medical journals, were chosen for two reasons. First, marketing and educative materials had tremendous influence in shaping women's views on menstruation. By prudently and consciously manipulating widely accepted conventions to sell menstrual products, advertisements and educative materials served as a strong force in the continuity of norms. Indeed, advertisements highlighted and perpetuated, if not helped create, the dominant (patriarchal and class based) conventions, values, and norms held by society. While one cannot prove concisely the degree to which advertisements act as a socializing agent, it is clear that they reflected people's needs, wants, and desires. Indeed, as Roland Marchand argues:

> the ads actually surpass most other recorded communications as a basis for plausible inference about popular attitudes and values. Among elite communicators, advertisers have been motivated by a particularly direct and intense need to understand and communicate effective with their audiences...assessing audience response.[45]

Historians and other scholars of the mass media no longer accepting

the view that advertisements, or other forms of communication, shape an unknowing and passive audience, do, nonetheless recognize their power. Indeed, scholars recognize that through the repeated messages and ideas, there lay tremendous power in establishing "broad frames of reference and boundaries of public discussion."[46] Though it is impossible to examine the degree of advertisements' role in the reinforcement and creation of certain values and mores, there is little doubt that the constant and consistent dissemination of certain ideas and images helped shape and reinforce North American culture.[47]

Secondly, there existed an intimacy between the advertisements, even more so with corporate materials, and their readership which other sources lack. For the women interviewed, advertisements and corporate sources were, besides mothers, by far the most immediate instructional forces. These materials presented themselves as accurate and factual, and thus gained a trust and confidence amongst their readers.

These two sources combined, oral history and the prescriptive context, offer greater understanding of the menstrual message and its reality. It is with these forces in mind, that this thesis has taken its ultimate form and structure. The study begins with an examination of menstrual instruction prior to or at menarche. The main focus of this first chapter deals with a mother's particular and unique role in the menstrual education while recognizing the effect other sources such as the sanitary napkin industry had over this dynamic. The second chapter, will explore how the menstrual

message, with its emphasis on hygiene, management, and concealment, affected women's views towards their bleeding bodies. The third chapter will examine the ways in which menstruation and its 'hygienic' message affected women's femininity and sexuality, and, in turn, how this discourse was transformed by women to meet their everyday realities. Finally, the fourth chapter will examine the ways in which women have attempted to deal with a body which was deemed deviant to the male defined norm.

If there exists one underlying impression from this exploration, it is how women have learned to live within a society which has judged their healthy bleeding bodies as something that is dirty, abnormal, and restricting. The women interviewed understood all too well the historical and cultural confinements placed upon their bodies. In their daily dealings of their own cycle, they learned that menstruation was seen as unhygienic, unhealthy, and unaesthetic and, in turn, how this resulted in their own status as being viewed as less productive, less sexual, less feminine - less of their normal self. They learned of it within their homes as their mothers hid the container of soaking pads or sanitary box from view. They experienced it at school when the teacher excused them or their peers from gym because of menstruation. They heard it through the jokes and teasing, experienced it as they sat by the side of the pool or on the beach while their friends swam, understood it when they witnessed someone walk home with a shirt tied around her waist or walked out of the classroom backwards. They learned it through the conflicting and ambiguous messages of

educative pamphlets or the counsels of advertisers, or simply sensed it by the uncommunicative and reticent treatment of its subject.

In a line of defence, though ultimately an ambiguous and conflicting one, the women interviewed consistently and adamantly reassure their listener, and perhaps themselves, that their menstruating bodies, despite dominant North American mores and norms, were nothing to be ashamed of, were far from debilitating, and were not deviant. There lies a strength in women's claims, who believed themselves to have rejected the negative prescriptions, working against it, to regain control over their own bodies and their own lifestyles. Menstruation, women realistically accepted, was not always the most comfortable or desirable, but it was part of womanhood; with a sense of pride and dignity, women reiterated that menstruation was "nothing to be ashamed of." And yet, parallel to their resistance, lay an undercurrent of evidence pointing towards women's participation in the very prescriptions they believed they had broken. Through a complex menstrual management system, women purposely continued to work along lines of secrecy and concealment, resulting, in turn, with the maintenance of a menstrual shame.

It is the disunity between women's claims of change and resistance and the persistent evidence pointing towards continuity and complicity, which becomes the centre of research. The views and understanding of menstruation were indeed socially constructed, but women participated in their creation. Indeed, how the

menstrual conventions existed in theory and how they were transformed into practice, though different processes, were interrelated forces. Historian, George Chauncey, in his exploration into the underground world of *Gay New York*, criticized traditional historical writings which have attributed too great a power to ideology as a relentless and autonomous force. Historians, argues Chauncey, have oversimplified the complex dialogue between ideology, social conditions, and consciousness.[48] The menstrual experience, is proof in point. While historians, for the most part, have traditionally been disheartened by the disaccord with an oral narrative, as they view it as being symptomatic of memory lapses or biased information, I would argue that the contradictions found in the women's narratives are very much a part of their realities. In fact, what is so fascinating about their stories is that they illustrate the many facets of life experiences - the interrelationship between personal views, ethnic and religious background, economic conditions, family upbringing, biology, culture, physical experiences, and social rhetoric. Indeed, in looking at women's voices, a far more colourful, rich, and multi-dimensional menstrual tale - a tale which was neither always logical nor complementary - emerges. Their discrepancies, diversities, and complexities lie at the heart of the communication between rhetoric and reality. Simply, it is within this blurred line, that the menstrual experience melds.

ENDNOTES

1. For further information see: Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University Press, 1991); Caroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 60:2(September, 1973): 332-356. For studies referring to the social and medical construct of menstruation see Janet M. Stoppard, "A Suitable Case for Treatment? Premenstrual Syndrome and the Medicalization of Women's Bodies," in Dawn H. Currie and Valerie Raoul, eds., *The Anatomy of Gender: Women's Struggle for the Body* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992): 119-129; Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 91(May, 1981): 47-73; Vern Bullough and Martha Voight, "Women, Menstruation, and Nineteenth-Century Medicine," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 47:1(January, 1973): 66-82; Elaine Showalter and English Showalter, "Victorian Women and Menstruation," *Victorian Studies* 14(1970): 83-89; R.O. Baldiserri, "Menstruation and Medical Theory: An Historical Overview," *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association* 38(1983): 66-70. For an important overview of nineteenth-century medicine's view of the female life-course see Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America," *Feminist Studies* 1(Spring, 1973): 58-72.

2. Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company Incorporated, 1976).

3. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls': Menarche and the Emergence of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4:1(Summer, 1993): 99-127.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

5. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, "A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism," in Buckley and Gottlieb, eds., *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), introduction.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

7. Andrée Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Québec, 1919-1939* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1994).

8. For a classic psychoanalytical study on menstruation see: Mary Chadwick, *The Psychological Effects of Menstruation* (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1932). Brumberg cites that Chadwick was "among a number of psychoanalytical

theorists, such as Helene Deutsch, Melanie Klein, and Karen Horney, who regarded menarche as "the first pollution," "'Something Happens to Girls'," p. 100. The medical literature on the topic is extremely broad, for reference of nineteenth-century works, see Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies.* For an analysis of twentieth-century medical texts see: Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction.* (New York: Beacon Press, 1987). Educators by the 1920s were more involved in the debate over appropriateness of sex education in schools. For a detailed analysis of their participation, I refer you to Margot Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films 1947-1983" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989).

9. For autobiographies turn to: Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (New York: Cardinal edition, 1953); Emma Goldman, *Living my Life* (New York: A.A Knopf, 1931); and Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1959). For Canadian fictional works see: Alice Munroe, *The Lives of Girls and Women* (Toronto: Penguin Books Limited, 1990), and Judy Blume, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (New York: Bradbury Press, 1970). Important references are also found in Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," pp. 99-100, as well as found in Delaney *et al.*, *The Curse*, pp. 131-174.

10. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: State University of N.Y Press, 1990), p. xvi of his introduction.

11. Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method," in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz, and David Sutton, eds., *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982): 205-252.

12. Frisch, *A Shared Authority.*

13. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 17.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

16. Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory," in Johnson, McLennan, Schwarz, and Sutton, eds., *Making Histories*, p. 22.

17. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, chap. 4-7.

18. Ann Oakley, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," in Helen Roberts, ed., *Doing Feminist Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981): 30-61.

19. Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop Journal* 12(Aut., 1981), p. 100.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

21. Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, p. 70.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

26. *Ibid.*, chap 1-4.

27. *Ibid.*, p. xxi of his introduction.

28. *Ibid.*, p. xxii of his introduction.

29. For an extensive study on the feminist thought on oral history, see: Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

30. Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, p. 32.

31. Gluck and Patai eds., *Women's Words*, introduction.

32. Judith Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?," in Gluck and Patai, *Women's Words*, p. 112.

33. Gluck and Patai, *Women's Words*, p. 3.

34. Nancy A. Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s," *Social History*, 10(1985): 299-303.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

36. Joy Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

37. The information I received during the interview helped formulate the questions which were to be asked during the second interview. Knowing whether or not individual women had a close relationship with their mothers or sisters - if they even had any - at what age they began dating or having sexual intercourse, if they had any children of their own, etc. were all factors which provided better understanding, context, and direction when questioning women on their menstrual experiences. For the women themselves, the first interview gave women a chance to become better acquainted and

more comfortable with the interview process (one woman from the first cohort asked, in the middle of the first interview, if she was doing alright. Other women, felt uneasy at first with the tape recorder, but eventually became less conscious of it as the interview progressed).

38. Natalie, born 1924, interviewed by author, Montreal, 3 December 1995.

39. Victoria, born 1923, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 December 1995.

40. The strength of 'conversations' over 'question-answer' in the methodology of oral research was also supported in Elizabeth Laposvsky Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

41. Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 12.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

44. The pamphlets used for this thesis were self-selected by the Kimberly-Clark company.

45. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985), p. xix of his introduction.

46. *Ibid.*, p. xx of his introduction.

47. Michael Schudson has coined the phrase "capitalist realism" to describe the way in which advertisement perpetuates and maintains society's values and norms. According to Schudson, advertising shows an extreme and idealized version of the society which produces it. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Other books which provide a basic knowledge of advertising history include Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968; first published 1929); Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); and Stephen R. Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and its Creators* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1984). Two classic studies, though now widely criticized for their overemphasis on advertisement as a socializing agent, are Stewart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982) and Stewart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill,

1976). A useful work on advertising and women, although lacking in historical perspective is Diane Barthel, *Putting on Appearances: Gender and Advertising* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). For a Canadian perspective which includes some discussion on the images of women see Benjamin D. Singer, *Advertising and Society* (Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley, 1986). For a more general Canadian historical account see H.E. Stephenson and Carlton McNaught, *The Story of Advertising in Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1940).

48. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

CHAPTER ONE

THE MOTHER - DAUGHTER DYNAMIC AND THE RISE OF EXPERTS

One of the most vivid memories of both cohorts, two groups of twelve women separated by roughly two generations, was a mother's participation in menstrual instruction. It was seen by all women as key if a young girl was to have any physical and emotional comfort with her own changing body. Even with the introduction of corporate education materials after 1932, the mother-daughter dynamic, according to the interviewees, was the most significant source of information of all.

These vivid memories of mothers' role in menarcheal experiences challenges historians to rethink experts' role in women's private lives. The history of the menstrual experience, along with other aspects of a woman's life cycle: puberty, childbirth, and menopause, have often been portrayed as one of encroachment and control over what was once considered a purely "feminine domain."[1] With 'scientific' knowledge as backing and often monetary or status considerations as motivations, experts', such as gynaecologists, are depicted as having gradually taken over women's areas of expertise and power - managing both the meaning and treatment of women's health.[2]

Joan Jacob Brumberg's detailed analysis on the history of menarche in the United States, "Something Happens to Girls" reflects this well.[3] Beginning in the eighteenth century and ending right before the sexual revolution of the 1960s, Brumberg

constructs a narrative which illustrates the ways in which experts gained control over what had for centuries remained within the female domain.[4] Brumberg is able to describe a history of decline; what once was an open discussion between women in the eighteenth century gradually disintegrated so that by the twentieth century women no longer had any control over the menstrual discourse.

It can not be disputed that the increased involvement of both industry and experts had a direct influence on how and by whom menstruation would be defined, nonetheless, with such a broad historiographical period complexities to the menstrual story are smoothed over. According to Brumberg, doctors criticized mothers as being unable or unwilling to provide adequate information to their daughters and, as such, felt they should take primary role as educators.[5] Though Brumberg's implications that doctors' and other experts' personal motives played a major role in their claims is not unsubstantiated, based on my own research, there would seem some support for their claims. After all, Brumberg herself cited studies which showed both an alarming number of uneducated women as well as complaints made by women themselves. Mothers were not always talking to their daughters, and as such, left room and perhaps even opened the door for experts to move in.[6]

Through a more localized study which includes women's own experiences and opinions, a deeper understanding and recognition of other factors which played a role in the process of menstrual education emerge. My own study would suggest that experts, rather than replacing a mother's role, were simply filling in a gap which

already existed between mother and daughter. Based on women's claims, mother-daughter discussions, though considered most important, were, for the most part, reserved to a one-time conversation after the onset of menarche. Menstruation and sex were simply "something you did not talk about" and mothers seemingly adhered to this concealment.[7] It was this silence, rather than the counsels of educative materials, which, according to the respondents had the greatest everlasting effect on their understanding and treatment of their monthly flow.

Indeed, women felt that menstruation was neither properly nor openly discussed. Of the twenty-four women interviewed, twenty-one found their menarcheal and early menstrual experiences mixed with neutral or mainly negative feelings. This general discomfort, in turn, was felt by the women to have been directly linked with the exchange or lack of exchange between mother and daughter. Had their mothers shown comfort and ease with the topic, rather than silence and concealment, their daughters argued, not only would they have been better prepared at its onset but they also would not have felt shame and embarrassment. Simply, the women's narratives were constructed along a continuum of openness equalled positive outlook, closed equalled negative outlook.

Though the underlying theme of this first chapter is that of early menstrual education, the main focus, following the respondents' lead, will be on the importance of the mother's role. From this perspective, I will examine, first and foremost, the strength of a mother's words, or silence, on her daughter's early

menstrual experience. Added to this, will be the general effect additional informants, such as doctors, advertisers, and the sanitary napkin industry, had over both mothers' influence and the respondents experience. In comparing these different aspects of education, I hope to illustrate that despite an increase in forms of public education, much of women's feelings and experiences over the past forty years have changed little. Though contemporary sociological and psychological studies believe that increased public education have lessened the trauma and discomfort young girls express towards their menses, I would argue its positive effect was limited.[8] Through women's narratives it becomes clear that the educative materials were only a partial substitute; they not only failed to meet all of young adolescents' questions and insecurities, but also failed to create a more comfortable and open atmosphere of communication and discussion.

MENSTRUAL INFORMANTS FROM THE EARLIER DAYS:

Mother's words -

The twelve women of the first cohort, whose menarcheal years spread over the 1920s and early 1930s, recalled a limited and sporadic, if any, form of instruction received in preparation for their menarche. While experts and educators alike may have increasingly become involved at various levels in providing sex education, according to my findings, it had yet to reach all women.[9] This resulted in a deeper dependency on their mothers' knowledge and openness towards the subject, as it was, in the case

of six of the twelve women's only source of information. When that failed, these women often found themselves completely unprepared and unaware. The staining of their underwear was often marked with fear and confusion - women believing themselves to be ill or injured. Virginia (1921), whose menarche began in the mid 1930s, recalled:

> Well there was only my mother. We never spoke about it. In them days, you didn't speak, it was a private thing and your mother taught ya: you keep it to yourself, you keep yourself clean and that's it...I came home from school one day and I said to my mother, I'm bleeding and I didn't fall. And then that is when she made me go and get cleaned up and that and gave me this [sanitary cloth] to put on and that's when she sat down and told me to keep myself clean and to wash yourself frequently and to keep away from boys. That's what she said about... [I was scared] because you had never seen the blood and that eh? You didn't know what it was. As I say, I ran into the house and I said to my mother. I never fell, I didn't do anything. And she just looked at me and laughed and sat me down.[10]

While Virginia, may not have been adequately informed prior to the onset of her menses, Virginia nevertheless maintained that she was properly instructed. Education, in her view, was only really to have been expected upon menarche. Her mother took the time to discuss the ways in which it should be handled, the emphasis being on personal hygiene strategies. For Virginia, this seemed adequate, in fact, she tended to agree with the way in which her mother dealt with the entire topic:

> Well, you got so much hygiene at school, but you didn't get taught as you do today about sex and all that sort of thing. But my mother had a good way o f explaining the thing, and get around the thing, and getting through to you without being well, crude, about it.[11]

There was a level of decorum within her mother's own silence and

treatment of the subject. Despite her own first reaction to the blood, Virginia perceived her own experience to have been one which was normal and natural given the private and personal nature of menstruation.

Virginia, indeed, might be correct in such an assumption given much of the similar remarks of women within her cohort. Though situations and relationships between mother and daughter differed tremendously, for the most part, women in the first cohort voiced little resentment towards their mothers for their lack of preparation. Indeed, women seemed quite satisfied with their mother's care, even if it was after the fact. Flora (1911), born into a middle-class family, recalled approaching her mother with questions regarding menstruation before she had begun herself. Her mother's response, or lack of, taught Flora early on that menstruation was something that was simply never discussed:

> I went to Guide Camp at the age of 12 I guess and they gave us a questionnaire - has your daughter matured yet and if so have you prepared her. I said "What does that mean?" And she said "Don't you worry about that dear" I asked one of my friends and she said, "Oh sometimes you don't feel too well." And that was it.[12]

The complete avoidance of the topic by her mother and the vague response from her girlfriend left Flora with little understanding of her changing body (one which she would only later learn in university when studying to become a doctor). In light of this, Flora maintained that the onset of her period was neither traumatic nor frightening - "it's just blood" - and felt her mother gave her all the information that was needed to deal with it. In fact when

asked: "So your mother brushed it off saying it had nothing to do with you?", she set the story straight:

> Oh no! It wasn't that way. She just didn't want to talk about it...I have a feeling she just didn't know much about it. So, when the period came on, of course, there was a stain...I was presented with the necessary equipment and my mother said "this is a little secret girls have. We don't talk about it very much. This is what we do". And I did...I thought this was a bit mysterious, but I went along and said "One of these days I'll know about it, but I'm not interested in it now."[13]

Like Virginia, Flora did not express any resentment towards her mother - she accepted and understood her own mother's discomfort with the topic. Silence, nonetheless, was the overriding memory of her initiation into womanhood and whether it bothered her or not, she still felt it to be a 'mystery'.

Though Virginia and Flora were seemingly resolved with the secretive treatment of the subject, not all women in the first cohort reacted similarly. Two of the six women who had received no instruction prior to their menarche, lamented against their lack of preparation, fearing it could only enhance an already difficult transition in a young girl's life. If not adequately warned beforehand, proclaimed these women, the first sight of blood, which should be regarded simply as a natural normal process, in turn, was viewed as frightening and confusing. Such was the case with Christina, a feisty independent woman born in 1899. When asked what information she might have received prior to her first period, her response was as follows:

> None. N.O.N.E. I think it's a crime. Well, I think it's a bad thing. Because I was 14, when I started, and I was at school and in those days you had to wear these

> long drawers and I remember going home one time and going to the bathroom at noon and here are my pants, they're all wet - and I called my mother as I turned them out. And she told me then - fine time. I had a friend - another girl in school and I guess her mother didn't tell her or anything and it was summer time - mine was in the winter which was lucky. We were playing ball, running and playing ball. And she got up from her chair and she walked - of course, there were boys and girls mixed. Of course, they wouldn't know anyway - and here her dress was a mess in back and she went right ahead and played ball that afternoon. And I said 'Susie' - I didn't tell her, because I didn't want to tell her - but I said "does anybody have a safety pin, so I got a pin, I don't remember where, but I pinned it sort of this way. She played ball. I don't know what she was told. But my mother [didn't tell me] - that's what I think is wrong.[14]

For Christina, the lack of preparation could only bring on fear and bewilderment. Without any knowledge of her own changing body or, perhaps more importantly, any notion of sanitary protection, Christina was left vulnerable to public acknowledgement of her menarche - without her even knowing it. Both her friend and her own situation were quite similar in that they happened at school, in front of her peers (Christina being quick to acknowledge this included boys and girls), only Christina was fortunate to have been wearing heavier layers and darker clothes where leakage was less likely to show or come through. It is also interesting to note that despite her adamant belief that a girl should receive information about menstruation, she was unable to tell her friend. Her only reaction was to conceal the stain and leave it for Susie's mother to explain once Susie got home. Despite her own criticism against silence, Christina learnt it all too well.

This need for concealment was strengthened by her comparison between Susie's and her own reaction to the onset of their

menses:

> She [Susie] didn't seem to mind too much, because we kept playing ball that afternoon. So I don't know how she felt. But I don't think she could have known or else she never would have been out in a red and white checked dress with a big mess like that.

And how did you feel?

> I was scared to death. I called Mom and said, "look what happened to me?" I was afraid. She said, "Oh. It's o.k." - I had two brothers that were out in the kitchen somewhere - "Oh, it's alright." Then she started explaining to me. And one thing I remember saying was "Don't tell Papa."[15]

The initial response, in Christina's case, was certainly that of fear, but once the understandings of menstruation and the practices of coping with it were explained, concern was directed for the most part at keeping her menstrual status hidden - especially from that of men. Indeed, the menstrual experience was to exist primarily within the restrictive barriers of women's circles only. Though mothers or girlfriends may have discussed this intimate topic amongst themselves, which, still at times, remained strained, discussion with or acknowledgement by men regarding a women's menstrual status was extremely limited. According to Christina, Susie would never have seemed so flippant of her stained red and white checkered dress in public, especially in front of the mixed crowd of both boys and girls, had she known of its origins.

Though there are differences in reactions to their first sightings of blood, Virginia's (1921), Flora's (1911), and Christina's (1899) perceptions of the meaning of menstruation do converge. Fear or no fear, women learned through their mother's treatment of the subject that menstruation was something which should be hidden and, in turn, a shameful process. As Christina

explained, "Whenever anything is 'hush, hush', you're 'hush, hush too'. Well, you grew up in that atmosphere eh?"[16] Indeed, while for four of these women, the restricted exchange between mother and daughter may have been acceptable, none, with the exception of one case, had recalled any positive commentary by their mother at the onset of their menarche. Instead, a young girl's experience at menarche, signifying a stage in her sexual maturity, was directed towards the special practices, passed down from mother to daughter, of hygienic disguise. From day one, girls learned menstruation was a 'problem' which all women went through, that all women had to cope with, and that all women had to conceal. In fact, the anxiety and fear which marked all women most strongly was not from their first spotting of unexpected blood, but was from the acknowledgement that others may discover their new found secret.

Public counsel -

Physicians were concerned as to the effects the lack of adequate education prior to a prepubescent girl's first menarche might have on their psychological development. Believing mothers' closed mouth treatment of the subject could only perpetuate and reinforce young girls' misgivings about growing up, these experts advocated for public forms of education and instruction. Doctor Emil Novak, in 1921, argued that "[n]o one can quite take the place of the mother in instructing her daughter in the simple and beautiful truths of the reproductive life and its various manifestations. [Yet] when such home instruction is out of the

question...there is a legitimate field for the activity of various agencies now interested in 'sex education of young people."[17] Doctors, in arguing that lack of pre-education detrimentally harmed young girls' outlook on their menstrual process, gained considerable validity and acceptance within the field of menstrual education.

The assertion for earlier education was also combined with concerns over the type of message young daughters were to receive. As a result of the First World War experience, in which many women proved their capability of uninterrupted work despite their menstrual cycle, as well as medical studies such as Mary Putnam Jacobi's *The Question of Rest for Women During Menstruation*, by the early 1920s, doctors concluded that menstruation was not a debilitating process.[18] Doctors, shifting away from the 'unwell' discourse, began to advocate a need in educating young girls on menstrual health and hygiene.

Whether this instruction was to take its form within the private walls of the young adolescent's home or instructed in a public format through schools, doctors maintained their position as the definers and mediators of such education. In 1923, it had been the "unanimous opinion" of lecturers at the University of London that "if pain was not expected it would not appear."[19] The speaker therefore emphasized "the need for instruction in the elementary and essential truth that menstruation should be regarded as a natural and not a pathological function."[20] The British medical journal, *The Lancet*, further published in 1925, a similar statement

issued under the auspices of the London based Medical Women's Federation. The report, based on published studies of doctors "who...had the opportunities of examining large numbers of girls", was intended to be distributed to schoolmistresses and parents so that it would be made clear that "the modern view that a girl during the time of menstruation should not be considered unwell."[21]

In this new found forum, young girls were instructed primarily on female physiology and its hygienic concerns. "What they were taught," Brumberg writes, "reflected middle-class sensibilities: cleanliness; they should do only moderate exercise; and they could not afford to rely on makeshift solutions to the hygienic problem posed by menstrual blood."[22] In the 1920s doctors advised young girls on various hygiene practices including the importance of taking warm baths, regularity of bowels, and light exercise such as walking - nothing more strenuous such as cycling, games, or competitions. Combined, these practices were expected to grant women a freedom from any pain or malaise.[23]

Instruction was not directed at young adolescent girls alone, for throughout the 1920s and 1930s doctors wished to transform the views of mothers as well. Doctors recognized that despite all attempts in changing and bettering young girls' views towards their own body, there would be little change as long as mothers continued to perpetuate traditional 'unscientific' views of the menstrual process. As a 1930 article published in *The Lancet* argued:

> The reticence about the hygiene of the menstrual period among women of all ages has been, and still is, a grave handicap in the way of abolishing bad traditions and of teaching young girls a regime conducive to heal and

> comfort. The prejudice against baths during the period is only being broken slowly, and the necessity for increased rather than diminished cleanliness at this time has hardly yet spread amongst the less educated...A further point of importance is to convince mothers and girls that menstruation ought not to be disabling, and that if it is treatment should be sought and persevered in as for any other ailment.[24]

The notion of the 'inadequate mother', therefore, was strengthed by doctor's claims that mothers' instructions were erroneous and detrimental. Mothers were influential in menstrual instruction, the doctors realized, but their discourse was considered filled with old wives tales and false claims (claims which, ironically, were supported by the doctors themselves only a few decades earlier). Doctors, in this way, found a niche of control over the menstrual discourse, for while accepting of a mother's role, doctors were to determine the way in which it would be defined. Comfortable in their own authoritative roles, doctors believed mothers could maintain their role as instructors so long as doctors could highlight the way.

