

Menstruation, Subjectivity and Constructions of Girlhood in Britain, 1960-1980

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Abstract

This thesis explores how ‘ordinary’ girls’ growing up in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s experienced menstruation. Using popular girls’ magazines *Jackie*, *Honey* and *Petticoat*, it looks at representations of menstruation in advertising and editorial content and highlights how discourses of menstrual invisibility were presented to girls. It also uses oral history and Mass Observation Directive responses to understand how women remembered and described their girlhood menstrual experiences, and to explore the significance of ‘menstrual invisibility’ to their menstrual management practices. Using magazines and personal testimony in conjunction, this thesis pays particular attention to the relationship between popular representation and personal experience contributing to debates regarding the accessibility of experience. It charts how ideas about menstruation disseminated to girls in popular magazines informed and spurred girls’ own articulations of their menstrual experiences, and uses interdisciplinary theories and methods from history, anthropology, phenomenology, fashion studies and pain studies to write a history of menstrual experience.

Using magazines and testimony in conjunction, this thesis highlights the persistence of a culture of menstrual invisibility across the period 1960-1980 and explores its impact on girls’ menstrual education, menstrual management practices, menstrual health and subjectivities more broadly. This bottom-up approach yields new insights into the little-known history of menstruation, magazines and girlhood in the period 1960-1980, whilst also contributing to historiographical debates about the ‘swinging sixties’, and ‘permissive Britain’. Menstruation as a framework and focus for study complicates assessments of the period as defined by changing social mores,

whilst simultaneously drawing attention to the historical roots of menstrual stigma today.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>BMJ</i>	<i>British Medical Journal</i>
BSF	Body, Self and Family
MO	Mass Observation
MOA	Mass Observation Archive
MOP	Mass Observation Project
MWF	Medical Women's Federation
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
PMS	Premenstrual Syndrome
PMT	Premenstrual Tension
PMDD	Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement

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Notes on Sources

This thesis makes use of 16 oral history interviews and 30 responses to the Mass Observation Directive 'Women's Sanitary Protection & Menstruation' (1996).

It was initially intended I would design and conduct my own oral history interviews to understand women's recollections of menstruation during girlhood using interdisciplinary photo-interviewing techniques. I had sought ethical approval, created a transcript and started recruiting in order to do so when COVID-19 broke out and disrupted my plans. It became unfeasible to recruit and interview during lockdown within the period of my PhD studentship. It was decided that it would be time efficient to instead orient my thesis to make use of existing oral history collections alongside responses to the Mass Observation directive, 'Women's Sanitary Protection & Menstruation'.

Quotations from all personal testimony are written out using phrasing, syntax and grammar used in the original documents. In order to uphold ethical obligations to participant anonymity each respondent has been given a pseudonym. The biographical information of each participant is given in the appendix. Each MO writer was issued a unique identifier by the project consisting of a mix of letter and numbers to retain their anonymity on archival. Despite already being anonymous, I have used pseudonyms for MO too, as it equalises the use of oral history and MO and makes for better reading.

COVID-19 limited my ability to visit archives. Thus, some images that are reproduced are of poor quality.

Notes on Terminology

According to the biographical information available, all the Mass Observation respondents and oral history interviewees are ciswomen. Trans men also menstruate, but as my primary source material relates entirely to cis girls and women I use 'girls' and 'women'. As Tinkler notes 'girl' is a slippery term. This thesis follows Tinkler's approach by using the phrase 'girls' to refer to menstruating females up to age 18.¹ The phrase 'menstruators' or 'menstruating bodies' is used when making more generalised statements about menstruation. The Mass Observation Archive no longer organise responses in accordance with a gender binary, and the 2016 annual report cited that as of 2016, there were 454 current writers, consisting of 61% ciswomen, 38% cismen and 1% identifying as transgender or gender fluid, marking an important shift in what and how information will be collated and stored hereafter.²

Phrases such as 'hygiene' and 'sanitary' dominate menstrual discourse past and present. This thesis makes a deliberate attempt to avoid replicating them, exploring how menstruation came to be seen as a matter of 'hygiene' and 'sanitation', and only uses these phrases where they have been adopted by other scholars. Menstruation is not dirty, and this is a notion that contributes to menstrual stigma. Throughout this thesis I make use of the phrase 'menstrual technology' and only use 'sanitary protection' where the phrase occurs in pre-existing source material.

¹ No lowest age is specified, reflecting the varied ages with which menstruation can begin. Definition adopted from Penny Tinkler, 'Girlhood and Growing Up', in, *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. by Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Pearson Education, 2001), p.35.

² The Mass Observation Archive Annual Report, 36, (2016), p.11, http://www.massobs.org.uk/images/Directives/MOA_Annual_Report_15-16_final.pdf [Accessed, 12/12/2020].

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Lastly I would like to thank all of the women who agreed to be interviewed, and who wrote for Mass Observation for talking and writing about their menstrual experiences. Their decision to resist and document menstrual stigma has allowed me to write this thesis.

Introduction

How come the heroine never has a period

For real-life girls, periods are a fact. Most of us would like to forget them. But to do that you've got to find a really efficient way of coping. And that's Lil-lets tampons.

Lil-lets are specially made to expand widthways to mould themselves gently to your shape. To fit you comfortably. To fit your shape exactly. So you can forget about leakage and odour.

That's why thousands of young women are discovering every month that Lil-lets give them a new kind of personal confidence.

There are three different absorbencies to choose from: Regular, Super and Super Plus. You'll probably find Regular will be right for you.

All are easy to insert and easy to dispose of. And all come in discreet little packs.




Place a Lil-let tampon in a small glass of water. See how it expands widthways all round...

and compare with any other tampon placed in an identical glass.

Maybe we can never be as lucky as the heroines in the novels. But with Lil-lets, at least our period problems can be written off. Write now for a free pack of Lil-lets and an illustrated booklet that will answer all your questions about periods. The address is:-

Sister Marion, Dept L/J/F7W
Lilia-White (Sales) Limited,
Charford Mills, Birmingham 8.



Lil-lets expand widthways to fit you perfectly.

1.1: Lil-lets advert, Jackie, 31.07.1971

In 1971, an advert for Lil-lets tampons featured in *Jackie* magazine, the bestselling British girls' weekly for over a ten-year period (figure 1.1). The advert featured an image of a young, slim, white female model sat reading, and was headed by the bold rhetorical question 'how come the heroine never has a period?'.³ Problematising the fact that menstruation was rarely represented beyond advertising in magazines, the advert encapsulated the contemporary cultural invisibility of menstruation and the disparity between representations of girlhood circulating in the media, and the everyday experiences and subjectivities of those who consumed them.

Yet menstrual advertising and the discourses that it proffered had a complicated relationship to notions of menstrual invisibility. Whilst in this advert Lil-lets positioned its marketing as both a menstrual 'consciousness-raising' force intent on challenging entrenched ideas about menstrual discretion and as a necessary intervention into (a lack of) mass cultural depictions of menstruation, the advert, like all adverts for menstrual technology, relied on and reinforced the assumption that menstruation was shameful and required concealment. The very same advert encouraged readers to buy Lil-lets to avoid leakage and odour, and described the 'period-less' literary heroines as 'lucky', by proxy demarking those who menstruated as leaky, dirty and unlucky. Lil-lets depicted a tightly policed perception of menstrual management, and by extension, appropriate feminine behaviour intimately bound to and repelled by the bleeding, menstrual body.

This thesis explores how discourses of menstrual invisibility structured girls' everyday menstrual management practices in Britain between 1960 and 1980. It looks at representations of menstruation in girls' magazines *Jackie*, *Honey* and *Petticoat* and explores how discourses of menstrual invisibility manifested in advertising and

³ 'How Come the Heroine Never Has a Period?', Lil-lets Ad, *Jackie*, 31st July 1971.

editorial content. Menstrual advertising and the magazines it featured in are important sources for understanding the history of menstruation in Britain 1960-1980. In Trevor Millum's words, the adverts contain 'cultural meanings above and beyond the sales message' constructing a social world around the product.⁴ They offer a rare opportunity for insight into some of the ideas, images, and descriptions of menstruation in cultural circulation and constitute some of the only representations of menstruation available to girls growing up in Britain in the period 1960-1980. They also offer the opportunity to consider how menstruation was constructed and positioned in relation to contemporary understandings of girlhood and femininity. Magazines reveal the complicated relationship menstruation had to normative understandings of girlhood femininity, and femininity to broader society and culture, across the period 1960 – 1980.

Alongside magazines, this thesis looks at women's reflections on their girlhood menstrual experiences provided in oral history interviews and Mass Observation (MO) correspondence. These life documents centre the subjective memories, experiences, and emotional interiorities of menstruating women who grew up in Britain in the period 1960-1980. This thesis seeks to understand how ideas regarding menstrual invisibility affected the menstrual management practices of girls growing up during these years, tracing these discourses of invisibility across the pages of popular magazines and girls' lives more broadly.

Personal testimony presents the opportunity to explore not only what women remember, but how they remember, and how this is intimately shaped by past and present, personal and public, and individual and collective understandings of

⁴ Trevor Millum, *Images of Women: Advertising in Women's Magazines*, (Chatto & Windus, 1975), p.11.

menstruation and girlhood. Each source suggests discourses of menstrual invisibility had a pervasive reach, shaping how girls experienced menstruation and how they have since remembered and narrativised these experiences.

Using magazines and personal testimony in conjunction this thesis pays particular attention to the relationship between popular representation and personal experience. It considers if and how ideas about menstruation disseminated to girls in popular magazines informed and spurred girls' own articulations of their menstrual experiences. As Penny Tinkler has stated, 'discourse is not a straitjacket' and although it is not always easy, 'women may take up dominant meanings, seek to resist them, position themselves in a counter discourse' or 'seek to invent new discourses'.⁵ It is only possible to know if and how girls adopted, usurped, countered, and discarded menstrual discourses by listening to women's and girls' voices and stories. As Kevin Stagg suggested, histories that take into account bodies provide a narrative with the potential to unite 'experience and representation'.⁶ Using both kinds of sources yields new insights into the history of menstruation, magazines and girlhood in the period 1960-1980, ensuring that magazines are not reduced solely to text and imagery by a poststructuralist emphasis on linguistics and signs, and their readers not reduced to passive vessels awaiting inscription.

As the Lil-lets advert acknowledged, representations of menstruation were rare, and often could not speak to the complexity of girls' menstrual experience. Yet personal testimony reveals that these representations, however inaccurate, stigmatising or disempowering did play a role in aiding women to understand,

⁵ Penny Tinkler, *Smoke Signals, Women Smoking and Visual Culture in Britain* (Berg English, 2006), p.4.

⁶ Kevin Stagg, 'The Body' in *Writing Early Modern History* (Hodder Arnold, 2005), p.216.

articulate, and reflect on their girlhood menstrual experience. Menstrual invisibility, and the ever-present threat of visibility, consistently structured both menstrual advertising across the period 1960-1980, and women's reflections on their menstrual knowledge and management practices. This does not mean to say that women did not critique the representations of menstruation that appeared in magazines. Rather, it reveals that articulations of experience expressed through a shared language of menstrual invisibility coexisted with critiques of menstrual advertising and articulations of experience that actively challenged notions of an all-pervasive culture of invisibility. Many women strongly expressed their sense that their girlhood menstrual experiences were different from those depicted in mass culture, demonstrating the importance of preserving and studying the voices of past historical subjects for illuminating histories of girls' everyday lives.

'Modern' Menstrual Management

As Sharra L. Vostral notes, managing menstruation with mass-produced, over-the-counter menstrual technology 'is a thoroughly modern phenomena'.⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century, most women and girls used handmade napkins made from gauze, cotton or cut-up rags. These makeshift towels were pinned to undergarments, washed, and reused monthly. Menstrual knowledge was typically passed on via

⁷ Sharra L. Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation: The Emergence of Menstrual Hygiene Products in the United States', in *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed by Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (Palgrave, 2005), p. 243.

intergenerational, single-sex conversations, and usually coalesced with discussions of the 'wonders of nature' and the role of God. Joan Jacobs Brumberg notes this model was eclipsed in the mid-nineteenth-century because menarche and puberty – like so many other aspects of the life course - were 'drastically altered by industrialization, urbanization and secularization', now understood to be 'critical dimensions of modern mass society'.⁸ Lara Freidenfelds deliberately adopts the term 'the modern period' to collate and describe the confluence of new ideas and practices surrounding menstruation.⁹ These technologies, ideas, and practices laid the groundwork for girls' menstrual experiences in the mid to late twentieth century. The invention, advertising and use of modern menstrual technology compounded invisibility as a pervasive and defining facet of menstrual discourse, management and embodiment for girls in the period 1960-1980.

Ideas about menstruation emanating from scientists were intimately bound to contemporary social scripts. Elaine Showalter and English Showalter note that despite relatively progressive individuals taking up the cause, 'scientific fact and scientific theory were being influenced by the prevailing social or ethical doctrine of woman's inferiority'.¹⁰ Paradigms of menstruation were, as Julie-Marie Strange notes, 'created, understood and interpreted in direct relation to perceptions of femininity', and operated to maintain a 'sex-based status quo'.¹¹ Ludmilla Jordanova's work on images of gender in medical cultures has revealed 'how understandings of femininity' often relate to

⁸ Joan Jacob Brumberg, "Something Happens to Girls": Menarche and the Emergence of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4:1 (1993), p.102.

⁹ Lara Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth Century America* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), p.3

¹⁰ Elaine Showalter and English Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Menstruation', *Victorian Studies*, 14:1, (1970), p.85.

¹¹ Julie-Marie Strange, "I Believe It To Be a Case Depending on Menstruation": Madness and Menstrual Taboo in British Medical Practice, c.1840-1930', in *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed. by Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (Palgrave, 2005) p.102.

‘deep-seated gender stereotypes possessing cultural currency’. In relation to contemporary medicine, this has meant ‘female mood swings’ have been used as the basis of a stereotype. She highlights that medicine is positioned as an ‘agent of the true inner nature of things’, capable of ‘unveiling’ the mysteries of ‘othered’ bodies that are not male and not white.¹² This exploration makes sense of how science is culturally positioned and regarded as the locus of truth, regardless of the socio-cultural scripts guiding its theory, research and practice.¹³ This, in turn makes sense of much theory espoused by Victorians, and why its aftershocks can still be observed in the ideas about menstruation in circulation almost one hundred years later.

Knowledge of the physiological basis of menstruation was slow to build up and disseminate. Showalter and Showalter state that it is ‘hard to comprehend how little even scientists and doctors knew about human reproduction in the nineteenth century’.¹⁴ Early understandings suggested that menstrual flow was the result of an excess of nutrient in the female. In 1845, Dr Adam Raciborski discovered eggs were ejected spontaneously, and progressive campaigner for birth control and social reformer George R. Drysdale wrote and published about the similarities between menstruation and the period of heat in animals.¹⁵ In an attempt to bring the physiology up to date, another progressive called Charles Knowlton suggested that during menstruation ‘the woman is said to be unwell, or out of order’. He warned of the dangers of ‘indigestible food, dancing in warm rooms, and sudden exposure to cold or

¹² Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Century* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.92.

¹³ Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women Essays on Art, Sex and the Mind* (Sceptre, 2016), p.x.

¹⁴ Showalter, ‘Victorian Women and Menstruation’, p. 83.

¹⁵ George R. Drysdale, *Elements of Social Science* (1854) in Showalter, ‘Victorian Women and Menstruation’, p.84.

wet, and mental agitations'.¹⁶ The discovery of spontaneous ovulation gave scientific validity to conceptualisations of menstruation as periodic illness that rendered subjects vulnerable to incapacitation and mental instability. This provided necessary justification for the assumption that menstruating women needed to remain housebound, and the broader texture of women's lives, namely the gendered division of labour and access to the public sphere. Physicians remained confused about its role, but stood certain in their assessments that it rendered women temporarily disabled.

Antifeminists used these arguments to delegitimise women's equal access to education on the grounds that it caused degeneration in women who, because of their reproductive capabilities, could not cope with learning.¹⁷ Studying asylum case notes of patients at Pen-Y-Fal Asylum in Abergavenny, Strange notes that female patients were given gynaecological exams on admittance and asked to relate the history of their menstrual cycle. Yet there was a backlash to the overuse of hysteria diagnoses gathering pace which prompted a re-evaluation of trust in gynaecologist assessments. She suggests this was inseparable from the women's rights movement, and the increasing number of women entering the medical profession.¹⁸

Evoking her professional credentials, in 1874 Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson drew attention to the exaggeration of female invalidism amongst male doctors, the many working-class women who did not break with their usual routine on the advent of their period, and the negative health implications likely to stem from maintaining the belief that growing adolescent girls should not display any weakness when

¹⁶ Charles Knowlton, *Fruits of Philosophy*, (1832), in Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Menstruation', p.84.

¹⁷ Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Menstruation', p.85.

¹⁸ Strange, "I Believe It To Be a Case" pp.102-113.

menstruating.¹⁹ Despite these challenges, the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* and *The Lancet* continued to describe menstruation as ‘unfortunate, unpleasant, distasteful, troublesome and tedious’ into the 1920s, suggesting longevity to its conception as pathological.²⁰ Yet after the First World War there was a flourishing of clinical and qualitative social research conducted by women. Resultantly, challenges to this conceptualisation gained traction. The Medical Women’s Federation (MWF) for instance, aimed to recreate a language of menstruation associated with activity, health and hygiene. Inspired by her distaste with the negative language, school medical officer Alice Sanderson Clow conducted research on schoolgirls’ attitudes towards puberty and menstruation. In 1925 the MWF published *The Hygiene of Menstruation: An Authoritative Statement* based on these findings. The statement rejected older paradigms of menstrual disability and insisted that ‘menstruation is a natural function; it is not an illness, and girls should therefore continue their ordinary work and play...it should not be and is not normally accompanied by pain and malaise’.²¹

This alternate frame of reference proliferated, and notions of menstruation as a hygienic concern became a predominant menstrual script. Brumberg deconstructs the apparent naturalness of viewing menstruation as a matter of hygiene, noting that a longer history of ‘hygiene’ in the US contributed to menstruation being viewed as such. In the late nineteenth-century the American middle classes became familiarised with increasingly powerful ideas about the sources of diseases, namely Joseph Lister’s concept of ‘antiseptis’ and the ‘idea that there was something alive and dangerous in human waste, air and water’. This meant accustomed menstrual management

¹⁹ Showalter, ‘Victorian Women and Menstruation’, pp.87-89, and Laura Kelly, ‘Elizabeth Garrett Anderson: early pioneer of women in medicine’, *The Lancet*, 390:10113, (2017), pp.2620-2621.

²⁰ Strange, “‘I believe it to be a case’”, p.103.

²¹ *Hygiene of Menstruation: An Authoritative Statement* (1925) in Strange, “‘I believe it to be a case’”, p.112.

practices amongst wealthier women became a source of concern. Reusable rags facilitated a mix of germs and gases, and became closely associated with a lack of hygiene.²² Vostral notes that the increasing emphasis on personal and household hygiene was closely linked to ideas about progress and civilisation, and that this 'fixation on cleanliness embodied elements of a racial hierarchy, and rationalisation of white, upper-class superiority'. The increasing awareness that intimate matters of hygiene affected outcomes of public health demanded clean and hygienic bodies, and destabilised notions of public and private.²³ Menstrual technology brands capitalised on fears bound up in ideas about class, race, hygiene and health.

Women's periodicals, papers and magazines were central to the circulation of narratives of hygiene in the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century. Adverts for talc, deodorant, toothpaste and laxatives proliferated, and it is in this context that menstruation became understood as a matter of civilisation and a modern hygienic problem too. Modern 'sanitary' products were designed as a means of offsetting such concerns, but disposable technologies were only adopted en masse after the First World War.²⁴ The First World War recharged fears regarding disease, specifically venereal disease, instigating a sanitisation of sexuality and a further entrenchment of the link between menstrual preparedness and the social hygiene movement.²⁵ The Kimberley Clark Corporation created Kotex - the first widely available product - after being informed that wartime nurses had found surgical dressing gauze was also adept at absorbing menstrual blood. The disposable product was marketed by Kotex as the technological fix to menstruation's 'hygienic handicap' in the 1920s.²⁶

²² Brumberg, "Something Happens to Girls", p.113.

²³ Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation', p.247.

²⁴ Brumberg, "Something Happens to Girls", p.99 and Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation', p.247.

²⁵ Brumberg, "Something Happens to Girls", p.122.

²⁶ Kotex ad, *Liberty*, 31.12.1927 in Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation', pp.244-245.

As Brumberg notes, the early adverts constituted 'some of the first real public acknowledgement of menstruation'. Exploiting this gap in menstrual knowledge, they targeted mothers who found it difficult to talk to and prepare daughters, hired nurses to offer advice and depicted idealised conversations between generations of women and girls. In the 1930s and 1940s, adverts for technologies were concerned with preparation for menarche. Educational divisions within the industry began to supply mothers, teachers and parent-teacher associations with programs of instruction about menstruation, constituting a public form of common vocabulary for thinking about menstruation. This did not always extend to include working-class women and girls. For a large part of the early twentieth-century menstrual technologies were marketed to middle-class, upwardly mobile women.²⁷ Modern menstrual management and technology were not always economically viable. Indeed, testimony explored in this thesis recounts girls' experiences of wearing rags into the 1960s.

Scholarship has drawn attention to the silence covering women's bodies and female sexuality in the interwar years. Elizabeth Roberts suggests a 'virtual total ban' on the discussion of sexual matters applied to both boys and girls in Barrow-in-Furness, Lancaster and Preston. There was a 'striking' lack of knowledge about menstrual hygiene and menstruating girls were encouraged not to bathe or wash their hair.²⁸ Sally Alexander drew attention to the 'silence on sex' common to working-class upbringings in interwar London that meant knowledge about sex was pieced together like a 'jigsaw puzzle'.²⁹

²⁷ Brumberg, "Something Happens to Girls", p.124 and Vostral, Masking Menstruation', p.246.

²⁸ Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Wiley-Blackwell 1995), pp.16-18.

²⁹ Sally Alexander, 'The Mysteries and Secrets of Women's Bodies' in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, ed, by Mica Nava & Alan O'Shea. (Routledge, 1995), pp.161 and 165.

At the same time, however, menstrual technology companies were expanding the kinds of products being produced. In America, after extensive market research on what women desired from their menstrual products, Lillian Gilbreth, an engineer and psychologist interested in applying scientific principles to a study of menstruation and the menstrual technology industry, concluded that most available equipment was 'probably wrong', because it was either 'copied from a homemade product' or from 'a hospital pad designed for obstetrical use' and thus not designed to meet the needs of most menstruating women.³⁰ As a result of this research, tampons were patented in 1931 and developed by Tampax Sales Corporation in 1934 as a means of managing and hiding menstruation more 'comfortably' and 'effectively'. Yet for the ten years after they were produced concerns about their safety, efficacy and sexual implications dominated in both the US and the UK.³¹ Tampons had previously been used by physicians and nurses in medical settings to administer medicines, and the prospect that they could be used by unskilled women and girls raised concerns surrounding 'hygiene'. Some physicians worried about the threat to drainage of blood, but research conducted by universities and manufacturers debunked such ideas. Concerns also revolved around the implications of young, virginal girls using tampons, namely the likelihood it could break the hymen, and provide sexual stimulation.³² Attuned to these conversations, Tampax continually addressed concerns in its package inserts and advertising, enlightening the user that only in exceptional cases 'very young girls' might have trouble using Tampax. This concern with the fit of internally worn menstrual protection was still a feature of marketing for brands like Tampax and Lil-lets across the 1970s and into the 1980s. In 1977, Lil-lets introduced the 'mini', designed to be

³⁰ Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation', pp.253-256.

³¹ Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period*, p.170.

³² Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period*, pp.170-176.

'your first tampon', whilst in 1980, Tampax produced adverts with the strapline 'some bodies need a smaller, more absorbent tampon' and 'do you expand to fit your tampon? Or does your tampon expand to fit you?'.³³

This deliberate targeting of youthful consumers began in the 1950s and 1960s as industries set out to develop a distinctive youthful adolescent market. This move capitalised on the increasing affluence of a generation of young people. Brumberg suggests this was achieved using a strategy that 'successfully played on adolescent awkwardness and the embarrassing spectre of stained clothes'.³⁴ Girls' magazines were of utmost importance to their ability to reach this demographic. As Ros Ballaster et. al state, femininity had 'always been taken as the common ground for definition of the readership of women's magazines'. Menstruation was culturally positioned as an innately feminine concern, making them prime places to advertise.³⁵ Yet in the first half of the twentieth century magazines had considered menstruation a taboo issue. Tinkler notes that it was not until the 1930s that letter replies concerned with menses occasionally featured, whilst advertising for towels and iron tablets treated menstruation as a handicap and positioned these products as a medicinal cure.³⁶ By the 1960s content about menstruation was still sparse, and its relationship to the definitions and depictions of girlhood presented in magazines still complicated.

Clearly, ideas about menstrual invisibility structuring girls' menstrual management practices were not the product of mass-market magazines alone. Yet in

³³ 'Introducing Mini', Tampax ad. *Honey*, 03.1977, 'Some bodies need a smaller, more absorbent tampon', Tampax ad, *Honey*, 03.1980, 'Do you expand to fit your tampon?', Tampax ad, *Honey*, 11.1980.

³⁴ Brumberg, 'Something Happens to Girls', p.124.

³⁵ Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer & Sandra Hebron, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Women's Magazine* (Macmillan Education, 1991), p.111.

³⁶ Penny Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood Popular Magazines for Girls Growing up in England 1920-1950*, (Taylor and Francis, 1995), pp.163-164.

the period 1960-1980, mass-market magazines played a key role in disseminating such ideas in print format.

Magazines, Menstruation and Constructions of 1960's Girlhood

In the 1960s discourses of self-discovery and self-fulfilment were a distinctive feature of girls' and young women's magazines in Britain. As Tinkler notes, they idealised a 'lifestyle characterised by independence, experience and opportunity'.³⁷ Girls' periodicals typically depicted feminine subjects who were young, white, slim and beautiful. This was in keeping with prevailing understandings in fashion, photography, publishing and society more broadly about appropriate forms of feminine expression, defined by patriarchal and Eurocentric beauty ideals. Topics covered and models featured were intended as emblems of girls' potential future trajectory; aspirational ideals for readers finding themselves and their place in the world. Angela McRobbie highlights that *Jackie* magazine acted as a powerful ideological force promoting feminine culture for its middle- and working-class readers, endowing certain topics like romance, domestic life, fashion, beauty and pop music with importance.³⁸

Whilst magazines like *Jackie* situated this self-discovery firmly within the bounds of monogamous heterosexual relations, *Honey* and *Petticoat* appealed to an ideal of aspirational girlhood concerned foremostly with single life, travel and work.³⁹

Honey was launched in 1960 by Audrey Slaughter at Fleetway publications, 'for teens

³⁷ Penny Tinkler, "'Are You Really Living?'" If Not, "Get With It!" The Teenage Self and Lifestyle in Young Women's Magazines, Britain 1957-70', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4, (2015) p.598.