The implications of the 'inadequate mother' used by experts as validation for their participation in this field of education was used and adapted by the sanitary napkin industry during the 1920s. In the early advertisements, which Brumberg argues "constituted the first real public acknowledgment of menstruation," the American industry focused on mothers' hesitancy in preparing their daughters.[25] They hired female experts such a graduate nurse Ellen J. Buckland in 1923, who, five years later, would be replaced by advice columnist Mary Pauline Callender, to discuss "personal letters about women's oldest problems."[26] Such women's advice

helped integrate the public nature of the industry's menstrual discourse with what once was a private exchange between mother and daughter. Indeed, it was through corporate texts that mothers were provided with the 'new' appropriate words and rationale for introducing and discussing the subject of menstruation. One advertisement from *Chatelaine* in 1935 read:

> Fran: Whenever I think over the handicaps nature hands to women I just boil.
> Fran's friend: I wouldn't talk that way, Fran. Especially not around a young daughter.
> Fran: That's just what kills me. Here Grace is just twelve and has to go through this miserable uncomfortable time: rubbing ...chafing
> Fran's friend: Why Fran Dear, why don't you get that child a book on the New Kotex? It's as soft as down and...
> Fran: Oh, that's just an advertisement.
> Fran's friend: All right, I'm going to give you a book for her. She'll find it's a different world.
>
> LATER...
>
> Fran's friend: Grace going to a party tonight?
> Fran: Yes, thanks to your advice about Kotex neither Grace nor I would use any other kind.
> "Here's new comfort...new freedom from embarrassment for your daughter."[27]

Similar to the doctors' discourse on menstrual hygiene, the sanitary napkin industry, through the medium of advertisements, took its sound and solid place as advisors and educators on 'proper menstrual thinking'. The industry, as this advertisement illustrates, presented mothers as having a distorted and destructive view of the menstrual experience and, that, fortunately with the help of the sanitary napkin industry, its product, and its pamphlet, this could easily be eradicated. The sanitary napkin industry, placed itself along with experts, as possessing the new and correct way of thinking about this monthly process. In this

way, it gained a degree of control over the message, how and what would be said.

This form of instruction was further heightened by the 1930s and 1940s, when the industry introduced educative materials such as pamphlets and films. Newly-established educational divisions within the sanitary products industry began to supply mothers, teachers, and parent-teacher associations with free booklets of instruction. Together, these pamphlets reinforced notions of the industry's role in educating young women on the modern view of the menstrual experience. Discrediting the role of older women's knowledge and experience, pamphlets, such as the 1946 pamphlet *Very Personally Yours*, proclaimed "science and education", as the modern thinkers and definers of the meaning and treatment of menstruation.[28] They "have cleared away the cobwebs that used to clutter our thinking about menstruation."[29] No longer would they advocate the "superstitious scare-stories that make the medical profession shudder."[30] Indeed, with the long list of "weird explanations" such as "the loss of menstrual blood weakens you. Cold drinks give you cramps. A pain between periods means something's wrong. If the dentist puts in a filling it won't stay. It's dangerous to take baths or showers during your period. It's risky to shampoo your hair at this time. Stay in bed the first day. Exercise is bad for you. Certain foods should be avoided during menstruation", the sanitary napkin had seemingly proven and found its place in education.[31] As *Very Personally Yours* congratulated itself:

> through an educational program that has cleared minds of old taboos and fears about menstruation, Kotex pioneered a new freedom in thinking. And, thanks to the additional help of Kotex advertising and Kotex displays, women and girls now buy this product as casually as they buy cosmetics or household needs.[32]

The sanitary napkin industry proudly proclaimed itself as missionaries of modernity. Linking good health, science, and medical authority, the sanitary napkin industry claims seemed hardly disputable.

The industry's role in instruction was furthered by the 1940s, when it had developed, in co-operation with the Walt Disney corporation, the first corporate-sponsored educational film on the subject, *The Story of Menstruation* (1946). Over the years, various pamphlets and films followed, often suggesting as Brumberg notes, that mothers' uncertainty in broaching the topic with their daughters was viewed as dangerous and harmful. Simply, mothers reservations and reticent treatment of the topic could, a *Good Housekeeping* article warned, in fact, "scare them to death".[33]

For those women in the first cohort who received some instruction prior to their menarche, this information primarily took its form in pamphlets - an indication that the sanitary napkin industry had found a comfortable position in the role of instructor. While mothers may have continued to first briefly discuss menstruation with their daughters at menarche, six out of the twelve informants' mothers supplemented their talk with pamphlets. According to the respondents, these educative materials were useful for, at least, it was one way to reveal the mysteries behind this curious thing called 'the curse'. Best summarized by

Dorothy (1923):

> Oh. It was a dark secret. I was handed a book. Ran into the next room, read it, don't think I understood what I read really. But I remember thinking this is the greatest thing since sliced bread. [I] brought it back to my mother or kept it or something and that was the end of it...My mother wasn't that kind of a person [to talk about menstruation]. In your head, its sort of I say unforbidden fruit - that's probably not a good way of putting it, but...[34]

Recognizing her mother's awkwardness towards the subject, Dorothy was appreciative of any form of information she could receive. Indeed, based on Dorothy's claims, it would seem that the industry's educational efforts contributed to the demystification of menstruation. After all, mothers who were seemingly uncomfortable with the topic themselves could use the availability of free corporate-sponsored pamphlets as a tool for instruction. With one easy mail order, a mother found a way to instruct and inform her daughter in a way she felt incapable of doing herself. Daughters, in turn, were content that, if at the very least, they were prepared for its onset.

As useful as the pamphlets may have seemed, their long term effects may not have been positive. According to Brumberg, the industry's and experts' advice was not always a satisfactory substitute. Mothers came to rely heavily on the pamphlets, using them often as the only source of instruction and that provisions for personal advice and counsel from mothers about growing up female were no longer seen as necessary. As a result, young girls were often left with many unanswered questions. Argues Brumberg, "young women wanted meaningful exchanges about female sexuality and

womanhood in addition to the best techniques for keeping their closthes and their genitals clean," pamphlets simply did not provide it.[35] Nowhere are the effects of this emerging instructor and advisor more clearly seen, than through the narratives of the second cohort.

VOICES FROM THE LATER GENERATION:

Experts and mother's advice combined -

By the time women of the second cohort had reached their prepubescent stage, which was roughly between the periods the late 1950s to the mid 1970s, public instruction had been firmly entrenched for nearly twenty years. It was these women who felt the full brunt of the industry's encroachment - both the positive and negative aspects. As Sonya (1965) explained:

> My mother left a book on my bed with little pictures, not real pictures, drawing pictures. And it talked about it in there.
>
> What was your reaction to the book?
>
> I laughed, I laughed. It was funny, because I knew my mother had put it there. It was her way of teaching me where she couldn't feel she could talk about it. [I also] had a movie, again, not real pictures where they talked about it. But that was about it, we didn't talk about it.[36]

Though Sonya may not have acknowledged it, she was fortunate to have received information - even if it did come out of a book or seen on screen - prior to her menarche. Unlike Virginia (1921) or Christina (1899), she never had to face the kind of dismaying shock others had felt by the initial spotting of blood on their underwear. Never would she suspect, as some women of her older generation did, that she were injured or ill. She was adequately

prepared and knew well in advance what was to happen to her body. So why then, did she remain dissatisfied by the way in which it was treated? Like Dorothy (1923), Sonya perceived a barrier between her mother and herself. She had questions that went beyond anatomy and hygiene which she would have liked to have been answered. Unsatisfied by the pamphlets instruction, and recognizing her mothers discomfort Sonya turned to another woman for help. If she could not talk comfortably with her mother, Sonya claimed, she knew who and where she could get the advice she truly needed to hear, "I had one older girlfriend who was in her twenties and she...told me what it was and how long it would last...I felt comfortable with her and with my elder sister."[37]

Though Sonya (1965), who began her menses in 1975, may have had the opportunity to speak to someone she could trust and confide in, she was still left, as with many women of her cohort, with a lasting impression of the secretive and shameful treatment of menstruation within their home. Erin (1961), through a tone of resentment and regret, similarly described her mother's reservations and how, that in turn, influenced her own outlook on menstruation:

> It's not something you talked about. It seemed private. We were brought up purely in an age when, I mean I'm not that old, really when your parents didn't talk to you about anything...I think it made me think that this is a big secret. This you don't talk about this, you don't talk about any of this. When you're brought up that way, you can't help but think that this is a big secret. This is something you don't talk about.[38]

What is interesting in Erin's case was that, unlike Sonya, Erin's mother had given some personal instruction. Unfortunately, much of

what followed was the hygienic formula prescribed by both experts and industry. Though Erin's mother had taken the time to sit down and discuss menstruation, it remained within the boundaries of sanitary protection which was then later supplemented by a leaflet. Combined with Erin's impression of her mother's discomfort, Erin's introduction to menstruation had little positive influence. Like many others of both her own and the older cohort, Erin learned menstruation was to remain hidden even after her own menarche:

> Oh, I'm sure I didn't tell anyone
>
> Were you embarrassed?
>
> Probably, I can't remember, but I knew how I felt about it like later on...I can distinctly remember in university that it was a big joke. You know, I remember my friend...she just was the most hilarious person I ever met, and she was just like open about everything. She called tampons cigars. Like 'Do you have a cigar?' I remember this in the changing room, she was just a big clown. That was the first time where I really felt comfortable and that's university!...I think that was when I realized how much of a - not big deal that it was - it was never a big deal - but of how much THAT was included in things that you don't talk about. Not that there weren't other things that should have not been talked about. But we just didn't talk about sex, we didn't talk about anything in our house and that was just lumped right in there...I wasn't brought up in a family where - I mean us, we walk around naked all the time -...at home it wasn't like that, I mean everything was just such a secret.[39]

Erin's comparison with her girlfriend's attitude as well as her present treatment of such subjects (sex and menstruation) with that of her mother's reservations reflected a belief in the correlation between openness and what Erin believed to be a comfortable normal view of one's body. Women had directly associated the past treatment of menstruation by mothers to that of their initial discomfort and anxiety with their own changing bodies. For these

women, had menstruation in some way been treated more openly, their negative reactions, it was predicted, would have diminished. Information from home, prior to a young girl's first menstruation was believed by all women as a must, if she was to better understand the happenings of her body, be better prepared for menstruation's arrival, and, thus, have an overall better outlook on menstruation itself. Sylvie (1952), who began menstruating on the day of her older sister's wedding, did not tell her mother at first, choosing instead to discuss it with one of her older sisters. For Sylvie, the avoidance of the topic with her mother was due to the fact that "she [her mother] never talked to me about it. I was kinda shy, it was embarrassing for me to talk about it...It was a little bit of shame. It was shame...Because it was never spoken at home. It was like so private."[40]

The hypothesis of the cycle of shame made by such women as Erin (1961) and Sylvie (1952), was strengthened when it was compared to women's opposite experience. Though these women remained in the minority, their almost flippant reaction to their menarche only reinforced the notion that openness between mother and daughter was key. One woman, in comparing her situation with that of her sisters'-in-law, recreated a narrative which is structured around similar binary lines of open/closed treatment resulted in positive/negative impressions. She, brought up in an Italian working-class home, described her relationships with her mother and sisters as inhibited when dealing with women's sexuality. Between mother and daughters, menstruation was

considered:

> a very open topic...there was no mystery about menstruation. We expected it and that was that. I would have been probably 14, yeah, quite late...I guess I would have told my Mom. I don't remember the incident at all because it wasn't traumatizing or unusual. I can't remember the specifics. It would have been, "Oh! It started!" I was expecting it and its no big event... Among us girls it was as if there were no walls, no doors...it was totally open. It's just since birth, we just grew up with it, it wasn't something unusual. That's why there was no discomfort in it, that's why I probably can't specifically pinpoint when it was that I learned about it because it was ongoing. Whereas Dan's family was the opposite, they probably would remember their [menarche] quite specifically because their bodies were hidden, even between each other as sisters and with their Mom.[41]

While such descriptions were found only in three of the twelve women's narratives of the second cohort (suggesting that over the years the topic of menstruation has slowly become uncovered), these women recognized that menstruation had been, for the most part, treated through a veil of concealment. By using their own example, these women advocated to the listener how preparedness by their mothers led to a happier result. Openness was, once again, adhered to if a child was to have had a 'normal' and 'proper' relationship with her menstruating body.

THE MAINSTAY OF MOTHER'S ROLE:

Though with the involvement of experts, mothers faced sharing the authority of instruction, mothers were still, at least for the women interviewed, the most important person involved, be it negative or positive, in their early menstrual experience. Indeed, despite the introduction of pamphlets and educational movies

presented at school, young daughters consulted their mothers first for advice and counsel. Women felt that it was their mothers' place to give them the information they required, they went to their mothers both when their initial period started, and sought for help when problems or questions arose. Brumberg, presenting this as a "new division of labour, the doctor was the biomedical strategist but the mother was the chief operative", coldly proclaims a mother's role as being demoted to one of 'monitor'.[42] A mother, relegated to control aspects of behaviour and habits, no longer had power over the meaning or description.[43] The women themselves, however, described a far more complex recollection of their mothers' involvement.

It would seem that, though uncomfortable towards broaching the subject prior to menarche, once the menses came on, conversations between mothers and daughters quickly ensued. "My mother was very kind and considerate," Flora (1911) recalled, "[She] gave me aspirins and all this sort of thing, but she didn't offer me any sort of information."[44] Patricia (1962), similarily argued, how despite the original discomfort she felt between herself and her mother, once her menses began at the age of eleven, there was a sense of closeness and understanding:

> I remember it was in the summertime, and I remember finding some blood in my panties and I didn't know what to do. I didn't know who to turn to. At this point, I went to my mother and she's lying by the pool and I remember just lying down next to my Mom in the lounge chair and just telling her that I think something happened and then she said, "What?" And I told her that there was some blood in my panties. And she took me into the house and told me that this is what you'll have to be using. She showed me the sanitary napkins and she told

> me what to do...That's how it all started and then at that point I started to feel more comfortable with it. Once you start the conversation then you're comfortable with that...and then she [mother] was very comfortable with it at that point.[45]

Women overwhelmingly described the time of their menarche as an important moment between mother and daughter. As Julie (1955), whose menarche arrived at the early age of nine, argued, "it was one time that you were closer to your mother. That it was showing dependence on her. I was closer to my father, I would tell him everything and this was one part I could go to her."[46]

This notion of understanding and support continued well after the onset of their first period. No matter what questions or concerns the women held, twenty women interviewed felt they could go to their mother. Jane (1956) recalled her mother's help with using a tampon for the first time. Invited to go to Cape Cod with her boyfriend and his parents for a week, Jane, whose menstruation was due to arrive during the trip, felt that unless she tried wearing a tampon, she would not have been able to go swimming. So, she turned to her mother:

> That was probably the most intimate moment in my life with my mother because I could vividly remember standing in this bathroom...my mother and I in there...I couldn't find where to put it and she's trying to explain it to me and at that point I did have my period...I'm getting frustrated and angry and then one minute we were laughing because it so funny, but it is not...She's trying to explain it to me, "use your finger." Meanwhile my hand is covered in blood. So anyway we figured it out and it was like Eureka![47]

As these women's narratives suggest, it is important to recognize that women, as mothers (or as friends, sisters, or other adult female family members), also helped shape and create the menstrual

experience. Certainly one can not ignore the strength of the doctors' and the sanitary napkin industry's encroachment, for, as we have seen in women's narratives, they too played a significant role. Nonetheless, women's dependence and need for their mother's advice and instruction, despite all other formats of education, suggests that a special place continued to exist for a mother's guide and direction.[48] There may have been a negotiation, but in no way did women completely lose their place in their daughters' menstrual experience.

CONCLUSION:

Though women of both cohorts - as well as doctors alike - believed the linkage between education and outlook to be a strong one, my findings have shown this to be a far too simplistic construct. There were differences in treatment both between and within the two cohorts, and yet surprisingly, views and concerns remained strikingly similar. Certainly, if one was to place women's reaction on a continuum of information, the levels of fear and confusion decreased as the level of instruction rose; however, for the most part, women even with a higher degree of information still perceived degrees of tension and anxiety. Embarrassment, shame, and the desire to conceal their menstrual status remained. Indeed, many young adolescents were left with ambiguous feelings towards their own body. Best summarized by Sonya (1965), "it was kinda a secret. Not positive or negative. Positive for them [because it meant we were growing up], but negative...because we

didn't want everyone to know about it."[49]

If instruction was key for a woman's comfort with her own menstruating body, than what must first and foremost be considered is the actual message. To examine this further, we must go beyond menarche and begin, now, to delve into a comparison of the early and later years of a woman's menstrual life cycle. Women in their own narratives moved beyond their instruction as a rationale for their uneasiness with menstruation. Issues such as age, physical discomfort, and the sanitary napkin and tampon all played an important role in their own contradictory feelings towards their menstruating bodies. It is these factors which will be investigated in the following chapters.

ENDNOTES

1. To read further on the topic of experts' roles in traditional female domains see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1979). For a Canadian perspective turn to: Katherine Arnup, Andrée Lévesque, and Ruth Roach Pierson, *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Selected essays from British Columbia to Newfoundland discuss how, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, motherhood became a contested terrain for control. These papers illustrate well the complex development where control over the different stages of reproduction, from conception to delivery to child care, shifted from mothers to that of experts and professionals. Also turn to Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mother's in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Though still written from the perspective of the experts, Arnup recognizes women's daily experiences as factors within the negotiation.

2. See Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). The belief that doctors, using the power of science, perpetuated and maintained women's secondary position is commonly found amongst feminists writers. For further readings see: Gena Corea, *The Hidden Malpractice: How American Medicine Treats Women as Patients and Professionals* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc., 1977); Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc. 1976), chapter five; Elaine and English Showalter, "Victorian Women and Menstruation," *Victorian Studies* 14(1970): 83-89; Diana Scully *Men Who Control Women's Health: The Miseducation of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists* (Boston: Haughton Mifflin Company, 1980). While there is no denying the strength medical discourse played in defining women's roles, such studies tend to ignore any element of women agency. Contrarily, Ann Douglas Wood argues that women's complaints and their treatment in nineteenth century America was exploited by both women and their doctors, "Fashionable Diseases," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4(Summer, 1973): 25-52. For a favourable presentation of doctors involvement in women's health see: Edward Shorter's *Women's Bodies: A Social History of Women's Encounter With Health, Ill-Health, and Medicine* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

3. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls': Menarche and the Emergence of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4:1(Summer, 1993): 99-126.

4. For a theoretical framework on the construction of the historical narrative see: William Cronnon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and the Narrative," *Journal of American History*

78:4(March, 1992): 1347-1376.

5. Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," pp. 105-126.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

7. Josie, born 1910, interviewed by author, Montreal, 4 December 1995. Other historical works which have based most or part of their analysis on oral history also highlight the disclosure on such topics as sex and menstruation even between mother and daughter. For some further readings see Elizabeth Robert's analysis of the British working-class, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Worcester: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1984), as well as the first two chapters of Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour of Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1986).

8. A few examples are: Elissa Koff, Jill Rierdan, and Karen Sheingold, "Memories of Menarche; Age, Preparation, and Prior Knowledge as Determinant of Initial Menstrual Experience," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 11:1(1982): 1-8. Their study investigated the role age and early preparation played on a woman's menstrual outlook. Though Koffe *et al.*, did not disregard a mother's importance in education, they found mothers to be ill-equipped and inadequate. As a result of their findings, they supported a view of public education for young daughters as well as a re-education of mothers. They also cited similar findings by D. Bloch, "Sex Education Practices of Mothers," *Journal of Sex Education Therapy* 4(1978): 7-12. For some of the early supporters of public education see: Emil Novak, *Menstruation and its Disorders* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1921) and Helene Deutsch, *Psychoanalysis of the Sexual Functions of Women* (London: Karnac, 1991). For further references see: Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," pp. 105-116 and pp. 122-127.

9. According to Brumberg, at the end of the First World War, the United States began a crusade promoting moral health in which all aspects of sexuality, including menstruation, were sanitized. After 1918, all classes of young American adolescent girls were more likely to have received public education within the school program regarding menstruation. *ibid*, pp. 122-123.

10. Virginia, born 1921, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 December 1995. The date after names refers to date of birth.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Flora, born 1911, interviewed by author, Montreal, 16 November 1995.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Christina, born 1899, interviewed by author, Montreal, 4 December 1995.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Novak, *Menstruation and Its Disorders*, p.108.

18. *The Lancet*, April 7, 1928, p. 712.

19. *Ibid.*, June 16, 1923. p. 1219.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 1219.

21. *Ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1925, p. 1263.

22. Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," p. 123.

23. *The Lancet*, Dec. 12, 1925, p. 1263.

24. *Ibid.*, July 5, 1930, p. 33.

25. Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," p. 124.

26. *Chatelaine*, February 1935, p. 49. Mary Pauline Callender was a fictitious character created by Kimberly-Clark for advertising purposes. For further information on the marketing of Kotex see: Janice Jorgens, ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands, vol. 2: Personal Products* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1994), pp. 316-319.

27. *Chatelaine*, March 1935, p. 37.

28. *Very Personally Yours* (Kimberly-Clark, Canada Limited. Toronto: Educational Department, 1946, republished unrevised in 1953, 1959, 1961), p.7.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

33. Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," p. 125.

34. Dorothy, born 1923, interviewed by author, Montreal, 3 November, 1995.

35. Brumberg, "'Something Happen's to Girls'," p.126.

36. Sonya, born 1965, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 November 1995.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Erin, born 1961, interviewed by author, Montreal, 25 November 1995.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Sylvie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 10 November 1995.

41. Theresa, born 1954, interviewed by author, Montreal, 20 November 1995.

42. Brumberg, "'Something Happen's to Girls'," p. 126.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

44. Flora, born 1911, interviewed by author, Montreal, 16 November 1995.

45. Patricia, born 1962, interviewed by author, Montreal, 2 December 1995.

46. Julie, born 1955, interviewed by author, Montreal, 26 November 1995.

47. Jane, born 1956, interviewed by author, Montreal, 1 November 1995.

48. While I believe the relationship between mother and daughter to be an important one, in no way do I wish to claim this closeness was shared by all. As a result of their mothers' reservations, some women (three out of the twenty-four respondents - one from the first cohort, two from the second) did not feel they could go to their mothers. In such cases, women went to either an older sister or an older friend for help. There was one other case, in which the advice and counsel from a step-mother was, according to the interviewee, abrupt and unsympathetic. In this case, she relied primarily on her own self-education.

49. Sonya, born 1965, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 November 1995.

CHAPTER TWO

MENSTRUATION AND THE HYGIENIC CRISIS

> No [I did not look forward to getting my first period], because it was never discussed. It came along and you just coped with it. You cope with it. It's part of growing up...It seemed to be a normal thing that would take place at my time of life. It wasn't unpleasant to me. I just found I could do without it. I didn't have to wear pads and all that stuff. That was just messy and uncomfortable.[1]
>
> Dorothy (born 1923)

> I don't think I felt anything tremendously profound. I didn't think I broached womanhood, or some ritual passing or anything. I didn't feel like anything except its happened and now I've got to deal with it. It was just gross that thick pad between my legs. I learned to hate it [pad] from that day forward.[2]
>
> Melanie (born 1952)

If menstruation had ever represented, in dominant North American culture, a young girl's initiation into adulthood, by the early decades of the twentieth century this no longer held true.[3] Based on the similarities of these two experiences (occurring more than thirty years apart), it would seem that a young girl's menstrual experience primarily became one of management and concealment. Throughout the years dividing the two cohorts, advertisement, pamphlets, and mother's advice, consistently reiterated a menstrual message that focused primarily on the complex rules and regulations of how to maintain bodily cleanliness. While the importance of personal hygiene included such factors as bathing, showering, and sponge baths or the use of deodorants and douches, for the most part, it was directly linked to sanitary products. From the moment a young girl began to bleed, her focus would turn primarily on both the product and the actual

practices of product management (making sure one had a spare rag, sanitary napkin or tampon, changing and disposing the sanitary product).

Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* remains one of the most significant contributions to the study of menstruation and its relation with hygiene. Though not specific to the cultural-anthropological studies on menstrual pollution as such, her investigations into and construction of a general framework on pollution has served to create a solid theoretical structure for the study of menstrual taboos. In her work, Douglas asserts that the categorizing of a substance (be it a type of food, an animal, faeces, saliva...) as a pollutant is based on shared perception of that substance as deviant to a general symbolic or cultural order. Pollutants, viewed as 'dirt' or 'matter out of place', are considered both a threat to the culture's specific symbolic order. As threats to this order, pollutants are also perceived as dangers to social order given that, for Douglas, the symbolic system has a functional purpose in the maintenance of society. To protect the social order from any potentially dangerous or disruptive forces, the pollutants are accompanied by certain rules, regulations, and prohibitions.[4]

As useful as Douglas' pollutant theory is for the analysis of menstrual taboos, it must be used within its proper context. As anthropologists Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb have criticized, while Douglas might have been careful in attributing her theory to the specific culture under study, not all scholars have been so

meticulous. Under the strength of Douglas' work, many anthropologists and feminists alike have developed a notion of a universal menstrual taboo without taking into consideration differences in social and cultural beliefs and symbolic ordering.[5] According to Buckley and Gottlieb, this tendency to view menstruation only in terms of the pollution theory is not only a far too simplistic account, but leaves scholars feeling satisfied that nothing really is left to be said about the topic. Challenging this univeralistic view, Buckley and Gottlieb assert that through closer examination of menstrual experiences, it has become clear that wide variences in menstrual behaviour and attitudes do exist - not only between cultures, but possibly even within cultures as well.[6]

We must go beyond the general truisms found in popular feminist writings, and begin to take greater heed of the cultural and historical background particular to our own cultures dominant beliefs, mores, and practices.[7] Our obsessiveness with menstrual hygiene does not exist in its own isolated box, but rather, is part and parcel of both the dominant culture in Western society's concerns over 'deadly' micro-organisms, germs, odour and filth, as well as, as we will later see, patriarchal visions of the body politic deeming women as deviant from the healthy (male) norm.

Richard and Claudia L. Bushman provide important insight in the practices and routines of cleanliness by exploring how washing, between 1750-1900, went from being an occasional and haphazard routine of a small segment of the population to a regular practice

of the majority of the people. According to Bushman and Bushman, the combination of traditional genteel fashion with the rise of new medical ideas regarding 'dirty skin', was the eventual force which would promote the use of soap.[8] In all, Bushman and Bushman recognize that this new concern for health, though gradually more widely used, was primarily maintained by the upper-classes of society. Cleanliness was, so the Bushmans' argue, the mark of civilization and a symbol of one's better class and moral worth; to be dirty was to show disgrace and barbarism.[9]

Indeed, it was not until the introduction of mass markets and the explosion of advertisements that the notion of cleanliness derived its most solid footing for the general population. While Bushman and Bushman maintain that it was the health and genteel movement that created and popularized the notion of cleanliness, it was the industrialists and advertisers who could bring the message forth on a nation-wide scale. In addition to the social pressures of respectability and health through maintaining the cleanliness standard, the Bushman's argue that the force of advertisement made the culture of cleanliness universal to all.[10] It was not long after advertisement began proclaiming the values of cleanliness, that its habits solidified into the everyday of American life.

Vincent Vinikas amplifies the latter half of the Bushmans' study. In his work, Vinikas investigates the rise of cleanliness, focusing in particular on the relationship between the dictates of the marketplace and those of changing human desires. According to Vinikas, consumers were consistently, by the early 1920s,

conditioned by advertising to follow the regiments of personal hygiene. Deodorant sprays, soaps, antiperspirants, foot powders, scented shampoos, douches, clothes fresheners, deodorant cleansers, and air fresheners all eventually pervaded the common consciousness, taking a prominent place in the American personality. Indeed, through advertisements' inundating process, argues Vinikas, people became fixated on their own natural odours and the need to conceal them with the newly developed or the now transformed magical formulas.[11]

The notions of personal hygiene played a significant, if not overwhelming role in defining the menstrual experience. Indeed, all twenty-four women went to great lengths to manage and control the "messy side-effects" of menstruation: women changed their pads regularly, were more fastidious in bathing (despite the difficulty this played for women of the first cohort, who, until well into the 1940s did not always have the luxury of indoor plumbing and private baths), and never wore light coloured clothing. Eleven out of twenty-four women expressed fear of odour, fourteen complained that it was messy, and all were extremely mortified by leakage. The concerns of personal hygiene with its fear of odour and leakage, have led to a complex menstrual management system of concealment.

This adherence to personal hygiene, was different from what other feminist studies have referred to as a pollutant taboo. Unlike Delaney *et al.*'s and Weideger's claims, women did not believe that the maintenance of the menstrual management system was about an issue of cleansing a body deemed tainted and spoiled.

Women separated the difference between 'dirty' *per se* and the 'messiness' of menstruation - menstruation may have been physically uncomfortable at times, may have had a distinct odour, and may have left unwanted stains on underwear (or worst, outer clothing) and bed sheets, but menstruation itself was, according to the interviewees a natural normal process; it was part of being a woman, and, for that, no disgrace was felt. Best summarized by Mary (1947) whose menstruating years began in the 1950s, "I was never told it was dirty, or that my body was unclean. It was just part of life. Part of being a girl."[12] She further asserted, "it was inconvenient because...there's an odour that you were conscious of and it was messy because of this thick wide wad of cotton between your legs."[13] As this last quote illustrated, woman's most immediate and most consistent understanding of her menstrual cycle was directed at personal hygiene and comfort. The sanitary napkin and with that, its coping techniques, had ultimately become the overriding defining qualities of women's menstrual experiences. Just as one woman referred to her menstrual period, a woman's cycle could rightly be proclaimed as a woman's "pad days."[14]

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the dynamics of the menstrual message and its overwhelming priority placed on 'personal hygiene'. First, the message itself and by whom the message was transmitted will be explored. Here I will examine the role mothers and the industry played in constructing the discussion of menstruation around the sanitary napkin. From there, I will investigate how this view of menstruation affected women's own

views towards their bodies. It is in this section where the complexities and intricacies of women's acceptance or rejection of the negative menstrual normative will be highlighted.

INFORMANTS ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE:

The view that menstruation was an 'hygienic crisis', solved only by careful adherence to a complex menstrual management system, was presented, by the early 1920s, to young girls of all classes through a number of mediums. According to the women interviewed, the most significant group involved were mothers. As already established in the first chapter, women, despite variances in preparation prior to the onset of their menarche, recognized their mothers as their primary source of instruction. The conversation between mother and daughter, albeit brief and not always comfortable, overwhelmingly turned to that of sanitary products and personal hygiene. One woman from the first cohort was told, at menarche, to go straight in the bath where she was then provided her first instruction; the only discussion being on the strict rules of keeping clean.[15] Her experience was far from unique. Women of both cohorts explained how, as young girls, the presentation of their first menses was followed by instruction on such sanitary measures as placing the sanitary napkin (be it bought or hand made) and belt in ways which would be discrete, bathing to rid the odour which might give themselves away, and altering dress to heavier and dark clothing. Young girls most certainly were informed on the importance of changing their pads or home-made rags

(products which overlapped during the 1920s) often and regularly for the simple reasons that they may leak or that someone may smell a distinct odour resinating from their bodies.[16] As Victoria (1923) recalled:

> It was June during the holiday and I was home with my stepmother, so she just gave me a belt and a pad and said, "Here, put this on." But there was no discussion about you becoming a woman and things like that. You started to bleed, period, and put this on.

She also learned,

> well, you had to change your pad often and get washed; make sure you were clean...You had to make sure to be really clean so there would be no odour, eh?[17]

Sexuality and maturation had no place within the discourse Victoria received regarding her menstruation and, as such, when describing her experience much emphasis was placed simply on how she felt about managing her period. Indeed, when asked one word to describe menstruation, her response was as follows:

> A nuisance and a bother...Well, you had to put on this belt and this pad and you had to be careful to change it often and be clean and not smell. I was always afraid I would smell. I remember some girls who would smell so bad. Yeah, I didn't want to smell. But it's a lot less trouble and bother if you don't have it...But, something no use complaining about it. You have to put up with it, that's all. It didn't bother me, but I was happier when I wasn't menstruating.[18]

The silence existing between mother and daughter was not confined to Victoria's experience alone. Natalie's (1924) narrative further illustrated how for most women of her cohort, issues about growing up were simply ignored:

> I just remember coming home from school and telling my mother, "Mom, something is - " I was bleeding. She never said a word, just gave me a piece of rag and put it on and that was it...If I remember correctly I had no

> feelings. I just figured that was it. Never asked questions. I often think of that now...I just took it for granted, that was it. But I can remember my mother standing in the door watching me go to school. She never ever did that before. I think maybe she thought, "Oh, my soul, she's growing up."[19]

It is interesting that while Natalie may have felt her mother regarded Natalie's menarche as her departure from childhood, her mother did not express this to Natalie. Based on Natalie's recollection, being introduced to the sanitary rag was the only fact presented to her on the day she began to bleed.

While, according to Brumberg, discussion on menstruation had traditionally included such topics as sexuality, this was slowly eliminated and replaced, during the nineteenth century, by an 'hygienic discourse'. Part of the reason behind this transformation, suggests Brumberg, was the growing disjuncture between biology and social mores.[20] Over the past two centuries, North America and western Europe witnessed a consistent decline in the average age at menarche, dropping to an average age of 13 or 14 by the 1920s, and 12. 9 by 1948.[21] By the 1960s, the average showed a slight decline, as menarche could have arrived at any age between 11 to 15.[22] This changing female biology affected the way in which the menstrual discourse would be constructed, most easily reflected in the case of sexual maturation. Although menarche may have marked a female body's readiness to reproduce, Canadian mores dictated this to occur within the structure of marriage. Mothers, fearing that sexual knowledge at too early an age would, like a slippery slope, led to moral degeneracy, believed that, to prolong a young daughter's innocence any sexual topic should be avoided

completely.[23] "In this way," argues Brumberg, "an earlier age at menarche may have contributed to the ongoing desegregation of information about sex and the body that was characteristic of the decline of traditional women's culture."[24]

The earlier age of menarche would also explain why its arrival was no longer treated or viewed as a symbol of maturity. While there exists amongst present feminist and other scholarly works the assumption that menstruation is an important transition marking the young child's entrance into womanhood, few of the women's experiences coincided with this view. They felt little significant change in the relationship between daughter and parent, received no recognition from society that proclaimed these girls as adults, and experienced no greater forms of responsibility or freedom.[25] Later life stages such as leaving school, finding full-time employment, moving away from home, getting married, were more significant indications of adulthood than menarche. Indeed, since menarche began on average in the early or even pre-teens, girls were, in the eyes of society, still viewed as a child. Simply, the rhetoric "you're a young lady now", had very little meaning.

These factors would explain why a non-sexualized version of the menstrual discourse was maintained throughout the decades that followed. From the moment their menses began, young adolescents of the 1960s and 1970s were introduced to the practices and regulations of sanitary protection: what to use, how to use it, how many to carry as spares, how often to change it, and how to dispose of it. Through personal experience, this message was translated

into concerns over proper protection, cleanliness, leakage, and odour. Best illustrating the strength of the 'sanitary protection message' was Melanie's (1952) narrative describing her first exchange with her mother about menstruation. It was her menses which served as the opening of conversation, and it was, according to Melanie, quite brief and awkward. For the most part, all Melanie could recall was the horrendous look and feel of the pad.

> I remember the first reaction of my mother giving me this dreadful thick sanitary napkin - I don't know if you've ever seen those things: with the [belt] tabs that you have to wind the long ends through. And I remember walking down the hall for the first time with this thing in between my legs going "Oh, God!"[26]

In this narrative, Melanie constructed her menstrual experience around the sanitary napkin. Having a cycle and what it meant in terms of reproductivity and maturation were completely ignored, or at least, forgotten.

This quote was also significant as it highlighted the conflict between the menstrual process, deemed limiting, and an active lifestyle. Melanie, a self-proclaimed tomboy of the 1960s, climbing trees, playing baseball, and riding horses, recognized her menarche as an instantaneous limitation in her liberty and freedom. Though Melanie argued that menstruation never limited her in any way, the depiction of her first menstrual experience showed otherwise. According to Melanie, the pad "didn't sit too well figuratively and literally at all."[27] At menarche, her world as a tomboy was transformed, with a thick uncomfortable pad between her legs, it would never be the same again.

Besides the pad and belt, Melanie's only other memory of her

first period was receiving a booklet handed out by her mother:

> I remember getting my period, I was probably ten and a half...My mother was mortified. She didn't know what to do, I remember her sitting on a lawn chair in front of our house and she gave me this book from, I think it was Kotex, *How to Speak to Your Daughter* or something about your period or menstruation or whatever the terminology was. She just looked at me and said read this and she left.[28]

This narrative illustrated a dual yet complimentary message pertaining to management and concealment. The first message was contrived more through silence than through actual discourse. Melanie's mother's reticent and reserved reaction to her daughter's menarche powerfully reinforced the notion that menstruation was something hidden, personal, and private. Such a message highlighted the view that menstruation was something tainted or spoiled, something of which to be ashamed of. The second message, working alongside the first, was the importance of personal hygiene. Though this included issues of bathing, Melanie's, as with most women of the second cohort, strongest recollection towards hygiene was that of the pad and the pamphlet. With the introduction of these objects, Melanie learned that the messy and unhygienic aspects of menstruation could be controlled, managed, and concealed. As long as she played close attention to what product she used, to how often she changed, and to proper disposal no one would ever discover her menstrual status. The secret would be maintained.

While Melanie's experience illustrated what menstrual messages existed, through her narrative it also became clear that the perpetuation and maintenance of the 'hygienic crisis' discourse was

not completely laid at the feet of mothers alone - others were involved. Her mother's use of the pamphlet as a form of instruction confirmed that one of the most consistent and powerful instigators of this discourse was the promoters of sanitary products.

From the beginning of its campaign in the 1920s and 1930s, the sanitary product industry recognized the potential difficulty in public acceptance, due to its 'taboo' and 'personal' nature, and as such, divined that the best way to sell thier product would be through a combination of education and promotion. One of the industry's most successful ways of gaining the public's acceptance of this newly developed product was through the publication and distribution of educational pamphlets.[29] One of the earliest booklets addressed to mothers and teachers in preparing pre-adolescent girls for menarche was entitled *Marjorie May's Twelfth Birthday*.[30] First published in 1931, this pamphlet was available throughout Great Britain, when, in 1932, Kimberly-Clark brought the idea to both the United States and Canada.[31] One recollection of a women interviewed, born and brought up in Montreal, was exactly this booklet. Though no other woman could remember the title of the book, there is evidence that it was widely used in English Canada. Susan (1924), who began menstruating in the mid 1930s claimed the provision of Kotex pamphlets by mothers was a common experience shared by her peers.[32] The booklet, *Marjorie May's Twelfth Birthday*, was also promoted in such widely-read Canadian magazines as *Chatelaine*. A 1933 advertisement published in the

magazine stated the importance of its use for instruction:

> thousands of mothers -- courageous -- intimate in all things but this. There will be thousands too timid to meet this problem - and it will pass - but with what possible unhappiness...To free this task of enlightenment from the slightest embarrassment the Kotex Company has had prepared an intimate chat between mother and daughter called *Marjorie May's Twelfth Birthday*.[33]

All which was required to receive *Marjorie May's Twelfth Birthday* was to return a coupon, provided in the advertisement, and the booklet would then be sent, arriving by return mail, in a 'plain envelope'. Clearly, the industry was well aware of the awkwardness that often existed between mother and daughter talks and used this tension to their advantage. Roland Marchand calls this the "vacuum of advice...in which the delicacy of the topic inhibited person-to-person conversation."[34] Deficiencies of advice about menstruation gave advertisers the "opportunity to dispense the needed counsel in conjunction with their product."[35]

Although women, especially from the first cohort, found these an important and appreciated form of instruction, the positive effects were limited. The combination of education and the retail of the product tended to define menstruation solely in terms of sanitary protection. In *Marjorie May's Twelfth Birthday*, the main instruction of menstruation, though first geared at the experience of menarche - when menstruation may occur, what it will look like - was quickly directed towards the sanitary product:

> One of these days, at any hour of the morning or even in the middle of the night, you will find coming from you a slight blood-stained fluid. When you see it, do not be afraid or worried, for this is the first indication that the new development has started. When this happens, you are to take from your dresser one of these Kotex pads and

> wear it with this elastic girdle, known as the sanitary belt.[36]

Any opportunity to discuss or ask questions about the fears or insecurities a young adolescent may have felt towards her changing body seemingly took a back seat to what the company felt was most important overall, that is, selling their product.

If the opportunity to create an atmosphere of meaningful exchange between mother and daughter was ever possible through the service provided by the corporation, this held no longer true by the 1940s. As a result of growing market competition after the war, advertising agencies began to shift their emphasis on what they believed to be the greatest market potential - their youngest consumers.[37] According to advertisers, it made much better economic sense in the long run to "make each girl a confirmed Kotex user...than it was convincing a 35-year-old woman to switch to Kotex."[38] As such, advertisers began to bypass mothers completely, gearing their educational pamphlets directly to teenagers themselves. Two pamphlets reflecting this new younger market were entitled *"You're a Young Lady Now"* and *Very Personally Yours*, both republished several times between 1946 and 1961.[39] There was continuity between the new pamphlets and the material of the 1930s since the content of the pamphlets focused more on how to deal with menstruation.

The pamphlet, *"You're a Young Lady Now"*, for instance, introduced its young reader first to a description of menstruation including what it looked like and how it may be discovered. It asserted that this was a very normal part of a woman's life and

that one should not be alarmed when the first spottings of red appeared. However, it was also quick to note that though menstruation was a "natural part of being a girl - a natural part of growing up", it was a "very personal thing, so you won't want to discuss it with anyone else except your mother, school nurse, or adviser."[40] This was to be presented in strict confidence between mother and daughter, teacher or advisor and student; to discuss it with friends was completely unacceptable. Fear that young adolescents' discussions may turn to issues of sex, the pamphlets encouraged limited access to information. In this way, mothers and doctors were ensured control over the type of message received, maintaining an unthreatening desexualized version.

No sooner did the pamphlet present the basic definition of menstruation, then the discussion turned towards keeping "fresh as a daisy."[41] It was in this section that the "soft pads called sanitary napkins" were introduced.[42] Here the reader learned about the belt and the pad, the importance of changing regularly in order to feel "fresh and comfortable," as well as the necessity of washing the belt.[43] The reader, so the pamphlet thus concluded, was assured that "NOTHING SHOWS so no one else knows you are wearing a belt and napkin."[44]

The third section provided a brief description on how a young girl may feel in terms of physical discomfort. Though the pamphlet began by recognizing premenstrual signs including headaches, a fullness in the lower part of the body, emotional strain such as feeling "blue, upset, or cross", the corporation did not recognize

these as normal sensations or feelings.[45] According to the pamphlet, such aches and pains were, for the most part, imagined or exaggerated by a "few" young women. Indeed, if a young girl was to feel a "little ache or two," she should not, the pamphlet counselled, pay any attention to it.[46] Read a book, go to the movies, play your favourite record, but do not let menstruation get you down, the pamphlet advised. Indeed, as long as one understood menstruation and "how little bother it need be, paying attention to it makes about as much sense as worrying over breathing."[47]

As much as the pamphlet attempted to reassure its audience that menstruation was really nothing to pay attention to and nothing to be concerned about, it was contradictory. Though a young woman was advised to act as though her period was just like any other day of the month, in the same breath it suggested that throughout her menstruation, certain rules and regulations had to be followed. Bathing to "stay neat and sweet," though important at any time, was especially so during her menstruation.[48] After all, not only was menstruation considered to carry an odour, but it was also claimed that perspiration may also be a little more noticeable than usual. And even then, as much as having a bath or shower every day during her menses was necessary, not just any type of bath or shower would do. A woman could not take a shower or bath as she normally might have done, for during her period, temperature of the bath could have potentially caused harm: "if the water is too hot it may increase the flow" and if the water was "too cold [it] may check it."[49] Comfortable warm temperatures, the pamphlet

counselled, were best. With that, a young woman was also taught that even closer attention at keeping her hair, nails, and clothes clean and neat was of grave import, for, as the pamphlet reassured, "just looking neat and pretty will help you feel better."[50] One might ask, if menstruation was not supposed to cause any great physical or emotional discomfort, than why the importance on making yourself feel better? Further advice for maintaining a healthy body and attitude were plenty of sleep, moderate exercise (though do not "get tired, overheated, or chilled"), and avoidance of rich foods.[51] Finally, a 'model young lady' should "stand tall, pull in [her] stomach, and hold [her] head high."[52]

Based on such health rules, it would seem, that the only way menstruation could be considered in its proper light - 'a natural normal process' - was when the complex system of menstrual management was strictly followed. To this end, the pamphlet left the reader with one last reminder of its product and the necessity of its use. Here, the pamphlet discussed the importance of being prepared for the first menstrual period:

> Ask your mother to get you a sanitary belt and a box of napkins. Perhaps you will want to try them on ahead of time, to know just how they should be worn. Then put them away in a handy place until needed.[53]

With the final assertion for sanitary products, combined with the other health rules, the corporation constructed the topic of menstruation in terms of a 'problem' which Kotex was able to solve. It seemed to work. According to Kennard, the industry throughout the period under study consistently reinforced the legitimacy for the corporation in educating women with the 'right answers' in

concerns of not only their physical health, but in their mental health and social lives as well.[54]

Advertisements, from the late 1920s onward, expressed a similar message as was found in pamphlets. In such a medium, product lines including not only Kotex, but Modess, a brand developed in 1929, Tampax, developed in 1931 and marketed in 1936, the Playtex tampon introduced in 1967, and Stayfree, the adhesive pad marketed in 1971, advertised their product as the ultimate solution to any and all menstrual 'problems' a women may experience.[55] During the 1920s advertisers primarily linked concerns of hygiene with health and focused on the so-called unsanitary home-made rag. Using medical experts as the voice of authority, an advertisement from *Chatelaine*'s 1928 March issue described the importance and necessity of turning away from the home-made protection turning, instead, towards the scientifically-proven superior Kotex product:

> Doctors recommend to all women the use of Kotex sanitary napkins instead of home-made pads that are unsanitary and so often dangerous to the health. For Kotex is the scientific method that permits women's greatest freedom in time of hygienic distress. It removes all worry.[56]

The weight of doctors' voices, as trusting experts of the scientific truth, were used to convince women of the hygienic, in fact, healthier ways of the new sanitary pad. Self-proclaimed leaders of this new modern, rational, scientific thought, advertisers "championed the new against the old, the modern against the old fashioned."[57] Indeed, so the advertisers claimed, the soaking, filthy germ-infested home-made rags, which had been used

by women for centuries, had now, under the rubric of scientific discovery, become a menace and danger to one's own and family's health. With this new modern concern at hand, women were told that the only safe solution was Kotex.[58]

It was from this perspective that Kotex used to open up a new market for its product. In the same 1928 advertisement, Kotex announced it was:

> most comfortable - it is scientifically shaped. Form-fitting, it is non-detectable when worn. It is soft, yet secure. It is simple to dispose of - direction in every package. Another important thing: it deodorizes and that every women appreciates. Today start with the Kotex habit to health.[59]

Advertisements directed at the francophone community were no different "une utile mesure d'hygiene...protection contres toutes les graves conséquences que peut entrainé certaine indisposition hygienique, tels sont les advantages...par Kotex."[60] In both languages, advertisers continued to stress the importance of proper sanitary protection as a way of maintaining both physical and mental comfort.

The overwhelming priority placed on issues of freshness, tidiness, and dryness continued in full-force for decades to come. Though the message changed little, the discourse slightly transferred its emphasis; notions of good-grooming overtook health concerns. As early as the mid 1930s, looking and feeling feminine, possible through hiding the menstrual status, was key for selling the corporations' products. Such claims were evident in these respective 1961 and 1965 advertisements which boasted their products as capable of making customers feel "White dress fresh and

sea cool! You feel so immaculate!...You feel so cool, so clean, so fresh with Tampax", or "fresher than springtime are you".[61] Simply, advertisment claims adhered to notions of proper sanitary measures as ways of maintaining not simply comfort, but also one's beauty, composure, and poise.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF WOMEN'S MENSTRUAL EXPERIENCE:

The commercial rhetoric combined with mothers' emphasis on personal hygiene were influential forces shaping women's views of and behaviour towards their menstruating bodies in ways which were conflicting and ambiguous. One women from the first cohort described her experience as:

> The physical part of it and the sheer nuisance of having to cope with it. Change pads, wear pads, have them on hand...making sure that you are prepared and not caught short. Even putting on a pad a day early so that, when you feel it coming, you're not going to be caught short. All these mechanics of it.
>
> Would you connect menstruation with hygiene?
>
> What do you mean hygiene? It's just blood...No it's just your own good blood coming out...Well, it's messy. You've got a pad on that's getting soaked and it's unpleasant...I don't think it's a dirty thing, but I think it's something that requires your attention. It's an area that you want cleansed whether it's blood or whatever else. And you're certainly much more comfortable with a clean pad on then you are with one that's all caked with blood.[62]

Within this narrative, two separate concerns emerged. On the one hand, the hygienic functionings of changing one's pad and cleaning the genital area were related to issues of comfort. A sticky soaked pad, a dried chafing pad, and or the feeling of moistness around and on the skin were the inescapable realities of menstruation when using a home-made or even a bought pad. In this

regard, Flora's (1911) complaint of menstruation as 'messy' and not always comfortable, was mainly referring to the mere logistics of menstruation. On the other hand, the importance of adhering to an hygienic management system (changing pads regularly, wearing pads, having them on hand, putting on a pad a day early) was related to Flora's fear "of being caught short." Flora's concern that leakage or odour might signal her menstrual status was embodied in her need to wear pads a day early - just in case. In this regard, the importance of hygienic practices often had as much to do, if not more, with issues of concealment and fear of judgement, then it did with issues of comfort and health.