³⁸ Angela McRobbie, '*Jackie Magazine*: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl', *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (Macmillan, 1991), pp.81-134.

³⁹ For more on these magazines see Methodology Two.

and twenties and the single girl'.⁴⁰ Similarly *Petticoat* magazine, *Honey's* 'sister publication', launched in 1966 and professed to offer readers the opportunity to read about a newer, more liberal style of young womanhood seemingly born from the postwar baby boom, newly distinctive and visible 'youth culture', and onset of the 'swinging sixties'. The form, content and style of these magazines intended to personify modernity, 'permissiveness', and a distinctive female youth culture. Tinkler suggests the creation and content of these magazines reflected the way perceptions of young people changed across the postwar period to acknowledge that 'young people were not simply becoming they were also being'.⁴¹ Yet despite the magazines' commitment to exploring relationships, and in *Honey* and *Petticoat's* case sex too, coverage of menstruation was sparse. Periods featured only in certain parts of the magazine, namely adverts, question-and-answer columns and in *Honey* and *Petticoat's* case, the odd editorial feature.

These magazines, much like the ideals they espoused and the adverts for menstrual products that they contained, were the product of rapid alterations in the publishing industry and changing expectations regarding women's lives and girls' future trajectories.⁴² As Angela Davis notes, 'the years following 1945 are fascinating because of the changing expectations of women who were reaching adulthood at this time'.⁴³ Changes to the school-leaving age, rising employment, the declining birth-rate and changing social mores around sexual intimacy all contributed to a landscape that

⁴⁰ Fan Carter 'A Taste of *Honey*: Get-Ahead Femininity in 1960's Britain', *Women in Magazines Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. by Ritchie, Rachel, Hawkins, Sue, Phillips Nicola and Kleinburg S. Jay (Oxford, 2016), p.183, and McRobbie, 'Jackie Magazine', p. 83.

⁴¹ Tinkler, "'Are you really living?'" , p.601.

⁴² For more on publishing industry at this time see Cynthia L. White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968* (London, 1970) and Brian Braithwaite and Joan Barrell, *2nd ed.:The Business of Women's Magazines: The Agonies and Ecstasies* (London, 1988).

⁴³ Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945-2000* (Manchester University Press, 2012), p.3.

was in some ways very different for a generation of daughters in comparison to their mothers. A media preoccupation with describing and debating the effects of these changes compounded a contemporary sense that they were insurmountable and totalising. Yet as Sam Brewitt-Taylor suggests the idea of a 1960s 'sexual revolution' was a 'cultural invention' about something that was yet to happen.⁴⁴

There were, nonetheless, a core set of widely acknowledged institutional changes in this period, even if the reach and effect of these changes on the lives of women from different classes, races, ethnicities and localities were disparate. There were increasing numbers of women in employment during and after the Second World War.⁴⁵ Women and girls had fuller access to healthcare after the introduction of the NHS in 1948. The contraceptive pill was made available to married women in 1961, whilst the 1967 National Health Service (NHS) Family Planning Act and implementation of family planning clinics meant doctors could, in theory, give free birth control advice to women regardless of marital status. From the 1970s onwards, '70% of women of child-bearing age were practising birth control and the pill was the most popular form of contraception used by about a quarter of women'.⁴⁶ These changes have been seen as a key driving force of the declining fertility rate, and women's increasing visibility and participation in the public sphere, even if historians are now cautious to suggest the pill revolutionised women's lives.⁴⁷ The 1967 Abortion Act

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise Women in PostWar Britain: 1945-1968* (Tavistock Publications, 1980), p.39 and Sam Brewitt-Taylor, 'Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain, 1963-1967', *Historical Journal*, 60:2, (2017), p. 528

⁴⁵ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91* (Tauris & Co, 1997), Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Introduction', in *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Pearson Education, 2001), p.8.

⁴⁷ Whilst Hera Cook suggested the pill revolutionised women's lives in *The Long Sexual Revolution, English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975* (New York, 2004), much scholarship offers contrary conclusions. See Deidre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales*, (University of Wales Press, 2000) p.150, Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, Suzanne

allowed for the termination of pregnancy if two independent medical practitioners agreed that continuance would cause risk to the health of mother or child. The same year the decriminalisation of homosexuality, born from a long fought debate over the findings of the 1957 Wolfenden Report's enquiry into the legality of homosexuality partially legalised sex between men over the age of twenty-one, so long as it was private.⁴⁸ The 1969 Divorce Reform Act made 'irretrievable breakdown' grounds for divorce enabling women to leave marriages. In 1964, 37, 657 petitions for divorce were filed, 58% by women. In 1985, 176,969 petitions were filed, 73% by women.⁴⁹ The growing feminist activism of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) fought for women's equal status in society, whilst the Women's Health Movement set out to improve the provision of and access to physical and mental healthcare.⁵⁰ Each change promised a previously uncharted trajectory for girls growing up and reaching adulthood.

Scafe, *The Heart of Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (Verso, 2018), p.100-107, Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, p.2, Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage in Britain, 1918-1960* (Oxford and New York, 2006), Helen Jones, 'Health and Reproduction', in I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 86-101, Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 76-94pp. 1-75, Caroline Rusterholz, *Women's Medicine, Sex, Family Planning and British Female Doctors in Transnational Perspective (1920-1970)* (Manchester University Press, 2020), Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968* (London, 1980), Ballaster et. al, *Women's Worlds*, p.112.

⁴⁸ It did not include other genders, as they were not accounted for in the first place.

⁴⁹ Selina Todd and Hilary Young, 'Baby boomers to 'bean stalkers': Making the Modern Teenager in Post-war Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:3 (2012), p/462.

⁵⁰ Ben Kasstan and Sarah Crook, Reproductive Rebellions in Britain and the Republic of Ireland: Contemporary and Past Abortion Activism and Alternative Sites of Care', *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 2:2, (2018), pp.1-16, Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (Penguin, 2000), Zoe Strimpel, 'Spare Rib, The British Women's Health Movement and the Empowerment of Misery', *Social History of Medicine*, 0:0, pp.1-20, Michelene Wandor, *Once A Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (Virago, 1990). For more on the tensions within, and limitations of the Women's Liberation Movement see Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, *The Heart of Race*, Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England 1968-1993* (Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements, 2016), and 'The Colour of Feminism: White feminists and Race in the Women's Liberation Movement', *History*, 327:97 (2012), pp.453-475, and 'Race and Discomposure in Oral histories with White Feminists Activists', *Oral History*, 42:1 (2014), pp.84-94.

More specifically, for girls the twentieth century could be seen as a period of increasing status.⁵¹ This period saw an increasing number of 15-24 year olds compared to a decade earlier.⁵² Bill Osgerby suggests that changes to schooling marked a process of institutionalising youth 'as a discrete social group associated with specific needs and problems'.⁵³ The school leaving age was raised from fourteen in 1918, to fifteen in 1947, and again to sixteen in 1972. After the Second World War, the Education Act of 1944 ensured primary schooling for all children between five and eleven and secondary education for all children over eleven in either secondary modern, secondary grammar or secondary technical schools.⁵⁴ Until the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, school subjects were distinguished as 'male' or 'female'. In less academic schools, girls' subjects tended to be domestic science, cookery, needlework, childcare, typing and commerce. Boys' subjects tended to be woodwork, metalwork and technical drawing. These distinctions illuminate the institutional parameters influencing not only girls experiences of schooling, but their potential life trajectory.⁵⁵ After the 1975 act schools were obliged to give all students the chance to take on subjects regardless of their gender. Notwithstanding, discouragement, overt opposition and sexism, and a lack of support from teachers, parents, careers advisers, relative and friends continued to steer girls toward more typically feminine careers. Girls typically transitioned from full-time education to full time employment in administrative, clerical, pink or blue collar jobs.⁵⁶ Interviewing 180 middle and working

⁵¹Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Introduction', in *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Pearson Education, 2001), p.2.

⁵² Janet Fink and Penny Tinkler, 'Teetering on the Edge: portraits of innocence, risk and young female sexualities in 1950s and 1960s British Cinema', *Women's History Review*, 26:1 (2017), p.9

⁵³ Bill Osgerby, in *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939-2000* ed. by Paul Addison and Harriet Jones (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p.128.

⁵⁴ Penny Tinkler, 'Girlhood and Growing Up' in *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. By Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Pearson Education, 2001), p.41.

⁵⁵ Griffin, *Typical Girls*, p.77.

⁵⁶ Tinkler, 'Girlhood and Growing Up', p.41.

class Asian, Afro-Caribbean and white students from schools across Birmingham in 1979, Griffin noted a mix of career aspirations and expectations. Some expected to leave fifth form with no qualifications, to find a job or go to college, whilst some hoped to stay on at sixth form and take further exams. More 'academic' sixth formers were taking 'A' levels and expected to go to college or university, and a minority expected a specific job afterwards. For most working class fifth formers, the distinction between office and factory work was important; office work was a 'good job for a good girl', whilst factory work was much less desirable. Office work typically consisted of office junior roles, data processors, secretarial trainees and clerical workers in banking, whilst typical girl's factory work consisted of skilled sewing machinist roles or assembly work in Birmingham's small metal trades. Some women moved into engineering or trainee technical and operative roles, working in heavily male dominated environments.⁵⁷

Opportunities for clerical work greatly increased in some areas of Britain, but this was coupled with a decline in the relative status of white collar occupations. Occupations had been stratified, enabling a wider division between clerical 'supervisor' and clerical 'shop floor'. On a national scale, over 70% of 15-19 year olds were in full-time work between 1939 and 1970. Full employment and rising wages encouraged young workers to forge their own paths, often encouraged by their parents. This aided the steady decline of average age of marriage from the 1940s to the 1970s in all social classes.⁵⁸ In 1921 15% of brides were under twenty-one years when they married. By 1965, this figure stood at 40%.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Griffin, *Typical Girls?*, p.3.

⁵⁸ Selina Todd and Hilary Young, 'Baby boomers to 'bean stalkers': Making the Modern Teenager in Post-war Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:3 (2012), p.460.

⁵⁹ Fink and Tinkler, 'Teetering on the Edge', p.9.

Griffin found that girls from Birmingham tended to enter roles in banks, offices, hairdressers, shops, and factories. Starting wages were typically between £22 and £42 per week. Hairdressers and sewing machinists made the least, between £22 and £23.50 a week, trainee engineers between 23.50 and £35 a week, whilst the girls who went on to work in banks earned around £40 pound a week. Wages were not taken as an index of their proximity to appropriate forms of femininity however, in the way wages were central to masculine identity of their male peers. Griffin suggests that these women and girls were used to seeing their mothers, and other women, performing unpaid work in the home, and so any opportunity for a wage was a welcome prospect.⁶⁰

This holistic notion of job satisfaction, born from alternate understandings of feminine identity and role was reflected in adverts for job opportunities in girls' magazines. Some adverts for career opportunities including the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) and modelling opportunities at *Honey* did not list the potential wages careers provided, but instead focussed on the opportunities for 'companionship' in the WRAC, and for climbing to the top of the modelling industry and to model in *Honey* magazine in the latter.⁶¹ Adverts for the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps in *Jackie* magazine did list the wage, but also specified the potential for a newfound social life. For girls seventeen and over, the pay was 'good-£19.18', and the 'social life was marvellous', because the army ensured there was 'dances and clubs', 'sports to try' and the opportunity to be with a 'lively crowd of young men and women'. Accompanying the text, the advert included an image of a female nurse and male

⁶⁰ Griffin, *Typical Girls?*, p.99.

⁶¹ 'Take a new look at life', *Honey*, 11.1960, p.73 and 'Here's your chance to be a model', *Honey*, 11.1960, p.99.

patient looking and smiling at one another, relying on girls' desire for sociability and romance to inspire job applications.⁶²

This new-found spending power also 'underpinned a huge expansion of a commercial youth market'.⁶³ With their newfound income, girls' leisure pursuits often revolved around the purchase of dress, cosmetics, magazines and clothes. As Davis notes, 'the department store, the cinema, the dance hall, and the mass production of newspapers, magazines and cheap books' offered what Judy Giles refers to as a 'kaleidoscope of images, commodities and experiences, representing a world beyond the family, home and the locality'.⁶⁴ Contemporary cultural commentators such as Peter Laurie acknowledged the importance of consumption to youth culture, writing that 'the distinctive fact about teenagers' behaviour is economic: they spend a lot of money on clothes, records, concerts, make-up, magazines.'⁶⁵

The importance of teenage consumers and their cultural and economic capital was noted by Boots chemists in their 'Sales & Selling' periodical. *Sales & Selling* was a short glossy sent to all branches of Boots to inform staff about current purchasing trends and to provide direction regarding pricing, store lay out and sales and marketing techniques. The July 1962 edition of the periodical was dedicated to teenage consumption habits, and was titled the 'teenage number'. The front cover presented a picture of the busy Nottingham shop floor, bustling with young female shoppers. Capturing the contemporary preoccupation with permissiveness in society and mass culture at the time, the inside cover stated 'get with it...that's the slant of this issue of *Sales & Selling*'. The text went on, 'Let's face it, or better still let's get with it, the

⁶² 'I'd love to work in a hospital and go abroad', QA advertisement, *Jackie*, 23.04.1974, p.21.

⁶³ Osgerby, 'Youth Culture', p.129.

⁶⁴ Judy Giles, 'Narratives of Gender, Class and Modernity in Women's Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Signs*, 28 (2008), pp.34-35.

⁶⁵ Laurie, *The Teenage Revolution* (1965) in Osgerby, 'Youth Culture', p.130.

teenagers demands comprise a formidable market and our share is tremendous - it's BIG BUSINESS for Boots which can, and will develop into BIGGER BUSINESS when the teenager becomes the housewife, or the mother of tomorrow.'

One article featured the importance of the 'Friday rush' of teenage buyers to the companies turnover, and provided guidance on how best to attract, interact with and satisfy teenage customers, and manage a busy shop floor. The feature stressed that Boots was well equipped to help teenage shoppers, and that this was partly to do with the 'well trained teenagers' with 'similar outlooks and ideas' working in the branches. Small branches were instructed to divide between toiletries and cosmetics, because whilst teenagers were 'happy for mothers to buy toiletries', they wanted to 'buy their own cosmetics'. Larger branches were instructed to have a 'composite display of teenager's needs, including 'cosmetics, handbags, pop records', entirely divided from displays of toiletries. The 'Teenage Number' also contained an article from a branch manager who described the success of remodelling shop floors to prioritise self-selection and direct access to merchandise, and the resulting higher sales garnered from this newer floor plan.⁶⁶

Whilst the relationship between girls wages and their spending habits and investments in beauty culture have been explored,⁶⁷ if and how menstrual technologies were acquired and paid for has not been explored. A 1978 edition of *Chemist & Druggist* news reported that many girls under the age of sixteen relied on their mothers for access to menstrual products.⁶⁸ Yet Boots publications also reported

⁶⁶ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/38/1/4/49, Boots UK, 'Sales & Selling', No.42, July 1962, pp.1-47.

⁶⁷ Griffin, *Typical Girls?*, Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture Second Edition* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), Anna Pollert, *Girls, Wives and Factory Lives*, (Macmillan, 1981).

⁶⁸ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/22/14/2, 'The influence of age', *Chemist & Druggist*, 8th April 1978, p.545

that if girls did purchase their own products, they were likely to be spending their wages on menstrual technologies. Research findings presented in the *Retail Business* special report titled 'The Sanitary Protection Market', utilised by Boots to direct their retail and marketing strategies, found that as of 1969 60% of menstruators used towels, whilst 40% used tampons. Whilst towels were preferable, usage was declining at 1% per annum. It was noted that this decline was accelerating in the 16-24 age group, and social classes A, B and C due to 'fewer phobias about tampons' and specifically regarding the declining emphasis on virginity as a construct hindering use of internally worn protection.

The research cited that the most popular brand on the market was Dr Whites, attracting 60% of users, whilst Lillia attracted 11%, Kotex 7% and 'other brands' (including Boots Supersort, Celtex, Nikini) 22% of users. In descending order, the most popular tampon brands were Tampax (74%), Lillets (15%) all other brands 1%.⁶⁹ The report acknowledged high degrees of brand loyalty. As the Boots 'teenage number' noted, this was often due to women choosing a brand in their youth and continuing to choose this brand across their lifetime as the teenager became the 'housewife or the mother of tomorrow'.⁷⁰ The report suggested that retail chemists were the source of purchase for 53% of menstruators, grocers for 23%, and all other means of purchasing products, including department stores, Woolworths and drapers for 24% of users. The report cited that the volume sold through grocers was increasing, particularly at self-

⁶⁹ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive , WBA/BT/BH/CPD/5/2/9, 'The Sanitary Protection Market', *Retail Business*, Special Report No. 1.142, December 1969, pp.12-16.

⁷⁰ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/38/1/4/49, Boots UK, 'Sales & Selling', No.42, July 1962, p.15.

serving counters, but that there was some, albeit diminishing, reticence about taking menstrual technologies through cash out points.⁷¹

Boots were aware of their role as one of the main distributors of technologies. In the 1962 'teenage number' a spread about 'Summertime in the Sundries Department' emphasised the importance of "S.T's, Belts and Knickers' to Boots' teenage market and capital. The article stated, 'we make this point every year- and we do so again without apology because it is so important. How can one apologise for mentioning too often a range of merchandise bring us £2 million a year! You are supplying an enormous number of women each year with their most intimate needs.' This discussion of menstrual technology was deliberately placed in the 'teenage number', and it was also deliberate that this edition was sent in July. The article continued, 'At holiday time they are away from home and forced to change their shopping habits, and we must remind them that Boots are a nation-wide organisation anxious to meet all their needs Your displays will create new customers who may then stay loyal to the firm forever.' Staff were instructed to also direct shoppers to other holiday items once they had purchased their menstrual protection in order to increase sales across the store.⁷²

Other correspondence sent to Boots branches, such as the *Merchandise News*, consistently stressed the increased sales of menstrual protection during the summer months when women and girls were holidaying. An issue of *Merchandise News* from July 1964 outlined a promotion on Boots own brand tampons and towels running from July 27th to August 8th on the front cover. It questioned, 'Why do we always call for a

⁷¹ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/BH/CPD/5/2/9, 'The Sanitary Protection Market', *Retail Business*, Special Report No. 1.142, December 1969, p.14.

⁷² Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/38/1/4/49, Boots UK, 'Sales & Selling', No.42, July 1962, pp.1-47.

special promotion of our Sanitary Protection range at this particular time of year? Because, during this fortnight a very large slice of the population are away from home'. New customers were the target, and large scale displays and promotions were to make this possible.⁷³ Branches entered into a 'Kotex competition' in September of the same year, with 'at least £500 prize money' being awarded to the group of branches that could reach their sales targets and boost Kotex towel sales above the current 7% percent increase.⁷⁴ The *Merchandise News* also emphasised that stores were to display Tampax at all times, not only because it maintained 'it's position as brand leader' but because it was also covered in 'national and provincial newspapers' and 'nearly all the monthly and weekly periodicals and women's magazines', highlighting the important influence of mass culture and advertising on Boots' business decisions and its customers sales habits.⁷⁵ After *Merchandise News* rebranded as *Sales Talk*, emphasis was still placed on displaying and selling Tampax, due to its 'intensive advertising' and popularity. *Sales Talk* stressed that stores display and market 'sanitary protection' effectively, because it was now a £25, 000 000+ industry that Boots held a major share in.⁷⁶ In 1972 stores were sent show cards highlighting Boots' competitive pricing, which priced 10 regular tampons at 12½p compared to 15p at other stores, and 40 super tampons at 45½p as opposed to 59p. Store workers were encouraged to '**have big bold displays**', and to '**ensure sufficient stock**', suggesting

⁷³ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/ BT/11/38/1/10/3, Boots UK, *Merchandise News*, July 10th 1964, p.1.

⁷⁴ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/ BT/11/38/1/10/3, Boots UK, *Merchandise News*, 4th September 1964. p.2.

⁷⁵ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/ BT/11/38/1/10/3, Boots UK, *Merchandise News*, 8th March, 1968.

⁷⁶ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/38/1/13/1, Boots UK, *Sales Talk*, No.13, 28th June 1972.

the lucrativeness of the menstrual technology industry went some way to challenging notions of menstrual invisibility in everyday life.⁷⁷

The IPC cosmetics and toiletries survey from 1977/8 revealed where women and girls between the ages of 13-64 had obtained their menstrual products in the last three to four weeks. These statistics reveal age, class and location to be factors influencing how girls obtained menstrual products. 65% of girls aged 13-15 were cited as obtaining their products from chemists, with roughly 30% citing Boots specifically. 5% were cited as obtaining products from other drug stores, 17% from grocers or supermarkets, 7% department stores and/ or Woolworths, Marks and Spencer's, British Homes Stores or Littlewoods. 2% sought products in 'other ways' unspecified on the survey, whilst 4% were recorded as not knowing where they had obtained their products at all. Amongst 16-18 year olds, 69% obtained products from chemists, with 42% citing Boots specifically. 4% cited other drug stores, 17% grocers and supermarkets, 3% department stores and other aforementioned shops, 3% market stalls and 3% did not know. Amongst the 19-24 age range, 65% cited chemists, 40% Boots specifically, 3% other drug stores, 19% grocers or supermarkets, 6% department stores or other shops, 2% market stalls and 6% did not know.

Girls and Women in social class AB were most likely to buy from chemists (72%), but 2% bought from drug stores, and 18% from grocers or supermarkets. By contrast, women and girls in social class DE were less likely to buy products from retail chemists (59%), but they were more likely than those in social class AB to buy products from other drug stores (5%) or grocers and supermarkets (22%). Statistics about regional variation in purchase habits revealed that whilst 70% women and girls in

⁷⁷ Text is in bold in original document. Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/38/1/13/1, Boots UK, *Sales Talk*, No.11, June 14th, 1972, p.5.

'London and the South East' bought their products from chemists, 6% bought them from other drug stores and 16% from grocers or supermarkets. By contrast 44% of women and girls in 'Yorkshire, Humberside & North' bought their products in chemists, and whilst 6% also bought from drug stores, the figure of users buying products in grocers rose to 37%, 21% higher than in London.⁷⁸

The contemporary awareness of a distinctive youth culture, market and spending power influenced how brands such as Boots operated, marketed and designed their stores. Furthermore, the menstrual technology industry and teenagers who upheld this industry played a significant role in determining these factors too. This preoccupation with girls youth cultural engagements and lifestyles reflected the increasing focus on the lifestyles of young people across society and culture more broadly. Whilst the delinquency of working class men had been the initial concern of social scientists, press and politicians keen to understand teenagers, girls' unique youth cultural engagements came to the fore too. In particular, the factors encouraging and ramifications of premarital sex became increasingly debated and sensationalised. This discourse reveals a unique historical juncture in the intersections of gender and age, and the contemporary social anxieties around the sexuality of girls in their teens and early twenties in this period.⁷⁹ This discourse was also implicitly about menstruation and the declining of first menses, and contextualises contemporary concerns regarding girls' use of internally worn sanitary protection.

Popular and professional commentary in the late 50s and early 60s centred on the dangers and risks associated with girls maturing earlier than they had in

⁷⁸ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/17/2/129, IPC Cosmetics and Toiletries Survey 1977-1978. See Appendix 7 for full table of statistics.

⁷⁹ Fink and Tinkler, 'Teetering on the edge', p.9.

previous decades. In 1956, the *Liverpool Echo* quoted a Cheshire pub landlord who had complained that 'some girls of sixteen don't look a day less than twenty' due to their fashionable clothes and cosmetics, highlighting a discourse about early maturation, but also implicitly about girls' spending habits and engagements with consumer culture.⁸⁰

On Monday 15 September 1958 the *Daily Mirror* ran a double page spread headed 'Our Children are Changing'. The article was also concerned with the decreasing age of girls' physical maturation in the post war period. The subheading read, 'by 1980 the average British Girl might be capable of motherhood at twelve.' The *Mirror* used the term 'beanstalk generation' to denote 'the youngsters of today who are growing up faster and sooner than any other generation before them'. Coverage of the 'beanstalk generation' became a recurrent feature in the *Mirror* from September 1958 into early January 1959. Features focussed on the changing physicality of pubescent girls, their ability to have children younger, their investments in commercialised forms of youth culture and their adornment practices. The spread included voices from a variety of perspectives, including girls', parents and medical professionals.

In 'Our Children are Changing' the *Mirror* emphasised that in 1958 the average age of sexual maturity was thirteen, and that this was a year younger than it had been for the mothers of the beanstalk generation. It also emphasised that the average age of puberty was 'becoming earlier by five months every ten years', and that in 1850 girls had reached womanhood at seventeen. A child specialist at Great Ormond Street hospital was quoted stating that if this trend continued, "the average girl may be

⁸⁰ 'Underage Drinkers are difficult to spot', *Liverpool Echo*, 10 February 1956 in Todd and Young, 'Baby Boomers to Bean Stalkers', p.7.

capable of motherhood at the age of twelve by 1980'.⁸¹ Post war prosperity was the catalyst for the intensification of anxieties about girls' sexuality. Early and premature physical and sexual maturity of young women was deemed the result of improved nutrition, girls not staying on at school beyond the minimum school-leaving age of fifteen, the decreasing age of marriage, mass-commercial youth culture and increased demands of youth for autonomy and new forms of pleasure. The *Mirror* emphasised the importance of improved diet, and many parents who featured in the articles reiterated their belief of its role in girls' maturation.⁸² In October 1958, the *Mirror* presented 'the food facts of life' for 'bean stalkers', emphasising the continued emphasis on diet to optimum physical development for girls.⁸³

Depictions of maturing girls in British social problem films from the time were informed by similar concerns, and explored these themes in a way that centred the subjectivities of the beanstalk generation. Fink and Tinkler have suggested British Social problem films situated the teenage girl in a 'liminal space of child-adult and girl-woman', and that this liminality informed both the films depiction and navigation of her 'sexual vulnerability' and wider contemporary concerns too.⁸⁴ Fink and Tinkler highlight that this was a 'gender specific conundrum'. In these films, like in the *Mirror*, there was no suggestion boys and young men could be mistaken for one another'.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Keith Waterhouse, 'Our children are changing', *Daily Mirror*, 15th September, 1958, p.12. < https://0-ukpressonline-co-uk.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/ukpressonline/getDocument/DMir_1958_09_15_012?fileType=PDF& > [accessed 04/03/2022].

⁸² Keith Waterhouse, 'Mum and Dad Say', *Daily Mirror*, 17th September 1958, p.12. < https://0-ukpressonline-co-uk.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/ukpressonline/database/search/preview.jsp?fileName=DMir_1958_09_17_012&sr=1 > [accessed, 04/03/2022].

⁸³ Keith Waterhouse, 'The food facts of life', *Daily Mirror*, 27th October 1958, p. 13 < https://0-ukpressonline-co-uk.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/ukpressonline/view/pagview/DMir_1958_10_20_037 > [accessed 04/03/2022].

⁸⁴ Fink and Tinkler, 'Teetering on the Edge', p.9.

⁸⁵ Fink and Tinkler, 'Teetering on the Edge' p.15.

The *Mirror* demonstrated that contemporary discussions of girls' sexual maturity were closely related to their liminality; particularly their fertility, and the potential for pregnancy and motherhood so young. These concerns were therefore implicitly about the decreasing age when girls began menstruating, although this was never foregrounded explicitly in the beanstalk series. As Vostral notes, 'the maturation process that produces a fertile body brings with it a developing sexual persona. What to do with this nascent sexual being with erotic potential is a matter of cultural interpretation, and oftentimes cultural policing.' Discomfort with the potential assignment of womanhood to eight to ten year olds hitherto deemed children was transnational, and structured contemporary discourse in the UK and America.⁸⁶

First menarche symbolises important physiological changes from child to adult. Yet as Vostral notes, societal interpretations of this biological event reveal 'much about the definition of childhood and adulthood, and the steps in between.' As Brumberg notes, histories of menstruation need to consider 'how a biological event or biomedical phenomenon becomes subject to cultural values and constraints...in the case of menarche, there is a changing body to consider along with its figurative and ideological representations.'⁸⁷ Whilst popular coverage like the 'beanstalk series' drew explicit attention to some aspects of biological phenomenon and a changing body, like growing breasts and widening hips by listing girls' measurements and including photographs, the threat of young motherhood was never explicitly negotiated in terms of the consequences of reaching first menses. Periods remained invisible, alluded to through discussions of the potentiality for motherhood, but never out rightly acknowledged as the reason why this was possible. Foregrounding

⁸⁶ Vostral, *Under Wraps*, p.115-116.

⁸⁷ Brumberg, 'Something Happens to Girls', p.104.

menstruation enables this thesis to consider contemporary concerns regarding girls' sexuality, bodies and lifestyles through a different lens, approaching debates about permissiveness from a new perspective.

As Vostral notes, menstrual technologies, and the explicit attempts of advertisers to market tampons and towels to girls and teens across the post war period 'forced a confrontation between the cultural denial of sexual maturation and the public pronouncement of menstruation as a consumer event'.⁸⁸ Use of technologies amongst pre-pubescent girls, teenagers and young women raised concerns closely related to these blurry boundaries. These included concerns about practical menstrual management in schools and colleges, questions regarding appropriate level of knowledge of human development and reproduction for 'innocent' children, discussions about girl's sexuality and tampon use, and subsequently how much agency and decision making they should possess. As Vostral notes, if 'technologies provided the pragmatics' that allowed women to pass as non-menstruating, 'proved effacious, and empowered teens, then teens were far savvier than many adults wanted to acknowledge.' Girls use of menstrual technologies challenged assumptions about girlhood, whilst asserting new means of autonomy.⁸⁹

Age of maturation and first menses is significant for understanding girls' experiences of acquiring menstrual knowledge, and can frame understanding of their everyday menstrual management practices. Depending on their age, girls had different experiences of first menses, acquiring knowledge and managing their period. This determined if they began menstruating whilst in attendance at primary or

⁸⁸ Vostral, *Under Wraps*, p.116.

⁸⁹ Vostral, *Under Wraps*, p.116.

secondary school. Knowledge was more likely by the time they reached secondary school, as was the company of peers who also menstruated. Whilst this did not guarantee open discussion, for some women whose experiences are drawn on in this thesis it facilitated communication about periods, self-confidence and feelings of inclusion. Further, although secondary schools were often not equipped with the appropriate infrastructure to help girls manage menstruation securely and discreetly, this was even less likely if girls began to menstruate at primary school.⁹⁰ Girls were more likely to be responsible for purchasing menstrual products as they grew older and entered adulthood, and many women reported being provided with various traditional menstrual technologies (rags and belts) and newer forms of technologies (adhesive pads) when experiencing their first period. Tampons were typically reserved for years later, and in some instances caused conflict between mothers and daughters who had alternative perspectives on their suitability. These experiences are explored in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

Girls were also more likely to read magazines instead of comics in their teenage years, and thus come into contact with adverts and editorials about menstruation more frequently. Research into the under-explored area of girls' unique youth-cultural engagements have recorded the significance of magazines to girls' lives.⁹¹ These magazines, Tinkler notes, 'are a prism through which to explore ideas about the teenage self and lifestyle' in the postwar period 'infused with optimism

⁹⁰ See chapter one, 'Learning about menstruation', pp.140-190.

⁹¹For work on the gender blindness and bias of early youth culture studies see Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (Macmillan Press, 1983), Mary Celeste Kearney, *Producing Girls: Rethinking the Study of Female Youth Culture* (New York University Press, 1998), Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (Macmillan Press, 1991), p.ix., Sue Lees, *Losing Out: Sexuality and Adolescent Girls* (Hutchinson, 1986), p.15, Elizabeth Frazer, 'Teenage Girls Reading Jackie', *Media, Culture and Society*, 9:4 (2016), pp.407-425, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, 'Girls and Subcultures', in McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, pp.1-15.

about being a teenage girl'. By the 1960s teenagers were explicitly acknowledged as a distinctive youth market, with distinctive interests and aspirations and ideas.⁹²

Yet the ideals of independence, self-discovery and self-actualisation presented in magazines were 'fraught with tension' and often very difficult for young women to implement in their own life. This was due to factors such as expense, regional variations in access to employment, housing and opportunities, practical concerns regarding personal safety, parental authority, the continuing emphasis on heterosexual marriage as the ultimate goal, and tightly policed parameters regarding appropriate feminine presentation, behaviour and lifestyle choices to which magazines themselves contributed.⁹³ Albeit central to girls' youthful activities, experiences and subject positions, magazines were not always reflective of their lived experiences.

Powerfully shaping the contours of girlhood and appropriate feminine interests for their readership, magazines were, as the Lil-lets advert retorted, one of the only places they could see menstruation. As Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie state, advertising was the 'loudest message' about menstruation available to girls in the past.⁹⁴ These adverts, and the magazines they featured in, are the 'loudest messages' about menstruation available to historians too. As Maggie Andrews says, magazines reflect the tensions, anxieties and preoccupations of an era, acting as a 'site of debate and discussion and perhaps even as a site for the working through of ideas' relating to what Susan Speaker terms 'culturally resonant themes and images of a period'.⁹⁵

⁹² Penny Tinkler, "Are You Really Living?" p.597.

⁹³ Penny Tinker, "Are you really living?", pp.597-619.

⁹⁴ Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie, 'Introduction: 'Talking Your Body's Language': The Menstrual Materialisations of Sexed Ontology' in *Menstruation: A Cultural History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.1.

⁹⁵ Maggie Andrews, 'The Gendering of Racism in Social Problem Films', *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. by Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara, (Taylor and Francis, 2014), p.8, Susan Speaker, "From 'Happiness Pills' to 'National Nightmare'. Changing Cultural Assessment of Minor Tranquilisers in America, 1955-1980," *Journal of*

As stated above, magazines contained a multitude of seemingly contradictory ideas about menstrual 'hygiene', concealment, confidence and empowerment and feminine personhood too, making them helpful sources for recognising the socio-cultural position of menstruation in the period 1960- 1980 and the tensions, anxieties and preoccupations relating to girls 'hygiene', sexuality, bodies and life choices.

Notwithstanding these contradictions, the menstrual technology industry's efforts were an important part of the 'demystification' of menstruation for many girls. Yet Brumberg reminds us that this advertising did not qualify as 'meaningful exchanges' of information about female sexuality and womanhood nor menstrual management and 'hygiene' for girls in the US.⁹⁶ As Hannah Charnock has notes, education in the 'physical, emotional, relational and social aspects of sex' was what girls in Britain also wanted but lacked.⁹⁷ Testimony explored in this thesis about girls' experiences of learning about menstruation, sex and the body in the period 1960-1980 adds further weight to such conclusions.

This history of menstruation in the period 1960-1980 takes into account the cultural reach of the permissive 1960s as a concept in Britain, whilst simultaneously making a historiographical contribution to an extensive body of literature that challenges the ingrained assumption that the sixties was swinging, and that 'permissiveness' and 'freedom' were defining qualities of young people's day-to-day lives. Whilst as Helena Mills notes, initial histories of the 'swinging sixties' were 'necessarily stylised and simplified', revisionist interpretations have revealed

the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, 52 (1997)p.342, in Vostral, *Under Wraps*, p.9, and Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity', p.25.

⁹⁶ Brumberg, "Something Happens to Girls", p.126.

⁹⁷ Hannah Charnock, '*Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity in England 1950 -1980*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2017), pp.56-57.

conservative continuation continued to define people's lives across the 'long sixties' and the 1970s as much as radical change.⁹⁸

Periodisation

There is expansive historiographical debate about periodization of the post-war era, and particularly the sixties. Periodizing the sixties was initially the project of Frederic Jameson, whose analysis spanned from the 1950s in to the early 1970s.⁹⁹ Arthur Marwick also explored the notion of the 'swinging sixties'. Marwick utilises the term the 'long sixties' to suggest that the swinging sixties emerged in Britain, France, Italy and the US in 1958, and his work demarks the period 1958-1974 as an appropriate time frame for exploring how society was 'permeated by new ideas'.¹⁰⁰ Presenting a radical Latina perspective, Elizabeth Martinez stretched the decade from 1955 to 1975, whilst Bernadine Dohrn suggested the sixties begun in 1954 and were not yet over in 2001 when she wrote her article. Other scholars have alternatively suggested analyses of a short sixties, whilst others have focussed almost entirely on the year 1968.¹⁰¹

Scholars have put forward alternative narratives that pay more attention to continuities as well as changes in people's lives, further deconstructing the notion of

⁹⁸ Helena Mills, 'Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women's Memories of 1960's Youth', *Contemporary British History*, 30:4, (2016), p.464.

⁹⁹ J Heale, 'The Sixties as History: A review of political historiography', *Reviews in American History*, 33:1 (2005), p.135.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, C. 1958-C. 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Arthur Marwick, 'The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest and Permeation', *The International History Review*, (2005), 27:4, p.781.

¹⁰¹ For details on studies listed see M. J Heale, 'The Sixties as History: A review of political historiography', *Reviews in American History*, 33:1 (2005), p.135.

the '1960s' as a distinct moment. In her memoir Sheila Rowbotham suggests that sixties culture 'oscillated between dramatic lunges towards modernity and nostalgic flirtations with the old'.¹⁰² Hall notes that the "permissive society" is a term which exaggerates the degree of liberalisation in Britain in the mid-1960's...How widespread permissiveness became outside certain areas and groups in London is dubious'.¹⁰³ Adding weight to such conclusions Beddoe highlights that although the 1960s is often referred to as the 'swinging sixties', the likely response amongst Welsh women about their experiences, was that 'it wasn't swinging around here. Perhaps in London'.¹⁰⁴ Roberts presents a similar case in relation to the lives of women in Barrow, Lancaster and Preston. She suggests that 'the swinging sixties' was a far-removed phenomenon for these women, regarding the phrase to be 'overworked'.¹⁰⁵ As Heale notes, 'the sixties- or the more symbolic "sixties"- can be pushed into almost any shape...the slipperiness of the topic is illustrated in the debate over just when the era occurred'.¹⁰⁶

A host of scholarship has considered sexual mores more specifically, and concluded, much like Gorer did in his 1969 study *Sex and Marriage in England Today*, that despite 'all the emphasis on the permissive society', England was still a very 'chaste society'.¹⁰⁷ A silence on sex from both parents and social institutions kept a culture of secrecy alive in Britain. A climate of ignorance regarding sexual matters remained central to discussions and attitudes about sex, whilst the performance of

¹⁰² Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (Penguin, 2001) p.xii.

¹⁰³ Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change since 1880* (Macmillan, 2000), p.173.

¹⁰⁴ Deidre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (University of Wales Press, 2000) p.149.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Blackwell, 1995), p.63.

¹⁰⁶ Heale, 'The Sixties as History', p.135.

¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Gorer, *Sex and Marriage in England Today: A Study of the Views and experience of the under-45's* (1969) in Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change*, p.173.

ignorance remained a key aspect of women's identity formation.¹⁰⁸ Histories of how young people learnt about sex and reproduction reach similar conclusions, highlighting that ignorance and shame still defined the acquisition of sexual knowledge for many young people across the 1960s and in to the 1970s.¹⁰⁹

Attitude surveys during the 1960s showed that young people were much more conservative in their ideas about sex and marriage than press reports about promiscuity would indicate. Jane Lewis suggests that whilst changes in the sexual behaviour of women seemed to indicate they were exercising more choice in regard to marriage and reproduction, this was not an indication of permissiveness nor liberation.¹¹⁰ Pop music, fashion and mass-market magazines might have been neatly incorporated into girl's lives, but strict moral and behavioural codes still prospered.¹¹¹

This thesis studies the period 1960-1980. This periodisation requires discussion and reflection particularly because it does not replicate the periodisation adopted by leading scholars of the era such as Marwick. Whilst 'the long sixties' would have also provided a useful framework to begin researching, sampling and analysing, it would have necessitated different start and end points for magazine analysis, and thus different magazines be consulted. The magazines consulted for this thesis all

¹⁰⁸ Roberts, *Women and Families*, p.63 and Simon Szreter, and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.74 and Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain 1918-1960*, p.25.

¹⁰⁹ Lucinda McCray Beier, 'We were Green as Grass': Learning about Sex and Reproduction in Three Working-Class Lancashire Communities, 1900-1970', *Social History of Medicine*, 16:3 (2003), pp.461-480, Angela Davis, "'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything': Sex Education and the preparation of girls for Motherhood, c.1930-1970', *History of Education*, 37:5 (2008), pp.661-677, James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, "'The Ravages of Permissiveness": Sex Education and the Permissive Society', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:3 (2004), pp.290-312, David Limond, "'I never imagined that the time would come": Martin Cole, the *Growing Up* Controversy and the Limits of School Sex Education in 1970s England', *History of Education*, 37:3 (2008), pp.409-429, Chelsea Saxby, 'Rosemary Proom Misses a 'Sex Lesson': BBC Schools Broadcasting and the Private Family in 1970s Britain' (unpublished article).

¹¹⁰ Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Blackwell, 1992), p.66.

¹¹¹ Mills, 'Using the Personal to Critique the Popular', p.464.

opened between 1960 and 1970. *Honey* began publishing in 1960, *Jackie* in 1964, and *Petticoat* 1966, testament to the booming teenage magazine markets at this time, the growing commercialisation of girls' cultural engagements and contemporary desire to grapple with notions of 'permissiveness'. As stated previously, however, the content of these magazines differed from one another, and whilst *Honey* and *Petticoat* adopted a permissive persona, *Jackie* relayed a version of girlhood that neatly fits with what Marwick defined as 'middle 1950s' conservative attitudes, values and conventions.

In his work, Marwick suggested that conservative voices 'persisted throughout the 1960s', and that these voices were largely 'submerged' or 'washed away' by progressive tides released by the 'potency' of the cultural revolution.¹¹² The existence and popularity of *Jackie* across the 1960s and 1970s paints a different picture of the extent to which progressive ideas permeated and submerged more traditional values and attitudes in this period, particularly in relation to girls' lives. Further, writing bottom up history requires a consideration of lived experience, and the diffuse understandings of the timing and impact of the 'swinging sixties' on individuals. The effects of the 'swinging sixties' in Britain were, as stated previously, variable and disparate. Many claimed not to feel them until years later, whilst others claimed not to have at all. Taking this into account, it becomes difficult to pin down if, and when 'swinging sixties' ideals began to impact girls lives. Adopting a date range that could adequately explore the nuances of change and similarity in societal ideals, magazine content and girls' lives over the post war period would have necessitated a larger research project, which was not possible within the confines of this studentship. Whilst this thesis focusses on the twenty years between 1960 and 1980, this start point is not taken as verbatim for the

¹¹² Arthur Marwick, 'The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest and Permeation', *The International History Review*, (2005), 27:4, p.782.

beginning of the 'sixties'. This thesis critically engages with the concept of the 'swinging sixties' throughout.

The blurring of distinct boundaries between the fifties and the sixties, conservative and progressive ideals, living through the swinging sixties or imagining the swinging sixties, are factors guiding analysis presented in this thesis. It acknowledges the limitations of adopting such periodisation, but has done so because this periodization has enabled a study of three popular mass market girls' periodicals that came to be at this time, precisely because of a sense that the teenager was becoming its own distinct life stage, however permissive or 'swinging' that stage was or was not. These magazines negotiated ideas about the 'swinging sixties' and permissiveness to differing degrees. The array of understandings of if and when the swinging sixties happened highlights the difficulty in adopting appropriate forms of periodisation that can adequately take into account the lived experience of different cohorts of women.

This thesis demarks 1980 as the upper boundary of its period of study. The 1980s saw unique social, economic and cultural changes in Britain and a unique political moment commonly understood in terms of the rise of conservative Thatcherism, neoliberalism and individualism. Whilst scholars have unpicked popular historical understandings of a causal affiliation between socio-economic and cultural changes and changing politics, and questioned the hegemonic influence of Thatcherism as an analytical framework for understanding ordinary life in the 1980s, the period is demarked as one in which a return to 'traditional' and 'Victorian' moral values manifest in the heterosexual nuclear family were heralded by Thatcher and

implemented through policy.¹¹³ Furthermore, the impact of the AIDS crisis on public health, consciousness and everyday sexual mores and practices in the 1980s, the Education Reform Act of 1986 that ruled that sex education should pay 'due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life' and encouraged parents to remove their children from sex education classes, and the introduction of section 28 in 1988, prohibiting the 'promotion of homosexuality' in taught or published materials signalled a different political and sexual landscape in Britain than previously.¹¹⁴ An exploration of girls' magazines and experiences in this period would require attention be paid to the specificities of this moment, and the differences between the 1980s and the previous decades. This would, in turn, require study of other magazines in circulation in the 1980s too. This thesis chooses to focus on the years leading up to 1980 to avoid skimming over the specificities of the period.

Building on this scholarship, this exploration of menstrual representations and experiences adds to a body of literature that complicates the either/or 'swinging sixties' and 'permissive era' narrative. By focussing specifically on menstruation it offers an exploration of everyday life and girlhood in relation to historiographical debates about 'permissiveness' in a way previously neglected. Whilst a study of magazines alone suggests varying degrees of preoccupation with permissiveness, testimony about girls' menstrual knowledge and management practices in the period 1960-1980 do not align with notions of sexual and bodily autonomy, independence, self-discovery and

¹¹³ Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'New Times revisited: Britain in the 1980s', *Contemporary British History*, 31:2 (2017), pp.145-165, p.146. Matt Cook, 'Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 26:2 (2017), pp.239-272.

¹¹⁴Cook, 'Mass Observation and the Fate of the Permissive Turn', p.245 and *Local Government Act 1988* (c.9, part 5, section 28), [online] < <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted> > [accessed 02/03/2022].

self-actualisation. Menstruation, as a framework and focus of study, provides an illuminating case study of everyday life as a girl in 1960s and 1970s Britain.

Scope

Scholarship that takes menstruation as the subject of its study has, as Chris Bobel noted in 2020, been ‘relegated to the fringes’ of most academic disciplines until recently. It is transgressive to resist menstrual concealment, and resultantly we ‘socialize this biological process - including serious inquiry into its form, function and meaning - into hiding’.¹¹⁵ This lack of sources and histories is inextricably linked to its wider socio-cultural invisibility and stigmatisation. The formation of the UK Menstruation Research Network indicates an upward trend in attention being paid specifically to interdisciplinary menstruation studies, as does the publication of the 1000-page edited collection *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies* in 2020.¹¹⁶

Notwithstanding, histories of menstruation are still rare, particularly those that privilege ‘everyday’ understandings and experiences. Historical studies have typically

¹¹⁵ Chris Bobel, ‘Introduction: Menstruation as Lens-Menstruation as Opportunity’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation*, ed. by Chris Bobel et. al (Palgrave, 2020), p.1. For examples of menstruation across different cultures and eras see *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed. by Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (Palgrave, 2005).

¹¹⁶ Bee Hughes & Camilla Rostvik, ‘Menstruation in Art and Visual Culture’, *The International Encyclopaedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, ed. by k. Ross, I. Bachmann, V. Cardo, S. Moorti and M. Scarcelli (2020), and ‘Introducing: the Menstruation Research Network’, The Polyphony: Conversations across the medical humanities, 3 July 2019, <https://thepolyphony.org/2019/07/03/introducing-the-menstruation-research-network/> [accessed 28/06/2021]. Official Website for UK Menstruation Research Network, <https://menstruationresearchnetwork.co.uk/> [accessed 28/06/2021], Sarah Zipp and Camilla Rostvik, ‘It will take more than free periods to end stigma around menstruation’, *The Conversation*, 11th December 2020, <https://theconversation.com/it-will-take-lot-more-than-free-period-products-to-end-stigma-around-menstruation-151711> [accessed 28/06/2021], and Chris Bobel, Inga T. Winkler, Breanne Fahs, Katie Ann Hasson, Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, Tomi-Ann Roberts, *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies* in 2020 (Palgrave, 2020).

centred the gaze, knowledge, and perspective of individuals embedded in medical, psychiatric, political and commercial institutions, or the discourses that emanated from these cultures. Further, much of this literature has concerned America, and/or rarely extended to cover British history in the period 1960–1980. As Strange notes, ‘historical analyses of gynaecological theory and practice in America and Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have, almost invariably, fixed on the texts of male specialists who located menstruation in the realm of pathology.’¹¹⁷ Even histories of the MWF privilege the voices of women in medicine. Whilst the MWF were concerned with listening to girls, the surviving source material refracts their concerns through the language, ideology and voices of individuals embedded in medical institutions and discourses. These are thorough and important contributions to the historiography of menstruation, and have informed this thesis throughout. Yet the perspectives, experiences and voices of ordinary women and girls are largely absent from these histories, demarking an area that requires further research.

As outlined above, the period 1960-1980 is a unique moment in the history of menstruation and girlhood worthy of attention. Historical literature that offers a ‘bottom up’ history of menstruation in the UK typically does not extend to the period 1960-1980. This thesis offers a bottom-up focus that centres the voices and lives of ‘ordinary people’. When referring to ‘ordinary people’, this thesis concerns people who are not experts. As Claire Langhamer states, the ‘ordinary’ and ‘the everyday’ are ‘malleable, messy’ but also closely associated with a critique of expertise.¹¹⁸ None of the respondents encountered in this thesis were gynaecologists or doctors, or professed

¹¹⁷ Julie- Marie Strange, ‘The Assault on Ignorance: Teaching Menstrual Etiquette in England, c.1920-1960s’, *Social History of Medicine*, 14:2 (2001), p.247.

¹¹⁸ Claire Langhamer, “‘Who the Hell Are Ordinary People?’ Ordinarity as a Category of Historical Analysis’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (2018), p.194.

to have any expert training relating to menstruation, meaning they dealt with it without expertise that might have otherwise impacted how they remembered, framed and wrote about their experiences. This conceptualisation of 'ordinary' is reflective of the wider aims of this thesis; to explore the way medical terminology, ideas, and concepts are made sense of and popularised in the everyday by 'ordinary people', and the role of mass market-magazines in disseminating advice about menstruation to ordinary girls.

Most histories that offer bottom-up perspectives on sex, the body or girls' lives in Britain in the twentieth century do not take menstruation as the sole focus, rather they reflect on menstrual discourse and experience as part of a wider study of sex, sex education, or girls' and women's health, or lives more broadly.¹¹⁹ This is to be expected to a certain extent. The topics are intimately related and difficult to disentangle from one another. Discussions drawn on in this thesis evidence the ease with which discussions of menstruation are bound up in more general discussions of sex and sex education. Notwithstanding, it attempts to alter the balance by making menstruation the main focus as much as possible.

Few historians have used magazines specifically to explore menstruation, or to understand the kinds of images and texts about menstruation girls saw in their day-to-

¹¹⁹ Examples of such histories include Alexander, 'The Mysteries and Secrets of Women's Bodies', pp.161-175, Lucinda McCray Beier, *For their Own Good: The Transformation of English Working-Class Health Culture, 1880-1970* (2008), Beier, "'We were green as Grass'", pp.461-480, Sue Bruley, "'Little Mothers' : Adolescent Girls and Young Women in the South Wales Valleys between the Wars', *LLafur*, 10:3 (2010), pp.126-144, Davis, "'Oh no, nothing'", pp.661-677, James Hampshire, 'The politics of school sex education policy in England and Wales from the 1940s to the 1960s', *Social History of Medicine*, 18:1, (2005), pp.87-105, Hampshire and Lewis, "'The Ravages of Permissiveness'", pp.290-312, David Limond, 'Frequently but Naturally: William Michael Duance, Kenneth Charles Barnes and Teachers as Innovators in Sex(uality) Education in English Adolescent Schooling: c.1945-1965', *Sex education*, 5:2 (2005), pp.107-118, Jane Pilcher, 'School Sex Education: Policy and Practice in England 1870-2000', *Sex Education*, 15:2 (2005), pp.153-170, Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, pp.16-18, Strange, 'The Assault on Ignorance', pp.247-266, Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood*.

day lives. Nor have they explored these in conjunction with methodologies that centre personal testimony. By doing so this thesis explores how discourses of menstrual invisibility structured girls' magazines and girls' lives more broadly, and how magazines representations of menstruation functioned in the lives of their readers, adding to an increasing body of literature that challenges the notion of the determinative role of magazine discourse. Beyond exploring representations of menstruation in magazines, and the role of magazines in girls' menstrual education, this thesis also explores women's reflections on learning about menstruation, first menses, choosing and wearing menstrual technology, and (pre)menstrual discomfort, pain and pain management. It explores the structuring influence of menstrual invisibility to women's articulations of menstrual experiences. Focussing on both representations of menstruation in magazines, and on accounts of personal experience, this thesis contributes to a limited historiographical landscape concerned with menstruation. Using a bottom-up approach, this thesis sheds light on an under-explored time period, aspects of everyday life and selfhood, contributing to historical scholarship about menstruation, the 'swinging sixties', sex education in the postwar period, girls' health, magazines, subjectivities and lives more broadly.