Indeed, women, despite their assertions that menstruation was really nothing to be ashamed of, consistently showed anxiety over its potential discovery. The stigma surrounding the discovery of a woman's menstrual status whether it be through bulges, or odour and leakage left women to create and follow strict rules of management and disguise. Secrecy seemed an overwhelming factor in women's menstrual routine as they creatively sought ways to conceal. Erin (1961), for instance, recalled:

> I still remember to this day going to change it while you were in highschool and I mean it was like that's when all the girls started to wear purses so that you could go to the washroom and no one would ever know. It was hidden. Hide it. You had to hide it.[63]

Indeed, it is clear, from the women interviewed, that the concern women felt over the discovery of their menstrual status was a consistent one. It was the "guilt caught staining [leakage]," according to Jane (1956), "that was the biggest anxiety and it

still is a big anxiety...because the fear of being caught not properly protected. That's the one biggest anxiety about the whole thing...The embarrassed part of it, and the need to keep it to yourself seems to be prevalent and I don't care if it's now or twenty or thirty years ago."[64] No matter from which cohort, women often expressed feelings of awkwardness, embarrassment and shame when their menstrual status was accidentally revealed. All women recognized the potential threat which lay in menstrual discovery. Melanie (1952) saw it in her friend's flushed cheeks as she walked backwards out of a classroom; Julie (1955) recognized it in the girl who wore a shirt around her waist; Natalie (1923) learned it through her mother's lies or aversions when as a young child she had spotted blood on her mothers' clothing. With such examples at hand women told themselves, as one told me, that they would never "allow that to happen to me."[65] These women would always remain "in control."[66]

Indeed, even when women's assertions of control failed, mortification, lies and aversions to maintain even the slightest form of disguise ensued. Julie (1955), for instance, recalls:

> I remember one day being so embarrassed...I went into the washroom to get changed and I forgot the dirty one in there. And he [brother] went in right after me...I was taking a fit out in the kitchen telling my Grandma, "I forgot it! Oh, my God!" Now, he never said a word about it, and she obviously went in and fixed everything up and disposed of it or whatever. But it struck me. I remember thinking, "Oh, God! How embarrassing having him walk in after you and I forgot to bring it out."[67]

Julie's situation illustrated, in many ways, the complexities embodying the importance of menstrual concealment. While Julie

felt comfortable revealing her predicament to her grandmother, in fact, depending on her for support and counsel, it was not alright for her brother, a man, to notice and acknowledge Julie's period. The dividing line was clearly demarcated:

> I guess it was a man thing. You weren't supposed to discuss this with men and talk about it...Well, it's grandmother-mother passed down, you don't talk about this with men, it's a woman's thing.[68]

The notion of menstrual management, and its emphasis in concealment, hence, had much to do with male/female relations and gendered norms. Indeed, when threat of judgement did not exist, primarily amongst the women themselves, sharing one's status - "I've got the curse," "I'm going to get my period soon," "My cramps are just killing me" - was easily revealed. And when this status was accidentally discovered, the blood stain would mark women's sympathy, understanding, and perhaps even, shared embarrassment for their fellow sister. Nonetheless, at the same time, this stain served as a reminder to never allow that to happen to them. None so desired to be judged dirty, unattractive, and smelly - a judgement which was perceived as not necessarily coming from the women themselves, but from the boys in their classroom, the men at work, the men walking along the streets, in their family, or even still, in their beds.

How is that while their menstruating bodies, albeit admittedly uncomfortable but hardly anything to be ashamed about according to respondents, simultaneously reflected levels of concern and mortification upon its discovery? I would argue that this discrepancy is found with women's very act of concealment.

Legitimized as personal hygiene, women were distanced from the prescription which had deemed menstruation as unclean. Indeed, through advertisement covert claims, the conflicting ambiguous lessons of the educative materials, the counsel of mothers, and even in women's personal choices regarding the importance of personal hygiene, the negative menstrual prescription was rendered invisible. Women were told never to discuss their menstrual status, their feelings or thoughts, as well as were told to disguise and conceal the messy defects of the menstrual process. As long as the rules and regulations were followed strictly and religiously, judgement disappeared, the odour and blood no longer existed, in fact, women did not even have to feel they were menstruating at all. Through the ability to manage one's menstrual cycle, any negatives surrounding menstruation were claimed as being under control, and, hence, contained.

Women's narratives from both the first and second cohort reflected well the effects of this ambiguous connection between personal hygiene and concealment. Virginia (1921), for instance, described her mother's reaction to those women whose lack of regular sanitary products led to public acknowledgement. Menstrual management, according to Virginia's mother, served the purpose of hiding from others one's dirty status:

> As my mother says, "you smell"...She would say, "if you don't keep yourself clean people sitting beside ya can smell it and they'll know your dirty...It's not dirty...as long as you keep yourself clean and free of smell."[69]

From Virginia's recollection of her mother's advice, there was no

question that a menstruating body was unclean and polluting when left unkept. A shameful and embarrassing process, offensive by its smell, Virginia's mother warned her daughter of the important steps of personal hygiene and menstrual management. Such practices, counselled her mother, would ensure that this shameful process was duly concealed - no one should ever have to know.

And yet, there existed an ambiguity in her mother's claims. While the narrative began with her mothers cautions that "you smell" and "you're dirty", it was concluded by opposing advice claiming "it's not dirty...as long as you keep yourself clean and free of smell." This conflicting evidence, I argue, was due to how the menstrual management system, by its very act, concealed the prescription deeming menstruation as unclean. Virginia's thoughts on menstruation, like those of the women interviewed, proved that menstruation was only considered 'dirty' if it was not controlled and maintained through the use of the correct products. Like Virginia, Melanie (1952), a woman from the second cohort, asserted that:

> The actual physical occurrence is not an unclean act. It's not. We were created that way. If you choose not to deal with it - then it can become unclean and very odorous and that becomes offensive that way.[70]

Seemingly, with the proper solution at hand, all the disgusting aspects of the menstrual cycle were eradicated, and, shame in, turn was supposedly alleviated. It was, in this way, that women were able to claim menstruation was no big deal, hardly a concern, for they had it all under control.

Of course, the effects were only short lived, for as we have

already seen, the potential threat of discovery and fear of judgement continued as an undercurrent in women's menstrual experience throughout both cohorts. Any evidence of discovery, and the shame resurfaced again. Menstrual management system, in essence, represented something far more than simple personal hygiene routines, it was about concealing a body deemed dirty and unclean. The fact that women have not always recognized this themselves only illustrated how insidious and well disguised the menstrual message became.[71] Indeed, while hidden well within the shadows of the menstrual management system, the menstrual conventions remained solidly placed, unchallenged and unchanging.

CONCLUSION:

We have seen the way in which the sanitary napkin industry, through its advertisements and educative materials, and mothers themselves have defined the meaning of the menstrual experience primarily around that of personal hygiene. Young girls in the 1920s and well into the 1960s, were taught ways of managing their period which were primarily defined by the sanitary product itself. Though shame continued to exist - so cleverly implied in the educative materials and advertisements as 'normal' fears of leakage, odour, offending, or of judgement - it had become readily disguised. Through the promises of the menstrual management system, the disgusting unclean process of a woman's menstruation was controlled, hidden from all eyes, even the women's themselves. "In one neat purchase," argued feminist Ann Treneman, "women were

promised that they could solve the monthly problem, and in the process buy into the idea that we did not see menstruation as anything 'dirty' at all."[72] As Treneman found, the effect was devastating, for "we, its 'liberated victims, [became] even more deeply mired in a pattern of thought that [denied] our sex...the taboo affect[ed] more than our buying power habits, it influence[d] how we [thought] of ourselves."[73] Indeed, it affected a woman's femininity, her sexuality, and as we will later see, her productivity as well.

ENDNOTES

1. Dorothy, born 1923, interviewed by author, Montreal, 3 November 1995.

2. Melanie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 15 November 1995.

3.3. Joan Jacobs Brumberg's analysis of the history of the menarcheal experience illustrates that the hygienic discourse is a relatively new phenomenon, emerging in full force after the First World War. In the eighteenth century, education seems to have been an "integrated, core curriculum"; passed down from generation to generation, young girls were taught about their menarcheal 'flowers' (French term used to denote menstrual discharge until the nineteenth century). This was to be eclipsed by mid-nineteenth century with the encroachment of doctors and other social reformers. With the full brunt of their approach witnessed finally in the 1920s, the scientific, hygienic, discourse had taken its primary role. "'Something Happens to Girls': Menarche and the Emergence of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4:1(Summer, 1993): 99-126.

4. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

5. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, eds., "A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism," in *ibid.*, *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 32.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

7. For some examples of popular feminist works supporting the universal view of the menstrual taboo see: Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, Emily Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1976). Also see: Paula Weideger, *Menstruation and Menopause: The Physiology, and Psychology, the Myth and the Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

8. Richard L. Bushman and Claudia L. Bushman, "The Early History of Cleanliness in America," *The Journal of American History* 74:4 (March, 1988): 1217-1225.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 1225.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 1232-1238.

11. While Vinikas provides a provocative study on the rise of advertisement and its socializing effects, he nonetheless overlooks some important issues. The claim that the phenomenon of the good-grooming standard grew out of a conscious creation of the marketers and companies of soap industries is far too simplistic, if not misleading, for it ignores, as already noted from Richard L. Bushman and Claudia L. Bushman, "The Early History of Cleanliness in America," social and economic factors. Simply, the manufacturers did not create the value of cleanliness, they only helped spread its message (albeit on a national level). For further reviews on Vincent Vinikas' *"Soft Soap, Hard Sell"* see: Charles McGovern's assessment in *Journal of American History*, 79(March, 1993): 1639-1640, as well as, Jaqueline S. Wilkie, *Journal of Social History*, 27:2(1993-1994): 383-384.

12. Mary, born 1947, interviewed by author, Montreal, 6 December 1995.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Patricia, born 1962, interviewed by author, Montreal, 2 December 1995.

15. Virginia, born 1921, interviewed by author, Montreal, 5 December 1995.

16. While all women of the second cohort were, at menarche, introduced with bought sanitary napkins, the majority of women from the first cohort were introduced with home-made rags. Though mothers of the first cohort did not always seem interested in the manufactured pads - Flora (1911) claimed her mother felt the flannel home-made rags were more comfortable than the bought pads - the interviewees, for reasons of convenience, eventually switched over. This often occurred once their mothers stopped doing their daughters' laundry, often coinciding around the age when women began working and having their own pocket money.

17. Victoria, born 1923, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 December 1995.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Natalie, born 1924, interviewed by author, Montreal, 3 December 1995.

20. Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," pp. 108-109.

21. According to Brumberg's findings, "in 1780, the average age at menarche in the United States and western Europe was probably about 17; by 1877, the average age had declined to almost 15; by 1901 it was 13.9," *ibid.*, p. 104.

22. The statistic was found in Helen I. Driver, ed., *Sex Guidance for Your Child. A Parent Handbook* (Wisconsin: Monona Publications, 1960), p. 49. It would seem the age of menarche has slightly fallen. In Sharon Golub's 1992 work, *Periods: From Menarche to Menopause* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), menarche, on average, occurs between 12.8 and 13.2 years. However, she does recognize that it is considered perfectly normal for young girls to begin menstruating as early as age 9 and as late as age 16, p.26.

23. Mary Louise Adams argues that during the post-Second World War period there existed strong incentives to 'protect' the 'innocence' of adolescents. Ideas about the moral and physical capacities of young people were represented in the strong initiatives for moral and sexual regulation - initiatives which limited and defined how and by whom sexuality could be defined. Whether it be due to fear that either teenagers were under the control of "their blossoming sex drives" or due to the fear that teenagers were still too immature to receive sexual information (as they would not be able to decipher right from wrong), both perspectives saw early sexual discourse as dangerous and threatening to the adolescence respectability. "Youth Corruptibility, and English-Canadian Postwar Campaigns against Indecency, 1948-1955," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6:1(1995): 89-117. Regarding attitudes held towards women's sexuality in the late 1920s and 1930s, see Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), pp. 86-91. For further information on the culture of adolescence, written from the perspective of the working-class experience, see: Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), chapter one.

24. Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls'," p. 109.

25. It should be noted that three respondents upon menarche were explicityly told by their mothers that they were growing up and becoming a woman, and four women claimed that they had viewed their menses as a mark of their womanhood. Nonetheless, these feelings and assertions were momentary and fleeting. The reality for all women was that socially their status remained that of a growing child.

26. Melanie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 20 November 1995.

27. *Ibid.* Jane M. Ussher similarly observes the difficulty young girls showing tomboy behaviour have with menarche. According to Ussher, "in society today...tomboy behaviour is less acceptable postmenarche when the adolescent girl is encouraged to conform to the female role model. This loss of freedom can feel like a punishment for being a woman, suddenly having to refrain from previously acceptable pastimes, with no alternative and positive

role being offered," *The Psychology of the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 25.

28. *Ibid.*

29. According to Margot Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films 1947-1983" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989), the use of education as a form of advertising not only helped the increase of sales, but it also "enabled the agency both to legitimize the corporation as the best source for information on menstruation and women's health, and to praise the corporation for performing a valuable service to mothers, young girls and women," p. 77.

30. In 1932, Kotex announced through its advertisements the availability of their corporate-sponsored educative pamphlet, *"Preparing for Womanhood". Chatelaine*, August 1932. p. 29. This was to be replaced with *Marjorie May's Twelfth Birthday* in 1933.

31. Janice Jergensen, ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands, Vol. 2: Personal Products* (Detroit: St. James, 1994), p. 317.

32. Susan, born 1924, interviewed by author, Montreal, 15 November 1995.

33. *Chatelaine*, May 1933, p. 31.

34. Roland Marchand. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 344.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 344.

36. Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom," p. 75.

37. Jergenson ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands*, p. 317.

38. Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom," p. 75.

39. *"You're a Young Lady Now"* (Kimberly-Clark Canada Limited. Toronto: Educational Department, 1946, 1953, 1959, 1961). Also see: *Very Personally Yours* (Kimberly-Clark Canada Limited. Toronto: Educational Department, 1946, 1953, 1959, 1961).

40. *"You're a Young Lady Now,"* p. 4.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 8. The pamphlets' stress on the importance of showering or bathing everyday were not always easily met when it is considered that household amenities, such as indoor plumbing and electricity, were not available to all women. For some statistics on the urban and rural differences as late as 1941, see Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History*, (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 245.

50. *"You're a Young Lady Now"*, pp. 8-9.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

54. Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom," p. 80. Besides *"You're a Young Lady Now"* and *Very Personally Yours*, another popular pamphlet used by Kotex during this period was *As One Girl to Another*.

55. Jorgenson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands*, pp. 316-319, pp. 428-430, pp. 516-518, pp. 533-536.

56. *Chatelaine*, March 1928. p. 65.

57. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, p. xxi of his introduction.

58. While advertisements may have stressed health concerns as the main reason to switch from home-made rags to bought pads, this did not coincide with women's claims. As already mentioned, according to the respondents, convenience was the main reason why they switched to manufactured pads. A disposable pad meant less work for women since it meant not having to make and launder one's own.

59. *Chatelaine*, March 1928. p. 65.

60. *La Presse*, June 5, 1929. p.15.

61. *Chatelaine*, July 1961, p. 65; *Ibid*, July 1965, p. 45.

62. Flora, born 1911, interviewed by author, Montreal, 16 November 1995.

63. Erin, born 1961, interviewed by author, Montreal, 25 November 1995.

64. Jane, born 1956, interviewed by author, Montreal, 1 November 1995.

65. Melanie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 20 November 1995 .

66. Erin, born 1961, interviewed by author, Montreal, 25 November 1995.

67. Julie, born 1955, interviewed by author, Montreal, 26 November 1995.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Virginia, born 1921, interviewed by author, Montreal, 5 December 1995. Virginia recognized that the middle-class standards of cleanliness were not easily met by poorer working-class women. As Virginia claimed, "I mean there was some [women] - Oh! I think they used one [pad] from beginning to end. But there were a Hell of a lot of people who didn't have the money... But as my mother used to say, 'they must have some old sheets they could make them the same as I made for you all'." How the different economic and cultural backgrounds affected women's menstrual experience warrants further study.

70. Melanie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 20 November 1995.

71. For a similar argument, see: Anne Treneman, "Cashing in on the Curse: Advertising and the Menstrual Taboo," in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, eds., *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (Seattle: The Real comet Press, 1989), p. 161.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TAINTED SEX.

> It is not easy to play the idol, the fairy, the faraway princess, when one feels a bloody cloth between one's legs; and more generally, when one feels conscious of the primitive misery of being a body. The modesty is spontaneous refusal to admit one's carnal nature verges on hypocrisy.[1]
>
> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (first published in 1953)

The contradiction between dealing with one's own bodily processes - which, according to most women was at the very least "no big deal" if not "something to be proud of" - and social expectations - which portrayed menstruation as an 'hygienic crisis' - was clear in most of the women's narratives. Women, despite their positive assertions about menstruation, also admitted to feelings of discomfort and dislike towards their bleeding bodies. Some felt this to be only natural considering the feel and odour of the menstrual blood, while others recognized their ambivalence as being part and parcel of society. A woman from the second cohort, who began menstruating in the 1960s, argued:

> I would never refer to it as something that dirty. But I would define or refer to it as something that requires you to be - to use normal hygiene as you would...It's just like B.O. [body odour] that's just a visceral gut kind of reaction that's part and parcel with our society. I'm sure in other cultures...It's like shaving your underarms or your legs. I just can't imagine not doing that. But in Europe, they don't. And I don't think it's very feminine or very pretty. I don't find it sexually attractive to be walking around with stubble on your legs and under your arms. So, perhaps it's part of all that cultural thing. Society's expectations.[2]

As this quote suggested, the constructed meanings of menstruation were not created in isolation but were rather

influenced by the socially created idealized identity of the contemporary woman. Defined within the context of Western gendered idealogies, menstruation represented far more than a healthy body and potential reproductive capabilities, it embodied the 'female nature' entirely. It limited and directed her femininity, sexuality, and, as we will see in the last chapter, her productivity.

These two former themes, advanced by feminist and women's historians as cannons regulating women's position in society, are broadly defined as follows: femininity refers to "individual self-definition or attribution based on acceptance, manipulation, rejection, or redefinition of their culture's gender role expectations."[3] These expectations include such characteristics as passivity, sensitivity, emotionality, delicacy, and beauty. Sexuality, referred to "sexual behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and practices based on binding behaviours."[4] As advertisements, educative materials, and women alike referred to the menstrual experience in terms of heterosexuality - much directed at women's use of their bodies as objects of appeal and allurement - it will become the basis of my own analysis.[5] Variances in the menstrual experience and its effect on different forms of sexual choices, beliefs, attitudes, and actions warrants further study, but are beyond the scope of this thesis.

The focus of this chapter, once again divided between issues of prescription versus reality, deals, first, with the ways in which advertisements and educative materials presented menstruation

in terms of a woman's femininity and her sexuality. I hope to demonstrate that menstruation, a 'hygienic crisis', was viewed as affecting a woman's attractiveness and sexual appeal, of which, women were expected to remedy. With proper care, women could disguise and hide their menstruating status, and thus ensure their tainted identity would remain well hidden from the critical eyes of the public. From this, women's own experience will be compared and contrasted with the public discourse. It will become evident that women's interpretations were ever hardly a simple case of complete rejection or pure acceptance, but were rather a combination of them both.

FEMININITY:

Simone de Beauvoir recognized, in her 1953 classic feminist work, *The Second Sex*, the complex symbolic message a menstruating woman was presented:

> On the day she can reproduce, a woman becomes impure; and rigorous taboos surround the menstruating female... Since paternal times only evil powers have been attributed to the feminine flow. Certainly, there is more here then reaction to blood in general, sacred as it is. But menstrual blood is peculiar, it represents the essence of femininity.[6]

From the first finding of spots on her clothing, and every cycle from there on afterward, a woman was reminded of her constructed 'femaleness' as child bearers and rearers. And yet, though society expected, 'validated' and defined these roles for women, the menstrual event did not promise privileges and celebration, but rather brought lost status and shame. Despite all

women's attempt to regain control, or at least conceal, their menstrual process through the menstrual management system, the stigma women faced towards their stained and blemished bodies persisted.

Femininity was an ideal state to which the depicted women in the advertisement, pamphlets, and the intended audience were assumed to aspire. However, like most ideal states, femininity was never completely fulfilled as it was obstructed by at least one impediment, menstruation. Reflecting and maintaining the view that menstruation was a hygienic crisis, advertisements and educative materials portrayed the menstruating woman as never completely secure or satisfied with her own femininity. The stench, the untidiness, and the uncleanliness drastically altered her composure and her attractiveness.[7] She was not, during her period, the beautiful, youthful, fun-loving woman society expected her to be, but was rather shamed, smelly, and blemished by the bloody pad and stained underwear. Messages such as this 1935 *Chatelaine* advertisement claimed:

> Fashion decrees 1936 styles that demand perfect poise, complete confidence. Only Kotex give absolute assurance on those occasions that are so trying...CAN'T SHOW - fashion experts know that Kotex is truly inconspicuous under the sheerest, most clinging gowns CAN'T FAIL - the centre layer of Kotex is channelled to draw moisture away from centre, towards the ends, this equalizer prevents embarrassing accidents, gives longer lasting security.[8]

The once shared concerns of both health and appearance (in the 1920s) had shifted its main focus towards the latter. The voice of doctors replaced by the fashion experts was significant for it was

they who recognized the importance of maintenance of a woman's femininity and attractiveness. Indeed, from the 1930s until well into the 1970s, advertisements proclaiming: "there's Helen. Overwhelmingly feminine...Helen likes Tampax because it's so dainty", "play beauty on the beach", and "stay perky through your period", displayed the notion of good grooming and proper sanitary measures as ways of maintaining feminine delicacy, charm, and poise.[9] Nowhere was this more strongly illustrated than in Modess' successful ad campaign of the 1950s.[10] Underneath a large picture of a young and beautiful Modess model, dressed elegantly in a ballroom gown, self-confident, and purely feminine, held the simple caption: "Modess, because..." In this case, little else but allurement and grace were highlighted. By placing importance on these features, it would seem that regaining one's femininity was an advertisers, and by extension, women's primary concern. Best summarized by this 1941 *Chatelaine* teen-age advertising campaign:

> Boys, clothes, parties, dates - You've got plenty on your mind besides musty old history dates and what x plus y equals! You're stockings are all shot. So's your budget. You're simply mad for a 'formal'. Slippers too! ...Frivolous? No! They all add up to being attractive. And being attractive helps achieve success and happiness. So more power to you. Only do remember this. To have friends, beaux, and good times (or hold a job and get ahead in the world). You must be attractive and poised...regardless of what day of the month it is! But that's not as difficult as it sounds. Being comfortable is half the battle. And Kotex sanitary napkins can be comfortable and carefree just as they help millions of other girls.[11]

Seemingly, allurement and appeal were a woman's ultimate goal, for with these elements she could manage her way into someone's heart - or a job, in parenthesis - and into a life of pure bliss:

"carefree." And what better way to get there than with the help of the ever so dependable product Kotex? Indeed, with the help from Kotex, success, happiness, popularity, and love were in all women's reach.[12] Forget an education, good-grooming was, by the 1940s, the most important factor in a young woman's life, so the advertisements proclaimed.