The geographical spread of source material in this thesis warrants comment. This thesis has consulted oral history interviews and MO responses from women living in England, Scotland and Wales. Accounts of women living in the South East and London dominate the MO archive, and whilst this thesis draws on accounts from across England, Scotland and Wales, attempting to sketch a wider picture of girls' menstrual experience and the language used to articulate such experiences, the majority are from women living in the South of England. Whilst oral history interviews

were conducted with women living in England, Scotland and Wales, the majority of interviews conducted and used in this thesis were also with women living in England.

As a means of acknowledging the geographical spread of source material, appendix three lists the locations Mass Observers cited on their directive responses, whilst appendix five lists the place of birth of the women interviewed for the BSF project. Neither quantification encompasses the full impact of geographical location on life story. Some women lived in one place their whole life, whilst others lived in multiple locations across Britain and the world. Unless women explicitly used place and location to frame their articulations about their menstrual experiences, the impact of location and of moving on girlhood experiences cannot be gleaned from looking solely at the menstruation directive responses. This relates to the wider discussion of methodological issues inherent in using MO material addressed in chapter two, particularly the question of how much it is possible to know about subject's life by engaging with limited source material that does not take a life history approach.

By contrast, the life history approach to oral history research utilised by the BSF team offers the opportunity to explore the significance of location to women's lived experiences of menstruation more explicitly. Many interviewees recounted their experiences of moving in their oral history interviews, as these were important to their broader life history and the stories they wanted to tell in interviews. These experiences have been included in this thesis or appendix where relevant. Whilst it might have been more uniform to specify where the interview took place in the appendix, reflecting the way MO gathered information about where writing took place, when BSF interviews started to be conducted during the pandemic the interview transcripts stopped specifying the location of the interview and started specifying that it was conducted 'remotely' instead. This made it difficult to discern location at the point of

interview. Conversely, it would have also been more uniform to specify where MO participants were born, reflecting the location specified in the oral history appendix, but the menstruation directive responses did not specify place of birth or require any uniform record of where girls had grown up.

Analysis conducted in this thesis is situated in relation to scholarly contributions regarding regional differences in sex education, and attitudes to sex more broadly, and is highlighted where appropriate throughout.¹²⁰ Geographical details relating to personal testimony are also noted where relevant. Attempts to consider the impact of location on quality and content of schooling and sex education are explicitly made at points in the third chapter, whilst the fourth chapter considers the significance of living rurally to a mass observer's experiences of managing menstruation and wearing technology. Yet this study cannot assert statistically robust claims to geographical variations regarding menstrual experience. In her thesis Charnock acknowledged that 'specific social and geographical contexts can have a significant effect upon the sexual culture' girls were embedded in. Yet by taking a national view, she revealed 'patterns and themes that appear to have underpinned adolescent sexual landscapes across the country'.¹²¹ This thesis takes a similar approach, and engages with personal testimony to emphasise the pervasiveness of a culture of menstrual secrecy and invisibility across Britain as a whole.

¹²⁰ Some examples drawn on include Sally Alexander, 'The Mysteries and Secrets of Women's Bodies' in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, ed. by Mica Nava & Alan O'Shea. (Routledge, 1995), pp.161-175. Deidre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (University of Wales Press, 2000), Lucinda McCray Beier, 'We were Green as Grass': Learning about Sex and Reproduction in Three Working-class Lancashire Communities, 1900-1970, *Social History of Medicine*, 16:3 (2003), pp.461-480. Angela Davis, "'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything": Sex Education and the preparation of girls for Motherhood, c.1930-1970', *History of Education*, 37:5 (2008), pp.661-677.

¹²¹ Charnock, 'Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity in England 1950 -1980', p.31.

This decision was also influenced by the consultation of national girls' magazines *Jackie*, *Honey* and *Petticoat*. These magazines were distributed to, and read by girls across Britain. Although often London centric in their content, they inspired a form of collective and fantastical community and consciousness within their readership, that crossed regional and national lines. Whilst many women have critiqued the concept of the swinging sixties, often informed by their own geographically and socially specific circumstances during their youth, it is important to acknowledge that even if girls did not live in swinging London, nor bring the same life experiences to their psychic and psychogeographical investments in each magazines portrayal of it, girls across England, Scotland and Wales were confronted with the same representations of girlhood and menstruation when they read them. Ideas about menstruation distributed in magazines tell us something of the sexual landscape of girls lives across Britain in the period 1960-1980, and about the most dominant publicly circulating ideas about menstruation in Britain at this time.

Conceptual Framework

Whilst literature on menstruation is sparse, there are interdisciplinary frameworks and theories available that can help glean the most from source material. These frameworks are outlined below as they inform analysis throughout the thesis. Divided into two sub-sections, 'interpreting adverts' and 'accessing lived experience', the former deals with approaches to representations and discourse analysis, whilst the latter focuses more on subjective, individual accounts. This divide is somewhat arbitrary, as a study of 'representations' must take into account the people who created and viewed them, and a study of 'lived experience' must consider how individuals

interacted with, and were shaped by, discourses. This is explored in more detail in the second subsection.

Interpreting Adverts

The framework of ‘passing’ illuminates how menstrual technologies functioned in girls lives. ‘Passing’ is understood to mean moving from one identity to another, and is sometimes used in relation to discussions of how people appear to ‘pass’ between sexualities, races, and genders. Studying menstrual advertising, Vostral situates menstrual products as ‘technologies of passing’ that enabled girls to traverse identities of ‘menstruator’ and ‘non-menstruator’ based on the visibility or invisibility of their period.¹²² In this way, menstrual technologies helped women and girls remain ‘clean’, masking their menstruation so they could ‘pass’ as non-menstruating. A concern with ‘passing’ as non-menstruating is the sometimes implicit, and more often explicit, concern of menstrual technology advertising. Passing is the crux of menstrual technologies’ saleability. Whilst advertising and editorial discussions of menstruation render menstruation visible, they consistently reinforce the need for menstrual concealment and position their products as the means by which this can be achieved.

Menstrual technology brands rendered menstruation visible in a variety of ways. Across the 1960s adverts employed what Jordanova has termed ‘scientific modes of representation’ to allude to medical authority. This enabled brands to teach girls about, and how to use, their products, and to create the presentation of a legitimate, salubrious and ‘hygienic’ product.¹²³ A brief look at the historic positioning of women’s

¹²²Sharra L. Vostral, *Under Wraps: A History of Menstrual Hygiene Technology*, (Lexington Books, 2011), pp.9-20.

¹²³ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.92.

bodies in science and scientific medicine makes sense of why information about the 'mysteries' of menstruation was not available to girls, and why advertisers adopted scientific modes of representation.

Science, Jordanova asserts, has been culturally positioned as veiling and unveiling 'othered' bodies, namely gendered or raced bodies that are not male and/or not white. The hierarchy of knowledge, Siri Hustvedt suggests, positions science at the top, and 'art at the bottom'.¹²⁴ Throughout history, science has been perceived and positioned as the hallmark of absolutism, truth and objectivity. Medical science in particular is, as Jordanova notes, positioned as 'an agent of the true inner nature of things'.¹²⁵ In contrast, women's bodies have been culturally positioned as art, to be observed, and defined as leaky, unruly and inherently closer to nature, the antithesis of the values attributed to science.¹²⁶ Science, with all its masculinist associations, has been positioned as able to 'see through', or make sense of women's bodies. This becomes clear when menstruation is understood in relation to its longer history of pathology and disability. As outlined above, historians of science, particularly those who have explored the proliferation of Victorian evolutionary theories and pseudo-sciences, have shown how science was imagined, written and practised within the contexts and needs of the prevailing culture.¹²⁷

Jordanova analyses the statue of *Nature Unveiling Herself Before Science*, made in 1899 for the Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers. The statue is of a naked woman incompletely covered by a long veil, which Jordanova suggests 'brings together women, the veil and secrecy'.¹²⁸ The woman is 'nature', and she literally

¹²⁴ Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking*, p.x.

¹²⁵ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.92.

¹²⁶ Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Menstruation', pp.83-89.

¹²⁷ Winter, 'Science and Popular Culture', p.219.

¹²⁸ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.93.

unveils herself before man (science). Jordanova asks why, historically, 'is it the female' or anybody marked as 'other' in relation to the white- masculinist norm, 'that is to be unveiled' by science? She suggests that one aspect of this preoccupation with un/covering women's bodies is that covering the female body is historically linked to shame and modesty. Secondly, Jordanova suggests veiling implies secrecy, and so women's bodies, and by extension feminine attributes, cannot be treated as fully public, as 'something dangerous might happen, secrets be let out, if they were open to view'. Secrecy, she claims is gendered, and the unveiling of secrets seems to 'lead inexorably to femininity'.¹²⁹ The inherent contradiction is that if something is 'inaccessible and dangerous, an invitation to know and to possess is extended'; 'the secrecy associated with female bodies is sexual and linked to the multiple associations between women and privacy'. Across the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, science, and its new modes of understanding, vision, and representation, did the unveiling.¹³⁰

Jordanova's assertion takes on particular significance in relation to menstruation. Notions of shame, modesty, secrecy and privacy were, and are, essential to how menstruation is culturally positioned, described and experienced in Britain. Privacy, secrecy, and hiding are themes common to magazines and testimony, and women refer to these themes almost constantly in their accounts of their menstrual experiences. Representations of menstruation in girls' magazines often relied heavily on the associations between women and privacy, using scientific modes of representation to discuss menstruation. Using such modes the advertisers positioned themselves as authorities on menstruation, rendering visible the invisible process of

¹²⁹ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.92

¹³⁰ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.93 and p.110.

menstruation and menstrual management. In some cases this concerned aspects of menstruation typically not visible to the eye. At the same time, however, these representations were euphemistic and pseudo-scientific. They simultaneously drew on the stylistic conventions of medicalised and scientific ways of seeing, viewing and representing menstruation and relied on euphemism, assumed knowledge and secrecy.

Whilst women were able to critique these depictions and notice where they deviated from their own experiences, the cultural visibility of menstrual advertising over other conversation or representation has played a large part in the perpetuation of harmful and disempowering menstrual discourses that need to be deconstructed. Menstrual advertising, although often committed to deconstructing myths and taboos, ultimately contributed to the culture of secrecy, misinformation, and shame. This is unsurprising. If complete secrecy was not desirable, there would be no market for menstrual technologies.

Advertisers tended to only make use of tropes and ideas that they were sure would already resonate, to some degree, with those who might look at them.¹³¹ Beyond scientific modes of representation, the ‘unveiling’ of menstruation in magazines was often achieved through the adoption of the language, imagery and ideas of contemporary feminist concerns too. Magazines, and more specifically and particularly advertising, reworked feminist agendas so that purchases of menstrual technology were positioned as acts of empowerment. Vostrat reveals how in the 1970s the call from women’s health activists for bodily autonomy was capitalised on, exploited and mutated into a form of consumer feminism that sold menstrual

¹³¹ Millum, *Images of Women: Advertising in Women’s Magazines*, p.7.

technologies. Brands marketed items so that purchase was presented as an act of emancipation that exercised the appearance of choice and control.¹³² As Vostral notes, companies 'invested in the concept of debility in order to tout the transformative power of the product in creating sophisticated, modern and functional' menstruating subjects.¹³³ The idea that advertisers were partially receptive to feminism is useful for exploring the way feminist concerns mutated and were discussed in British girls' magazines. Vostral's assessment ties with Tinkler's findings that magazines for teen girls often adopted feminist arguments in 'individualistic and consumerist terms rather than collective ones'.¹³⁴ In a discussion of post-feminism and media representations of women in the 1990s, McRobbie adopts the term 'feminism taken into account' to summate how brands engaged with feminist ideology in their campaigns, usually to disregard it as overworked, unnecessary or outdated.¹³⁵ Albeit originally used in a 'post-feminist' context, the phrase 'feminism taken into account' is utilised in this thesis to describe how advertisers adopted and negotiated feminist discourses. It neatly summates Vostral's findings, and those in this thesis too, whilst also providing historical longevity to McRobbie's assessments of marketing strategies aimed at women. Vostral's work on advertising in the US draws similar conclusions to this study of advertising for menstrual products in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, highlighting that for over sixty years their use, and sale, transnationally, was 'premised upon removing debility and embarrassment, and concealing the menstruating body'.¹³⁶ The 'how come the heroine never has a period?' (figure 1.1) is typical of this 'feminism taken into account'. This advert and more feature throughout.

¹³² Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation', p.249.

¹³³ Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation', p.246.

¹³⁴ Tinkler, "Are you Really living?", p.614.

¹³⁵ Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4:3 (2007), pp.255-264.

¹³⁶ Vostral, 'Masking Menstruation', p.257.

Accessing Lived Experience

A history of menstrual representation and experience necessitates engagement with epistemological debates regarding if and how historians can access 'lived experience'. For Louis Montrose, historians have to contend with questions about the 'textuality of history.'¹³⁷ By this he means that access to 'a full and authentic past, a lived material existence unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question' is unobtainable.¹³⁸ His stance reflects the disturbance academic historians faced in the wake of the cultural and linguistic turn. Prior to the cultural turn, social historians had dominated the discipline and emphasis had been upon the importance of recording a history of lived material existence, and recovering voices of those hidden from history.¹³⁹ Such an approach was rendered impossible by the insights of postmodernist linguistic theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. For Barthes, objectivity was a 'referential illusion', meaning historian's accounts of the past were based on a pretence. In principle, this rendered all historical interpretations equal. For Derrida, language was an 'infinite play of significations' with no 'transcendental signified'.¹⁴⁰ This meant that meaning did not exist outside of language, and that the meaning of a text altered each time it was read by an individual. Discourse was understood to determine the subjective experiences of the individual, defining their conduct and being in the social world.¹⁴¹ An eminent example of such an approach came from Joan W. Scott in 1991, who suggested that experience is 'a

¹³⁷ Louis Montrose, 'Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics of Politics and Culture' in *The New Historicism* ed. by Harold Aram Veeser (Routledge, 1989), p.20.

¹³⁸ Montrose, 'Professing the Renaissance', p.20.

¹³⁹ Harry Cocks & Matt Houlbrook, 'Introduction' in *The Modern History of Sexuality* ed. by H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.5.

¹⁴⁰ Richard J Evans, *In Defence of History* (Granta Books, 1997), pp.94-95.

¹⁴¹ Patrick Joyce, 'The End of Social History?' in *The Postmodern History Reader* ed. by Keith Jenkins (Routledge, 1997), p.346.

linguistic event'; 'it is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience'.¹⁴²

As Kathleen Canning states, 'much of the provocative rethinking and recasting' of 'tools, concepts and epistemologies' commonplace to historians came from outside of the historical discipline.¹⁴³ Alexander and Taylor note there was a 'growing concern with the constraints of subjectivity', as interdisciplinary engagement with linguistic theory prompted more scholars to consider how subjectivity was moulded by 'deep structures of power embedded in cultural life, especially in language and communicative practices' or discourse'.¹⁴⁴ Attempts to redefine keywords such as 'experience, agency, discourse and identity' were embedded in debates across disciplines, terms key to the vocabulary of social and women's historians.¹⁴⁵ If scholars were to adopt a poststructuralist stance, the vision of 'liberated subjectivity' that had fuelled history from below in the preceding decades was unobtainable, because it professed that experience was constituted by cultural and discursive constructs.¹⁴⁶ After the cultural turn, historians who believed the social to be clearly visible and easily describable had to contend with criticism that they were operating simplistically in relation to their subject from the historians who had embraced linguistic theory.¹⁴⁷ The appeal and adoption of poststructuralism was not uniform across the discipline and many scholars remained hostile. Most scholars, however, have neither fully embraced strict textual poststructuralism nor completely rejected it. Combining the aims of social

¹⁴² Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (1986), p.779.

¹⁴³ Kathleen Canning, 'Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 19, 2 (1994) p.368.

¹⁴⁴ Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, 'Introduction', in *History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis, and the Past*, ed. by Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.4.

¹⁴⁵ Canning, 'Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn', p.368.

¹⁴⁶ Alexander and Taylor, 'Introduction', p.4.

¹⁴⁷ Sasha Roseneil and Stephen Frosh, 'Social Research after the Cultural Turn: A (self) Critical Introduction' in ed. *Social Research After the Cultural Turn* (Basingstoke, 2012), p.12.

history with poststructuralist insights, many scholars have embraced the turn towards studying discourse, identity and construction but have also continued to search for histories of 'lived material existence' beyond discourse.¹⁴⁸

In this vein, this thesis studies discourse, identity and construction, but also searches for histories of lived experience. Canning suggests that if the body is understood as a complex site of inscription and of subjectivity and resistance, it can offer an interesting and intricate way of retheorizing agency.¹⁴⁹ Emily Martin's anthropological *The Woman in the Body*, and Young's philosophical *On Female Body Experience* are interdisciplinary studies of menstruation that provide a framework for writing about menstrual embodiment that offers the opportunity to unite histories of representation and experience.¹⁵⁰

In *The Woman in The Body*, Martin charts the way medical discourses on menstruation have been laced with metaphors of economy and alienation that have presented and implicitly evaluated the menstruating body in terms of its 'productivity' and ability to reproduce by describing menstruation in terms of 'loss' and 'failure'. Via interviews with women, she explores how these metaphors have shaped women's views and experiences of their bodies. Martin calls for more awareness of the way menstruation, as understood and experienced, consists of a co-existing phenomenological and medical explanation, 'one about how something feels, and what you do, rather than what is happening'. By paying attention to the women's articulations of the sensory and emotional experience of menstruation, Martin centres

¹⁴⁸ Montrose, 'Professing the Renaissance', p.20.

¹⁴⁹ Canning, 'Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn', p.397.

¹⁵⁰ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Beacon Press, 2001) and Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience "Throwing like a girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

what women see and feel. This aids an understanding of menstruation in its wholeness. She believes this might help reduce some of the associated disgust.¹⁵¹

In a similar vein, in 'Menstrual Meditations' Young reveals her intention to write an essay about the 'devaluation and oppression' typically associated with menstruation, followed by a 'woman'-centred account of the positives, which could rewrite social scripts. She supposes there was a 'positive female experience of the processes and meanings of menstruation...covered by patriarchal biases and interests.' Reflecting on her initial sentiments after conducting her research, she suggested 'we can learn many things from reflecting on menstrual experience... but a transvaluation of values is not likely'.¹⁵² Her essay is marked by an exploration of shame, stigma and social oppression born from the societal refusal to accept or accommodate menstruation. Like Martin, she also suggests a focus on feelings and sensations might be the antidote. This focus on 'feelings' and 'sensations' is typical of phenomenological approaches. Phenomenology proposes that an individual's lived body, their sensory perceptions, emotions and consciousness, inform a person's point of view of the world. This allows for an approach that centres the 'lived body', as opposed to gender, dealing with subjects, not structures.¹⁵³ Encouraged by this focus, Young questions the implicit assumption in much feminist literature that girls and women 'ought to have an accurate and complete understanding of the physiology of menstruation.' She states 'few men and women have a very accurate or complete understanding of the physiology of other internal bodily processes...this assumption that 'menstrual knowledge' is equivalent to medical science may itself contribute to a

¹⁵¹ Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, p.111.

¹⁵² Iris Marion Young, 'Menstrual Meditations' in *On Female Body Experience "Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays"* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p.97.

¹⁵³ I touch on 'phenomenology' more explicitly in chapter four. Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Cornell's University Press, 2001), pp.1-51.

sense of alienation women have from the process.¹⁵⁴ Certainly, women's accounts of what they wanted to learn about sex and menstruation as girls testify to this assumption.

Martin and Young both stress the benefits of engaging with narratives of menstrual experience from a phenomenological perspective. They believe this approach complements and enhances a history of menstrual experience in two ways. Firstly, it sets out theoretical questions and approaches that account for girls' and women's assessments of what knowledge about menstruation matters to them. Secondly, it does not frame their articulations in such a way to bolster the notion that medical explanations of menstruation in the past were the only or indeed an accurate way of describing and defining menstrual experience. Doing so de-privileges scientific readings of menstrual experience and amplifies attention to women's sensory and emotional experiences.

This thesis utilises these insights to analyse how women describe menstruation. It takes into account what subjects say about their embodied feelings and sensations, whilst also acknowledging how publicly circulating discourses about menstruation, like those born from medical cultures and advertising, might contribute to how women understood and articulated their experiences. This allows experiences to be understood as historically and socially specific, without requiring breaking apart the different elements of an individual's identity. Whilst acknowledging that identity politics and cultural understandings of sex and gender, and nature and culture might have informed how individuals understand themselves and interpret the world around them, the phenomenological 'lived body', as Young states, offers a 'means of

¹⁵⁴ Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p.102.

theorizing sexual subjectivity without danger of either biological reductionism or gender essentialism'.¹⁵⁵ This is particularly pertinent when it comes to understanding menstruation and menstruating bodies.

Structure

Chapter one of this thesis explores how Mass Observation and oral history collections can aid histories of menstrual 'experience' and subjectivity, and sets out this thesis' methodological approach. Part one begins with an overview of the role of oral history within the academy, a description of the oral histories consulted for this thesis, and an exploration of the methodological considerations inherent in re-using pre-existing oral history interviews. It outlines how historical approaches to the 'cultural circuit' and 'composure' informed analysis, and explores women's recollections of their girlhoods in relation to these theories. Part two of the chapter explores the history of Mass Observation and its use for historians interested in subjectivity. It then considers the similarities and differences between oral history and written Mass Observation responses, and how the two different approaches can be used in tandem to study subjectivity, before outlining the methodological engagement with Mass Observation material informing this thesis.

Chapter two begins with an overview of *Jackie*, *Honey* and *Petticoat* magazines, and details the adopted sampling method. This is followed by a discussion of how and why magazines have been used as historical sources by scholars, some of the issues inherent in early magazine analyses, and how more recent scholars have used alternative approaches to overcome early criticisms and blind spots. Following

¹⁵⁵ Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p.410.

this, it builds on the discussion of the benefits of personal testimony and histories of subjectivity for histories of magazines and menstruation laid out in chapter one by exploring women's reflections on magazines. Combining holistic magazine research with oral history and Mass Observation, it reveals women's own articulations of why magazines mattered to them during their girlhood, and their own assessments of the influence, relatability and validity of the menstrual discourses that they contained. Foregrounding analysis of magazine content with women's accounts of their engagements with them, this chapter provides a degree of difficult-to-access, bottom up context regarding the atmosphere into which menstrual discourses were published and circulated. Following this, it outlines the adopted methodological approach to magazine analysis, and the scholarship informing it. Each of the approaches, sources and reflections outlined aim to ensure that this thesis considers both magazines and their readers as wholly as possible.

Chapter three explores how girls learnt about menstruation. It explores women's memories of girlhood sex education, discussions of sex and menstruation with friends and family and first menses. These accounts are situated in relation to existing literature on sex education policy, delivery and reception in the postwar period. This chapter reveals that women's reflections on menstrual education were often structured around a continued emphasis on its insufficiency and the prevalence of shame and secrecy to their adolescent understandings. It builds on the findings of previous scholars that girls wanted holistic sex and menstrual education attuned to the emotional, physical and interpersonal dimensions. It explores the role of magazines in girls' sex education and how scientific modes of representation were adopted to deliver narratives of menstrual invisibility and hygiene imbued with a sense of medical

authority and educative value. It also highlights the tensions between menstrual visibility and invisibility inherent in magazine discourse.

Chapter four looks at the relationship between menstrual technology and the body. It pays specific attention to the representation of bodies in menstrual advertising, namely the significance of dress, fashion and fashion photography to depictions of emotional states and feminine selfhood in adverts for menstrual products. It also explores women's accounts of wearing menstrual technology during girlhood, specifically the relationship between the menstruating body, menstrual technology, clothing and the body. Focussing on women's recollections of the sensory aspects of wearing menstrual technology, and the emotional reactions associated with bleeding, wearing technologies and dressing whilst menstruating, this chapter takes an explicitly phenomenological approach. This approach reveals that girls' ability to navigate their environment was impinged by ill-fitting and unreliable menstrual technology, and by menstrual stigma that morally coded visible menstrual blood as a failure of hygiene and femininity.

Chapter five considers menstrual pain. It looks at magazine advertisements for over-the-counter painkillers, charting how these representations defined, described and depicted premenstrual pain. It reveals that distinctly gendered medical understandings of illnesses and their sufferers resonating from the base assumption that women's bodies were inherently pathological structured analgesic advertising way into the 1970s. Following this it explores women's recollections of their painful (pre)menstrual experiences in relation to multidisciplinary studies about gender disparities in medical treatment of pain and the cultural validity of menstrual pain. Testimony reveals the precarious position of menstrual pain in the cultural imagination of women and girls in postwar Britain, how it was perceived as something to be

endured, not talked about or displayed in excess, and how this affected how girls responded to their own pain, and the pain of others too.

How then, did girls in 1960s and 1970s Britain learn about menstruation? What representations of menstruation did they have to contend with in magazines like *Jackie*, *Honey* and *Petticoat*? What did they know about their own bodies and what were their experiences of menstruation like? How do women reflect on their past menstrual experiences orally and in writing, and how do these relate to the present? These questions are at the heart of this thesis, and explored throughout each of its chapters. Using girls' magazines, Mass Observation Directive responses, and pre-existing oral history interviews, this thesis historicises girls' menstrual experiences in Britain in the period 1960-1980, contributing to historical scholarship on girlhood, mass-market magazines and menstruation in Britain in the period 1960–1980 and on the process of writing histories of subjectivity more broadly.

Chapter One

Oral History, Mass Observation and Histories of Girlhood Menstrual Experience

Mass Observation and oral history are helpful sources for studying menstrual discourse, 'experience' and subjectivity, as they centre the voices and experiences of ordinary people. As Tinkler has stated, 'discourse is not a straitjacket' and although it is not always easy 'women may take up dominant meanings, seek to resist them, position themselves in a counter discourse' or 'seek to invent new discourses'.¹⁵⁶ Part one of this chapter reflects briefly on the history of oral history within the academy, and the criticisms and praise it has amassed. Building on this, it outlines oral history's suitability for a study of girlhood menstrual experiences, details the oral history collection consulted for this thesis and reflects on issues of reuse. Following this, it outlines the theoretical insights brought to analysis of personal testimony, offering examples from the Body, Self and Family (BSF) interviews that bolster existing understandings of the slippery nature of memory, composure, and the cultural circuit.

Part two explores the history of Mass Observation, and outlines its usefulness for studying historical subjectivity. It considers the similarities and differences between oral history and Mass Observation, and the benefits of using both sources in conjunction to study subjective menstrual experience. Lastly, it outlines the methodological engagement with Mass Observation material guiding this thesis. The approaches described in this chapter frame all subsequent analysis of personal testimony in this thesis.

¹⁵⁶ Penny Tinkler, *Smoke Signals, Women Smoking and Visual Culture in Britain* (Berg English, 2006), p.4.

The implications of COVID-19 on the scope of this thesis and access to source material are outlined below. As stated in the notes on sources, COVID-19 necessitated a substantial reorientation of this thesis from conducting and analysing oral history interviews, to studying those conducted for the BSF project in conjunction with MO directive responses about menstruation. Time constraints and the process of reorientation impacted the research process. Subsequently, I utilise 16 oral history interviews with women who experienced girlhood in the period 1960-1980 in this thesis. Whilst 56 Mass Observation directives fell within the sample of women who experienced girlhood between 1960 and 1980, I address 30 testimonies in this thesis. The sample of 30 addressed in this thesis contain some 'outliers'. These outliers consist of responses from women who experienced girlhood before, or after the period 1960-1980. These responses are drawn on to highlight the potentiality for similarities and changes in menstrual experience over time, although the small number considered means this thesis does not attempt to draw statistically significant conclusions about generational difference and similarity. One outlier was born in 1919, and experienced her first period in 1932, whilst at other points this thesis draws on the testimony from women who were teenagers in the late 1980s, or at the time they wrote their directive responses in 1996. These generational differences are considered explicitly in the conclusion to this thesis. The impact of COVID-19 on magazine research is considered explicitly in chapter two, 'menstruation in girls' magazines'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Magazines as Historical Sources, pp.109-110.

Part One: Oral History

The Purpose of Oral History

Oral history has been flagged by historians as offering unparalleled opportunities to understand, record and amplify histories of marginalised groups since the proliferation of its use in the 1970s and 1980s. As Summerfield states, the lives of individuals who make up the intersecting categories of women, workers, black people and the colonised, have typically been excluded from the historical record.¹⁵⁸ Elizabeth Roberts stresses that ‘ordinary people’ rarely kept diaries or wrote letters, and that if they did, their status meant that the preservation of these materials was not deemed necessary.¹⁵⁹ Positioned initially as the recovery of lost voices and histories, oral history was overtly politicised. Interviews conducted with living, ‘ordinary’ subjects about their own experiences were seen to offer an opportunity for a host of new understandings, sources, and historical interpretations that also challenged existing preconceptions about whose voices and stories mattered.

Historians who worked on areas of life deemed ‘private’ valued the unparalleled opportunity to find out about topics like the domestic, family, sexuality, emotions and health with the subjectivity of ‘ordinary’ people at the fore. As historians of sexuality, Houlbrook and Cocks have suggested that testimony is ‘extraordinarily important’ and the most ‘authoritative, authentic and irreducible form of evidence’ for rescuing those

¹⁵⁸ Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (Routledge, 2019), p.106.

¹⁵⁹ Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 3.

'marginal and voiceless people from the past, restoring their agency and understanding their worldview'.¹⁶⁰

Its use, however, attracted greater criticism than other established historical approaches.¹⁶¹ Much of this criticism, which lies in the past, revolved around its reliance on memory.¹⁶² Eric Hobsbawm believed this made it unreliable and unsuitable for fact-finding, and therefore redundant.¹⁶³ Yet the very aspects some scholars were berating, were the reasons its advocates found it valuable. In 1979, the *History Workshop* editorial collective suggested 'the difficulty lies in the fact that memory does not constitute pure recall: the memory of any particular event is refracted through layer upon layer of subsequent experience'.¹⁶⁴ Historians interested in the nature of subjectivity and memory, and in destabilising understandings of written history as objective truth, were interested in these anecdotes and misrememberings, the presence of the interviewer in the room, the relationship formed with the interviewee, and the minutiae of subjective experience. This prompted a shift from oral history being positioned solely as a vehicle for the retrieval of facts, to being seen as an opportunity to explore *how* people remember and construct narratives about their lives, and to engage with theoretical debates about how historians can access histories of

¹⁶⁰ Harry Cocks & Matt Houlbrook, 'Introduction' in *The Modern History of Sexuality* ed. by Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.5.

¹⁶¹ Summerfield, *Histories of the Self*, p.107.

¹⁶² Lynn Abrams notes that such criticisms nowadays are rare in 'Memory as Both Source and Subject of study: The Transformations of Oral History', in *Writing the History of Memory* ed. by Bill Niven and Stefan Berger (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p.89.

¹⁶³ Summerfield notes that there was lively upset regarding oral history at many conferences, but that one of the only written criticisms of the same tone was Hobsbawm. *On History* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), p.206m Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1, (2004), pp.65-93. See also Alistair Thomson, 'Making the Most of Memories: The Empirical and Subjective Value of Oral History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9, (1999), pp.291-301.

¹⁶⁴ Editorial', *History Workshop*, 8 (1979) p. iii in Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p.66.

'experience' in light of poststructuralist assertions that experience beyond discourse was a myth.

Alessandro Portelli concludes, 'memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings.'¹⁶⁵ Oral history came to represent a dialogue between the past and the present, a reflective kind of testimony that was uniquely subjective, and therefore uniquely insightful for understanding the everyday lives of historical subjects in the recent past. Part of the work of oral history now involves contemplating what meanings are being created by interviewees and why. For Summerfield, the idea that memory is fallible, and that it is not necessarily independent of cultural influences but is shaped or constructed by them, is 'an inevitability that needs analysing. The starting point is to accept that people do not simply remember what happened to them, but make sense of the subject matter they recall by interpreting it'.¹⁶⁶

Oral history lends itself to histories of intimate, private and understudied areas of women's lives, as it can amplify marginalised voices, and because it can allow historians to explore how memory, narrative and subjectivity operate. It lends itself particularly well to the study of intimate bodily health, sex, the body and menstruation, where sources that centre women's voices and experiences are sparse. Whilst magazines offer the opportunity to explore representations of women's and girls' lives and menstrual practices in the past, they do not reveal much about the emotional interiority or the day-to-day life of the individuals who read them.

¹⁶⁵ Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different?', in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.37.

¹⁶⁶ Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p.67.

Listening to what women remember about, and how they narrate, their past menstrual experiences is a fruitful yet underexplored area of study that sheds light on the history of menstruation, and girls' everyday health in the postwar period. Oral history also offers the opportunity to explore reader opinions of mass-market magazines, a facet of the history of magazines that has often been deprioritised, but is essential for understanding magazines effectively.¹⁶⁷ What women say about magazines in oral history interviews offers the opportunity to explore how women engaged with magazines as girls, and whether magazines provided them with any knowledge about menstruation. As Canning suggests oral history allows 'historians to untangle the relationships between discourses and experiences, by exploring the ways subjects mediate or transform discourses made available to them.'¹⁶⁸ Oral histories reveal that women do, at times, draw on publicly circulating discourses about menstruation to articulate their experiences, but that they also criticise the discourses presented to them in the representations they encounter.

BSF Oral History Collection

The oral history interviews consulted for this thesis are from a collection of interviews conducted and collated by Tracey Loughran, Daisy Payling and Kate Mahoney as a part of the BSF project researching 'Women's Psychological, Emotional and Bodily

¹⁶⁷ See chapter two for detailed discussion of scholarship on reader voices in histories of women's magazines.

¹⁶⁸ Kathleen Canning, 'Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn: Historicising Discourse and Experience', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 19:2 (1994), pp.368-404.

Health in Britain c.1960-1990'.¹⁶⁹ The interviews were undertaken between 2017 and 2021, initially in person, and remotely from 2020 onward. Recruitment took multiple forms. This included advertising the project via flyers handed out or kept in public spaces, calling for participants in the Essex Alumni magazine, and online via Facebook. Community awareness of the project snowballed via word of mouth, as conversations between communities led to organically established interest from women who wanted to contribute, and held a shared sense of the importance of recording hidden histories of women's everyday health. The collection contains ninety-one rich and detailed life stories that will be archived at the British Library from 2022; accessible to anyone interested in listening to, engaging with, and analysing their content.

The interviews took a life history approach, and were loosely chronological in shape, starting in early childhood, and ending in the present (2021). Using the broadest possible descriptive categories, interview questions were grouped under the areas, 'Childhood & Growing Up', 'Adolescence, Adult Life and Relationships', 'Health and Medical Experiences' and 'Reflections' (see appendix 4 for interview schedule, and appendix 5 for list of biographical information for oral history participants discussed in this thesis). Due to the nature of memory, and due to the way many topics relating to health span a lifetime, this chronology was expectedly unstable.

Stories, however, are rarely told in a linear fashion. As Carolyn Steedman reminds us, 'history doesn't have to be linear'. Historical time may or may not shape a person's narrative, and the historian can 'move about amid the order of things, present

¹⁶⁹This thesis forms part of the Wellcome Trust-funded project 'Body, Self and Family: Women's Psychological, Emotional and Bodily Health in Britain, c. 1960-1990.' For more on the BSF project as a whole see, 'Body, Self and Family' website, <https://bodyselffamily.org/> [accessed, 17/06/2021].

ends before beginnings, and write thematically among the dates'.¹⁷⁰ Discussions of menstruation typically arose in the 'adolescence' part of the interview, in response to the question 'how did your relationship with your body change as you were growing up?'. Participants occasionally returned to discuss menstruation at various points in the interview as discussion of other life events triggered past memories. In some cases, it was brought up in response to questions about first memories of health, as some girls recalled seeing their mother's painful periods. If interviewees, or any of their family members, had experienced any gynaecological issues throughout their lifetime, they often talked about menstruation again in the 'health and medical experiences' section too.

Participants often mentioned magazines when asked about where they gathered information about health from as a girl. These conversations typically happened in the 'adolescence' part of the interview too. Questions specifically about magazines were not a consistent feature of the schedule, but the fact magazines still came up in relation to discussions of girlhood and sources of information about health points to their role in girls' lives, and the role of public forms in the formation of personal memories and life stories. It is unfortunate that I did not have the opportunity ask any follow up questions pertinent to the themes of this thesis. Yet this highlights a key difference between conducting and reusing interviews that needs to be addressed.

Reusing Oral Histories

¹⁷⁰ Carolyn Steedman *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (Rivers Oram Press, 1992), p.49.

Reusing pre-existing oral history collections elicits different ethical, methodological and analytical considerations to designing and conducting interviews. As Loughran and Mahoney note, within the literature on oral history theory and practice there is a 'real gap around the issue of (re)use'.¹⁷¹ This gap in knowledge makes it difficult to situate the approach adopted in this study in relation to existing ideas and understandings about the difference between conducting interviews and (re)using pre-existing oral history collections. Notwithstanding, the limited scholarship that has contemplated the potential pitfalls is addressed below.¹⁷²

Some pitfalls include the need for the historian to reimagine the original interview interaction, the lack of biographical context about the interviewer, interviewee, historical or contemporary context and climate in which the interviews were being undertaken, potentially different motivations for using the material to the original researchers, or the intention to use a small part of the interview for their own research. Loughran and Mahoney have noted that this historical cherry-picking 'potentially limits researchers' awareness and analysis of the oral history narratives that existing projects contain, an issue that simultaneously affects their capacity to engage with the original context of the interviews that they are exploring'.¹⁷³ Some of these criticisms are highly relevant to this (re)use of interviews, but some of them do not quite fit.

As Loughran and Mahoney note, when re-using oral history interviews, the historian is 'not required, or even able to, embody the research encounter' in the way

¹⁷¹ Tracey Loughran and Kate Mahoney, 'Sideways Glimpses of "Everyday Health": (Re)using, (Re)Visiting, and (Re)Contextualising Oral History Collections', (unpublished paper) p.1.

¹⁷² Joanna Bornat, 'A Second Take: Revisiting Interviews with a Different Purpose', *Oral History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 47-53, Joanna Bornat, 'Secondary analysis in reflection: some experiences of re-use from an oral history perspective', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2013), pp. 309-17, Loughran and Mahoney, 'Sideways Glimpses', p.1

¹⁷³ Loughran and Mahoney, 'Sideways Glimpses', p.20.

that those conducting interviews do, displaying and retaining their 'presence' in the interview through their sitting, nodding, listening and asking questions.¹⁷⁴ Bornat reflects on the complicated process of conducting interviews, stating, 'preparation for the interview not only involves familiarising oneself with the context of a person's life, their occupation, community, generation and the public chronology of their time, it also means developing social and interpersonal skills, listening capabilities as well as qualities of empathy and sensitivity.'¹⁷⁵ Developing relationships with participants based on these values is a key locus of feminist oral history objectives. Feminist oral history objectives relating to intersubjectivity can broadly be defined as an attempt to foster a non-hierarchical, trusting and comfortable relationship between interviewer and interviewee, facilitated by a schedule made up of open questions and attentive listening that enables the interviewee to have a say in what is discussed and at what point in the interview.¹⁷⁶

I engaged less directly with feminist concerns regarding intersubjectivity, because the reuse of interview material meant I did not establish actual relationships with research participants. My consideration of intersubjectivity has been mostly theoretical, and has involved reflection on the interactions between other researchers

¹⁷⁴ Loughran and Mahoney, 'Sideways Glimpses', p.4.

¹⁷⁵ Bornat, 'A Second Take', p.50.

¹⁷⁶ For discussions of the 'usefulness' of 'intersubjectivity' and feminist approaches to oral history see Kathryn Anderson, Susan Armitage, Dana Jack, and Judith Wittner, 'Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, 15 (1987) pp.103-127, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (Routledge, 2013), Patricia Leavy, 'The Practice of Feminist Oral History and Focus Group Interviews', in *Feminist Research Practice* ed. by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy (Sage Publications, 2007) pp.149-186, Ann Oakley, 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms' in *Doing Feminist Research* ed. by Helen Roberts (Routledge, 1981) pp.30-61, Juliette Pattinson, "'The thing that made me hesitate....' Re-examining Gendered Intersubjectivities in Interviews with British Secret War Veterans', *Women's History Review*, 20:2 (2011), pp.245-263, Helen Roberts, 'Introduction', in *Doing Feminist Research* ed. by Helen Roberts (Routledge, 1981), Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, 1988).

and the interviewees, and considering how the intersubjective relationship might have contributed to the dynamic between individuals and memories presented in an interview.

Although relative proximity to the original research project does not equate to the process of interviewing, proximity to the original project was an important factor affecting my research process, relationship with material and the common criticisms of reuse. I had direct access to transcripts that had already been produced, a degree of insight into the design of the oral history schedule, and an awareness of the contemporary context in which the interview took place, because interviews were consulted in real time as they were being created and stored. Group transcript analysis meetings for the early phase of oral history production provided the opportunity to hear each other's reflections and interpretations of the interview, and to hear reflexive descriptions of interview interactions. This group analysis hugely improved analytical engagement with source material, whilst also familiarising me with the life story of each participant. Notwithstanding, proximity to the project lessened reliance on historical imagination. Motivations for consulting the interviews were in line with the overarching motivations of those on the original project, however, by focussing specifically on girlhood menstrual experiences, research centred on the areas of the interview where this was discussed at the expense of an explorative life history.

Twenty-two BSF interviews from women born after 1950 were consulted as part of the transcript analysis sessions. Sixteen feature in this thesis due to the impact of COVID-19 on my schedule and thesis orientation. They belong to women who experienced girlhood and young womanhood from 1960 onwards, and contain particularly insightful reflections on girlhood and menstruation. They form the basis of an in-depth analysis of women's descriptions of girlhood menstrual experiences,

drawing together parallels in experience and common themes whilst remaining conscious that each oral history is unique. As Lynn Abrams notes, the same interview with the same respondent on a different day would likely elicit a different interview entirely, because interviewees are story tellers, they are creative in their responses, influenced by a multitude of factors and no number of oral history interviews can remove this subjective edge.¹⁷⁷ Analysis of oral testimony features alongside analysis of testimony from thirty-one Mass Observers. This analysis considered the idiosyncrasies and similarities in experiences of historical subjects between 1960 and 1980, and of recording experiences orally and in writing.

Analysing Oral Histories

The study of what is said, *how* it is said, and *why* it is said, and how this is shaped by cultural influences is central to gleaning the most from oral history interviews. Memory is not just the source, but the subject of historical study.¹⁷⁸ Awareness that memories hold deep personal significance and sometimes a wider community significance, can reflect the intensely personal and the general, can be forgotten, suppressed, left unmentioned and can change over time, enhances engagements with oral testimony.

Notions of ‘composure’ help to explain the psychic and social processes that drive storytelling and the recounting of memories.¹⁷⁹ ‘Composure’ refers to the way

¹⁷⁷ Lynn Abrams, ‘Memory as a source and subject of study in oral histories of post-war lives, paper given at Tagung Oral History, 2016 , Available at, <https://vimeo.com/193857511> , [Accessed 18/06/2021]

¹⁷⁸ See chapter on ‘Memory’ in Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* 2nd Edition (Routledge, 2016), pp.78-106.

¹⁷⁹ Listed chronologically, Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living With the Legend* (Melbourne and New York, 1987), Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of*

stories about the past are fashioned by individuals; the way they 'compose' a narrative about their lives that makes sense to them. In his work on soldier masculinities, Graham Dawson suggests storytelling creates 'a perspective for the self' to make sense of events, so that 'troubling, disturbing aspects may be "managed", worked through, contained, repressed.' He notes that during this process, events that an individual wishes to narrativise may become bound to the storyteller's fantasies, 'a site of imaginary scenarios with desired and feared outcomes, narrated "as if" they had "really happened"'. Each fantasy represents a number of possible selves to the individual, each with differing degrees of power and effect in the social world.¹⁸⁰

'Composure' has a dual signification, however, and also refers to the way that storytelling involves 'a subjective orientation of the self within the social relations of its world'. The story told is always the preferred version, as this allows the individual to orchestrate a satisfying and coherent narrative, and a version of the self that can be lived with in relative psychic comfort. Dawson calls this 'subjective composure', and suggests it is an 'inescapably social process', because storytelling relies on social recognition, and the social recognition offered within any specific public depends on that public's cultural values. Some stories are more valuable, appropriate and recognisable than others, depending on how similar they are, or how much they relate

Masculinities, (Routledge, 1994), Alistair Thomson, 'Making the Most of Memories: The Empirical and Subjective Value of Oral History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9, (1999), pp.291-301, Michael Roper, 'Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: the Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 50:1 (2000) pp.181-204, Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1, (2004), Lyn Abrams, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World: Shetland 1800-2000* (Manchester University Press, 2005), Penny Summerfield, 'Public Memory or Public Amnesia? British Women of the Second World War in Popular Films of the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of British Studies*, 48:4 (2009), pp. 935-57, Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the great war* (Manchester University Press, 2010), pp.65-93.

¹⁸⁰ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.22

to private or public forms of storytelling. This impacts the way a narrative is told, and resultantly the kind of composure that is possible.

Historians have drawn on Richard Johnson's concept of the 'cultural circuit' to understand why and how certain narratives become more 'appropriate' or recognisable than others in historically specific contexts, and how this relates to the memories individuals have, and the stories they 'compose' about their lives.¹⁸¹ Dawson suggests the cultural circuit has played a role in constituting the figure of the soldier hero as a longstanding and readily accessible form of British masculinity. In his analysis he distinguishes between private forms, local or particular public forms, and general public forms of soldier masculinity. This is a distinction that can also aid a study of menstrual discourse in Britain in the period 1960-1980.

Private forms refer to personal or individual stories which may, or may not, have shared, communal meaning, relating to the characteristic life experiences of particular communities and social groups. Local or particular public forms are different in that they have a wider reach than personal stories, but have a particularity and concreteness that distinguishes them from more generally available public forms. Dawson suggests working-class families or military regiments remain 'localized, particular' publics for soldier's stories. By contrast public forms include national discourses of the soldier as national hero, which construe notions of military service in more abstract and generalized terms of national identity. News stories, comics and feature films are more general public forms, abstracted from everyday life in the form of a text. Because they are abstracted, public forms become detached from their immediate context, but achieve a more general distribution than more limited or local

¹⁸¹ Richard Johnson, 'What is cultural studies anyway?' *Anglistica*, 26:1-2, (1983), pp.26-39 in Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, pp.24-25.

forms because they are fuelled by large-scale cultural production such as print and broadcasting.

To make his point about the cultural circuit, Dawson draws on Valerie Walkerdine's research on girls' magazines. Walkerdine suggests magazines 'pick up and represent some elements of the private [local] cultures of femininity by which young girls live their lives', render these elements open to public evaluation as trivial, generalise the cultural forms that go into their making, and redistribute the raw material for thousands of girl-readers to make their own re-appropriations of elements first borrowed from their lived culture and forms of subjectivity. As Dawson notes, 'the power of established public representations ensures that all local public forms are forced to relate to and negotiate these general framing assumptions about "real femininity"'. Thus, personal stories that chime with public forms of storytelling, or narratives, will likely garner more social recognition, and those that differ might be expressed in terms of positioning in relation to such public forms. As Dawson notes, 'the narrative resources of a culture - its repertoire of shared and recognized forms - therefore functions as a currency of recognizable social identities.'¹⁸² This exploration of how magazines relate to the cultural circuit sets out how and why it is useful to explore magazines and personal testimony in tandem when attempting to understand historical girlhood experiences. Further, it has elicited further research questions about the relationship between menstrual discourses featured in magazines and the cultural circuit.

Menstruation was culturally positioned and understood as innately private. In the period 1960-1980 most menstrual discourse and discussion remained at what

¹⁸² Valerie Walkerdine, *Schoolgirl Fictions* (Verso, 1990), in Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, pp.22-23.

Dawson would describe as the 'private' or 'personal' level. Menstrual narratives circulated at a localised level too in publics like a classroom, a cohort of girls, a family, or a friendship group. Menstruation was also sporadically represented in mass culture, a general public form, which operated as a 'girl's world' and a national community. Menstruation had and continues to have, however, a contentious relationship to general public forms. Magazines were some of the only public spaces in which menstruation was represented until the advent of trial runs at TV advertising for menstrual products in 1972.¹⁸³ Girls past and present have had to navigate these depictions and 'framing assumptions' about 'real' menstruation in the media. In the period 1960-1980 these depictions came mostly in the form of adverts for menstrual technology that framed it through a language of invisibility. Girls consumed adverts, but these 'public' discourses still retained a degree of privacy in the girls' magazine. Menstruation, and the discourses of invisibility, concealment and secrecy that defined its representation, blurred the boundary between private and public forms, and the local and the general forms. The representations made public declarations about menstrual privacy and secrecy. Menstruation was made public whilst adverts simultaneously reiterated that it was an innately private matter.

The notion of public and private forms help to make sense of why much MO testimony reveals a backlash to menstrual advertising being shown on TV in the 1990s. There is a sense in personal testimony that women disliked this shift from magazine advertising to TV, and resented this increasing visibility, particularly because people who did not 'need' to see adverts, because they did not menstruate, could see them. Accounts flagged that the adverts were unrealistic, misrepresentative

¹⁸³ Daisy Payling, 'Selling Shame: Feminine Hygiene Advertising and the Boundaries of Permissiveness in 1970s Britain', (under review at *Gender & History*).

and flattening of their experiences, reflecting the ways stories can lose their significance as they become forms for public consumption. These public forms, and the language, imagery and signs they contained, however, became a part of a general lexicon, structuring how women reflected on their personal experiences, even if part of their reflections were a critique of them. Such reflections on advertising are explored in more detail in the next chapter.

The cultural circuit then, accounts for the interrelation between public and private forms of menstrual discourse and offers a framework for interpreting women's responses to magazine and TV menstrual advertising. Scholars that have looked specifically at how TV representations fuel the cultural circuit and shape personal memories and stories offer further insights. Summerfield's research on women in the Home Guard during the Second World War found that the silence surrounding such experiences was partly due to the lack of large-scale representation of women's experiences in the Home Guard, which meant there was a gendered dimension to the cultural memory of the Home Guard. Popular portrayals like *Get Cracking* or *Dad's Army* did not account for women's experiences in any great detail, and she found that this altered how women reflected on and recalled their own experiences.¹⁸⁴ Alistair Thomson's work with Anzac veterans of the First World War found that they described scenes from *Gallipoli*, released shortly before his research, as if they were accounts of their own experience, suppressing their own memories if they did not fit with the depictions of soldier masculinity presented in the film.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', pp.65-93.

¹⁸⁵ Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia', *Oral History*, 18, 2 (1990) pp. 25–31.

As Summerfield states, the cultural circuit refers to the way that memory is 'fallible, and that it is not necessarily independent of cultural influences but is shaped or constructed by them...people do not simply remember what happened to them, but make sense of the subject matter they recall by interpreting it'.¹⁸⁶ The cultural circuit, and idea of 'memories-outside-discourse' is crucial to thinking about how women tell their stories about girlhood in general, and menstrual experience more specifically, because culturally validated ways of talking about menstruation are relatively sparse. As outlined, magazines and advertising were some of the most culturally, publicly and widely available representations of menstruation available to girls, and so their relationship to memory and accounts of experience is worthy of study.

This does not mean that personal memory can *only* be recalled through the prism of public discourse, but that there is a two-way relationship, 'a feedback loop, between the personal or autographical account and culture'.¹⁸⁷ Helena Mills' research into women's memories of their 1960s youths demonstrate this point, as she explores the way women confidently critiqued popular memories of the 1960s when they did not fit with their own experiences. Her research reveals that women were still negotiating between the popular and the personal when constructing their narratives, a sentiment that this thesis takes as its starting point too.¹⁸⁸

The BSF interviews provide the chance to explore women's negotiations of popular representations and understandings of menstruation. Interviews revealed women's investments in other aspects of popular culture, news and media, beyond menstrual representation, at the time they were interviewed, and how these

¹⁸⁶ Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p.67.

¹⁸⁷ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p.95.

¹⁸⁸ Helena Mills, 'Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth', *Contemporary British History*, 30:4 (2016), pp.463-483,

conversations acted as scaffolding for how they understood, reproached, reinterpreted and articulated memories of their girlhood experiences. The number of interviews where women reflected on past experiences of sexual harassment and assault, with some outright referencing the #metoo movement that was gaining traction and coverage in the popular press and social media at the time the interviews were undertaken, also demonstrate the impact of the cultural circuit.

Kirsty, born in 1953, considered how different and/ or similar her girlhood experiences were to those of girls growing up to today. She mentioned the 'Me Too Campaign' as a notable difference. She stated, the 'men in authority are on wobbly ground, erm, and that didn't exist when I was young. Men took what they wanted, and they would sexually abuse their employees if they wanted to, it was common. It was, you know, it was there, and you couldn't do a thing about it.'¹⁸⁹ Kirsty's decision to frame her evaluation of her young adulthood experiences of employment in relation to current conversations about sexual assault suggests that contemporary pop cultural discourse had provided her with a framework for revisiting, recreating and reframing her past experiences, and the opportunity to construct a narrative that also offers her a sense of 'composure'.