Along with advertisements for lipsticks, hosiery, and clothes, the sanitary napkin industry now added its own counsel to women on how they could attain the self-confidence required to achieve life success. Geared purely on appearances, the sanitary napkin industry combined advice on general good-grooming strategies, on fashion, diet and exercise, and on skin care with its own product. Appealing to the ever so important role of beauty, this 1945 *Chatelaine* advertisement, for example, brought together advice on hair care with Kotex:

> For a slick permanent which is a must?
> [] a skilled operator
> [] cold wave
> []a machine wave
> Frizzy flub - or dream girl? That depends largely on the skill of your operator. Her experience, plus a test curl, should decide the right type of wave for your hair-texture. Slick grooming requires infinite care...but its worth it when it pays off in poise...self-confidence! And speaking of poise, it needn't be a problem any more, on difficult days, if you choose Kotex.[13]

Working along similar lines was this 1945 Modess campaign. With its slogan "It pays off," Modess instructed young women on the importance of appearances. "It pays off to be tidy...about your room, your clothes, yourself. Whether you are hunting a job or a beau - straight seams, shining hair, that band box look are

important."[14] Appearances were, according to this advertisement, women's only root to success in love and finances. Of course, this was only made possible along with the help of the Modess promise:

> And on those droopy days it's more important than ever. Helps bolster flagging self-confidence. Modess too is a great morale booster - because its triple safety shield helps keep you safe.[15]

Beyond advising women on beauty strategies, the sanitary napkin also combined premiums - associated with good-grooming - to enhance sales. Modess, beginning in the early 1950s, promised free perfume, silk scarves, and a tiny sewing kit with the purchase of their product. Kotex, in response to this sales pitch announced its first offer, in 1955, a discount on stockings. Over the next few years, "the brands exchanged blows with offers of purses, simulated earrings, and sweepstakes."[16]

Francophone advertisements reflected much the same emphasis on femininity in selling their products. As these two advertisements dating from *La Presse*, 1969 demonstrate, "soyez chatte, soyez delicate, soyez aristocrate, mais soyez sure vous même. Vous êtes feminine", francophone daughters, by the 1940s, were bombarded by much of the same 'appearance' oriented message as their anglophone peers.[17]

Educative materials, distributed in English Canada, further supported the importance of attractiveness. Both pamphlets and film linked good health and comfort with the importance good-grooming 'tactics'. Confidence and self-assertiveness, as advised in the pamphlet *Very Personally Yours*, was possible as long as a young girl took "full advantage of every known comfort trick."[18]

Among suggestions such as eating right, getting enough sleep and exercise, and keeping good-posture was the advice of giving "yourself a little extra break in personal grooming. Turn on the charm 'full power'."[19] This might include, as *"You're a Young Lady Now"* counselled, keeping "hair clean and well brushed, your fingernails neat and your clothes crisp and fresh."[20] In reality, "just looking neat and pretty," proclaimed the pamphlet, "will help you feel better."[21]

Of course, good-grooming did not, nor could it, exist without the proper use of sanitary products. Looking and feeling good went beyond pink bows and ruffled dresses - these alone could do little towards what women and advertisers defined as the biggest problems of all: leakages and odour. Fortunately, asserted the film and pamphlets, use of proper products could eliminate all those tedious concerns. There was no need to "risk offending" so long as one used the proper sanitary napkin.[22] Moreover, "since daintiness was more important than ever during menstruation," changing the sanitary product regularly (at least every four hours, more often if the flow is heavy) and before going to bed could maintain a woman's composure and confidence.[23] After all, as the pamphlet proclaimed, "dainty is as dainty does..."[24]

The significance of linking femininity with menstruation was also embodied through the feminization of the product themselves. According to D.H. Berg and L. Block Coutts, "just as femininity was often incorporated into decorative, frivolous definition of style, so too were they incorporated into menstrual products."[25] The

unmarked or brown wrapped packages of the earlier decades were, by the 1940s and 1950s, transformed into stylized new packaging of pastels and flowered patterns. Indeed, advertisements found in Canadian magazines and newspapers extolled their sanitary napkin and tampon packages for "their delicate shade of pink", "their smart new parcelling", while the products themselves were described with such attributes as "a gentle little placement and no thicker than a daisy stem" or "soft fluffy linings", "feather-light shield." One 1969 advertisement discussed the absorbency process of the tampon using the popular analogy of a flower:

> Think of...a tulip that's closed. Now, imagine it in full bloom. That's the way Playtex first day tampon acts to protect you. Flowers out, fluffs out. And the more it absorbs, the more it blooms.[26]

The products were also proclaimed as being intrinsically fresh and clean. Scented or deodorized, this freshness feature promised to hinder the development of menstrual odour, an odour that was associated no longer with used menstrual pads, but with the menstruating woman herself. From such claims, it would seem, that while the menstruating woman was not feminine, at least the products she used were.

WOMEN'S VIEWS ON FEMININITY AND MENSTRUATION:

While prescription claimed menstruation was unclean, disgusting, and shameful, hence, spoiling a woman's beauty and her composure, women's own views of their bleeding bodies were far more ambivalent. Throughout each individual interview, contradictory claims of her menstrual experience were expressed. Few wished to

portray or believe menstruation to be simply the dark taboo society had deemed it to be. Menstruation was, according to all women interviewed, part of a woman's life cycle - a healthy normal natural process. Indeed, in many ways, menstruation was viewed as being very much a part of a woman's femininity. It was something which set women apart, bonding them together. Recollections of advice and counsel between mother and daughter or other female family members, support from girlfriends, sympathetic menstrual cycles (when two women's menstrual cycles are altered by each others causing their periods to fall closely together) all reflected the notion that menstruation was something which was powerful and positive.

In more neutral terms, menstruation was also simultaneously viewed as simply routine. It was nothing more than a natural biological process which women simply had to cope with. Except for the varying degrees of physical discomfort (both in cramps and in the feel of the sanitary rag or pad or even tampon) and except for the hassle and expense of maintaining hygienic practices, women from both cohorts asserted that menstruation was really "no big deal." Alexandra (1950) described her situation as follows:

> It's a necessity, it's not always pleasant, but it's part of being a woman and part of what we've got that men don't have. We call it the curse, but it's not really. It's really - I can't think of the opposite to curse - I mean we're lucky because we have that. That's something we all have and it's all part of it.[27]

And yet, as resigned as women were of their menstrual status, they were conscious of the negative value it represented in society. Alexandra felt the necessity to qualify menstruation against the

notion that it was a curse for a reason - it expressed the struggle and contradiction between women's own personal feelings and social conventions. Whether it had been through boys teasing, industry's counsel through educative materials and advertisements, teachers' silence (experienced by women in the first cohort), or mothers' reservations prior to and fathers' exclusion at menarche, women learned that menstruation was a shamed process.[28] Indeed, despite the positive or neutral assertions of women's menstrual experience, women often adhered to the prescription which had decreed their bleeding bodies as unattractive and unappealing.

Indeed, in the final count, women adhered to society's shame. Women recognized and perhaps believed that menstruation, as much as it was "nothing to be ashamed of", posed a threat to their overall composure. Fearful that their own menstrual bodies may be judged as unclean or odorous, women chose to hide and disguise their status. Women took extra care, despite its 'hassles' and inconveniences to ensure that they 'appeared' neat, clean, and fresh. Women of both cohorts were certain never to wear white, or light clothing, for fear of staining. Women, of the second cohort, expressed wearing looser clothing so that revealing outlines would not show; the fear of bulging pads was a particular concern for these women, since, by the 1960s fashion decreed much tighter clothing. To avoid leakages, women of both cohorts changed their pads regularly, while some wore both tampons and sanitary napkins at the same time. Some women of the second cohort, though in the minority, went as far as wearing two tampons simultaneously or

wearing tampons throughout the night despite worries of health complications, such as the discovery of Toxic Shock Syndrome in 1980. "It was a drag," argued Sylvie (1952), "because like it was still hidden, so I felt like I had to hide. So it was a drag in that way. I didn't want anybody to know I was menstruating so I was playing hide and go seek."[29] Seemingly, women understood the importance of concealment - with the right product and the proper tactics, a menstrual women's threatened status, though still a lingering concern, was, for the most part, evaded.

(HETERO)SEXUALITY:

While women's attempt at balancing their feelings between acceptance and rejection of the menstrual prescriptions was somewhat feasible so long as outer appearances were maintained, this grew more difficult when issues of sexuality were added to the formula. When it was considered that a woman's main source of sexual power was derived from her sensuality and attractiveness, menstruation, deemed as unclean and unattractive, seriously undermined this status. Advertisements, through their depictions of either a teenage girl competing for Saturday night dates or a married woman consumed with maintaining her husband's interest, proclaimed that menstruation threatened a woman's 'feminine mystique'. Indeed, without her sexual appeal, her capabilities of luring and keeping a man, according to marketers, were seriously weakened.[30] As one 1939 *Chatelaine* advertisement for Lysol suggested:

> A test for 'Model Wives'. Beware of the one neglect that sometimes kills romance. Are you a good housekeeper? Do you take care of your looks? Are your meals appetizing? Do you avoid nagging? Are you economical? Are you always careful about Feminine Hygiene? Carelessness or ignorance on this question means you 'flunk' the test. 'Lysol' can help you make a perfect score. A girl can take courses in housekeeping, but not in husband-keeping. There are women who neglect their husbands and still hold their love. But the woman who neglects herself is apt eventually to live alone. Neglect of intimate personal cleanliness, of feminine hygiene may spoil an otherwise happy marriage. Many thousands of women have solved the problem of feminine hygiene with 'Lysols' help.[31]

Though this advertisement was not directly linked with menstruation and menstrual products, it was connected to the general uncleanliness of a woman's genitalia. Whether it be after sexual relations, after her menstrual cycle, or for every day use, the Lysol campaign insinuated that women's natural odours, were, in fact, regarded as volatile and threatening.[32] Indeed, so offensive were women's genitalia that the virtues of a 'good woman' including dedication, nurturance, passiveness, and submission were not enough to keep her marriage alive, she also had to keep watch for any sign of a tainted sexual appeal.

While the menstrual advertisements' messages were, in the end, strikingly similar to that of the Lysol announcement, the rhetoric used was not as blatantly obvious. Indeed, at first glance, advertisements seemingly contradicted the depiction of sexual menstrual taboos. Claims such as "Whatever the plans, you needn't cower in a corner just because it's that time. Come...datin' duds, no one will know with Kotex" apparently expressed a positive view of menstruation as it encouraged and supported menstruating women's abilities to engage in heterosocial activities.[33] However, when

one recognizes where this liberation and freedom for sexual expression and participation was derived from, it becomes strikingly clear that the negatives of menstruation still existed. According to the advertisements of the 1930s and onward, the secret to 'gaining and keeping a man', lay not in an inner belief that menstruation was a beautiful natural process, but rather lay in the ability to disguise it from their male suitor: "no one will know." Indeed, advertisements for sanitary products, while reminding women the potential restrictions menstruation posed on their social calendar, claimed anything was possible in the 'quest for love' so long as one used the right product of concealment. This 1957 advertisement for instance proclaimed:

> You could have danced all night...The wonder of the evening lives on...in the magic of the corsage you still hold...in the strains of remembered music that run through your head...in the memories of laughter and moonlight and swirling gowns. And you, young lady, were superb! You were radiant! All aglow with gaiety and charm. Nothing could stand in your way, not even 'time of the month' difficulties - not since you found Tampax. Don't you feel...well...just a little bit sorry for those girls who haven't discovered Tampax as of yet...Tampax internal sanitary protection is light and dainty completely invisible.[34]

Some advertisements in their counsel on the proper menstrual management system, included as with the case of femininity, advice on such things as dating. As this 1947, "Are You in the Know" campaign by Kotex quizzed:

> How to rate on a first date?
> [] sling a sharp line
> [] be a listening post
> [] learn his interests
> Being a dumb bunny, or too-too clever can scare your new squire away! Learn his interests. Talk them over...and he'll soon be mighty interested in you. It's all a

> matter of forgetting about yourself, an art you can master on 'problem days' as well, with the Kotex Wonderform belt.[35]

This advertisement reinforced the traditional subservient role a woman was expected to play. Women, were expected to disguise and transform their mind and body - unblemished and without an opinion of her own - for their male suitors, no matter at what costs. "Forget yourself," the advertisement claimed, only then would a women be ensured a second date. Indeed, sacrificing oneself, no matter how one felt or what one thought, was the overwhelming message proposed by the advertisements. 'Problem days' or no, a woman was always expected to remain her feminine, dainty, happy, sexual pleasing self.

Reinforcing this view was a Kotex advertisement found in the 1945 July edition of *Chatelaine*. Combining the threat of competition with the 'troubling days' of a woman's cycle, this advertisement reinforced the notion that women should always maintain proper good-grooming techniques if she wished to successfully attract a man. The advertisement, assuming a woman's success and happiness lay in finding a male partner, asked:

> Which chick will get the dance?
> [] the one on the left
> [] the one on the right
> Why should he dance with a dolly in denims - when there's a swish dish to charm the eye? A fellow likes his females feminine (see the girl on the right). So wear your swooniest frock and be confident - even at 'certain' times. With Kotex you risk no revealing outlines, for all leading napkins only Kotex has flat tapered ends that don't show.[36]

By insinuating the importance of femininity in attracting a man - "a fellow likes his females feminine" - only to then proceed with

counsels on disguising one's menstrual cycle, these advertisements supported the shamed view that menstrual women were blemished, and hence, sexually unattractive. Only when her period was successfully concealed from her male suitors, would she gain his admiration and affection.

The innuendoes found within educative materials and pamphlets regarding menstruation and its effect on a woman's sexual status, was much the same narrow and limited one as the advertisements. Like advertisements, pamphlets and the film of the 1940s presented themselves as experts answering "all those new important questions...such as, how to keep smiling every day...what tactics to take in the matter of grooming - sports - social contacts."[37] According to their messages, a young adolescent should not feel they had to miss out on anything she would normally do. With the put-on smile and extra charm - "smile, sister, smile", the beauty techniques, and the use of proper sanitary protection where "nothing shows", a young girl was expected not to cancel out on her Saturday evening parties, dances, or dates.[38] In many ways, these tactics tended to reinforce the convention that women's role was based on providing pleasure for others. Looking and smelling dainty and fresh and keeping a happy attitude, whether it felt right or not, was a young adolescent's duty so as not to offend anyone around her.

Beyond linking menstrual products with women's participation in heterosocial activities, there existed one other connection between the products and a woman's sexuality: tampons and its link

with virginity. With the introduction of this product in the 1930s, developed a popular belief that a tampon's insertion may break a young girl's hymen, ruining her virginity.[39] While women recognized the existence of this fear, often warned by their mothers, it was for the most part ignored. Simply, as the advertisements proclaimed, women preferred the use of tampons as it was more efficient, cleaner, comfortable, and invisible; and, therefore worth the risk of using. Susan (1924), for instance, first heard of the tampon through magazines in the early 1940s, and with her university friends, decided to try out the new product despite the anti-virginity claims. Susan described how, feeling quite "avant-garde" (a term which was also used in earlier Tampax advertisements), first tried the tampon in a fervour of excitement and adventure. Together, she and a group of six female friends walked to the local drugstore and bought some tampons. When they had returned to the university, each of the seven women, privately and individually attempted their first tampon insertion:

> It was hairy! That's an exaggeration, maybe. We were a little bit nervous about doing it, o.k., but it didn't stop us...There was several of us. Now, nobody was with another person. We did it - this was not an easy trick - because we lived, I think there were four rooms in this particular corridor and there was one bathroom...and there were no stalls. So, you know, we just went in and took turns. And, we obviously didn't have our periods at the same time...There was lots of talk about it.[40]

In fact, when this first tampon trial became known to the gossip columnist of the university paper, Susan and her friends quickly became known (all in fun, Susan claims) as the "Seven foolish Virgins":

> Well, the theory was, at least the gossip, that if you had not had intercourse you couldn't use the tampon because your hymen wasn't broken, so, therefore the tampon wouldn't go in. Which was garbage in and garbage out...That's where the "Seven Foolish Virgins" came about. We were not a stupid group, and again, the gossip columnist was a clever girl and could see to make a joke out of something.[41]

This quote illustrated two things. First, women were willing to challenge the concerns suggesting that tampons destroyed a woman's virginity.[42] For these women, desire for better personal comfort and improved freedom overrid any inflammatory claims deriving from the altar or in their homes. Second, this tale, proves that within the discourse of concealment lay avenues in which women, and the public, could discuss menstruation. Not only did these seven women share in the tampon experiment, but, once this project was discovered, it became publicly discussed in the university press.

WOMEN'S VIEWPOINT ON THE MENSTRUAL-HETEROSEXUAL CONNECTION:

This complexity surrounding issues of concealment was further highlighted in women's interpretation of the menstrual discourse on heterosexuality. Women's concerns and attitudes towards their menstruating bodies as it relates to sexuality, not only depended on the degree of heterosocial and heterosexual activity a woman participated in and at what age, but also varied depending on the level of maturity, intimacy, personal choice, and openness with a partner. Attitudes may have been shared by most women as concealment remained an important factor, however, the degree at which it played a role depended much on both the women's and men's own personal views, experiences, and relationships.

As some women suggested, personal maturity on both women's and men's part played a role in concerns regarding sexuality and its relation to menstruation. A young woman, not always comfortable with her changing body and/or concerned as to what others may think of her, was more likely not to "broadcast" her menses to anyone, let alone her partner. Whereas by adulthood, women seemingly felt they were far more confident and self-assured, and, as such, seemed less concerned by their partner's discovery of their menstrual status. As one woman from the first cohort noted:

> [When younger] you've got to impress the boys. And after a while, you think, "oh, men"...Actually, as you get older your relation with people and men or whatever gets much easier, because you don't care as much. It's much more natural.[43]

The effect maturity had on a young woman's reaction to her bleeding body in relation to the opposite sex affected women of the second cohort differently considering that sexual experimentation (due to the more liberal sexual outlook of the 1960s and 1970s) occurred increasingly at a younger age. For an adolescent worried about menstrual discovery, greater sexual involvement meant increased tension and anxiety. Patricia (1962), who began menstruating in 1973, claimed that while going on dates during her menses "was fine," she recalled "[acting] a little more distant" since "you [didn't] want him to touch you in places where you [didn't] want him to feel."[44] This seemingly was not an issue for women of the first cohort, where it had been made clear that for unmarried women "waist was low enough."[45]

The importance of maturity also rested on men's shoulders.

Many women voiced a degree of insensitivity on young men's part, which tended to disappear along with age. A mother of two boys admitted:

> That's also...a maturation point. You grow with it and you develop a comfort level with your own body and a comfort level with your own self. I mean your talking about guys in their early twenties, you're not talking about guys that are fifteen or sixteen. You've gone from 'brain dead' to 'there's hope'. There's absolutely no question about it. You tell a thirteen year old boy something and you tell a nineteen year old boy something and the thirteen year old boy is going to giggle.[46]

As suggested by the women's narratives, these young men and women were at a stage where exploration of their own and each others bodies were all very new. Vulnerabilities and insecurities were, perhaps, more deeply, or at least differently, felt than during adulthood, making any discussion on this secretive and personal topic difficult.

The intricacies of sexuality was further illustrated in woman's attitudes towards sexual intercourse. According to Delaney *et al.*, women and men have conformed to the menstrual convention deeming menstrual women as unclean, and thus, sexually tainted.[47] Though, as it will later be shown, there existed strong evidence pointing towards adherence, certain qualifications must be made. While in the minority, three (one from the first cohort, two from the second) out of the twenty-four interviewees, had regularly engaged in sexual intercourse while menstruating. Susan (1924), who was married soon after the Second World War, recognized the prohibition on sexual intercourse during a woman's menses, however, she and her husband were willing to challenge the convention.

> Well, were back to the same unclean business eh? But of course, that didn't stop us from having intercourse...Sex was always important to us.[48]

Though admittedly messy and less appealing there were ways to work around it, argued both Susan and the respondents from the second cohort - having intercourse during a shower or having intercourse at either the beginning or towards the end of the their cycle when their flow was lighter lessened the physical unattractive signs of menstrual blood, while also eradicated any of the extra labour of laundering stained sheets. Even for the majority of women who had chosen abstinence from intercourse during their menses, none believed in the prescription that menstruation was unsanitary and, hence, dangerous during intercourse. Most certainly, they felt it to be messy and untidy, but this was associated with the physical signs of menstruation, such as blood dripping down one's legs or the blood soaked pad, rather than fear of contamination.

Despite women's own qualifications for their varied practices and views on intimacy and menstruation, women did show strands of both conformity and internalization of the narrow prescriptions. For women of the first cohort, menstruation was rarely discussed with their male partners, let alone its affect on sexual intimacy. Certainly, their husbands knew when they were menstruating, after all, asserted the women, they "slept in the same bed" and could "see through their nighties", but rarely had it led to any open communication.[49] For the most part, women of the first cohort, either assumed their husbands would not agree to having sexual relations during their menses or considered themselves fortunate

that their husbands were not "oversexed" and never pushed intercourse onto them while menstruating. One woman was not even certain sexual intercourse was possible during menstruation. Victoria (1923), who began menstruating in the 1930s, responded to questions on sexual intercourse by asking:

> No, no way - can you do that while on your period?...It's kind of messy. I don't think my husband would have liked that. We just took it for granted that it wasn't a good time. It would be a pretty messy thing. My husband wouldn't want to do that.
>
> And what about you?
>
> No, way...because its too messy. When you have intimate relations you like to be clean, you like to smell good. You like to be dainty.[50]

Victoria, and perhaps her husband as well, felt that sexual intercourse during menstruation was to be avoided as it was found to be messy and lacking in sensuality and eroticism.

It would seem, according to women interviewed from the second cohort, aesthetics, cleanliness, attractiveness, not to mention the extra labour, played the greatest role in why women did not participate in sexual relations. As Mary (1947) argued:

> I just don't see the point. It's messy. There are other ways of being intimate and connected to your husband without actually making love. You can cuddle, you can kiss, you can hug...There's a lot of other things you can do. So for a few days you don't do "It" or the "Act". So what?[51]

Far more extreme was the one interviewee who claimed that she would not even get into bed while menstruating unless she was certain she felt clean, free of odour, and presentable:

> I think when you are living intimately with another person, you become even more conscious of the [cleanliness]...like for example I wouldn't want to crawl into bed after doing aerobics for three hours and not taking a shower. Because I always sleep close to him.

> It's like when you go out on a date. What do you do? You make sure you have a shower. You put on a little make-up, a little perfume, do your hair. It's the same kind of thing, but on a much much lesser scale...I'm not having sex, but it's just the idea of, you know, you want to look half decent.[52]

Though an exaggerated case, this quote nonetheless illustrates the strength notions of 'hygiene', good-grooming, and concealment, played in women's menstrual experiences. Indeed, all twenty-four women argued that menstruation itself was not appealing, that they felt a physical uncomfortableness (women complained of bloating, tender breasts, and temporary weight gain), and, as Sylvie (1952) (who at times engaged in sexual intercourse) claimed less "sexy with that thick wet pad in between your legs."[53] Moreover, they recognized that men were uneasy with the topic. Boys had teased them in the school yard, fathers were silent at menarche, and boyfriends and even husbands (though not all), wanted to be spared the details. For a woman who perceived her sexual power as being derived from her body, these pressures and personal feelings altered the security of her sexual status.

CONCLUSION:

Through women's narratives regarding both issues of femininity and sexuality, it becomes clear that the balance between rejection and acceptance of the menstrual prescriptions was a fragile and intricate one. Advertisements and educative pamphlets showed the importance of good grooming as a way of maintaining her feminine and hence sexual power. Just as hiding grey hairs, pimples, laugh lines, weak nails, bad breath, oily or dry skin, or body odour were

all important factors in maintaining and keeping the interest of their male suitors, women were expected to disguise their menstrual status (to keep clean and smell fresh). Women altered their habits of dress, wore tampons, even two at a time, always carried an extra pad in their purse, and rarely engaged in sexual intercourse during their menses. Women also expressed feeling less attractive, and, hence less sensual and appealing to the opposite sex. Yet, as strongly as women adhered to the conventions, their narratives have proven that various factors including age and personal preference altered the way in which the negative and restrictive conventions were played out.

From this, the story of the menstrual experience has in many ways come full circle. In sharing their impressions and recollections of menarcheal, early, and post menstrual experiences, we have seen the factors leading to their ambivalent and contradictory feelings towards their own bodies. Together, we have seen how a mother's silence or reservations towards menstruation combined with the industry's and mother's emphasis on menstrual hygiene practices, and followed by advertisement's repetitive threat of social judgement, have influenced women's need to conceal their menstrual status - despite proclamations that it is 'no big deal', 'nothing to be ashamed about', or even still, something of which to be proud. But the story does not end here. Beyond issues of menstrual hygiene and the risk it played on a woman's femininity and sexuality, lay the issue of productivity. How women looked upon menstruation, its representation in both the public and

private sphere, was a significant aspect to their overall experiences. In their narratives, women touched upon issues such as motherhood, the effects of menstrual discomfort, and, finally, the maintenance of 'normalcy' and the desire for 'freedom'. It is these issues which lie at the heart of my final chapter.

ENDNOTES

1. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971, first ed. 1953), p. 357.

2. Jane, born 1956, interviewed by author, Montreal, 1 November 1995.

3. Sue Ellen Jacobs and Christine Robert, "Sex, Sexuality, Gender, and Gender Variance," in Sandra Morgan, ed., *Gender and Anthropology* (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1989), p. 440.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 441.

5. With the decline of the Victorian ideal, women emerged as sexual enthusiasts asserting a heightened expectation for erotic fulfilment. To gain a man's attention, women learned, beginning at adolescence, to use their bodies as sexual sensual objects. For more information see: Beth Bailey. *From the Front Porch to the Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990).

6. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 148.

7. According to Jane Ussher, the media has presented an unhealthy ambiguous message to women regarding their bodies. On the one hand, the media has encouraged the notion that a woman's body, whether it be through extra pounds, odours, or bleeding, can betray her. On the other hand, the media also transmits the message that a woman's body is her route to happiness - through the use of her body, she may entice a man, which, according to the media, should be her priority. Ussher finds that this conflicting message, leaves young adolescents distanced - split - from their own body. "The transformation of a body during the pubertal changes of adolescence - which conforms to society's present stereotype of feminine beauty - into one which is heavier and rounder, and therefore perceived as less attractive...It is at this stage that a major split can develop between body and self as the young woman develops insecurities about a body which is seemingly out of control." In the gravest of cases, Ussher believes this split could lead to anorexia nervosa. *The Psychology of the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 38-39.

8. *Chatelaine*, November 1935, p. 45.

9. *Chatelaine*, September 1953, p. 56.; *Ibid.*, August 1959, p. 94; *Ibid.*, August 1945, p. 43.

10. Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth explain how the term "Modess because" dated from a nation-wide contest offering $25,000 to the woman who could in twenty five words or less, best describe the uses of Modess - they were expected to fill in the sentence "I'm glad I switched to Modess because." In 1949, this advertisement campaign was awarded best national advertisements of the year. *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company Inc., 1976), p. 111. For further citations of these ads see Alice Munroe's fictional work, *The Lives of Girls and Women* (New York: McGraw, 1972), p. 186.

11. *Chatelaine*, March 1941, p. 31.

12. According to Joan Sangster's study on the experiences of working-class women in Peterborough, women who grew up during the inter-war period were bombarded by messages stressing the importance of consumption, beauty, heterosexuality and romance as central to a woman's identity. *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 44. This was not a new phenomenon, for according to Rhonda Mawhood's study, advertisers stress on beauty, though stronger by the 1930s and 1940s, began on a large-scale during the 1920s. "Images of Feminine Beauty in Advertisement for Beauty Products in English Canada, 1901-1941," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis. McGill University, 1991). For essays on beauty and advertising, some which refer specifically to Quebec, see Cecile Ouellet ed., *Souffrir pour être belle* (Quebec: Musée de la Civilisation, 1988). Mary Vipond, "The Image of Women in Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s," in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 116-124, is a study which compares the images of women with the changes in women's labour force participation, in their work in the home, and in birth rates. For a collection of images of Canadian women in advertisement and elsewhere see Maxin Nunes and Deanna White. *The Lace Ghetto* (Toronto: New Town Press, 1972).

13. *Chatelaine*, June 1945, p. 34.

14. *Ibid.*, June 1945, p. 36.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

16. Janice Jorgenson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands, Vol. 2: Personal Products* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1994), p. 318.

17. *La Presse*, 13 September, 1969, p. 18; *Ibid.*, 7 June, 1969, p. 13.

18. *Very Personally Yours* (Kimberly-Clark Canada Limited. Toronto: Educational Department, 1946, 1953, 1959, 1961), p. 14.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

20. *"You're a Young Lady Now"* (Kimberly-Clark Canada Limited, Toronto: Educational Department, 1946, 1953, 1959, 1961), pp. 8-9.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

22. *Very Personally Yours*, p. 19.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

25. D.H. Berg and L. Block Coutts, "The Portrayal of the Menstruating Woman in Menstrual Product Advertisements," *Health Care for Women International* 4:2(September,1993), p. 186.

26. *Chatelaine*, October 1969, p. 3.

27. Alexandra, born 1950, interviewed by author, Montreal, 12 November 1995.

28. As Sonya (1965) recalled: "Guys made fun of me. "Oh! She must be on the rag, it must be that time of the month. Teasing, but disgust: 'Ewwww!'. It was very hurtful and embarrassing." *Ibid.*, born 1965, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 November 1995.

29. Sylvie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 10 November 1995.

30. Veronica Strong-Boag argues in *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988) that "most female Canadians not only expected to marry but took it for granted that marriage would provide satisfaction, security, and purpose," p. 81. Strong-Boag also asserts that "women's most obvious resources in an unequal marriage market were their looks and sexuality," p. 85.

31. *Chatelaine*, March 1939, p. 38.

32. Paula Weideger recognizes the link between menstruation as unclean and the effect it has on women's outlook towards her genitalia and her sensuality. According to Weideger, "if menstruation is unclean, so are woman's genitals. If menstruation is feared or considered 'unattractive', then so are woman's sexual organs. To the extent that a woman believes in the attitudes surrounding the taboo, she will believe her sex and her sexuality are defiled. Sex and menstruation are most definitely connected," *Menstruation and Menopause: The Physiology, the Psychology, the Myth and the Reality* (New York: Alfred A Knopf: 1976), p. 115. Similar arguments have been made by Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1971), p.38. Also

see, Jane M. Ussher, *The Psychology of the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 19.

33. *Chatelaine*, July 1951, p. 16.

34. *Ibid.*, May 1957, p. 48.

35. *Ibid.*, June 1947, p. 47.

36. *Ibid.*, July 1945, p. 38.

37. *Very Personally Yours*, p. 2.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 10; *"You're a Young Lady Now"*, p. 5.

39. Jorgenson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands*, p. 533. For more information on the tampon see: Nancy Friedan, *Everything You Must Know About Tampons* (New York: Berkley Books, 1981).

40. Susan, born 1924, interviewed by author, Montreal, 15 November 1995.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Jorgenson ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands*, p.533.

43. Flora, born 1911, interviewed by author, Montreal, 16 Novmeber 1995.

44. Patricia, born 1962, interviewed by author, Montreal, 2 December 1995.

45. Flora, born 1911, interviewed by author, Montreal, 16 November 1995.

46. Melanie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 20 November 1995.

47. Delaney, Lupton, and Toth, *The Curse*, p. 23.

48. Susan, born 1924, interviewed by author, Montreal, 15 November 1995. With the discovery of the AIDS virus in the early 1980s, the appropriateness of having sexual intercourse during menstruation has grown far more complicated. No longer simply an issue of aesthetics or cleanliness, sexual intercourse while menstruating also includes the risk of contracting AIDS. Such dangers were not a consideration for women of the first cohort, but has certainly become an issue for women of later generations. This transformation illustrates how external factors, economic, social, medical, or cultural, can have an effect on the way in which we treat and deal with our menstrual cycle.

49. Virginia, born 1921, interviewed by author, Montreal, 5 December 1995; Victoria, born 1923, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 December 1995. Conversations regarding the appropriateness of sexual intercourse during menstruation were kept to a minimum. Josie recalled her husband as saying, "I can't wait for it to be over" or "I wish for it to be over". She also claimed that he would never initiate sexual relations during her menstrual cycle. *Ibid.*, born 1910, interviewed by author, Montreal, 4 December 1995.

50. Victoria, born 1923, interviewed by author, Montreal, 7 December 1995.

51. Mary, born 1947, interviewed by author, Montreal, 29 March 1995.

52. Jane, born 1957, interviewed by author, Montreal, 1 November 1995.

53. Sylvie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 10 November 1995.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEVIANT BLEEDING BODIES

> I lived my life by my life, not by my periods.[1]
> Susan (1924)

> [Menstruation]...didn't stop us [Melanie and her female friends] from doing anything...Nothing stopped me from doing what I wanted to do.[2]
> Melanie (1952)

According to these women, menstruation in no way handicapped or disrupted every day living. Women, from both cohorts, considered themselves unconstrained by menstruation, or, at the very least easily worked around it, so that they too could participate freely, without hinderance, in all the activities of public and social life. Indeed, though sympathetic (and sometimes not so sympathetic) of others who spent their menstrual days in bed with an aspirin by their side and a hot water bottle placed on their lower back, all women, with the exception of one interviewee, perceived themselves as fortunate and strong for maintaining their daily routine.[3] In fact, these women were proud to announce that, despite the aches, pains, and emotional waves caused by their period, they "kept going." Menstruation, once again, was seen as "really no big deal" - it was "just part of life."

This stance taken by twenty-three out of twenty-four women interviewed was striking considering menstruation's long history of being viewed as limiting and incapacitating. To justify and preserve the ideological construct of separate sexual spheres, doctors, psychologists, businessmen, and educators alike used biology as evidence of women's inescapable realities of inequality

and subordination.[4] It was their bodies, so the argument went, which handicapped women, not society. According to Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, physician's would-be scientific views - such as the conservation of energy theory - reflected as well as maintained the social expectations considered appropriate to a women's role and identity.[5] Menstruation was considered a process which controlled a woman's life - if a girl, especially at the onset of puberty, violated the laws of her body, by participating in the public world of higher education, sports, or paid work, a chain of illness and discomfort would ensue. Any behaviour, argues Smith-Rosenberg, that was considered unfeminine such as education, sexual assertiveness, or paid work, in other words virtually any form of participation found in the public realm, was, at puberty, prohibited.[6] Only when a woman remained quiet and passive, confined to the home, reproducing and rearing children, would she remain healthy and strong.

Wendy Mitchinson's study on the medical treatment of women in mid to late nineteenth-century English-speaking Canada highlights much of the same issues found in Smith-Rosenberg's study. Mitchinson, believing the defining qualities of health are normative and socially constructed, argues that women's bodies, deemed deviant from the male-centered norm of health, have been used to justify and maintain gender roles.[7] This deviancy or abnormalcy, according to Mitchinson, began with puberty, followed them through menstruation, and continued throughout menopause. All three, Mitchinson claims, emphasized women's difference from men,

not only physically but also mentally and psychologically. What in fact occurred was the transformation of women's normal physiological function into something defined as pathological and debilitating. Doctors, revealing a deep-seated belief that women's bodies placed them at a disadvantage compared to men's, argued that a woman's only possible function was in fact to bear and raise children; life in the public realm of economics, politics, and work, was inconsistent with their bodies capabilities.[8] Simply, "underlying all the descriptions of pubescent, menstruating, and menopausal women," Mitchinson argues, "was the sense that somehow these people were not like men and that men's bodies were somehow the way bodies should be."[9] Indeed, it was why, according to the scientific rationale, women, by their very nature could never possibly "equal man."[10]

It would seem, little has changed in the expert's tune, for according to Delaney *et al.*'s *The Curse*, women were and still are considered physically and emotionally handicapped by menstruation. Indeed, a woman's menses, devalued and misunderstood, serves the ever present reminder of why women can never possibly compete with men. Supported by the legal, medical, and religious systems, menstruation functions as a justification of women's secondary position in society; simply, women are, claim Delaney *et al.*, still considered unreliable and unstable during their menses.[11]

While the comparison between the views of the women interviewed with that of the historical representations of menstruation seemed, at first glance, polarized, closer

examinations reveals a far more adhesive relationship between the two. Though women believed that menstruation never stopped them from doing what they so desired, their actions and attitudes proved different. Women have not replaced the social views deeming menstruation as unappealing, unclean, unfeminine, and, in this case, unproductive, they have only adapted to it. Shame, resentment, and concealment, remained the underlying experiences of women in both cohorts.

The root of women's ambiguities became far more clear once the contemporary selling message was revealed. Insidious and underhanded, advertisements and educative materials articulated the views that menstruation was deviant, uncontrollable, and limiting while simultaneously asserting their products as key to women's release from menstruation's constraints. This had consequences on the attitudes and treatment of the menstrual experience, for as liberating as these advertisements and instructional pieces portray their products, it also perpetuated, to coin D.H. Berg and L. Block Coutts, a form of 'pseudodenial'. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote, "it is during her periods that [a woman] feels her body most painfully as an alien thing; it is indeed, the prey of a stubborn and foreign life that each month constructs and then tears down a cradle within it...Woman, like man, is her body; but her body is something other than herself."[12] Advertisers, by associating positive feelings with women's ability to restrict personal awareness of the self as menstruating, encouraged a woman to separate and distance herself from her own body. It is my intention, in this final section, to

look at the consequences of this ambivalent, if not deceitful, message put across by both the sanitary napkin industry, advertisers, and seemingly the women themselves.

MENSTRUATION AND (RE)PRODUCTIVITY:

Throughout the twentieth century, women's monthly flow served as the constant reminder of women's destined role - or to be more exact, her failure to fulfil it. It was a contradictory tale, for while on the one hand, menarche was presented as the debut to women's 'natural' function as child bearers and rearers, on the other, the monthly blemish from there on after was presented as a reminder of women's failure to reproduce.

Nowhere was this made more evident than in the educative materials sponsored by the sanitary napkin industry. In 1946, Kotex added to its educational/advertising campaign two pamphlets, *"You're a Young Lady Now"* and *Very Personally Yours*, meant to be read consecutively, as well as the film, *The Story of Menstruation.* These materials, presented to pre-adolescents across both the United States and Canada were strikingly similar in format. Each were divided into two parts including, first, a lesson on the biology and purpose of menstruation, and subsequently followed with a lesson on menstrual coping strategies. *"You're a Young Lady Now"* differed slightly from the other educative materials in that, while *Very Personally Yours* and the film stressed the internal anatomical process of menstruation, *"You're a Young Lady Now"* focused on the outer physical signs of menarche.

These educative materials created a narrative which defined the significance of menarche in terms of motherhood. The presentation of a young girl's first menses, in the pamphlet *"You're a Young Lady Now"*, concluded with the promise that "in years to come, when you are married and have a baby, that is where [the womb] the baby will grow."[13] Similarly, in the film, *The Story of Menstruation*, the narrator summarizes, "'there's nothing strange nor mysterious about menstruation. All life is built on cycles and the menstrual cycle is one normal and natural part of nature's internal plan for passing on the gift of life.'"[14] Enhancing this theme of "cycles" were the following visuals: a baby playing with blocks, a little girl playing with a doll, a teenaged girl who looks up from reading a book, a woman dressed in wedding dress, and, finally, a baby in a bassinet yawning, with a woman sitting and looking at the baby.[15] These narratives and visuals constructed the meaning that 'nature's internal plan' was directed towards motherhood; her reproductive cycle defined and controlled her pre-determined future role.

The stress on motherhood was further implied through the depiction of menstruation. Both *Very Personally Yours* and *The Story of Menstruation* defined menstruation in terms of the failure of a woman's reproductive destiny. The lining itself was described, if conception did not occur, as having "no further need" or of "no use", while menstruation was described as a flow which "has no more significance than many excess materials that the body discards."[16] Without the fertilized egg, menstruation was demoted

to the category of "fingernails, or eyelashes, or hair - that fall out or are snipped off."[17] These words are not neutral terms for as anthropologist Emily Martin observes:

> it may be that an element in the negativity attached to imaging menstruation as failure to produce is precisely that women are, in some sinister sense, out of control when they menstruation instead of getting pregnant. They are not reproducing, not continuing the species, not preparing to stay home with the baby, not providing a safe, warm womb to nurture a man's sperm.[18]

Though Martin believes the connection could be made only tenuously, claims made by physicians, throughout this century, proved there lies validity in her argument. A discussion in the medical journal, *The Lancet*, published in 1926 asked, "why does a normal function cause pain."[19] For one professor, the answer lay in its counter-question, "is it a normal function?" of which the response was, "a normal woman would never menstruate; Nature intended that from her first period onwards her sexual life should be a continuous series of pregnancies and lactations."[20] Similarly, psychoanalyst Erik Erikson wrote, as late as 1968, women remained "unfilled every moment they were not pregnant," for:

> clinical observation suggests that in female experience an 'inner space' is at the centre of despair even it is the very centre of potential fulfilment. Emptiness is the female form of perdition...but standard experience for all women. To be left, for her, means to be left empty...Such hurt can be re-experienced in each menstruation; it is crying to heaven in the mourning over a child.[21]

This ideology was commonly found amongst the women interviewed. One woman recalled once being told that menstruation was the "tears of the uterus."[22]

Although one cannot ignore the link between menstruation and

reproductivity, changing attitudes and practices throughout the twentieth-century caused a growing gap in the significance and relevance of menstruation's biological function and menstruation's overall experience. By 1921, as a result of a rise in urbanization and higher standards of living, fertility rates showed a trend of decline - particularly amongst the working class. According to Alison Prentice *et al.*, while in 1930 the average number of children born per Canadian woman was 3.2, this fell during the Depression decade to 2.7.[23] After World War II, Canadians witnessed a temporary move towards larger families, however, by 1957, the birth rate once again returned toward a downward spiral. Women were choosing to have fewer children in a more restricted space of time. By 1970, less than one-third of all live births were third or later children. The average number of children per family decreased from 1.9 in 1961 to 1.7 in 1971.[24] Fewer births and shorter lactation intervals, meant menstruation, according to the pamphlets and films discourse, was primarily a useless, meaningless, monthly process women had to endure.

As a result of the disjuncture between the biological functioning of menstruation and women's social practices, women's outlook towards their bleeding bodies became more complicated. While women recognized menstruation as the symbol of womanhood and motherhood, their life choices and situations did not always coincide.[25] Respondents, recalling that as young adolescents considerations of marriage and motherhood were only shadows of future possibilities, complained that their early instruction on

reproduction had little meaning. As Jane (1956) explained, young girls were more concerned with the duration of flow, the heaviness of flow, cramps, concealment and protection, then they were about what menstruation meant in terms of bearing children. According to Jane, "at thirteen, fourteen or eleven and a half, it's hard to think: 'Oh! This means some day I'll be able to have a baby'. Who the hell cares at eleven and a half?"[26]

This ambiguous connection was carried into women's adult lives, especially for those growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite both the continued increase in women's participation in the public sphere and the decline in size of families, adolescents of the later decades continued to be presented with traditional forms of menstrual instruction - instruction wich implied that motherhood (the only meaningful aspect of menstruation) was something women could not choose. Her body ultimately defined her social role. The conflict between women's changing realities and the ever consistent menstrual message resulted in a narrow view of menstruation's purpose and usefulness. Throughout the interviews it became clear that one of the only few times menstruation was viewed as positive was when women were hoping to have children in the near future or had young children. As Amanda (1951) argued:

> I mean the purpose for menstruation is for fertility and so on. Before children...I wonder if all this means anything. Am I going to be able to conceive children and stuff like that. And then, all of a sudden you have your three kids and then once that's through you say, "o.k. get rid of this thing. Get it out of my life so that's the only thing...It becomes such a way of life that you don't think of it as being annoying or whatever for the longest time, except for now because it serves no purpose any more. So for me, it's...let's get on with my

life. Eliminate the situation.[27]

Considering when and for how long, if ever, women actively sought to conceive, menstruation, existing for reproduction, lost much of its meaning.

Although this limited view of the menstrual process proved most strongly by the second generation, its implications were evident as early as the first cohort. Flora (1911), a family doctor, who was in the "business of delivering babies, not having them," found menstruation to be "a sheer nuissance."[28] Menstruation, in this regard, was reduced to an issue of sanitary management and physical uneasiness. For Flora, the monthly cycle meant nothing more than "having to cope with it."[29]

Menstruation, whether it be at menarche or every month thereafter, reinforced the notion that a woman's reproductive system defined her role in society. Not only did her cycle represent her destined role as mother, but, as we will now turn to, it also simultaneously represented her restrictions in the public life of productivity. By her very nature, a menstruating woman was confined and limited, incapable of participating equally and as successfully in the 'male' defined public life of paid work and leisure activities; nowhere was this made more profoundly clear than in this 1935 advertisement found in *Chatelaine* for Midol: "Nature being what it is, women are not born 'free and equal'."[30]

HOW THE ADVERTISEMENTS SOLD SHAME:

Advertisers and the sanitary napkin industry knew the importance of understanding their consumers - they needed to know the context of women's menstrual practices and coping strategies. In 1926, for instance, when Johnson and Johnson decided to manufacture, Modess, a product which would compete with the already established Kotex, Lillian Gilbreth was asked to conduct a survey on the use of sanitary napkins.[31] In her report, completed by January 1927, Gilbreth included a sample of her interviews, information on how women dealt with the flow, a survey of the various devices on the market, suggestions for improvement, a review of the literature, and a bibliography.[32] Her study revealed women's dissatisfaction with a bulky wet sanitary napkin uncomfortably wedged between the legs, the annoyance of the inevitable and constant readjustment of an ill-fitting belt and shifting pad, and the embarrassment of buying the product. Indeed, the results of Gilbreth's study led to the recommendations that the pad be modified in its size and shape, and that advertising stress its availability and play down its disposability.[33]

Beyond learning the simple logistics of women's menstrual management system, advertisers and the industry also learned the underlying motivations behind women's coping strategies. Advertisers understood well the potential threat menstruation posed to a woman's overall composure for they knew of the shame society held over this monthly process. Indeed, advertisers did not create menstrual shame - it pre-existed, as we have already seen, in

women's whispers, mother's aversions, and in practices of concealment. Recognizing this, advertisers used shame to their advantage by presenting their products as, in the words of Ann Treneman, a "ready-made individual cure to, what is, in fact, a societal curse."[34] On 3 March, 1930, the *Montreal Star* published, an advertisement for a product claiming to:

> To meet the requirements of the modern woman. Offering you New Comfort...Freedom...Safety! Modern women...who appreciate the new and better things of today...have been quick to approve Modess.[35]

A 1937 advertisement, found in the November issue of *Chatelaine* similarly enforced:

> Modern women no longer give in to periodic pain. It's old fashioned to suffer in silence, because there is now a reliable remedy for such suffering...Don't let the calendar regulate your activities! Don't favour yourself or 'save yourself' on certain days of every month. Keep going and keep comfortable with the aid of Midol.[36]

At first glance, these messages seemed positive assertions on women's capabilities. They avoided any emphasis on women's inherent weakness and instead focused on women's busy and active schedules. However, appearances were deceiving. In the advertisers' attempt to portray the menstrual experience as unrestrictive, they had to remind women, albeit subtly, of its limitations. Indeed, closer examination revealed that the advertisements' context, relatively unchanged between the years 1920 to 1975, did not necessarily dispute the notion that a woman was hindered by her menstrual period, it only told her that she was capable of working around it.[37] Women, it seemed by these covert claims, were tied down by their menstruation, restricted in their

abilities to handle the daily rituals that normally would have been handled easily.

While women were certainly considered bounded by their bodies' constraints, solutions were at hand. As the Midol advertisement asserted, liberation was possible - it lay in women's understanding of and prescribing to the proper coping strategies. Then, and only then, would women be able to "zip along" despite the weak sickly body nature had divined them.[38] Indeed, with the right kind of menstrual product the disruptive aspects of menstruation would be remedied. In a 1951 advertisement for Tampax, a young woman was described as having gained great achievements due to her use of the product:

> With her mind at ease at such times, a young woman has a great advantage she does her job better. If a student, she studies to better effect. Socially, she handles herself and her situation with more confidence and skill. So you see the use of Tampax can make a real and important difference in your life not only on the days in question but throughout the month.[39]

Indeed, if women did feel discomfort, it was they who were at fault. With all the products at a woman's disposal to help magically whisk away the aches and pains, a woman had no excuse to allow her life to be disrupted by menstruation. As this 1940 advertisement in *Chatelaine* scolded, "Those Pains Again...just at the wrong time! Blame yourself, Betty, for those shattered plans - for letting functional periodic pain interfere with pleasure."[40]

Advertisements, by placing responsibility on the individual, resulted in transforming what is in fact a societal curse into an individually based and individually constructed problem. Hidden

deep within the singularity of each women's experience, the negative menstrual prescription held by dominant North American culture went unseen. This in no way served women, on the contrary, these advertisements weakened, if not broke down, any potential resistance, rebellion, and, ultimately, change in the menstrual prescription.

Indeed, the marketing of shame worked well, for advertisements, even in the 1960s and 1970s, retained their dichotic menstrual message. Advertisements, stressing at this time the importance of freedom (a term extracted from popular political culture of the times reflecting issues of decolonization, civil rights, and, women's rights), never made their point on shame come across more poignantly or dangerously. Indeed, according to Treneman, the strength of the advertisement campaigns disguising shame as liberation was in their ability to use the ideas behind the modern Women's Liberation Movement while undercutting them with a meaning that was negative and powerless.[41] Feeding off the liberal struggle for women's rights and freedoms within the public domain, advertisers told women that, though admitting menstruation placed them at a disadvantage, they could, with the right choice in product, compete, work, and play just like men. Take, for instance, these two *Chatelaine* advertisements found in the respective years 1967 and 1969:

> You're free...Free to do exactly what you wish to do every day all summer long.[42]
>
> Freedom now. It's yours for the asking. New Kotex tampons offer you protection, freedom, peace of mind.[43]

In advertisements such as these, the depicted 'liberated' woman going off to school, dances, parties, work, or to the beach, may have felt unhindered by her period, now that she used Tampax or the new improved Kotex, but in all truth she remained haunted by the same taboos of over forty years ago. Indeed, in reading such quotations, it became clear that menstruating women were not accepted as free, but rather were expected to FREE themselves from the confines and limitations of their own bodies.

It was in this way, the companies sold, not just its product, but shame as well. It worked on society's belief that a woman's body would never amount to or live up to the standards of a healthy (male) body. She was, due to the monthly flow of blood, deviant, sickly, and burdened. No matter how far or how hard women fought to gain equality, their body would inevitably betray them. It was their ultimate failure.

Reinforcing the market of shame were Kotex's pamphlets and film distributed over a twenty year time span beginning as early as 1946 and still used as late as 1961. Pamphlets, such as *Very Personally Yours* or *"You're a Young Lady Now"*, counselled that a woman "needn't change her habits during menstruation," so long as she remained relatively passive and calm.[44] Exercise, for instance, "was good for you" as long as it was not "violent", "excessive", or "strenuous" - waltzing was considered proper forms of activity while jitterbugging was considered far too extreme.[45] "Just use common sense," so *Very Personally Yours* argued, for while tennis or a good hike might be considered appropriate, any

"strenuous routine" should be saved "for another time."[46] "Stay out of drafts", "avoid catching cold", "guard against wet feet and chilling", the pamphlet warned, for "any sudden change in body temperature can shock your entire system, may lower your resistance, and possibly interfere with your flow."[47] Clearly, moderation and careful attention was the primary concern for any form of physical activity.