There were interviews where participants referred to specific TV shows to describe their experiences, demonstrating the way the 'cultural circuit' informs memory. Tracey (b.1964) referred to the programme *Ashes to Ashes* when talking

¹⁸⁹ Oral history interviews collected for the project Body, Self, and Family: Women's Psychological, Emotional, and Bodily Health in Britain, c. 1960-1990, currently undeposited. Hereafter BSF OH. Interviews conducted by Daisy Payling (DP), Tracey Loughran (TL), and Kate Mahoney (KM). See Appendix 2 for further details. Kirsty, BSF OH, interview by DP 06.03.2020, Track 1 [0:42:12]. Other examples include, Rachel, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 25.1.18, Track 1 [1:17:03], Lisa, BSF OH, interviewed by DP 9.12.19, Track 1 of 2 [0:36:22].

about her experiences of ‘terrible sexist abuse’ whilst working for the police in the 1980s. She asked the interviewer,

I don't know if you've ever seen the programme *Ashes to Ashes*?

Mmm.

Yeah, well, it was classic *Ashes to Ashes*, women were very much, erm, the tea-makers and, you know, erm, subjected to some terrible sexist abuse really. Nowadays women wouldn't put up with it, you know.¹⁹⁰

For Tracey, *Ashes to Ashes* acted as a reference point for conveying her experience to the interviewer. By comparing her experiences in the 1980s to the present day, and by comparing how she managed the abuse in the past with her interpretation of how women today might respond her testimony revealed, as Summerfield states, that ‘the language, tropes and narrative forms through which experiences are publicly represented can easily be absorbed into personal narratives.’¹⁹¹

Other women also used TV shows as reference points for articulating memories of their own experiences. *Call the Midwife* featured in some women's descriptions of their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. On some occasions women just wanted to express to the researcher how historically accurate they found it, believing it could adequately convey a sense of what their own experiences looked like.¹⁹² Ada (b.1957)

¹⁹⁰ Tracey, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 17.5.18, Track 1 [0:11:04]

¹⁹¹ Summerfield, *Histories of the Self*, p.118.

¹⁹² See Sian, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 23.1.18, track 1 [1:48:59], Ada, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 10.3.18, Track 1 [00:29:08]. Floss, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 13.2.18, track 1 [0:41:56] for examples.

drew on a specific scene from a recent episode so she could describe the menstrual protection she used. She asked the interviewer,

I remember the sanitary towels, right? Do you watch, *Call the Midwife*?

Yes. Yeah, I have.

Yeah, did you see the one where she was doing the talk, there was a recent one where she was doing the talking about periods and things, and saying that they could use tampons, or you could use these, you know, this sort of like a garter thing that you attached it to, and I remember being presented with that, and thought, 'God, I'm not wearing that!' I think I did wear it for a short while, and then very quickly, you know, worked out about tampons. I think, er, I think having an older sister probably helped me there, because I think Mum had probably been through it with my older sister. Yeah.¹⁹³

For Ada, *Call the Midwife* acted as a common reference between her and the interviewer that helped her to explain her experience. It provided her with a way of remembering, assessing and describing her own experiences of using menstrual protection during her girlhood and to comment on the role of her family members in influencing her habits.¹⁹⁴

Building on these insights, the next chapter explores the relationship between representations and experiences, the popular and the personal, and memory and the cultural circuit in more detail. Using concrete examples of women's engagements with representations of menstruation in magazines and on TV, it explores the history of girls' menstrual experience in Britain 1960-1980, and the ways that private, public and

¹⁹³ Floss, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 13.2.18, track 1 [00:29:08].

¹⁹⁴ Summerfield states that sometimes, if cultural representations are lacking, people might provide intense justifications for telling their own stories. Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', p.93

general forms of storytelling, and discourses of menstruation, inform oral and written testimony on the topic.

Part Two: Mass Observation

Alongside oral history, responses to the 1996 Mass Observation Directive 'Women's Sanitary Protection & Menstruation' kept at the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) have been key to exploring everyday understandings, experiences and accounts of menstruation. The qualitative, written responses contain retrospective accounts about girlhood menstrual experiences at various points between 1960 and 1980 making them suited to a study of memory.

Like oral history, ambiguities and uncertainties are what make Mass Observation an appealing source for exploring modern selfhood. MO material does not lend itself to a study of objectivity, positivism and representative 'truths'. When approaching MO material, ambiguities should be embraced, rather than critiqued for their accuracy, factuality or representativeness. As Mike Savage writes, 'there is no way to produce "aggregate" findings. Samples for qualitative research rarely (if ever) approximate to the kind of representative sample that allow quantitative researchers to report national demographic trends.'¹⁹⁵ Whilst, as James Hinton states, 'nothing can be proved from a handful of individual cases', a study of them still has the potential to

¹⁹⁵ Mike Savage, 'Changing Social Class Identities in Post-War Britain: Perspectives from Mass Observation', *Historical Social Research*, 33:3 (2008), p.49.

enrich understanding of a topic.¹⁹⁶ If the historian's aim is to focus on individual subjectivity, identity, understandings of the self and of wider society, then the perceived 'pitfalls' of MO material are insignificant.

This section outlines the usefulness of Mass Observation to a study of everyday experiences of menstruation and some of the approaches informing the study of this material. Following this, it explores the similarities and differences between engaging with Mass Observation material and oral history testimony, and how they work together to aid a history of menstrual experience.

The Purpose of Mass Observation

First founded in 1937, Mass Observation was concerned with capturing ordinary existence and day-to-day mundanities. Before the Second World War, the Mass Observation movement took different forms, including the establishment of a panel of voluntary observers of daily life, diarists and respondents to questionnaires. The first phase was characterised by what Hinton defines as 'cross currents of radicalism', a desire to document the everyday and to democratise sociological knowledge, with the overarching aim of impacting the way 'ordinary' people and political institutions interacted.¹⁹⁷ The MOA was created in 1970, and the Mass Observation Project (MOP) in 1980.¹⁹⁸ The establishment of both has ensured that existing materials are safeguarded, and that the recording and study of everyday life can continue. Since its renewal at the University of Sussex in 1981, the MOP has sent Directives to its volunteers, ceasing with other means of collecting qualitative accounts of everyday

¹⁹⁶ James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self*, (Oxford, 2010), p.18.

¹⁹⁷ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, p.2.

¹⁹⁸ Annabella Pollen, 'Research Methodology in Mass Observation Past and Present: 'Scientifically, about as valuable as a chimpanzee's tea party at the zoo'', *History Workshop Journal*, 75, (2013), p.213-214.

phenomena.¹⁹⁹ Directives have been commissioned on a range of topics from menstruation to the Falkland Islands Crisis, Pocket Money, Christmas Cards and Dreaming.

This thesis makes use of the 1996 Menstruation Directive and responses, a product of the later phase of the MOP. Structured in a similar format to a qualitative questionnaire, the directive was created by Alia Al-Khalidi, a postgraduate student at Southampton Institute, in collaboration with the MOP. The Directive asked its volunteer respondents for stories, anecdotes, beliefs and observations about a range of topics relating to menstruation including, but not limited to, sex education, menstrual management and technology, menopause, and PMS (premenstrual syndrome) (see Appendix 1).²⁰⁰ The last part of the Directive asked individuals to reflect on how they felt about the topic in general, and on how they felt about its inclusion in the Directive, hinting towards an awareness amongst the researchers that the creation and dissemination of this Directive might be viewed as unconventional, divide opinion and elicit impassioned responses. Al-Khalidi and MO were acknowledging that there was a blind spot in cultural understanding of menstruation, orchestrated by a socio-cultural insistence on invisibility and secrecy. They were also challenging its normalcy.

The uncertainty of public perception and opinion when it came to knowledge of, talking, or writing about the intimate experience of menstruating was palpable in the design of the Directive, and in the responses. MO sent different versions of the

¹⁹⁹ Historians have questioned if the qualitative notes of the observers can tell us as much about the observed as initially intended, or if their most useful and appropriate use is for exploring the assumptions, subject position and selfhood of those who volunteered to observe and write about others. Peter Gurney, "Intersex" and "Dirty Girls": Mass Observation and Working Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8:2 (1997), pp.256-290.

²⁰⁰ A copy of each directive is available on the Mass Observation website: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/mass-observation-project-directives> (accessed 22/03/2020). It is also reproduced in Appendix one and two.

Directive to men and women. The amount of explanation about, and justification for the dissemination of the Directive was much greater on the Directive sent to men (see appendix 2). The menstruation Directive made up one half of the document sent out to volunteer writers. The other half, which was not commissioned by Alia Al-khalidi, asked writers about the lottery. The inclusion of these two topics on one directive is testament to the anthropological reach of the project and its broad conceptualisation of what constitutes the 'everyday'.

Like oral history, accounts of menstrual experience in twentieth-century Britain collated for MO privilege the narratives and voices of those without medical or professional authority or expertise. Thus the responses provide a level of insight into everyday experiences of menstrual and gynaecological health during adolescence, adulthood, and in some cases old age, hitherto non-existent on the same scale. The MO Directive created a space in which the respondents could render menstruation visible, and where they could write as briefly or as extensively as they wanted to about an intimate aspect of their personhood and life experiences. Many women took the opportunity to write at length and in detail about their personal experiences and feelings, allowing us to see the diversity of experience whilst also shedding light on the diffuse impact of publicly circulating codes and forms of knowledge that perpetuated menstrual stigma.²⁰¹ The responses from women to MO both challenged, and provided a commentary on, the cultural blind spot in shared knowledge of menstrual experience.

There were 332 responses to the directive. 238 (71%) came from women and 94 (29%) from men. The responses do not contain any accounts written by

²⁰¹ Responses range in length from roughly one A4 page up to sixteen.

transgender individuals. The title 'Women's Sanitary Products and Menstruation' does not account for experiences beyond the gender binary, and the responses from women made no acknowledgement of transgender experience. This thesis uses replies from women born in or after 1950. Out of 238, 56 fitted within the chosen date range (women who experienced girlhood between 1960 and 1980), and I refer to the testimony of 30 in this thesis.

By narrowing the sample to women born between 1949 and 1980, it was guaranteed that accounts discussing adolescence and the onset of first menses took place in either the 1960s or after, fitting with the date range of the project. Responses from younger women are featured in places. These serve to open up discussion of generational differences. The youngest respondent in my sample was born in 1980 (sixteen years old), the oldest born in 1919 (seventy-seven years old). Women born after 1950 and up to age forty-six made up just below a quarter of the demographic of women writing for MO (23.5%), suggesting a tendency toward writing amongst women older than those substantially featured here.

The potential usefulness of MO for studying the everyday experiences of women is fully actualised when further attention is paid to who wrote for Mass Observation and why. In her study of stress in twentieth century Britain, Kirby noted that volunteers were mostly upper-working-class and lower-middle-class, left-leaning, and white.²⁰² Those who wrote deemed themselves ordinary- in opposition to identifications such as 'posh' or institutions such as 'the media', and had no 'expert' training in health or medicine. MO provides the opportunity to study menstruation from the bottom up: privileging the voices and perspectives of everyday individuals over

²⁰² Jill Kirby, *Feeling the Strain, A Cultural History of Stress in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Manchester University Press, 2019), p.22.

sources that present patient experience through the lens of medical discourses and expertise.²⁰³

Whilst the contributors were self-defined ordinary people, this thesis acknowledges the extraordinary within this.²⁰⁴ By definition, their commitment to recording and archiving their thoughts, experiences, and memories, meant these women were doing something atypical. This is particularly pertinent when considering that other respondents chose to avoid it completely, and much of the population did not write about their experiences in this way at all. Acknowledgment of the simultaneous typicality and atypicality of the cohort complicates debate regarding what constitutes 'the everyday' and how historians study it. This is not a pitfall. The decision to commit to writing, to select and tailor a narrative, to provide personal information and to turn memories into tangible textual documents offers the historian the opportunity to explore how women related to writing, how they understood themselves, made sense of their life experiences and how they wanted their experiences to be framed, recorded and understood by others.

Records of personal understandings and experiences of menstruation are sparse, and difficult to access. To have a dedicated collection of written testimony offers rare insight. Euphemism and non-verbal communication have been central to understandings and experiences of menstruation; thus asking women to speak about them, and asking women to write about them, elicit different experiences and different responses, with different degrees of openness, language and detail. As Tanya (b.1949) stated in her reply, 'if we had been invited to talk on the topic, I don't believe

²⁰³ David Bloome, Dorothy Sheridan and Brian Street, 'Reading Mass-Observation Writing: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Researching in the Mass Observation Archive', *Mass Observation Archive Occasional Paper Series*, 1 (1996): p.14, in in Jill Kirby, *Feeling the Strain*, p.20.

²⁰⁴ Claire Langhamer, "Who the Hell Are Ordinary People?" Ordinarity as a Category of Historical Analysis', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28, (2018) and Kirby, *Feeling the Strain*, p.22.

you'd have got so much information!'.²⁰⁵ The differences between oral history and Mass Observation are explored in more detail below.

Using Mass Observation and Oral History

As Charnock states, 'Mass Observation and oral history-based methods are complementary'.²⁰⁶ Oral history is, at its core, verbal (until transcribed) and the somewhat spontaneous result of a lived and embodied engagement between researcher and research participant. Mass Observation is made up of written source material produced by volunteers, committed to writing about their everyday life experiences and the ethos of social history, to ensure that they do not go unrecorded. Participants of MO did not sign up with prior knowledge that they would write about menstruation, rather they signed up knowing they would reply to a range of directives on a range of topics relating to 'everyday life'. It is because of this that some respondents chose not to reply to the directive on menstruation at all.

Interestingly, whilst respondents volunteered themselves as writers about 'everyday life', many felt incapable of writing about menstruation, or were not willing to do. Of the writers that did respond, many thought carefully about what to write, and took time to craft their responses to the questions. Other respondents wrote spontaneously, as indicated by the scribbles, crossings out, non-linear narratives and conversational style of prose. MO is in some ways more contrived than oral history, as writers knew exactly what questions were being asked of them prior to responding, and had more time to consider how to respond than those undertaking an oral history interview. Like oral history, respondents tended to contemplate both the past and

²⁰⁵ T1843, Mass Observation Archive (University of Sussex): Replies to Spring 1996 Directive, 'Women's Sanitary Protection and Menstruation'. Hereafter abbreviated to MOA 'Menstruation'.

²⁰⁶ Hannah Charnock, *'Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity in England 1950 -1980'* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2017, p.40).

present in their writing, providing a reflexive account of everyday experiences of menstruation influenced by contemporary discourse, collective memory and the cultural circuit. Further, individuals were writing anonymously, as opposed to speaking about menstruation, which allowed menstruation to remain 'silent'. Tanya (b.1949) stated, 'this is easy to do - writing as if to a diary, where I am anonymous and can choose my words by writing instead of barging through an interview!'²⁰⁷

It is not possible to discern the circumstances in which the women wrote their replies to their Directive. Whether they were alone, and wrote privately, or discussed their writing process and wrote in public spaces is not specified by all respondents, but some did offer insight into their own writing practices. Winnie (b.1951) stressed 'my husband always likes to read what I send to MO but I don't think this is one I will be showing him!'²⁰⁸ Similarly Whitney (b.1970) stated 'I haven't even asked D, who I am very close to, what he thinks on any of these questions! That's how much we don't talk about it.'²⁰⁹ By contrast Janet (b.1959) suggested it was 'an interesting subject for Mass-Observation - I immediately rang my father to find out what HE was going to write about! It is good to have the opportunity to write about such a subject.'²¹⁰ The responses indicate some of the ways respondents engaged with the Directive, and the sense of unusualness surrounding the prospect of responding to a Directive about menstruation.

As Claire Langhamer notes, 'in the juxtapositions made between the political and the personal, the public and the private, and the expert and the non-expert' there is an attempt 'to challenge binary oppositions and to re-think categories of

²⁰⁷ T1843, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁰⁸ W1918, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁰⁹ W2731, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²¹⁰ J2703, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

analyses.²¹¹ As evidenced throughout this thesis, for some women responding to the Directive was a therapeutic or overtly politicised or empowering endeavour, whilst for others it was a sad, reflective or uncomfortable experience that brought up a range of emotions relating to their bodies, medical and life histories, identities and sense of self. Writing about intimate parts of the self acts as a form of self-fashioning. To quote Hinton, 'the focus is on the site of agency, where individuals are present at their own making.' There is the opportunity to explore the 'creative moment in which an individual, struggling to make sense of him- or herself in the world, will bend, select, recombine, amend or transform sources of meaning available in the public culture.'²¹²

In contrast to oral history, the MO Directive was dedicated solely to the study of menstruation. There were a list of extensive questions and prompts sent to Mass Observers in the Directive, that are not covered in the oral history interviews. The length and detail of replies that these questions elicited offer an unparalleled level of detail about menstrual experience in the past, not possible from my reuse of oral history alone, but also offer less opportunity to contextualise information in relation to a subject's life more broadly. Used in conjunction they offer the opportunity to see how different types of source elicit different responses and different opportunities to explore memory. The similarities and differences between their function, their shared focus on subjectivity and recording under-recorded aspects of life make Mass Observation and oral history complementary sources to use when exploring subjective accounts of lived experience in the past.

²¹¹ Claire Langhamer, 'Mass Observation', in *Bloomsbury History: Theory and Method*, (subscription-only digital resource).

²¹² Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, p.7.

Approaches to Mass Observation

Whilst historians have more recently reached a general consensus that the 'fragmentary' material provided by MO is useful, there is no standardised way of approaching it. Historians have methodological guidelines they can follow when analysing magazines, not least Tinkler's method adopted in this study and described in more detail in the next chapter.²¹³ Likewise, for oral historians, there are handbooks and guidelines indicating the most productive lines of enquiry and ways of establishing open communication and an ethical relationship between researcher and research subject.

With MO, there are no standardised guidelines. The methodological approach varies from historian to historian, reflecting the source materials' concern with the subjective, but also the increasing emphasis placed on how subjective the process of writing history is too. Savage stopped when saturation point was reached, and he felt there was little to gain from further reading. This equated to 10% of responses from the 1948 Directive on class and 10% from the 1990 Directive on the same topic.²¹⁴ Whilst Hinton's study makes use of diaries rather than Directives, he consulted nine diaries, and stated 'this is not about everyman's experience of war', but about 'a handful of people': 'Nine individuals could not be representative, but neither could ninety'.²¹⁵ As Savage states, a bigger sample offers 'false security', as 'thousands of one sample who were never representative to begin with' does little to address the issue.²¹⁶ The personal, subjective nature of the source material enables a study that

²¹³ Penny Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity: Methods for Working with Girls' and Women's Magazines' in *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. by Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinburg (Routledge, 2016), pp.25-39.

²¹⁴ Savage, 'Changing Social Class Identities', p.52.

²¹⁵ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, p.17.

²¹⁶ Savage, 'Changing Social Class Identities', p.53.

weaves between the micro and the macro, oscillating between understanding individual life and the bigger picture.

My engagement was driven by the date range of this thesis, which limited the number of sources suitable for consultation. Engagement with this sample was partly influenced by a sense of what themes were reoccurring in women's testimonies, and interest in why some questions elicited a great deal of passionate, lengthy responses. For instance, the consistency in women's recollections of sex education, the shock of first menses, and (pre) menstrual pain, and the recurrence of themes of insufficient education and shame, facilitated an interest in more on the topics. Similarly, the vim with which women critically analysed advertising for menstruation in magazines and on television was striking. This was an area of interest from the outset, as the research on magazines always intended to consider reader responses. This, combined with the dynamic offerings of feeling, emotion and experience relating to this area made it a clear line of investigation for this thesis.

This thesis does not centre a model that adequately theorises methodological engagement with MO material, largely in part because this does not exist. Notwithstanding literature about MO, the context of the MO's production, collation, and respondents have shaped engagement. As Langhamer states, 'Mass-Observation material must be used with an understanding of its context of production and a clear awareness of its limitations. Knowing what Mass-Observation was, and what it continues to be, helps the historian to understand the particularities as well as the potentialities of working with the archive.'²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Langhamer, 'Mass Observation', p.15.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how and why oral history and Mass Observation are sources suited for a history of menstrual experience. It has suggested that the most appropriate and effective way to engage with both forms of source material is to not only consider what a person says, but also *how* and *why* they say it too - because this can offer much more about an individual's life. As Steedman stated, the 'point doesn't lie there, back in the past...the past is re-used through the agency of social information and that interpretation of it can only be made with what people know of a social world and their place within it.'²¹⁸ Steedman's assertion neatly summarises the necessary approach to working with personal testimony, and to writing histories of subjective menstrual experience more broadly. The relationship between the past and the present is not a pitfall, rather a line of fruitful investigation. Acknowledging *how* and *why* people remember and narrate what they do provides the opportunity to explore not only past subjective experiences, but to consider how the construction and deliverance of these experiences is intimately bound to an individual's present understandings of themselves and their identity, and their engagements with the society and culture in which they operate. Building on these insights, the relationship between representations and experiences, and popular and personal conceptualisations of menstruation, is explored in more detail in the next chapter.

²¹⁸ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape For a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (Virgo press, 1986), p.5.

Chapter Two

Menstruation in Girls' Magazines

Mass-market magazines are one of few sources available that can aid a study of everyday menstrual knowledge and experience. This chapter outlines the sampling method and approach to analysing *Jackie*, *Honey* and *Petticoat* adopted in this thesis, and explains why these magazines are useful for a study of girlhood menstrual experience. Following this, it provides an overview of the previous ways that magazines have been studied, and the strengths and pitfalls of these approaches. Integrating personal testimony with theories about the cultural circuit it demonstrates how such theory can aid a history of mass-market girls' magazines in the period 1960-1980 and a history of menstruation respectively. Building on the discussion of oral history and Mass Observation in the previous chapter, it emphasises that personal testimony and magazines are complementary sources, because they allow for reflections on the cultural positioning of menstruation, and the relationship girls had with these representations in the period 1960-1980.

Sampling Girls Magazines

Copies of *Jackie* (1964-1993), *Honey* (1960-1986) and *Petticoat* (1966-1975) magazine were consulted at the British Library. The sample consisted of copies of *Jackie* from 1964-1975, *Honey* from 1960-1980 and *Petticoat* from 1966 -1973.²¹⁹ These magazines were chosen because they constitute some of the most popular

²¹⁹ The 1964 & 1965 copies of *Petticoat* were not available from the British Library.

girls' periodicals of the era. Whilst a large part of magazine analysis was undertaken at the British Library before lockdowns were enforced, much of the magazine analysis was not complete. Living in Wales and navigating different COVID-19 safety measures made it difficult to visit the archives, to conduct detailed analysis and to write this analysis into the thesis in the latter part of 2020 and 2021 before the end of the studentship. Resultantly, the sample of *Jackie* runs from 1964-1975, despite *Jackie* continuing to run until 1983. Whilst copies of *Honey* (1960-1986) produced between 1960 and 1980 were analysed, spanning the full duration of the sample, copies of *Petticoat* (1966-1975) spanning the whole length of its time in print were more difficult to access. It was only possible to access copies of *Petticoat* from 1966-1973 at the British Library as the 1974 and 1975 copies were unavailable.

Jackie was the most popular girls' periodical for over ten years, amassing a readership of 350 000 in 1966, which rose steadily to 605,947 by 1976.²²⁰ In 1964, a copy cost six pence, whilst in 1970 it cost seven pence. In 1980, *Jackie* cost fourteen pence. Published by D.C Thomson, it was conservative in outlook, and operated a strict code of censorship on content.²²¹ Notwithstanding, *Jackie* was immensely popular. It is distinctive from other periodicals because it has manufactured a substantial and lasting industry and legacy despite no longer being in print. There has been an enormous wave of *Jackie* nostalgia over the last 15-20 years, in the shape of widely available reprinted annuals, TV documentaries shown on the BBC, newspaper articles and a stage production titled 'Jackie the Musical'.²²² This revival means *Jackie*

²²⁰ Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and youth culture: from 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (Macmillan Press, 1991), p.81.

²²¹ McRobbie, 'Jackie Magazine', p.81.

²²² Westend Wilma, 'Full cast announced for the Jackie the musical tour', *WestendWilma.com*, 9 February 2016, <https://www.westendwilma.com/full-cast-announced-for-jackie-the-musical-uk-tour/> [accessed, 14/09/2021], *Jackie Magazine: A Girls Best Friend*, BBC TWO, 5th September 2008, not currently available on IPlayer, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00796tv> [accessed 14/09/2021], Steven Brocklehurst, 'Jackie Magazine- How a 'teenage bible' defined the 1970's', BBC News

has the potential to be more memorable than other periodicals, as it has maintained its place in the contemporary cultural circuit.

As indicated by the publication name, *Jackie* was concerned with the individual girl's feminine persona. It connoted the ideal reader as a fashionable, 1960s British girl interested in the landmarks and characteristics of adolescence girlhood. Girls as young as ten read *Jackie* throughout their adolescence. McRobbie notes that *Jackie* served to obscure differences of class or race in its representation, resulting in a 'false unity' of sameness with whiteness as default. This girlhood identification is defined by discussions of how to catch a boy, lose weight, look best and cook, leaving little room for other feminine modes or kinds of adolescence.²²³ McRobbie suggested that *Jackie* asserted the 'absolute and natural separation of sex roles', of the opinion that girls were 'to be looked at'.²²⁴ As Charnock notes, *Jackie* was deeply ambivalent about teenage girls' sexuality, always refracting it through a lens of romantic love.²²⁵ There is a lightness to the tone of *Jackie* however, as colour, graphics and advertisements indicate it is intended for pleasure and leisure.

This conservative outlook makes sense of why coverage of menstruation was so sparse. Although first published in 1964, it was not until March 1967 that menstruation featured in the sample, in an advert for Tampax.²²⁶ Weekly editorial content relating to periods was absent until 1972 and the creation of the 'Dear Dr' column, where young girls wrote in with queries about their physical health. These

Scotland, 19th September 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-24054765> [accessed, 14/09/2021], Zoe Williams, 'Jackie- it was so much more than a must read for every teenage girl', *The Guardian*, 4th March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/mar/04/jackie-first-uk-teen-magazine-girls-jacqueline-wilson> [accessed, 14.09.2021].

²²³ McRobbie, 'Feminism and Youth Culture', p.83.

²²⁴ McRobbie, 'Feminism and Youth Culture', pp.90-107.

²²⁵ Hannah Charnock, 'Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity in England 1950 -1980' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2017, p.9.

²²⁶ *Jackie*, 04.03.1967, p.17

queries were displayed in a question-and-answer format similar to the 'Dear Cathy and Claire' problem pages, and answered by an anonymous doctor. Menstruation did not feature in the Cathy and Claire problem page, and was only visible when framed as a medical concern in the Dear Dr Column. The separation of these two columns ensured that the Cathy and Claire pages could be solely dedicated to heartbreak, friendship, school and other sources of stress and sadness for teens, as an explicit discussion of emotions remained the preserve of the Cathy and Claire problem page.²²⁷ The 'relatability, directness, and openness' that characterised agony aunt responses at the time was the go-to for the Cathy and Claire page, although they often replied to concerns with comedic one-liners, aiming for a dynamic that simulated a sisterly bond. By contrast, the Dear Dr column maintained a detached and 'objective' stance, more typically associated with interactions with doctors. Responses were clinical, offering little acknowledgement of the emotional aspects accompanying the letters.

There were eighteen Dear Dr features in *Jackie* that asked about menstruation across the period 1972 – 1974, although the column ran across the 70s and into the 1980s. Beyond advertising, this was the only place in *Jackie* that menstruation featured. By positioning discussions of menstruation in the doctor Column rather than the problem page, *Jackie* situated menstruation firmly within the realm of medicine, and beyond the realm of the sisterly advice-giver. Peggy Makins, who wrote for *Woman* as popular agony aunt Evelyn Home, suggested in her memoir that agony aunts were still limited in what they could talk about, particularly if the subject was taboo. By contrast, the health section 'had a sort of special imprimatur of its own,

²²⁷ McRobbie, *From Jackie to Just Seventeen*, pp.108-115.

because you could decently say almost anything medically'.²²⁸ This is likely why menstruation, and all its associated taboos, was covered in a medical section of *Jackie*. The limited coverage of menstruation, particularly in the earlier editions, suggests it was deemed incompatible with the desired feminine persona of the *Jackie* girl. This tension served to simultaneously brand menstruation as a topic both feminine and unfeminine, and as unsuitable for discussion beyond the girls' magazine, but unsuitable for detailed discussion within it either.

By contrast, *Honey* was launched in 1960 by Audrey Slaughter at Fleetway publications, 'for teens and twenties and the single girl'.²²⁹ In 1960, *Honey* cost 1'6, three times as much as *Jackie*. By 1980, a copy was 45p. Using the tagline 'Young, gay and get ahead' *Honey* emphasised its youthful and modern identification, and Fan Carter suggests this 'distinct editorial style and innovative approach to branding' contributed to 'establish a new genre of young women's fashion magazines' as a major force within the British magazine market'.²³⁰ This new and distinctive format make it an important source for study. Tinkler notes how it covered topics such as 'fashion, personal relationships, travel, self, personal space, music, fiction, film, jazz, parties'.²³¹ 'Taboos were tackled, and by the mid-1970s each monthly copy of *Honey* had a lengthy editorial feature dedicated to discussing sex in some way, shape or form'.²³²

²²⁸ Peggy Makins, *The Evelyn Home Story* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1975), p.139.

²²⁹ Fan Carter 'A Taste of *Honey*: Get-Ahead Femininity in 1960's Britain', *Women in Magazines Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. by Ritchie, Rachel, Hawkins, Sue, Phillips Nicola and Kleinburg S. Jay (Oxford, 2016), p.183, and McRobbie, 'Jackie Magazine', p. 83.

²³⁰ Carter, 'A Taste of *Honey*', p.183.

²³¹ Tinkler, 'Are You Really Living?', p.600.

²³² A pertinent example includes 'SEX- A Laygirls Guide', featured in *Honey*, 11.1970. Spanning 7 pages, a humorous and blasé 'A-Z' made reference and provided a brief commentary on a range of topics rarely covered in girl's magazines including 'bi-sexuality, erogenous zones, orgies, and selling sex'. Others include, 'Sex Holds No Secrets', 03.1961, 'What to do if you are going to be an unmarried mother', 11.1964, 'Birth Control and the single girl', 03.1967, 'Could Sex Therapy Help you?', 03.1978, 'Sex: An Optional Extra?', 07.1978, 'The Right to Choose', 11.1979.

Representations of menstruation featured in adverts, question-and-answer columns and in editorial features too.

Honey initially struggled to secure readers, but between 1965 and 1969 it had 190,000 readers per month, which was more than *Vogue*. At its height *Honey* had a readership of 250, 000 a month. Readers were usually slightly older than *Jackie* readers, in possession of O-Levels, maybe A-Level's and earning up to £10-15 a week.²³³ *Honey* expanded its brand from the printed press into boutiques and hairdressers after 1965. These were spaces where *Honey* readers could purchase clothes and hairstyles as advertised in the periodical.²³⁴ *Honey* pushed boundaries, breaking away from the mould of the traditional love comic and translating its figurative consumerist community space into bricks-and mortar-spaces.

Contrasting with *Jackie*, *Honey's* discussion of periods was not always framed as a medical concern. Queries about periods were typically answered in the 'HELP!' column, and in the 'Medicine Chest', by an unspecified respondent at the magazine. A range of queries were considered in the HELP! column. A question about periods, headed 'preventing painful periods', featured alongside other questions about stretch marks, and getting a holiday job on a yacht. For further context, the HELP! Column from the previous month featured questions such as 'my colour makes me self-conscious', 'I'd like to work in an approved school' and 'how can I help my flatmate?', an indication of *Honey's* investment in representing 'get-ahead femininity'.²³⁵ *Honey* also occasionally tackled menstrual concerns in a sporadic feature of the magazine called the 'Medicine Chest', whereby a text box with a thick border contained a single

²³³ Tinkler, 'Are You Really Living?', p.600.

²³⁴ See *Honey*, 11.1965, p.132 for map of boutique locations,

²³⁵ HELP! Column, *Honey*, 07.29.1972.

question and answer inside.²³⁶ By discussing menstruation as both a medical matter and as an everyday concern, *Honey* moved conversation away from purely scientific modes of representation and understanding and acknowledged the impact of menstruation on girls' lives outside of its purely pathological and medical qualities. This reflects the ethos of *Honey*, and its dedication to challenging established norms and pushing bounds regarding what, and how, information was depicted in girls' periodicals.

It was the success of *Honey* that encouraged the launch of weekly title *Petticoat*. Despite its wealth of content, *Petticoat* has not been studied as intently as *Jackie* or *Honey*. It is for this reason it is approached in this thesis. Positioned as a 'younger sister magazine' to *Honey*, Audrey Slaughter launched *Petticoat* at Fleetway for fifteen to nineteen year olds who had left school and were earning. The periodical cost five pence (one shilling) in 1966, and by 1973 it cost six pence.²³⁷ Marketed with the tagline 'for the young and fancy free', it is clear Slaughter was attempting to replicate the success of *Honey*. Tinkler reveals that highlights included 'fashion, beauty, holidays and pop stars', and information on 'film, music and cooking'. Sexual relationships were a prominent theme and dealt with candidly. Whilst *Petticoat* was certainly the product of a media preoccupation with permissiveness, and intent on conveying it as a structuring influence on magazine content, discussions of sex in *Petticoat* read as some of the most mature and nuanced encountered in the sample. They often discussed sex in its physical, psychological and emotional aspects, and touched on gender inequalities inherent to casual sex between men and women, tying this in to a broader challenge to the notion that girls had equal opportunities to embody

²³⁶ *Honey*, 11.1967.

²³⁷ Tinkler, 'Are You Really Living?', p.600

'permissiveness' as an ideal. An article featured in November 1970 about deciding whether to have sex introduced the feature by stating,

'the so-called "permissive" society appears to be here to stay - at least for the next few years. It is supposed to be trendy to sleep with whoever takes your fancy, and not at all unusual to wake up and not know the persona at your side. But it's YOU that has to make up your mind'.²³⁸

Menstruation featured often in advertising and editorial features. In 1973, a copy of *Petticoat* featured a five-page spread written by agony aunt Claire Rayner, dedicated to a discussion of seven types of contraception, female sex organs and reproduction, the role of the endocrine system and hormones in the menstrual cycle, vaginal discharge, sexually transmitted infections, pre-menstrual tension, breast development, body hair, spots and pimples and masturbation. The feature was designed to be pulled from the magazine, folded down the middle, and kept as a booklet containing 'all the facts about your body'.²³⁹ Reader questions about menstruation frequently featured in Claire Rayner's Q+A column, which discussed issues ranging from wearing white to someone else's wedding, queer identities, depression, disability and breakups.²⁴⁰ Rayner answered all questions frankly and informatively, and provided emotional support wherever necessary. Questions about menstruation also appeared in a feature called 'Doctors Casebook', where questions were addressed by 'the Petticoat Doctor'. Answers were concise, clinical and offered little emotional support. Of all magazines, *Petticoat* contained the most editorial content about menstruation.

²³⁸ 'Love is Sex', *Petticoat*, 28.11.1970, pp.6-7, 'When you have to decide about sex', *Petticoat*, 07.11.1970, p.35.

²³⁹ 'You and your body', *Petticoat*, 24.03. 1973.

²⁴⁰ The copy of *Petticoat* issued on the 21.03.1970 contained a reader question titled 'Is he queer?'. Rayner did not reproduce this language, and instead used the phrase 'homosexual' in her reply. 'Claire Rayner Advises', *Petticoat*, 21.03.1970.

A months' worth of issues of all three periodicals were consulted for three points in the year. As *Jackie* was a weekly, this was four copies a month, each copy made up of roughly forty pages. *Honey* and *Petticoat* were both monthlies, so one copy a month was consulted, each about eighty to one hundred pages long. The three points of the year were March, July and November, as this sampling method allowed for acknowledgement of seasonal variation in magazine coverage. This, in turn, revealed that menstrual advertising also reflected the magazine's seasonal emphasis. Menstrual adverts featured in July copies of all three publications typically included images of beaches, swimwear and water-based activities, and emphasised the importance of wearing protection that remained concealed in swimwear or summer clothing, whilst copies of magazines produced in March or November did not have this focus. This seasonal difference was a consistent feature across the period 1960-1980. Each magazine in the sample was read in its entirety, but editorial content and advertising were only engaged with extensively if it featured text and/ or imagery explicitly about menstruation or sex, or related in some way to menstrual experience. For instance, *Anadin* adverts did not always explicitly mention menstruation, but spoke to the menstrual complaints of young girls in pain through the language and imagery used. Paying attention to the style, intention and reach of each periodical provides important context necessary for analysis.

Magazines as Historical Sources

How magazines have been conceptualised and analysed within academic scholarship provides necessary context for engaging with magazines as historical

sources today. Looking at past engagements with magazine content highlights the most fruitful ways of using girls' magazines to understand girls' lives in the past.

In 1956 cultural studies scholar Richard Hoggart condemned mass market magazines as media forms that catered for 'short attention spans' and 'presented fragmented oddities which aimed only to entertain, not to challenge, engage or enrich the reader'.²⁴¹ Putting forward an explicitly gendered analysis in 1963, Betty Friedan, a journalist, activist and member of the US National Organisation for women suggested magazines forbid women from having any sense of independence. She claimed they 'swallowed' women into a 'passive dependence on men' by policing the parameters of women's problems, interests, and individuality and ensuring they remained 'fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home'.²⁴² In a similar vein, in 1979 Gaye Tuchman used the term 'symbolic annihilation' to describe the effect media portrayals of women had on women.²⁴³

Following this line of critique, media scholars born from the distinctly anti-capitalist socialist-feminism of the WLM presented mass-market magazines as commercial sites that projected and reinforced narrowly defined definitions of femininity that legitimated gender inequality and upheld patriarchy for over twenty years.²⁴⁴ Similar attitudes proliferated across academic scholarship. Although critical, the wave of

²⁴¹ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1958), pp.164-165 in Tracey Loughran, 'Landscape for a Good Woman's Weekly: Finding Magazines in Post-War British History and Culture', in *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption* ed. by Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinburg (Routledge, 2016), p.46.

²⁴² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London, 1963), pp.32-44.

²⁴³ Gaye Tuchman, "The depiction of women in the mass media". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (1979), pp. 528-542.

²⁴⁴ Angela McRobbie, 'More! New Sexualities in Girls and Women's Magazines' in *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Angela McRobbie (Manchester, 1997) p.190 for an evaluation of some of these critiques. See *Is this your life? Images of Women in the Media*, ed. Josephine King and Mart Stott (Virago, 1977) for examples of criticisms.

interest in magazines and their contents nonetheless signalled their important place in contemporary women's culture. As McRobbie has highlighted, so established is the interest in magazines that it can be 'read in its own right, as part of the history of the development of feminism in the academy'.²⁴⁵

Scholars were preoccupied with the potential effects of magazines on readers. Yet they usually neglected to engage with readers, to hear what they had to say. Such readings typically focussed on analysing the text and imagery in magazines, extrapolating intention, meaning, reception and effect from the magazine pages. Scholars instead extrapolated from their own magazine reading and analysis and spoke on behalf of others. Resultantly, their account of the industry is partial.²⁴⁶ As Elizabeth Frazer states, these assessments commit the fallacy of reading the meaning of a text and then 'inferring the ideological effect the text "must" therefore have on the reader'.²⁴⁷

Underpinning these analyses were assumptions about the status and substance of women's magazines and their readership too. Loughran has suggested that in much academic and popular imagination, liking magazines has denoted empty consumerism, selfish individualism and the extent of a person's class and educational background. She suggests this denigration is characteristic of the denigration of women and their interests as represented by these magazines.²⁴⁸ Her work suggests that feminist scholars have inadvertently relied on, and reaffirmed existing power relations by neglecting to explore the opinions of women who wrote for, and who

²⁴⁵ McRobbie, 'More! New Sexualities in Girls and Women's Magazines', p.190.

²⁴⁶ Anna Gough Yates, *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships* (Routledge, 2003), p.7. Concerned with the business and production of women's periodical press.

²⁴⁷ Elizabeth Frazer, 'Teenage Girls Reading Jackie', *Media, Culture and Society*, 9:4 (June, 2016), p.412.

²⁴⁸ Loughran, 'Landscape for a Good Woman's Weekly', p.43.

bought, read and most importantly enjoyed these magazines. She states, denunciators of mass-market magazines have spoken by 'virtue of their status as an author and therefore an authority' and contrasted the magazine reader with a 'superior fully conscious agent who held the same position as the author'. Although claiming to speak for the 'subordinated and dispossessed' they have 'replicated the messages of dominant cultural forms and unwittingly reinforced elements of existing power relations'.²⁴⁹

The implicit suggestion that a critical engagement with magazine trends and tropes was the preserve of scholars, and beyond the capabilities of magazine readers without scholarly credentials, is inherently classist and elitist, and sits in direct opposition to values of intersubjectivity that feminist scholars have sought in their ethnographic research. Reader voices need to be in the picture, so women can offer their own assessments, analysis and answers.

Scholarship that centres the lived experiences and voices of mass-market magazine readers is sparse, particularly in comparison to the number of analyses concerned with close textual or semiotic readings.²⁵⁰ This is a more acute problem for historical scholarship, as it is often not possible to access these voices. The voices of magazine readers illuminate fractures in the interpretations and conclusions of early

²⁴⁹ Loughran, 'Landscape for a Good Woman's Weekly', p.46.

²⁵⁰ Semiotics is a term and method born from visual and linguistic studies, which is also understood as the 'study of signs'. 'Signs' refers to images or text that convey meaning. A study of signs involves understanding how this meaning is made and conveyed to the viewer. For brief overview see, Institute of Historical Research, '1807' Commemorated: Semiotics', 2007, <https://archives.history.ac.uk/1807commemorated/media/methods/semiotics.html> [accessed, 15/06/2021]. For longer explorations see Jonathan Culler, 'Semiotics and Deconstruction', *Poetics Today*, 1:1/2 (1979), pp.137-141, Kevin Passmore, 'Post Structuralism and History' in *Writing History: Theory and Practice 2nd ed.* ed. by Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner and Kevin Passmore, pp.123-146, Penny Tinkler, *Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research*, (Sage Publications, 2014), pp.12-15. For examples of its use see Ellen McRacken, *Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms.*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, (University of California Press, 1990).

media scholars and exhibit the importance of, as Ballaster et. al have described, 'resisting temptation to collapse the historical reader into the ideal reader of the magazine.'²⁵¹ The work of scholars that validate and amplify these voices has contributed to the establishment of less condescending, and more academically rigorous, conclusions. It is these conclusions that guide my engagement with personal testimony.

Janice Winship and Angela McRobbie have both stressed that the enjoyment, community and representation afforded to girls by magazines, and the capability of readers to also engage critically with content. McRobbie recognises that women's and girls' magazines were important and influential ideological forces, but that they also had a value for their reader, because they carved a space for women in mass culture that celebrated female sexuality and solidarity, albeit within the bounds of appropriate behaviour demarked in society more broadly at the time. She argues this culture of femininity made available to girls enabled them to foster relationships and carve out space for themselves and their peers in school, the youth club or the home.²⁵² Winship asserts that women reading magazines did not passively absorb information presented to them, but were often quite critical of content, read magazines differently at different times and in different situations, and thus the pleasure derived from them depended on the context in which it was read.²⁵³

Part of the value of Winship's approach is in her personal revelation; her decision to situate herself and her subjective experiences of magazine reading in her argument. Winship speaks of her own love for women's magazines, and Myra

²⁵¹ Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer and Hebron, *Women's Worlds*, p45.

²⁵² Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture From Jackie to Just Seventeen*, (Macmillan Press, 1991), p.xcii.

²⁵³ Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (Pandora Press, 1987), p.4.

MacDonald suggests that the assertion that feminists too could be silent admirers of media forms, whilst recognising their contradictory nature, was 'curiously liberating'.²⁵⁴ As Richie et al summate, whilst Winship did not dismiss the criticism levied at magazines, 'her work challenged the casual dismissal of forms of media associated with women as trivial, ephemeral and insignificant'.²⁵⁵ Winship's admission disrupts the hierarchy between researcher and research subject, and deconstructs the arbitrary binary between engaging in critical analysis and seeking pleasure. This researcher reflexivity is still more common in disciplines such as media studies and the social sciences, but is slowly being integrated into historical studies, as the idea, and thus value, of claiming access to objective truths continues to be questioned.²⁵⁶

Through the facilitation of focus groups Margaret Beetham, Ros Ballaster, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron explicitly engaged with magazines readers. Their focus groups enabled them to record and reassert women's ability to resist and critique ideological messages whilst experiencing (a not solely or wholly pure, unambiguous or unproblematic) sense of pleasure when reading magazines.²⁵⁷ In a separate study Frazer interviewed teenage girls who read *Jackie*, finding that a 'self-conscious and reflexive approach to texts' was natural for teenage girls.²⁵⁸ Frazer's interviews with schoolgirls demonstrated how readers negotiated and argued with the messages

²⁵⁴ Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women, Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (Oxford, 1995), p.11 and Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines*, p.4.

²⁵⁵ Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinburg, 'Introduction' to *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption* ed. by Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinburg (Routledge, 2016), p.5.

²⁵⁶ Although I discuss this in the previous chapter, I offer further examples here. Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (Virago Press, 1987), is the seminal example of this. Professor Lucy Robinson, 'Does my reflexivity embarrass you?', *Now That's What I Call History: Popular Culture, Politics, History*, 16th July 2015, <https://proflrobinson.com/2015/07/16/does-my-reflexivity-embarrass-you/> [accessed, 15/06/2021] for reflections, reading and live stream of conference discussions. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, (Manchester University Press, 2001), *Past Tenses. Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (Rivers Oram Press, 1992).

²⁵⁷ Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Women's Magazine* (Macmillan, 1991), p.vii.

²⁵⁸ Frazer, 'Teenage Girls Reading Jackie', p.416.

presented in magazines. The girls discussed whether magazine content was or was not realistic when measured against their own lives and experiences, and they repeatedly denigrated the usefulness of the problem pages.²⁵⁹ Underpinning these succeeding approaches was a basic recognition of the complex interiority of every scholar *and* magazine reader, which in turn produced scholarship that afforded women the capacity to engage in critical evaluations of materials that they also harboured emotional investments in, regardless of academic credentials.²⁶⁰

Discourse analysis features throughout the following chapters, yet assumptions about the effect of these representations on viewers are avoided, in favour of discussions of 'preferred readings'. Initially coined by Stuart Hall as a way of understanding the production and reception of television discourse, in this thesis a 'preferred reading' refers to the message journalists, advertisers and editors were most likely to be promoting and communicating through their text and imagery.²⁶¹ This interpretation of meaning is informed by the signs and signifiers in the text and imagery, and consideration of the wider socio-cultural context at the time of their publication. Rachel Ritchie's study of depictions of youthful femininity in *Woman* between 1954 and 1969 suggests that the 'concept of preferred meaning is crucial, although this is not to deny the possibility of other interpretations; while a journalist or advertiser may aim to communicate one particular meaning, readers can create others, even ones that were completely unintended.'²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Frazer, 'Teenage Girls Reading Jackie', pp.407-425.

²⁶⁰ Loughran, 'Landscape for a Good Woman's Weekly', p.42

²⁶¹ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse', *Paper for the Council of Europe on "Training In The Critical Reading of Television Language"*, University of Lancaster, (September 1973), <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP07.pdf> [accessed 16/02/2022].

²⁶² I explore my engagement with advertising in more detail at the end of this chapter. Quote taken from Rachel Ritchie, 'Young Women and *Woman*: Depictions of youthful femininity, 1954-1969' in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. by Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara, (Taylor and Francis, 2014), p.145.

Yet the transient nature of magazines and the similarities between different titles, combined with their wide-reaching and repeated denigration in wider culture and society does not make it easy to discern how much emphasis should be placed on their influence, nor easy to elicit detailed memories of a particular magazine's style, form, content and personal significance from readers in a structured interview setting. Women rarely remember details of their reading habits or magazine contents during girlhood. Magazines are designed to be disposable - and are therefore inherently ephemeral - although many women do keep them for tens of years.²⁶³ Designed to be picked up, leafed through and thrown away, they are often read during moments of everyday waiting, perhaps for a train, a haircut, or a medical appointment, affecting how this time is spent. Whilst they are throwaway, it is commonly accepted that because of the high number of periodicals in circulation during the period 1960-1980 most girls will have come into contact with a copy of a mass-market magazine, whether they actively sought and paid for it themselves, were given a copy by a friend, or stumbled upon it in a public space.

Whilst it is highly likely that many women did read magazines as girls in this period, this does not mean they will remember them. As previously stated, memory is informed by the cultural circuit, and some of the most popular narratives about magazines today focus on how dangerous they can be for women's and girls' mental health, wellbeing, and body image. This is partly due to lingering ideas born from early assessments, and partly due to the way many magazines in circulation in the early noughties, and today, dedicated extensive space to images of 'desirable' and 'undesirable' bodies. These assessments likely influence how women remember

²⁶³ Loughran, 'Landscape for a Good Woman's Weekly', p.41.

magazines and how they position their narrative even if they do not agree with such assessments.

The BSF oral history interviews suggest that women do struggle to recall extensive information about the magazines they read as girls. This is unsurprising, due to the length of time that has elapsed and the fact that magazines were ephemeral in nature. The fact that women do remember anything about them, and the way they frame their memories in oral history interviews, is interesting. Discussion of women's recollections of magazine-reading in these interviews reveals that issues surrounding information recall do not negate the usefulness of asking, or talking about magazines in oral history interview settings. Interviews provide important opportunities for women to tell their own stories and to construct, explore and retell memories of their experiences that offer information about the relationship women had with magazines both past and present.

Reader Voices in Magazine Research

The women who participated in interviews for the BSF project often could not remember specifics about the magazines they had read during their girlhood, but keenly emphasised their personal affiliation with them and the sense of community that they provided. Discussion typically arose when individuals were asked where they got information about health from as a girl. If they did not bring up magazines organically, they were prompted to describe any books or magazines they might have come into contact with.

Ada (b.1957) remembered that *Jackie* was very popular when she was growing up, although much of her recollection remained speculative. She suggested it was a

trustworthy source that was circulated amongst peers and talked about in friend groups at her school regularly, stating, 'I think the *Jackie* magazine was read. Do you know about *Jackie*?'. When the interviewer said no, in a deliberate attempt to elicit a description from her, Ada attempted to describe *Jackie*, stating 'I don't know whether it still exists', but it 'was read'. She could not remember many specifics and struggled to describe *Jackie* to the interviewer, an indication of the transient nature of magazine reading and the fallibility of memory. She did not offer any more descriptive info about it, but she commented, 'it's amazing isn't it, how you think, 'Yeah, it probably influenced you, but they do have a big influence, don't they.'²⁶⁴ In lieu of any personal anecdotes, Ada's testimony tapped in to broader cultural understandings of magazines as important and influential sources of information. By also suggesting that she learnt from her friends too, she was cautious not to overstate the importance of magazines to her acquisition of knowledge, informing the researcher that they were one part of the wider puzzle that made up her health education.²⁶⁵

Floss (b.1956) remembered *Diana*, a 'children's girlie magazine', and *Jackie*, which she never 'had', but read because there were copies of it 'around'. Coming into contact with copies of *Jackie* because others were reading it, or because copies were accessible without having to pay, is an experience that multiple women mentioned during their interview.²⁶⁶ Ivy (b.1963) suggested she often read *Jackie* communally with her friends on a local bench, and that this would elicit conversation about topics you might not 'have thought about chatting about without having had the magazine'.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Ada, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 10.3.18, Track 1 [0:21:33].

²⁶⁵ More on how girls learnt about sex, the body and menstruation in chapter three.

²⁶⁶ Floss, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 13.2.18, track 1 Mandy, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 13.3.18, track 1 [0:20:35], Frances BSF OH, interviewed by KM 22.2.18, track 1 [0:11:35], Jess, BSF OH, interviewed by TL 04.2.2020, track 1 [0:15:53], Ada, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 10.3.18, track 1 [0:35:18] More examples can be found in chapter three 'learning about menstruation'.

²⁶⁷ Ivy, BSF OH, interviewed by TF, 8.12.20, [0:49:23]

Mary (b.1945) and Elaine (b.1957) both came into contact with copies because their parents worked in newsagents.²⁶⁸ The prevalence of experiences of accessing magazines without purchasing them speaks to the community established by magazine readers and the way that magazines could be read independently or jointly. When she mentioned *Jackie*, Floss (b.1956) stated 'this is history isn't it, for you! You don't remember *Jackie*!'. Floss' comfort with qualifying experiences of reading magazines as worthy of historical study suggests that magazines were not flimsy, superfluous or unimportant artefacts of mass culture to her, rather they were historically significant. Floss positioned herself as the transmitter of social, cultural and historical knowledge, something Abrams reminds us we should always look out for in oral history interviews.²⁶⁹

Other women questioned the cultural positioning of magazines as trivial too. Dorothy (b.1967) recalled the English teacher at her school 'teasing' girls for reading *Jackie*: 'She said it was 'just drivel', and we should be reading books that would broaden our horizons more, but I can remember just not understanding, 'but how can this be drivel?' [laughs]. The interviewee responded, '*So how did you feel about it, if you didn't think it was drivel?*' and she expanded, 'oh, I think we all thought it was great for a while, though. It was brilliant. It, yeah, I mean, you could, it would come with a free sample of hair dye or something on the front which I'd duly use and turn my hair orange for a week, and things.'