With regards to menstrual discomfort such as cramps or emotional changes, young girls were expected, so *"You're a Young Lady Now"* asserted, to "learn to live with them easily."[48] Menstrual pain was not considered to be all that disruptive, in fact, complaints were rarely considered grounded. "You see," *"You're a Young Lady Now"* counselled, "some girls imagine they feel worse than they actually do. They get in a dither just by thinking too much about themselves."[49] The solution was simply not to let their periods "slow [them] down." After all, the educative materials further claimed, "no matter what, you have to live with people and you have to live with yourself too...once you stop feeling sorry for yourself and take those days in your stride, you'll find that it's easier to keep smiling and even tempered."[50] Of course, in order to follow this solution, a woman was expected to use Kotex for, according to its manufacturer, this product could provide the self-confidence and peace of mind needed to forget her menstrual problem. Concealment, according to these educative materials, was, once again, the ever present force in dealing correctly and easily with the menstrual process.

The implications of the advertising and instructional messages were far reaching. Though the pamphlets and advertisements may have claimed that a menstruating woman SHOULD live life as she normally would, it was conditional. For women to feel positive about their period, they would have to buy Tampax to avoid bulges of an ordinary rag or napkin, to spray deodorant or buy deodorized napkins to rid their bodies of odour, to put on a happy face despite the "menstrual blues", and to buy medication to relieve menstrual pain and distress. In so doing, it was proclaimed, women could manage to live life unhindered by their menstrual period. Menstruation would, by the very promises of menstrual management techniques, become something which was never a bother, never a "big deal." Women would be able to forget the process in its entirety.

WOMEN'S WORLD OF DISGUISE:

Women understood the negative value associated with their bleeding bodies. Beyond reading it in the pamphlets or interpreting the advertisements, women experienced the menstrual restrictions in their everyday routine. Women, from the first cohort, for instance, were automatically excused from gym class when menstruating. Women were not allowed to go swimming, not only since the pad was uncomfortable and bulky, but also because it was believed that the water - being too cold - was unhealthy for their fragile state. One woman recalled being told not to wash her hair during her menses as it was considered dangerous, while another was told never to get her feet wet. In contrast, three other women,

were expected to be more fastidious with bathing to rid odour. One woman also recalled the insensitive remark of a male co-worker, a doctor, who claimed that much of the ill feelings and discomforts women feel were for the most part imagined. By the second cohort, remnants of the old beliefs remained. In the 1960s and early 1970s, young girls, while no longer automatically excused from gym class, did not have to participate if on their period. One woman recalled the girls in her class having permission not to use the showers after gym class while menstruating (perhaps this was out of an issue of concealment, or due to the fear of blood running through the public stalls), while two other women referred to bathing more regularly. Another interviewee remembered her friends having to eat liver during their periods as it was believed that it would replenish their lost blood. One woman was advised never to take an aspirin during her period, believing it may cause the blood to thin, resulting in a heavier and longer menstrual flow. Finally, for all women from the second cohort, until they decided to use the tampon, swimming continued to serve as an obstacle - the health concern witnessed in the earlier narratives had disappeared.

Women, presented with these restrictions, expressed resentment towards them being imposed. While each woman's experience differed, depending on the degree of physical and emotional signs such as cramps, headaches, back pain, anger, or sadness, none felt any justification in what she considered to be artificial or constructed boundaries limiting her normal routine. Indeed, with the exception of one interviewee who complained of terrible

writhing cramps (caused by a tilted uterus), no other woman felt that the menstrual process, though at times a burdensome one, stopped them from taking part in any activity (with the exception of swimming) planned. Whether it be a party, a vacation, bike riding, horseback riding, going to school, or work, menstruation never caused them to miss out. Susan (1924), for instance, disputed the convention depicting menstruation as a weakly disruptive state. She never allowed her menses to stop her from any physical or social activity, nor did she allow herself to miss a day at school or work. According to Susan, menstruation was not, should not, be an excuse for inactivity, bed rest, and/or complaints. Menstruation or no, life went on. "I was not expected to baby myself becuase I had my period," Susan argued, "it was just a fact of life...it was, 'whatever you did you did just the same'."[51]

Nowhere was Susan's stand on menstrual behaviour more clearly illustrated than with her depiction of her two daughters. For Susan, there was a marked difference between the proper way of handling menses, represented by Lori whose lack of complaint and unbothered attitude proved she was not limited by her period, and the wrong way, represented by Joanne whose signs of anxiety, concern, and disruption by her period proved weak and debilitating:

> These two girls...they're totally different. Lori could be here and have her period and I wouldn't have the vaguest clue, wheras Joanne will walk in the door and tell you more than you ever wanted to know.[52]

For Susan, there was a decorum, a power it seemed, in not allowing one's own concerns, anxieties, and discomforts to affect those

around you. Indeed, for Susan, proof that menstruation was neither bothersome nor limiting lay in one's ability to ignore it entirely, perhaps even pretend it did not exist at all.

Indeed, according to women's narratives, it would seem there was nothing more helpless or powerless than admitting your own body had betrayed you in performing the everyday tasks which were normally handled so easily. Doctors, by the late 1920s, may have moved away from notions of menstruation as 'unwell', nonethless, a woman's menstrual cycle continued to be considered a fragile state. Women were still considered, as late as the 1960s, unreliable and handicapped by their periods. Simply, women, while on their cycle, were considered a liability.

While this certainly affected women of both cohorts, this menstrual prescription affected women of the later decades far more deeply. Not only were young women, by the early 1960s, gaining greater access into higher levels of education, they were also entering and staying in the labour force in ever increasing numbers, choosing careers traditionally dominated by men.[53] Women of the second cohort especially, believed that while they had every right to work in the public sphere, they had to prove they were both capable and reliable workers - any time of the month.

Women, rather than challenging outright the menstrual prescription which deemed their bodies as unproductive and weak, chose to hide their status instead. Liberation in their eyes, came from being able to act completely unhindered by their period, rather than validate and acknowledge its discomforts and emotional

fluctuations. Better to cope quietly and subtly, argued respondents, than to grant the gym teachers (who in many cases were women), the male co-workers, and the advertisers the fuel required to maintain women's marginalized status.[54] As Erin (1961) argued:

> I would think it's a society thing. I would venture to say that, I mean we fought for how many years...to be equal and we're certainly not going to admit now that maybe we have stay home one day a month because I have a period. Try telling that to the CEO [chief executive officer]. It would go over real good. I would venture to say that it's as strong as ever, that kind of thinking.[55]

Women recognized that menstruation signified weakness, and ultimately felt its shame. Seemingly the only way to avoid was to hide it from view.

Closely connected to this issue of concealment was that of controlling the menstrual process. According to the women, through adherence to the menstrual management system, women could better camouflage the nasty signs of her menstrual cycle, and, in turn, gain control over her anxieties and concerns. As long as women could be certain of being properly protected, free of any odour, bulkiness, or possible leakage, women would be able to properly participate in their everyday routines. One of the most important tool in maintaining control over one's body and lifestyle was the tampon. Distributed in Canada in the late 1930s, the tampon, with its smaller packaging and its internal usage, had become the embodiment of invisibility and the end-all answer to normalcy. Consistently, advertisements assured women the ability to do any form of physical activity with ease. Hiking, biking, horseback riding, skiing, were all guaranteed greater freedom and enjoyment.

Swimming, of course, was the greatest promise of all. No longer did women have to sit home alone, on the hottest day of the summer, feeling left out and constrained, so the advertisements proclaimed, with the practicality of internal protection, menstruating women, could now join in the fun. Showers and baths were also made easier, for with a tampon, women would be certain no leaky mess would have to be dealt with. In addition to such advantages, women were also told that menstrual indicators such as revealing outlines or odour were completely eliminated. It was the ultimate product of disguise.

Indeed, so great was the promise of invisibility, the tampon advertisements guaranteed (in their promises of comfort, unhindered movement, and invisible protection) disguising the menstrual experience even from the women themselves. A 1951 advertisement from *Chatelaine*, proclaimed:

> This little product is relied by millions of women to make life happier on 'the bad days' of the month. By abolishing the all too-familiar belts, pins, external pads. It provides them with sanitary protection without any of these REMINDERS...It is an internal absorbent, completely UNFELT when in place. Insertion is easy. Changing is quick.[56]

A similar advertisement, this time printed in 1963, claimed a tampon was "invisibile in place, unfelt in place. Out of sight, out of mind."[57]

Certainly, as compared to the bought pads or home-made rags, the tampon did have some inherent positive qualities. As Minnie (1953) proclaimed, "small, tidy, clean, easy to use, easy to carry. All the wonderful stuff. I mean they were great, I loved it."[58]

Indeed, for the women who decided to use tampons, hygiene and an extra comfort in everyday living was an important consideration, not to mention that it was discrete and facilitated easy disposal. With the fuss of belts, the uncomfortable bulk between their legs caused by the pad, or the painful irritation of a wet soggy or at times hard and dried up bloody pad, tampons, in many ways, were a considerable improvement. It meant extra comfort, freedom in sports - especially water activities - easier concealment, and better protection. For Jane (1956), tampons represented:

> freedom...In terms of swimming, I always swam. I guess I just didn't want anybody to know that I had my period including my boyfriend. So that way, nobody had to know anything...I never found the pads that comfortable when you had to wear the belt. It came down like a T and there was a piece that came down with a plastic hook at the end and invariably that thing would sit at the end of my coccyx so I would be sitting on it and it was very, very uncomfortable. Plus with that kind of system it shifted around a lot...Ugh! You never felt really protected, you never felt 100% protected.[59]

As this quote suggested, women wanted to feel like they did any other time of the month and did not want to have to worry that anyone else might discover their status.

So important was the notion of 'normalcy' that many women were willing to use tampons, despite the physical discomfort and anxieties that followed. Only three women expressed total comfort the first time they tried wearing a tampon - the majority were uneasy both mentally and physically with the insertion. Not only did it hurt, but women also expressed concerns over placing something 'foreign' into their bodies. Indeed, there was a common fear that tampons might cause infection or tear the tissues along

the vaginal canal.[60] In addition, four women expressed the notion that insertion was believed to damage their hymen and, hence ruin her virginity, while six expressed concerns of losing the cord. First insertion attempts were not always successful, five tried using tampons on many separate occasions before they actually felt comfortable with its use. Two women felt uneasy using tampons as they felt it disrupted the flow by "jamming up" the blood, and, two constantly worried that the tampon might leak. And yet, despite the hesitancy, and the original discomfort, women continued to use it. Tampons not only freed them from public judgement, it also freed them from the uncomfortable constraints menstruation placed upon them. With tampons, women found they had once again regained complete control over their lives. They decided, not their periods, when and how they would live.

Whether it be housework, working outside the home, leisure activities, or sports, the belief that, once a month, nature took control over their moods, their energy, their abilities, did not sit comfortably with women who took pride in their active lives. And yet, there was, throughout the interviews, a constant conflict and ambivalence between women's actual physical experience with menstruation and their desire and assertion for normalcy. Despite women's consistent denials that menstruation ever posed a threat or obstacle in their every day living, their behaviour often proved different.

A woman's body did not always grant the ability to control the negative signs of the menstrual cycle - lack of regularity in one's

menstrual cycle, especially during the early post-menarcheal years, seemed a constant anxiety. Allison (1923), a woman whose menstrual life cycle covered the decades of the 1930s to the 1980s, described how her feelings and experiences have evolved over the years. While certainly claiming to feel comfortable with her cycle as she grew older, as she could then better predict her cycle, this was not the case when she first began to menstruate. "You're not quite sure," recalled Allison, "you never know if it might all of a sudden get heavier or something and you might be in trouble if you didn't have a spare."[61] In agreement, Jane (1956) believed that easiness with one's menstrual cycle was directly related to an ability to anticipate her cycle and better protect herself:

> Oh absolutely. Because you get to know your body, and you could predict how its going to respond...And that's the most important part of it, is that you get to know yourself. And I found with friends and so on over the years that the ones that don't get to that comfort level are the one's that have these horrendous periods where nothing seems to work and they are running to the bathroom all the time. And it doesn't matter whether they're wearing Tampax or pads or both, they don't...feel protected. And if you don't feel protected then they can't relax".[62]

Seemingly, predictability facilitated improved personal comfort, and easier concealment. Knowing when and for how long their menstruation would flow, women could better equip themselves, regaining a sense of 'normalcy' and control.

While the menstrual cycle, for the most part would grow predictable with age, another factor, the pill, available only after 1960, also had a desired effect on regulating some women's cycle. Though hardly the main reason women used it (women have

been known to go on the pill to reduce menstrual symptoms, however, for all respondents who used the pill, in this case, its main usage was as a form of birth control), the pill often tended to alleviate women's worries and concerns regarding menstrual irregularity. Cramps have been known to dissipate with the use of the pill, the flow often becomes less heavy, and, best of all, your period, as Julie (1955) said, comes "like clockwork".[63] This capability to better predict, facilitated a sense of regaining control over a body which, for years, proved unpredictable and unreliable. Amanda (1951) explained that to "go a month, skip two, go a month, skip three" caused "a lot of anxiety." Uncertain of her flow and when it may arrive meant she could never properly prepare herself in advance, leaving Amanda with a constant fear of "getting caught unprotected." This anxiety, however, resided once she was introduced to the pill:

> When I went on the pill, things totally changed. Boy! I could tell exactly when I was going to start...So actually it got better in terms of losing that anxiety of wondering when - from going irregular. Then it was no problem. So, actually any worry or whatever concerns lessened in my part, because it became so routine.[64]

Still, no matter how 'routine' one's period became, no matter how one was better able to predict one's flow, menstruation still proved restrictive. Despite women's denials that menstruation was truly never a bother at all, anxieties persisted. Amanda (1952), in spite of her claims that menstruation was not "a concern" and "matter of fact," she noted that leakage was a consistent concern as a result of her profession.[65] As a dance and aerobics instructor, Amanda asserted that:

> Being in front of students all day with a body suit on, its very important to me to be organized and on top of things so...yes, it was just as much a concern...I can remember quite a bit, that between classes, I'd make sure I was o.k.. That was like, "o.k. I've got to go to the bathroom." So in my part, yes, it was just as important...it's a concern because you're in the public eye.[66]

Similarly, Melanie (1952) argued that her menses never bothered her, though, later admitted to not playing baseball. The pants, she claimed were tight, and she feared others would see the outline of her pad. Flora (1911), believed that she always managed to function normally during her period, but then also claimed that it was burdensome, caused her tremendous pain for a day, and that if she could plan her activities around it she would. Others still argued that menstruation was nothing to be concerned about, only then to confess that, as we have already seen, they often felt less feminine, often feeling bloated and unattractive. They also claimed that their heterosexual activity, due to both fear of judgement as well as to personal taste, was often either altered or was completely avoided. Even the every day mundane practices of going to the washroom or the choice of clothing one wore posed an extra concern and limitation.

Nowhere was this dichotomy more strongly illustrated, then with Minnie's (1953) narrative. According to Minnie, her period never proved any great concern. Even at menarche, she seemed undisturbed - though maybe a little excited, she claimed - by its arrival. Indeed, with the first sight of blood, she announced to her mother that she would need some sanitary pads, used tissue paper in the meantime, and went off to her friend's house in

preparation for her elementary school graduation. It was, according to Minnie, "just a matter of fact."[67] This attitude, she believed, continued throughout her adult life. Menstruation never caused any problems for her regarding participation in sports, social activities, work, or at school. Even when planning vacations, such as her honeymoon, she never worked it around her cycle. Indeed, she never, so Minnie asserted, thought of it at all. And yet, amongst all of these examples and assertions that menstruation never posed an obstacle or a threat to her everyday routine, Minnie admitted her period:

> was a nuisance, when I was younger more, I felt like I couldn't swim. Until you had tampons, you couldn't swim. So you really felt like it cramped your life. It was a bit of a nuisance and a pain. You know, sometimes, certainly I wished I didn't have it. I wished I was a boy (laughs). It was unfair. I didn't suffer any pain, so that was good.[68]

Minnie's wish to be a boy was a striking illustration of the dominant mores deeming the male body as the norm. To bleed was to exist outside the boundaries what has been defined as a healthy productive active body. It represented frailty and ill health. Despite all other claims to the contrary, this quote demonstrated that, in fact, Minnie did not always feel like her 'normal' (male defined) self during her period, she felt restricted and constrained. Seemingly, the very process which, as a young pubescent girl had represented the essence of womanhood, then stood as a frustrating boundary. And for that, it was "unfair".

CONCLUSION:

The ambivalence women felt towards their menstrual cycle, should come as no surprise when it is considered how insidious, even invisible, the negative menstrual prescriptions had become. Women have been told by the sanitary napkin educative materials and the advertisements throughout the twentieth century that menstruation was a natural normal biological process, while simultaneously, but in this case covertly, told, a weakened state. According to this line of thought, women, despite the inevitable burden nature had prescribed, were not allowed to feel disrupted by their period, and if they were, then they most certainly were not expected to show it. Normalcy was not accepted, in this case, as a menstruating body with all its aches and pains, it was a menstruating body, numbed by Midol, concealed by the new improved Kotex or Modess and, by the 1960s, Carefree, made odourless by deodorant, and unhindered by tampons. With their body free from all the shameful aspects of menstruation, women could believe that menstruation posed little threat to their overall composure. In fact, menstruation may be considered limiting, but women believed, despite proof of the contrary, that they had ultimately escaped its reality. The menstrual curse became a constant masquerade; so well hidden was its social reality, that at times, even the women themselves were not always conscious of the disguise. Unfortunately, by accepting and participating, in this masterfully crafted sense of illusion, the chains of the menstrual curse have solidly remained in place.

ENDNOTES

1. Susan, born 1924, interviewed by author, Montreal, 15 November 1995.

2. Melanie, born 1952, interviewed by author, Montreal, 20 November 1995.

3. Recent discussion of the validity of Premenstrual Syndrome have divided feminists. Some feminists, taking a social constructionist viewpoint, believe PMS is a socially created phenomenon used to maintain and justify women's oppressed social position. Hence, these feminists reject its validity. To read further on critical analyses of PMS please see: Lynda I. A. Birke and Sandy Best, "Changing Minds: Women, Biology, and the Menstrual Cycle", in Ruth Hubbard *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 161-179. Also see: Joan C. Chrisler and Karen B. Levy, "The Media Constructs a Menstrual Monster: A Content Analysis of PMS Articles in Popular Press," *Women and Health* 16:2(Spring, 1990): 47-73. Other feminists have questioned whether the rejection of PMS is the correct and positive direction to take. These feminists, recognizing that many women do in fact suffer pain and emotional fluctuation (women, who, in fact, gain a great comfort knowing there is a medical explanation for these experiences rather than being all 'in their head') argue that we should recognize all facets of the menstrual experience. In this way, these feminist recognize and validate menstrual pain as NORMAL and HEALTHY. They further argue that menstrual discomfort should not be considered a disadvantage regarding a women's productivity. For readings on this point of view please see: Emily Martin, "Premenstrual Syndrome: Discipline, Work, and Anger in Late Industrial Societies," Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, eds., *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 161-181. Also see: Janet Sayers, *Biological Politics: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Perspectives* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1982): chapter 7.

4. Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) takes a critical look at the way science has been used to support women's secondary role in society. Through her work she investigates ways in which women can free themselves from the debilitating misrepresentation of medical/scientific misinformation and to reconceptualize women's biology to "make it truly ours," p. 3. Similarly critical of the discourses of science, are the groups of essays found in Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon, 1987) is particularly useful in understanding how the contemporary medical model has constructed women's bodies in ways which perpetuate women's

secondary role. Also significant, as it pertains specifically to menstruation, is Martin's essay "Medical Metaphors of Women's Bodies: Menstruation and Menopause," *International Journal of Health Services* 18(1988): 237-254. For some general studies which cover the treatment of menstruation by doctors, psychologists, and educators see: Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation* (New York: E.P Dutton and Company, 1976) and Paula Wiedeger, *Menstruation and Menopause: The Physiology, and Psychology, the Myth and the Reality* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1976).

5. The underlying medical theory of women's weakness rested on what doctors considered the most basic physiological law: 'conservation of energy'. According to this theory, every human body held a finite amount of energy used for the functioning of various organs. This limited amount of energy meant that the organs were in constant conflict - each organ competing for the vital energy for its own functioning and development. Often the body's resources became highly unequal with some organs using the energy at the expense of another. The implications of this theory, as it pertained to women's health, was clear. Since a woman's reproductive organs dominated, most of the limited supply of energy, at puberty, shifted towards the development of her sex organs. In consequence, a woman's energy became so contracted, that there was little energy for anything else. In fact, it was for this reason, that women were expected to stay within the home, preparing for their destined role as childbearers and childrearers.

6. Caroll Smith Rosenberg, "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America," *Feminist Studies* 1(Spring, 1973), p. 61.

7. Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

8. A study by Vern Bullough proves this view is still maintained. The premise of his study works on the assumption that technology such as the pill and the tampon have freed women from an inherently debilitating biology. According to Bullough, if women continue to be treated unfairly, it is due to a lag in social values which continue to define women's position as secondary. "Technology and Female Sexuality and Physiology: Some Implications," in *The Journal of Sex Research*, 16:1 (February, 1980): 59-71.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

11. Delaney, Lupton, Toth, *The Curse*, p. 2.

12. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfread A Knopf, 1971, first ed., 1953), p. 29.

13. *"You're a Young Lady Now"* (Kimberly-Clark Corporation. Toronto: Education Department, 1946, 1953, 1959, and 1961), p. 3.

14. Margot Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films, 1947-1983" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989), p. 102.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

16. *Very Personally Yours* (Kimberly-Clark Corporation. Toronto: Education Department, 1946, 1953, 1959, and 1961), p. 6; Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom," p. 102. Kennard has highlighted that the message found in the educative materials are resoundly similar to that of medical texts. My own research has proven this true. In a 1960 medical advice book, menstruation was defined in terms of reproductivity which uses such phrases as "building up blood vessels and tissues to nourish a new life" or, when the egg is not fertilized, "the unused material", "break up", and "flushed out in menstrual flow". Helen I. Driver ed., Sex Guidance for Your Child: A Parent Handbook (Wisconsin: Monona Publications, 1960), p. 49; *Very Personally Yours*, p. 6.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

18. Martin, "Science and Women's Bodies: Forms of Anthropological Knowledge," p.75. Martin, who found similar depictions in medical school textbooks, claims that the construction represented in the film and in the sample can be termed the 'scientific medical model' of menstruation. This particular view (which grew out of the twentieth century) defines the body in term of a factory system geared towards production. In this way, argues Martin, menstruation has been described as not only a productive system that has failed to be productive, but also as a productive system gone awry, making products of no use. Simply, menstruation is viewed as producing nothing that is regarded as valuable.

19. *The Lancet*, March 20, 1926, p. 611.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 611.

21. Citation found in Vern L. Bullough, "Technology and Female Sexuality and Physiology: Some Implications," The Journal of Sex Research 16:1(February, 1980), p. 69.

22. Flora, born 1911, interviewed by author, Montreal, 16 November 1995.

23. Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 240.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

25. Martin suggests that there are other ways, besides the medical view, to describe and understand menstruation. While middle-class women tend to define menstruation in terms of the medical model, working-class women define it in terms of what a woman sees and feels, or the significance it has in her life. Martin also finds, similar to my own, that the medical version "leads to difficulties dealing with the actualities of menstruation," seemingly unseen in the working-class women's experiences. "Science and Women's Bodies," p. 78.

26. Jane, born 1956, interviewed by author, Montreal, 1 November 1995.

27. Amanda, born 1951, interviewed by author, Montreal, 23 November 1995.

28. Flora, born 1911, interviewed by author, Montreal, 16 November 1995.

29. *Ibid.* One should also not forget how women, unable to conceive, must have felt towards their monthly cycle. As Allison (1923) proclaimed:

> Well, it was a nuisance. I sometimes didn't feel too good. I wasn't going to have a child. So why did I have to have it? Get rid of it. I realize when it's the other way around, when you feel this is the end of the cycle of your life and you won't be able to have any more [children]. But I was happy to see the end of it, because it wasn't going to make any difference to me.

Unable to conceive herself, menstruation was viewed negatively. Throughout the years of her and her husband's attempts at conception, the monthly flow meant constant disappointment and frustration - a reminder of her failure to conceive. Once resolved to this fact, and after turning to adoption twice as an alternative (she raised a daughter and son), menstruation was seen as nothing more than a physical and hygienic hassle.

30. *Chatelaine*, October 1935, p. 42.

31. Johnson's and Johnson's hiring of Lillian Gilbreth is illustrative of manufacturers' growing utility of experts' advice and counsel in the selling of their products. By the 1920s and more so as the decade progressed, manufacturers hired experts, with their 'scientific and mathematical' methods, to determine the greatest market and profit potential. For more information on

Gilbreth, see: Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 119*n*, 202, 447

31. Vern L. Bullough, "Merchandising the Sanitary Napkin: Lillian Gibreth's 1927 Survey," *Signs* 10:3(Spring, 1985): 615-627.

33. Kimberly-Clark also set up its first Consumer Testing Board in 1933. The results of the Consumer Board tests showed that women wanted a smaller pad for days of lighter flow, so Kimberly-Clark introduced a 'Junior' size in 1935. Janice Jorgenson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Consumer Brands, vol.2: Personal Products* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1994), pp. 317-318. For further parallel examples of the use of surveys see Rhonda Mawhood, "Images of Feminine Beauty in Advertisement for Beauty Products in English Canada, 1901 -1941" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1991), pp. 43-44.

34. Ann Treneman, "Cashing in on the Curse: Advertising and the Menstrual Taboo," in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (Seattle: the Real Comet Press, 1989), p. 158.

35. The *Montreal Star*, 3 March, 1930, p. 15.

36. *Chatelaine*, November 1937, p. 52.

37. While the advertisements' promises of freedom remained a constant theme, there were slight differences in rhetoric during the period under study. In the late 1940s, advertisers for sanitary napkin industries incorporated the war rhetoric to entice their potential female market. In the 1970s, advertisers, following the 'back to nature' trend, added to their claims the importance of being and feeling natural.

38. *Chatelaine*, February 1969, p. 52.

39. *Ibid.*, February 1951, p. 54.

40. *Ibid.*, February 1940, p. 39.

41. Treneman, "Cashing in on the Curse," p. 157

42. *Chatelaine*, June 1967, p. 21.

43. *Chatelaine*, May 1969, p. 6.

44. *Very Personally Yours*, p. 9.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

48. *"You're a Young Lady Now"*, p. 7.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

50. Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom," p. 110.

51. Susan, born 1924, interviewed by author, Montreal, 15 November 1995.

52. *Ibid.* Susan also described, "Lori, the older [daughter] was very similar to me, from then to now...you'll never hear her mention her period. She doesn't complain, she doesn't wait for it - exactly my style. Joanne - her husband calls it her 'woman thing' - and it's quite a subject of conversation...but it's always been a real big deal to Joanne. She'll literally go to bed. Now she has had difficult periods, I will tell you that, from when she was young. But also, as far as I am concerned, it's always been in her head a great deal.

53. Women's participation rates in the work force has grown steadily from 1921 to 1961. In 1921, the participation rate was 17.7%, in 1931 - 19.4%, in 1941 - 22. 9%, in 1951 - 24.4%, and by 1961 - 29.3. The labour force, by the 1960s, also had a far greater number of older women engaged in work. In 1921, the participation rate of women between 25-34 years old was 19.5%, while by 1961, it had grown to 29.2%. For women between the ages of 35-64, the participation rates also grew from 12.0% to 29.9% between 1921 and 1961. F.H. Leacy ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada: Second Edition* (Statistics Canada, 1983), p. D107-123.

54. Although women certainly believed that society deemed their monthly cycle as debilitating and deviant, covert public admissions of this belief are few and far between. This is not to suggest that women's perceptions are distorted and false, but rather points towards how insidious and well-hidden the menstrual taboo has become. Though evidence is hard to find, some snippets do exist. I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Suzanne Morton for directing me to a reference cited in Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left: 1910-1918* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). Newton describes an article found in the party paper attacking Goldwin Smith's criticism of socialism. This was done by using vulgar and insensitive references to a woman's menses: "There is a periodicity about his [Smith's] outbreaks that would suggest that the moon has something to do with them. His last menstrual period was July the 29th when he was delivered of the usual mess," p. 42. Other evidence which points to the distaste dominant North American culture held over menstruation is found in the use of euphemisms - signifying the extent of concealment. Women recalled using terms such as, "on the rag", "grandma is here", "my friend", "the red sea's out", and "my

monthlies". Other euphemisms were far more vulgar, pointing at a menstruating woman's sexual unavailability: "Mickey Mouse is kaput", "there's a cherry in her sherry", or "ice-boxed". For further citations see: Natalie F. Joffe, "The Vernacular of Menstruation," *Word* 4:3(1948): 181-186.

55. Erin, born 1962, interviewed by author, Montreal, 25 November 1995.

56. *Chatelaine*, October 1951, p. 111. Emphasis mine.

57. *Chatelaine*, October 1963, p 98.

58. Minnie, born 1953, interviewed by author, Montreal, 4 January 1996.

59. Jane, born 1956, interviewed by author, Montreal, 1 November 1995.

60. In response to the growing demand for tampons, *The Lancet* published an article in 1945 to discuss the safety of their use. While doctors at family clinics had found that some women had used the tampons without any harmful side effects, they did not find this true for all women. Women with a heavy flow found the tampons unable to completely absorb the flow, while other women with "thin or sensitive vaginal mucosa", found that tampon usage caused irritation and discharge. Another suspicion doctors held towards the tampons was over the sterilization of this internal product, perhaps one of the reasons why Tampax advertisements specified its sterilization techniques. Due to these uncertainties, the article concluded that doctors should not encourage tampon usage. March 31, 1945, p. 421. Contrarily, an article from the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* published in 1939 debated the health concerns of the tampon. In response to a previous article which had debased tampon usage, Dr. Edward Elkan claimed that "the tampon...has come to stay, and we may be better employed in advocating its intelligent use rather than in condemn it *in toto*." As long as women used the tampon wisely by changing often, Dr. Elkan saw no justification as to why women could not use it. This debate continued well into the 1960s and 1970s, for women of the second cohort also recalled doctors' uncertainty of tampon usage. Patricia, born 1962, interviewed by author, Montreal, 2 December 1995, remembered her doctor telling her that he was not certain of the side-effects tampon usage might have on her health. Though he did not prevent Patricia from using the tampon, she was warned that if she took out a tampon too early she might tear her vaginal canal (the tampon would still be dry and rough), and if she took it out too late, she may get an infection. The answers, for women, were not always clear. It was not until the emergence of Toxic Shock Syndrome in the early 1980s, that doctors and women had any concrete evidence pointing towards the potential risks of tampon usage.

61. Allison, born 1923, interviewed by author, Montreal, 3 November 1995.

62. Jane, born 1956, interviewed by author, Montreal, 1 November 1995.

63. Julie, born 1955, interviewed by author, Montreal, 26 November 1995.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*

67. Minnie, born 1953, interviewed by author, Montreal, 4 January 1996.

68. *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

By the early twentieth century, a young adolescent was taught a menstrual discourse which focused on the importance of hygiene, concealment, and management. Menstruation, while represented as marking women's reproductive destiny, was treated by doctors, mothers, and the sanitary napkin industry as a shameful process deserving little celebration or validation. From the moment a young girl began to bleed, she was expected to hide, disguise, and forget her menstrual status, not only from those around her, but from herself as well.

Feminist scholars have tended to look at this negative and limiting view of the menstrual discourse as yet another example of what they consider a universal taboo. According to feminist claims, the menstrual taboo, whether it takes the form of menstrual huts or the concealing practices of the menstrual management system was common to all women's experience. It served to justify and maintain women's inferior and secondary position within society.

While there lies little doubt that menstruation has been used as grounds for women's subordinant position, such essentialist arguments tend to ignore the way in which diverse cultural, historical, and social factors affect the outlook and experience of menstruation. The menstrual prescription was neither fixed nor universal, it was subject to time and space and, as such, was changeable and adaptable. Though feminists have claimed the phenomenon of concealment as the ultimate menstrual taboo in North

American society, they have failed to take into consideration as to how and why this possibly occurred. By paying closer attention to wider historical and social forces, we gain greater understanding of the context in which the hygienic message and its emphasis on concealment emerged.

Listening to the experiences of twenty-four respondents, who began menstruating between the years of 1920 and 1975, we learn how menstruation, traditionally defined in terms of reproductivity and womanhood, no longer easily coincided with women's changing socio-biological realities. Mothers, educators, doctors, the industry, and the women themselves reacted to the disjuncture by transforming the menstrual discourse into one which down played issues of sexuality, focusing instead on the 'hygienic crisis' and a menstrual management system based on disguise. The menstrual experience, increasingly disconnected from reproduction, became defined primarily in terms of uncleanliness and deviancy, and was viewed as unattractive, unsexual, and unproductive. Though women did not always comply to the discourse, concealment and ultimately shame remained a constant and consistent theme.

Over the past two centuries, menstruation arrived at an increasingly earlier age, causing a gap, by the twentieth century between what was biologically possible and what was socially appropriate. Menstruation may have marked a young girl's entrance into womanhood, but socially her status remained that of a child. Later life stages, such as marriage or getting a job, signified adulthood and maturity far greater than did the first spotting of

blood. Still considered a child, this marking of her adult sexuality - so closely linked to procreativity - created great uncertainty amongst mothers and experts regarding the appropriateness of early menstrual instruction and its message. Indeed, not until the moment of menarche would mothers find themselves faced, often for the first time, with having to discuss the topic with their daughters.

The uneasiness felt over the topic of sexuality led to the limiting of the menstrual message. Mothers, uncomfortable with the topic of menstruation itself often based their instruction solely on menstrual hygiene. This instruction, reinforced through educative and advertising materials, focused on the necessity of bathing regularly (or at least the genital area daily), changing pads or tampons regularly, soaking home-made pads discreetly, making certain any revealing outlines were covered, and insuring any smell was eradicated and potential leakage was contained. Though some of these coping strategies were arguably techniques to ensure comfort against the ill effects of the menstrual cycle, it also stood as an elaborate form of disguise and concealment. From the moment, and even before, a young girl first began to bleed, she learned, through her mother's reticence and through the menstrual hygiene discourse, that menstruation was a process which was to be left in the dark - a secret only for themselves (and perhaps a few chosen trusted female friends or family) to know. Women did not wish to be judged as dirty, and hence, hid from view their menstrual cycle entirely.

This emphasis on menstrual hygiene also emerged during the period in which general aspects of personal hygiene became increasingly important. No longer a value pertaining to the upper and middle-classes, the importance of cleanliness had reached all classes; it was the mark of civility, health, and progress. Through the medical profession, bourgeoisie, and the mass production and marketing of soaps, mouthwashes, shampoos, and deodorants, modern society had, by the 1920s, become consumed by fears of odour and dirt. Not much unlike the importance of clean hair, fresh breath, and perfumed bodies, menstruation, with its blood soaked pads and distinct smell, was now expected to be controlled.

The stress on cleanliness affected a woman's outlook towards her menstruating body. Menstruation, treated primarily in terms of a 'hygienic crisis', was viewed as altering a woman's attractiveness and sexual appeal. Through boys teasing, men's aversions, fathers' absence, advertisements' claims, and pamphlets' messages, women learned and recognized the potential threat menstruation posed to her femininity and sexuality. Although women arguably challenged this discourse, their actions, attitudes, and behaviour were contradictory. Women may have viewed their menstrual cycle as part of their feminine identity, something from which power and strength could be derived, but they also recognized that society viewed it as unclean, unattractive, and unsexual. Ultimately complying to a society which based a woman's power on her body's appeal, women followed the menstrual management

techniques as a way of regaining control over a body viewed as tainted and spoiled. With the revealing outlines of the pad well hidden, the smell eradicated by the use of deodorants or the use of tampons, the threat of leakage covered by wearing darker clothes or by carrying extra spares in case, a woman could feel free from the embarrassing side-effects of her menstrual cycle. As long as the disguise was well maintained, her bleeding body, and hence, her lost sexual allurement, would remain unknown. Through the menstrual management system, her 'normal' lifestyle would be maintained.

The importance of 'normalcy' was further translated in terms of a woman's (re)productivity. The prescription stipulated that, on the one hand, a woman's menses was only 'functional' when fulfilling its purpose, that is, reproduction, and on the other hand, was 'dysfunctional' or 'debilitating' for any type of public activity. Combined, these claims worked along the gendered divisions of the public and private sphere, relegating women to the private, despite, or perhaps, in spite of, women's changing social and demographic realities - women were increasingly choosing to have fewer children in shorter time spans, while simultaneously entering into the workforce in larger numbers.

The menstrual message, while certainly reminiscent of the Victorian period was, nonetheless, different in tone and in subtlety. Although doctors and the industry were not, by the 1920s, explicitly defining menstruation in the traditional terms of being 'unwell', 'sickly', or 'abnormal', their message was, on a

more insidious level, quite the same. Take, for instance, the issue of reproduction. The link between motherhood and menstruation was an implied reinforcement, found primarily in the pamphlets' description of the purpose of menstruation. Through visuals of young girls growing-up to become wives and mothers, as well as through the terminology used to define menstruation and its flow, women learned that the only productive and normal function of their monthly cycle was for reproduction.

This notion was further supported by their covert claims on a menstruating woman's productive capabilities. Though doctors' counsels found in medical journals as early as the 1920s proclaimed women, despite their menstrual cycle, productive and capable in the public realm of work - a notion reinforced by the sanitary educative materials beginning in the 1940s and continuing well into the 1960s - their prescriptions remained contradictory. While it was claimed that women could and should act 'normally', unhindered by their menstrual cycle, the promise was conditional. According to such experts, with the emotional fluctuations and physical discomforts menstruation required careful regulation of a menstrual management system, one which enforced moderation through non-excessive exercise, fastidious bathing, specific diet, and good-grooming. Underlying all sets of counsel, was the stress that all signs of a women's menstrual status be managed and well hidden.

The disjuncture between this menstrual prescription and women's changing realities greatly affected and altered women's outlook towards their own bodies. This can be seen in two ways.

Firstly, the weakened link between procreativity and menstruation left both young girls and adult women with feelings of neutrality and disconnection towards their bleeding bodies. With the average age at menarche occurring at an increasingly younger age, adolescents could no longer directly associate their own personal experiences with the importance of reproductivity. Since procreation was expected to occur only after marriage, the notion that a young girl's menstrual flow will 'one day' mean she will be a mother was voiced by respondents as a foreign and often irrelevant concept. A young girl's new menstrual experience was consumed more with issues of personal comfort, regularity of flow, or hygienic practices, than with its link with reproductivity. For adult women, while the reproductive message certainly rang true for the women when they wished to start a family or were raisin a young family, this association was short lived. With women, form the early 1920s and on, choosing to limit the size of their family, having fewer children in a shorter time span, menstruation for the majority of their lives had little to no purpose. Menstruation, in this way, was reduced to the level of a hygienic hassle and an unwanted expense.

Secondly, the ambiguous claims regarding a menstruating woman's productivity led women to focus on managing and controlling their menstrual status, in fact, concealing their status, in order to feel 'normal'. Productivity and 'normalcy' was only possible as long as no one, including herself, recognized or was affected by its cycle. While notions of freedom from the shamed view of the

menstrual process seemed possible - after all, women truly had managed their cycle well enough that they felt neither constrained nor limited - its promises, in the end result, proved only false and empty. Through the process of the menstrual management system and its overwhelming emphasis placed on concealment, women had, in fact, accepted the same social belief they perceived to have rejected. Women seemingly only felt normal, appealing, sexual, and clean, as long as the messy side-effects were controlled and disguised. Menstruation was not, despite women's attempts, considered a positive process. On the contrary, it continued to be viewed as a deviant unclean state - women have only managed to work around it.

It is through the process of the menstrual management system, and its emphasis on concealment, I believe, that the negative prescription has gone unchanged for nearly forty years. While women believed that they successfully resisted the negative menstrual outlook, hints of shame, embarrassment, and judgement persistently existed within women's narratives, doctors' commentaries, corporate instruction, and advertisements. The promises of the menstrual management system, while seemingly solid, proved that very little of the menstrual cycle was view in a positive light - in fact, what was positive was the ability to disguise and deny menstruation's existence. Simply a woman was productive, sexual, and attractive only as long as she was not, or at least not acting as though she was, menstruating.

Once the root of these negatives are recognized, why and how

they have emerged, the direction towards change becomes far more clear. Through the lives of twenty-four women, we have learned that we must recreate (if we believe the premise that menstruation is socially constructed) a menstrual message, one which moves away from issues of reproductivity and concealment, and instead focuses on women's present needs and experiences. Feminists have already attempt to shift the pendulum towards a more positive view by highlighting aspects of the menstrual cycle previously ignored; they have brought forth facets of menstrual experiences such as feelings of heightened sensuality, greater introspection, and greater creativity.

Though their works have certainly been important, they have tended to swing the pendulum too far in the other extreme, ignoring aspects of menstruation including its messiness, discomforts, and often times pain. If we are to celebrate, rather than conceal our cycle, we must search for a more balanced view of the menstrual experience and its realities. We must accept and admit to its difficulties and its strengths, expose them and recognize them as natural and normal, not a handicap. Then and only then can we live with our menstrual cycle without shame, viewing it instead as positive, powerful, and healthy.

APPENDIX A
RESPONDENTS' NAMES AND DATES OF BIRTH[1]

Cohort 1 (born between 1910-1925)	Cohort 2 (born between 1950-1956)
Alice, born 1919.	Alexandra, born 1950.
Allison, born 1923.	Amanda, born 1951.
Dorothy, born 1923.	Erin, born 1961.
Flora, born 1911.	Jane, born 1956.
Josie, born 1910.	Julie, born 1955.
Louise, born 1922.	Melanie, born 1952.
Natalie, born 1924.	Minnie, born 1953.
Sarah, born 1917.	Olga, born 1962.
Stephanie, born 1925.	Patricia, born 1962.
Susan, born 1924.	Sonya, born 1965.
Victoria, born 1923.	Sylvie, born 1952.
Virginia, born 1921.	Theresa, born 1954.

Women included in the thesis, but who were not part of the formal interviews are:

Christina, born 1899.

Mary, born 1947.

[1] All names were changed to protect interviewees' anonymity.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS[1]

Interview # 1

General Questions:

1. What is your full name and date of birth?

2. Tell me a little bit about your home life when you were a child.
   a) How many brothers and sisters did you have, if any?
   b) Did you live with both parents?
   c) Were you close to any extended family?

3. Where did you grow up?

4. What was your relationship like with your mother as a child? As an adolescent? As an adult?

5. What was your relationship like with your father as a child? As an adolescent? As an adult?

6. What was your relationship like with your siblings?

7. As a pre-adolescent and adolescent, what were some of the activities you participated in? Clubs? Sports? After school activities? Reading? Art?

8. Did you work (inside - chores - and outside the home) as an adolescent?

9. Did you have any boyfriends during your adolescence? What kind of activities would you do on a date? Did the activities differ as you got older? Were activities mainly done as a group or alone as a couple, or both?

10. Did you marry? At what age?

11. How long had you been with your husband before marrying?

12. What kind of things would you do when you got together?

13. Did you have any children? How many? Girls? Boys?

14. What was your father's occupation? Your mother's occupation?

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[1] Questions were based on examples provided by Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

Your husband's occupation? Your occupation?

Interview #2

Questions on Menstruation:

Section I: Private/Public

1. How did your family regard menstruation?

2. Did you know anything about menstruation before your first menses? If so, what did you know? Who of your parents, siblings, friends, or teachers, if any, provided you with this information?

3. Did school provide or add to any information?

4. When did you first get your period? What was it like?

5. When you first got your period, did you tell anyone? Who? What was the exchange?

6. Did you discuss your menarche with anyone else? Who? What did you talk about?

7. Over the years, have you discussed your experience, feelings, questions with anyone? Your siblings, your parents, your doctor, your friends, your boyfriends, or your husband?

8. How did you treat menstruation with your daughter(s)? Did you talk about menstruation prior to the onset of her/their menarche? After her/their menarche? Did she/they come to you with any questions, before or after her/their menarche? How did you deal with her/their questions?

9. If a woman did not have any daughters, it would then be asked: How would you explain menstruation to a young girl who knew nothing about menstruation?

10. Did you ever discuss menstruation with your boyfriend or husband? Did they ever raise any questions or opinions regarding your menstruation?

Section II: Experience of menstruation

1. Were you looking forward to getting your first period? Why or why not?

2. How old were you when you first began menstruating?

3. Tell me about the first time you began menstruating. Did you

know what was happening?

4. Describe your menstrual experience? Did it change as you got older?

5. How did you feel about menstruating during your early post-menstruating years? Were you comfortable with it? Conscious of it? Welcomed it or dreaded it?

6. Did you ever keep a calendar marking your cycle?

7. What significance in your life did beginning to menstruate have? What did it mean to you? Did your relationship change with your father, mother, sisters, or friends?

8. What did you feel before, during, after your period? Did it differ as an adolescent than as an adult?

9. Were you limited in any way because of your menses? Were there any special practices or restrictions at school, work, or home, about diet, exercise, bathing?

10. Did you ever skip gym class or skip work? Did you continue or stop riding a bike? What about going swimming? Did you ever have your menses while on vacation? Did you engage in sexual intimacy while menstruating? What about changing your pads or tampons in public?

Section III: Sanitary rag/sanitary napkin/tampon

1. With the onset of your menarche, what did you use? Describe it.

2. Had you discussed what product you would use prior to your first menses? Where did you get your main information? Who did you talk about it with?

3. Have you ever used a tampon? When was the first time you used it?

4. Did you talk to anyone before using your first tampon?

5. What reason did you have for trying a tampon?

6. Why did you wait before using a tampon?

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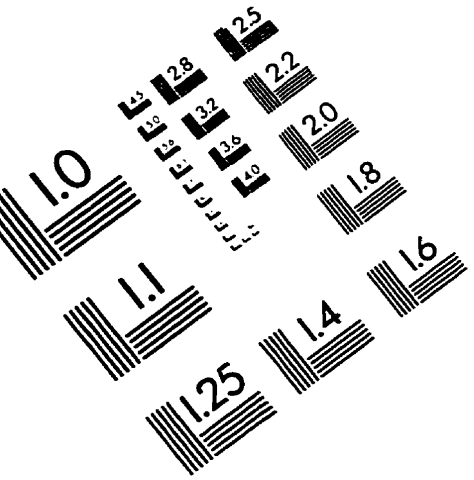
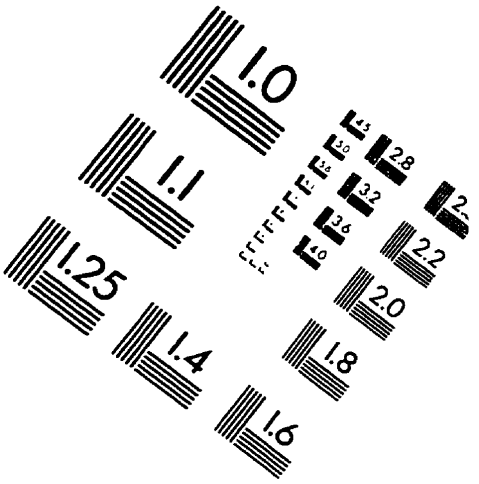
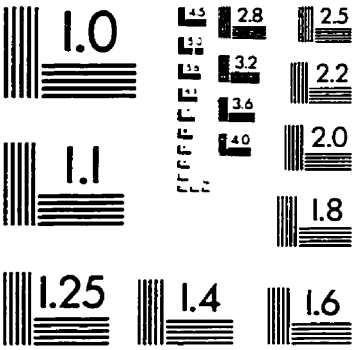
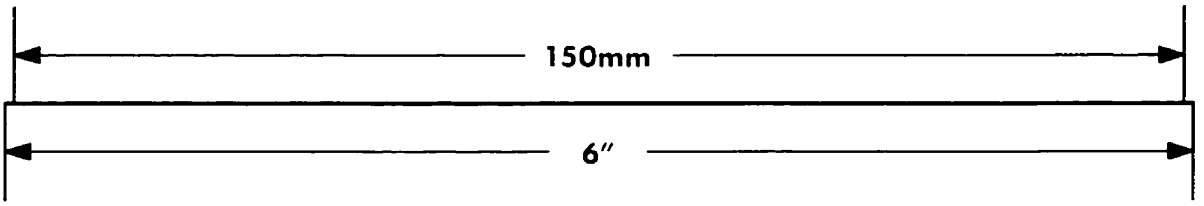
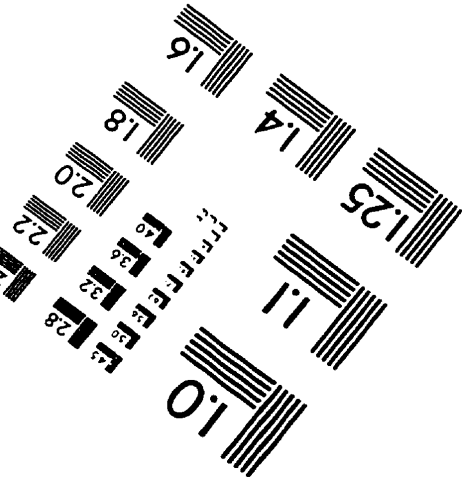
IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

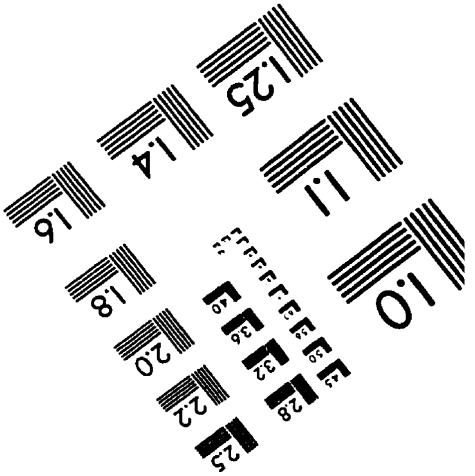












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