Like Floss, Dorothy had a strong sense that *Jackie* magazine was important and respectable reading, even if she struggled to articulate exactly why it was so

²⁶⁸ Mary, BSF OH, interviewed by DP 12.12.19, track 1[0:22:30] and Elaine, BSF OH, interviewed by TL 18.6.18, track 1 [0:33:28]

²⁶⁹ Floss, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 13.2.18, track 1 [0:19:19] Lynn Abrams, 'Memory as a source and subject of study in oral histories of post-war lives, paper given at Tagung Oral History, 2016 , Available at, <https://vimeo.com/193857511> , [Accessed 18/06/2021].

important to her. Her statement effectively conveys how age and life experience influenced how she engaged with the material. Her admission that it was 'great for a while' displays the complex interaction between the past and the present that takes place in an oral history interview, as she assesses and suggests she likely grew out of enjoying *Jackie* and this is not reflective of her present interests. She recalls her a distinctly youthful attitude to the magazine, and attributes it to her peers too through her use of 'we'.

Dorothy followed up with a critique of her English teacher's take on Jackie and branded her opinion 'snobbery'.²⁷⁰ She stated, 'this was, yeah, the world we were more excited about than, I mean, she wanted us to read *Jane Eyre*'. Dorothy offered a challenge to assessments of 'high' and 'low' brow mass culture, asserting the importance of magazines to her, her peers and the literary canon.

Dorothy described *Jackie* as a 'world', using language that chimes with the assessments of scholars that magazines functioned as a 'feminine world' for their readership. As Winship states, 'the 'woman's world' which women's magazines represent is created precisely because it does not exist outside their pages. In their isolation on the margins of the men's world, in their uneasiness about the feminine accomplishments, women need support - desperately.'²⁷¹ Kirsty (b.1953) also emphasised the importance of the feminine world constructed by magazines, suggesting *Jackie* helped her to process her experiences of sexual assault. It is likely Kirsty told the story of her assault because of the media coverage of #me too at the time of her interview. After being asked what she was reading as a girl, she mentioned *Jackie*, and suggested it was 'ahead of its time' because it 'treated' and 'spoke' to girls

²⁷⁰ Dorothy interview, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 05.2.18, track 1 [0:21:09]

²⁷¹ Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines*, p.6.

well. She then told a story about her childhood sexual assault, and how people had reacted. She stated, ‘and I remember, oh yeah, I remember, I was about seventeen or eighteen ... because of the sexual assault that I’d ... that had happened to me, I felt very guilty, you know, we always feel guilty when somebody sexually assaults us “That’s my fault”.’

She recounted reading *Jackie*, seeing a discussion of sexual assault and the sentence ‘it’s not your fault’. She stated, ‘that’s the first time I’d ever seen that, and that, that absolutely ... it did ... I tell you what, it changed, did change my life.’ She recalled being told by an acquaintance that she had changed completely, and attributed her growth in confidence to the editorial comment. She suggested ‘somebody gave me permission not to carry that weight of it being my fault, and I blossomed’. ²⁷² Kirsty situated *Jackie* as a lone voice that cared about, and for girls. It is possible she has mis-attributed the memory to *Jackie*, because it was the most conservative periodical, and rarely touched on issues like sexual assault in the copies I consulted. Nevertheless, Kirsty’s story and assertion that *Jackie* was ‘ahead of its time’ reveals her belief in the propensity of magazines to offer support, validation and community in ways otherwise unavailable to many girls,

Interviews also revealed that reading magazines and having conversations with peers about them offered the opportunity to discuss sex, menstruation and the body.²⁷³ Ada (b.1957) flagged the ‘old agony aunt’ pages in *Jackie* as being particularly helpful. She suggests that even if she didn’t buy it every week due to finances, she knew she would likely come in to contact with a copy regardless.²⁷⁴ Dorothy (b.1967) was ‘sure

²⁷² Kirsty, BSF OH, interviewed by DP 06.03.2020, track 1 [0:47:35].

²⁷³ Explored in further detail in chapter three.

²⁷⁴ Ada interview, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 10.3.18, track 1 [0:21:33]

it had a health page'. When she thought about what might have bothered her most at that age, she mentioned acne, and relayed her experience of attending the doctor about it. Similarly Pat (b.1959) humorously summarised discovering *Jackie*, stating, 'then I graduated to *Jackie* magazine which was all about dealing with spots'.²⁷⁵ Copies of *Jackie* consulted often contained Dear Dr column entries about acne or 'troubled skin' and numerous adverts for over-the-counter creams and ointments.²⁷⁶

When trying to remember experiences of learning about health, both Ada and Dorothy made generalising statements about the role magazines played in the lives of young girls. Dorothy stated, '*Jackie* magazine, which I'm sure must have had a health page. Must have, erm, about, yeah, the sort of things that girls of that age might be thinking about.'²⁷⁷ Ada and Dorothy identified with the collectivising term 'girls', their testimony suggesting they felt that their experiences likely reflected the experiences of other girls who were reading *Jackie* too. Whilst the women could not remember specifics, it is significant that they demarked magazines as important sources, and drew on a collective language of girlhood when talking about magazines. This perhaps tells us that it is difficult to remember magazines but it might also hint to something broader; specifically the cultural position of magazines, and the way they fostered what Anderson has described as an 'imagined community' of female readers who had shared concerns and investments in their content.²⁷⁸ This testimony enables us to see

²⁷⁵ Pat, BSF OH, interviewed by TL 08.04.2021 track 1 of 2 [2:00:00 onwards]

²⁷⁶ Some examples of *Jackie*'s coverage of acne and skincare include these adverts and editorials between 1964-1966 include, 'Dear Beauty Editor', *Jackie*, July 25th 1964, Clearasil advert, *Jackie*, March 20 1965, Clearasil advert, July 24th 1965, Dry or Greasy- which is your skin problem?, *Jackie*, July 3 1965, 'Dear Beauty Editor', *Jackie*, 03.13.1966.

²⁷⁷ Dorothy, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 05.2.18, track 1 [0:10:45]

²⁷⁸ The term 'imagined communities' comes from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), pp.5-7. In *Imagined Communities* Anderson suggests the nation can be defined as an 'imagined political community'. It is 'imagined' because 'members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. This thesis proposes magazines offer a means of facilitating and fostering a shared sense of imagined community amongst adolescent female readers from disparate parts of Britain.

the place magazines occupied in girls' memories, and how those memories of *Jackie* involved a consideration of the concerns of a wider community of girls too.

Mass Observation and Magazines

As outlined in the previous chapter, the creation, formatting, collection and preservation of the Mass Observation material differs to oral history methodologies. Whilst oral history interviews reveal the difficulties many women had recalling magazines on the spot in the presence of an interviewer, and women's assessments of the importance of, and pleasure derived from reading magazines, MO responses offered different revelations about magazines and menstruation.

If respondents to MO brought up magazines, they tended to do so to explain how they learnt about menstruation, or to critique menstrual advertisements. This was in response to the request on the Directive that writers comment on 'such things as the influence of advertising' on their 'use of sanitary products' over the years.²⁷⁹ There was nothing asking specifically about magazines, and resultantly reflections on magazine representations were less common than reflections on TV advertising. This was also likely due to TV advertising emerging closer to the time of writing. This is different to oral history, where respondents were either asked about magazines specifically, or brought them up when asked about what sources of information informed their health or sex education during girlhood.

Responses revealed that adverts for menstrual products shown on TV were seen by some respondents as more shocking, or more inappropriate, than those

²⁷⁹ Mass Observation Directive, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

available in magazines. This was typically attributed to their location within shared spaces in the home and their multisensory nature. As moving pictures containing images and sounds, they extended their reach and audience to the whole room, and could not be hidden swiftly. Women recalled that the format in which messages about menstruation were conveyed on the TV sometimes resulted in them feeling embarrassment and shame, and sensing it in others. Many respondents also criticised the style of the adverts shown on TV, particularly those which contained film of women exercising, because they reflected the wider representation of women in media. They positioned this misrepresentation as humorous, and suggested it often directly contrasted to how they felt and moved through the world when they were menstruating.

Women's critiques of menstrual advertising on TV and in magazines can be interpreted in relation to the cultural circuit. Individuals have to negotiate between the personal, the local and the general assumptions about menstruation offered in magazines. As menstruation enters public discourse and discussion, it deviates further from private and local understandings more available to women and girls whilst re-appropriating elements from lived culture and forms of subjectivity. Women recognise that adverts do not convey their experiences. They also have to contend with menstruation becoming more public, especially when advertising starts to feature on TV and this conflicts with the longstanding understandings of menstruation as private. Hitherto, these representations featured in girls' and women's magazines, which although public forms, were a 'female space'. Women offered critiques of the tropes presented in menstrual advertising. These critiques reveal how public forms of menstrual representation flattened and homogenised, and resultantly could not accurately account for multiple women's experiences of menstruation.

Responses to MO suggest that humour was a key narrative device framing how women structured their personal critiques of menstrual advertising. This humour suggests that women did not take the adverts seriously, saw them as too far removed from their own experiences, were aware their writing would be read by others, and were capable of rebutting popular narratives that did not speak to their own understandings about menstruation. Drawing connections between adverts for menstrual products and adverts for other consumer goods directed at women, Georgina (b.1973) believed that TV adverts for towels were

Sickening, like washing powder ads - look at the sheets now, the stains are gone! And the roller-skating, volleyball playing, lycra wearing models are ridiculous too - I just want to watch telly when I'm on, I eat lots of chocolate. It's not that I'm afraid of leakages...I haven't got the inclination to go skydiving at all. Mind you I don't like a lot of adverts on telly.

She compared them to magazine adverts stating, 'I don't read magazines that often so I can't actually think of any adverts I've seen recently. As I've already explained I always buy the same so I don't think the adverts would make any difference even if I did like them.'²⁸⁰ Gwen (b.1953) stated she liked some adverts but not others, and also offered a critique of their style,

I think adverts are good, although some are incredibly silly (blue blood??) And why would I wish to roller-skate while towing a dog on Day One of my period, when bed and a hot water bottle are far more appealing? ...And do I care if my towel can fly? Should a towel be bodyshaped - as opposed to housebrick shaped??²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ G2776, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁸¹ G2640, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

Winona (b.1958) actively acknowledged that the adverts could be humorous, and that they might have such a cultural legacy. She offered her thoughts, 'I think people will look back at the T.V advertisements in the future and be amused by their symbolism and indirectness.'

Unlike some of the other replies however, she suggested she enjoyed the TV advertising 'I must admit that I like the advert for Tampax which showed lots of women doing sporting activities chiefly because I like the music, "it's my life." I thought it was a clever choice.'²⁸² Angela (b.1974) offered a criticism of the appearance of the actors chosen for the adverts, stating 'the advertising, especially for Tampax, 'makes me so angry that I cannot watch them without shouting at the TV...It is not helpful to watch a skinny and beautiful woman prance about on a beach, or on roller-skates.'²⁸³

Each of the responses suggest it came very naturally to the women to engage with adverts critically, compare the adverts with their own real world experiences, and claim that they were not influenced by them. Annoyed with how companies depicted menstruating women, the respondents contrasted the representations with their own experiences to emphasise that they did not adequately display the discomfort they felt menstruating. Yet there is a refusal of a status of victimhood. Using humour as a key literary device the women demonstrated their ability to critique publicly circulating discourses and images about menstruation, emphasising that the representations were wrong, not them.²⁸⁴

²⁸² W2780, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁸³ A2685, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁸⁴ This was not true of all aspects of menstruation talked about in the responses. The final chapter of this thesis explores some of the more serious reflections on experience provided by the women, centring on chronic menstrual pain, and particularly cultural attitudes towards it.

By 1996, variations on the early critiques of magazines born from feminist media scholars had saturated the mainstream. As MO writers were mostly educated upper-working and middle-classes, it is likely they were familiar with this line of critique of advertising, once again demonstrating the reach of the cultural circuit. It is possible that the writers wanted to suggest they were 'above' being taken in by the adverts, to indirectly reveal their awareness of the unethical and exploitative ways that advertising and consumer culture functions.

Despite criticising the adverts' content, respondents suggested the stylistic conventions of the content were not important influences on brands used or the products worn. Georgina (b.1973) stated, 'I always buy the same and so I don't think the adverts would make any difference even if I did like them.'²⁸⁵ Gemma (b.1978) stated, 'advertising doesn't influence me- it can't, because I don't buy my own sanitary protection'.²⁸⁶ Winnie (b.1951) stated, 'all women have to use these things, but I just can't see that anyone would change brands just because of an advert'.²⁸⁷ These assessments highlight that women believed that brand loyalty, finances, insights from peers, parental authority or inherited familial practices were the factors influencing their product choice, more so than effective marketing.

Many women reflected on the impact of watching menstrual advertising in communal spaces and in the company of others. Winnie recalled that 'in last year or so there have been loads on the television' and that they 'always seem to be on at meal times'. She stated that she hadn't met anyone who thought the adverts should be on the TV. Winnie suggested the marketing negatively influenced her purchase

²⁸⁵ G2776, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁸⁶ G2769, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁸⁷ W1918, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

decisions, as she claimed that she 'would be less likely to buy product just because they put it on TV'. She compared TV ads to magazines, stating that she felt it was 'alright for them to advertise in women's magazines' but that it still wouldn't make her buy the product, reflecting the way magazines and menstruation were positioned and understood as a gendered issue, suitable solely for the 'women's world.' This reveals the tension women felt navigating discourses of invisibility, as although increased representation had the potential to 'normalise' menstruation, the women felt the representations often made them feel uncomfortable and limited their ability to uphold notions of menstrual secrecy.

Explaining her dislike of TV adverts, Gemma (b.1978) suggested they were 'embarrassing if other people are in the room too'. She cited a specific example,

the bodyform ad has particularly loud music with a women singing and I always have to turn the sound down on the TV set when it's on because I find the idea of a song about sanitary towels so ludicrous... In Britain it's not so bad because the adverts are usually only shown late at night on C4 which is an adult channel and which won't cause young children to ask awkward questions. But in other countries...I've had a couple of excruciating experiences abroad...The first was staying in France with French family in 1992; before my periods started. During an evening meal, which always took place at 9-10pm the family would watch TV. During one commercial break an ad for 'Always ultra' appeared and a sudden hush descended. Nobody knew where to look as a Frenchwoman sloshed blue ink into towels; the French family's faces all went blank and I'm sure I was blushing.

She also went on to compare TV adverts to magazine adverts, stating,

when I read magazines 'of the teenage type' it's always in public because I borrow other people's at school and when I come across full-page adverts for tampons or towels I feel so embarrassed that I have to fold the page under so that other people don't notice that I've got the chance to examine an advertisement like that.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ G2769, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

Gemma also read magazines communally. By telling this story as a deliberate contrast to her experiences of watching TV she emphasised the increased discomfort felt when viewing TV advertising because unlike magazines, where she could shut the page to avoid an awkward feeling or conversation, TV advertising made this impossible. Magazines were valued both for the opportunities they offered for communal reading, and for their relative privacy.

This sentiment was echoed in other women's responses too. Dawn (b.1980) stated that she hated adverts for menstrual products because they were 'extremely cringeworthy especially on television because they are obviously aimed at women whilst the film is watched by everyone'. She also commented on the timing of TV advertising, noticing that all menstrual products were 'advertised after the 9pm watershed'. She preferred magazine adverts because they offered more privacy, but suggested she would still feel embarrassed looking at them in case anyone saw what she was reading.²⁸⁹ Likewise Tina (b.1958) provided a similar reflection, suggesting that TV adverts were 'too much in mixed company', because her parents were in their seventies and found them embarrassing to watch. She claimed TV advertisements should be discreet 'for their sakes' but was happy for adverts to be featured in magazines.²⁹⁰

Women wrote about their reticence regarding menstrual visibility, and implicitly commented on the threat advertising posed to their ability to adhere to notions of menstrual concealment in their familial homes. Whitney (b.1970) more overtly suggested that the discourses presented in advertising influenced her decision to avoid discussions of menstruation. She described that her new products gave her

²⁸⁹ D2739, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

²⁹⁰ T1826, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

‘much more freedom and security’, and went on to say, ‘I was influenced by advertising, I suppose, because I don’t discuss these matters with others.’²⁹¹ The language she used to talk about her period, namely mentions of ‘freedom’ and ‘security’ suggest she had acquired this language from engaging with advertisements, but that her menstrual technology also had material benefits on her ability to live her life. She suggested her adherence to the culture of secrecy was likely to do with the other conflicting discourses present in advertising that encouraged users to remain silent on menstrual matters. It is this ‘silence’ regarding menstrual matters that made not only the auditory, but multi-sensory dimensions of TV advertising a key dimension of women’s memories of their girlhood and adulthood experiences of consuming representations of menstruation.

Building on the work of Joe Moran, Chelsea Saxby reminds us that ‘that fragments of qualitative TV reception were penned by those who were uniquely affected by content’, and that resultantly trying to construct an image of ‘typical’ feeling from such responses would be ‘rather like seeking an expression of today’s collective mentality from internet comment boards’.²⁹² Her study of public response to BBC sex education materials in the 1970s notes that whilst such responses are unable to denote ‘typical’ feeling, the complaints are still useful, because they both reflected and reproduced contemporary concerns about ‘familial privacy, the technology of broadcasting, and the sexual knowledge of children, especially girls’.²⁹³ Her assessments, to some extent, ring true of menstrual advertising too. Women’s assessments of their form, style and content reflect and reproduce contemporary

²⁹¹ W2731, MOA, ‘Menstruation’.

²⁹² Chelsea Saxby, Rosemary Proom Misses a ‘Sex Lesson’: BBC Schools Broadcasting and the Private Family in 1970s Britain, p.8.

²⁹³ Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain In Front of the TV* (London, 2014), p.10 in Saxby, ‘Rosemary Proom’, p.8.

concerns regarding menstrual (in)visibility, technology of broadcasting, sexual knowledge and women's and girls' social roles.

The snippets of lived experience taken from oral history and Mass Observation testimony offer the opportunity to understand how magazines and menstrual advertising functioned in the lives of girls growing up in Britain between 1960 and 1980. These materials and insights enhance a study of mass-market magazines in the period 1960-1980, whilst also situating a study of magazines in their wider historical context. A study of magazine's broader significance in the lives of girls growing up in this period enables a more detailed consideration of how these magazines functioned as sources of information about menstruation in the lives of their readers. Throughout the next three chapters analysis of magazine material is contextualised, in part, by the reception and concerns of their readers. This enables the study to consider the emotional landscape of the period 1960-1980. The methods used to engage in such analysis are outlined below.

Approaching Magazines

In 2016 Tinkler stated 'we currently have a fragmented picture of how to address historical questions using girls' and women's magazines.'²⁹⁴ How scholars engage with magazines when conducting research projects is rarely stated in any detail, but the methodological framework adopted by the researcher rarely stands alone from the findings presented. Tinkler's chapter 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity' sets out ways of engaging with magazines that involve distinct scholarly reflection on magazine

²⁹⁴ Penny Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity: Methods for Working with Girls' and Women's Magazines' in *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. by Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinburg (Routledge, 2016), pp.25.

research practices. The approach laid out by Tinkler is adopted in the proceeding chapters of this thesis, as it offers a way of historicising magazines that stays attuned to all their composite elements and of those involved in the research process.

Tinkler's approach involves reading 'around' magazines and 'with magazines'. Working 'around' magazines constitutes an attempt to consider all aspects of the magazine. Whilst the roles of publishers, editors and advertisers are beyond the scope of this thesis, it is concerned with practices of consumption and reading, and the context of magazine production, such as the broader socio-economic and cultural contexts. The aim of this approach is to move beyond solely providing close readings of text, but to consider and explore how readers responded to representations, and how they were shaped by, and contributed to, wider culturally circulating codes too.

Working 'with' magazines involves visual and textual analyses to trace themes within and across periodicals. In my case, this involves analysing the ideological constructions of menstruation across images and texts, adverts and editorial content. Analysis encourages reflection on the impression created by magazine content in both individual features and the magazine as a whole.²⁹⁵ This involves consideration of editorial content, advertising, letters from readers, and pages like the agony aunt or the Dear Dr Column to ensure that magazines are read 'holistically' and recognised as spaces that give voice to multiple and often conflicting messages. As Maggie Andrews has said, magazines reflect the tensions, anxieties and preoccupations of an era, often acting as 'site of debate and discussion and perhaps even as a site for the

²⁹⁵ Penny Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity', pp.25-39.

working through of ideas', offering some degree of explanation for their conflicting and contradictory features.²⁹⁶

Whilst early analysis of mass culture and magazines relied upon close textual analysis of magazine content, Tinkler suggests that historians attend more to 'the broader socio-economic, political and cultural contexts of particular periods' in which magazines circulated.²⁹⁷ This concern with context, addressed in the introduction to this thesis, helps to realise some of the 'debates and discussions' being worked through in a magazine, and provide a broader understanding of the 'tensions, anxieties and preoccupations of an era'.²⁹⁸ Resultantly, teen magazines are not used here as evidence of norms and behaviour, rather they are used as sources indicating contemporary discursive struggle and contestation regarding girlhood, femininity, menstrual stigma and how these discussions played out in girls' magazines over the period 1960-1980. Below I address my engagement with adverts and problem pages specifically in more detail, as these are the two places in magazines where menstruation featured.

Advertising

As Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie state, advertising was, and is, the 'most explicit and loudest form of discussion of the menses'.²⁹⁹ Advertising for menstrual technology in magazines has played a significant role in disseminating information about

²⁹⁶ Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity', p.25 and Maggie Andrews, 'The Gendering of Racism in Social Problem Films', *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. by Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara, (Taylor and Francis, 2014), p.8.

²⁹⁷ Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity', p.25.

²⁹⁸ Andrews, 'The Gendering of Racism in Social Problem Films', p.8.

²⁹⁹ Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (eds), *Menstruation: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke, 2005) in Chris Bobel, *New Blood Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation* (Rutgers University Press, 2010), p.33.

menstruation to girls. As Winship suggested the necessity for revenue from advertising can often result in advertising that conflicts with magazine content.³⁰⁰ Yet when it comes to menstruation, advertising makes up a large part of the content. Adverts for menstrual products harbour seemingly contradictory ideas about menstruation, and subsequently menstruating bodies, which are always both female and feminine in their advertising. Menstruation is portrayed as a hygienic crisis, as adverts project a need for secrecy and protection onto a society already impervious to menstruation and those who experience it. At the same time, they emphasise the potential for confidence, empowerment and freedom. This freedom however, was conditional, highly dependent on the purchase of both a magazine and menstrual protection to mediate between blood and cleanliness, private and public, the feminine body and the masculinist world. This discourse of protection relates to the longer history of thinking about femaleness and the body marked female as a danger to itself and incomplete.³⁰¹

Advertising presents us with a prism through which to see complex social patterns.³⁰² In relation to menstrual products, this, Shail and Howie state, is because to be effective as consumables they have to be marketed in a way that resonates with personal and social values.³⁰³ In Millum's words, the adverts contain 'cultural meanings above and beyond the sales message', constructing a social world around the product.³⁰⁴ Advertisers tend to opt for a series of the most readily understood and available messages for the consumer. Because of this, Shail and Howie suggest attention be paid to any changes in marketing, because they may reflect much wider

³⁰⁰ Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines*, p.46.

³⁰¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism* (Routledge, 1994), p.203.

³⁰² Raymond Williams, 'Advertising: The Magic System', in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. by Simon During (Routledge, 1993), p. 334 in Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (eds), *Menstruation: A Cultural History* (Palgrave, 2005), p.1.

³⁰³ Shail and Howie, 'Introduction', p.1.

³⁰⁴ Trevor Millum, *Images of Women: Advertising in Women's Magazines*, (Chatto & Windus, 1975), p.11.

changes in the economy, society and culture.³⁰⁵ Jordanova suggests that although 'visual images are static entities that appear to stand outside the chaos of social life, they can be deconstructed so that the ways in which they have been produced become apparent and the nature of their relationship to social and cultural processes becomes explicit.'³⁰⁶

Menstrual advertising contained the most widely available, culturally circulating, ideas about menstrual management, health and its prescribed relationship to femininity. For this reason, its analysis is essential for understanding the history of menstruation in Britain in the period 1960-1980. As Jordanova has stated, 'images in advertising have a pervasive power so long as we do not reflect on their underlying assumptions'. However, these assumptions do need to be 'held up for inspection and analysis, precisely because it is so easy to take them for granted'.³⁰⁷ Adverts are influential, and designed deliberately to influence the consumer. Deconstructing what advertisers want to convey to consumers about their product, the world and the status and opportunities afforded to consumers, can tell us about the predominant ideologies of an era, and what behaviours, lifestyles and ways of being were socially and culturally validated under capitalism. This task also makes up a large portion of this thesis moving forward. I look at the socio-cultural context in which adverts for menstrual-related products (technologies and pain killers) were produced, and I explore the centrality of gendered medical understandings and conceptualisations of appropriate feminine behaviour to their depictions of menstruation and menstruating

³⁰⁵ Milum, *Images of Women*, p.7 and Shail and Howie, *Menstruation*, p.1.

³⁰⁶ In *Sexual Visions*, Jordanova looked at medical advertisements to exhibit the impossibility of viewing advertising as 'asocial images'. Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Century* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.149.

³⁰⁷ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.149

bodies. These representations tell us about contemporary ideas regarding women's bodies, menstruation, health and selfhood at this time.

Problem Pages

Problem pages are particularly useful sources both for pinpointing areas of contemporary discourse on a wide scale, and for understanding the types of problems faced by girls on a personal and individual basis. Reader voices that appear in magazines are cherry-picked, monitored and branded to fit with the stylistic and ideological stance of the magazine, but they are important because they prioritise the voices and concerns of the magazine readers. Problem pages are a public forum that invite readers to seek help, whilst simultaneously also promising confidentiality and advice. As McRobbie notes, they have a longstanding place in women's and teen magazines and are an intimate mode, reliant 'on a careful navigation of the boundaries which mark out the private from the public' for their success.³⁰⁸ They are a place where differing forms of expertise and authority meet, and where the person writing in often pits experiential expertise against familial authority, whilst calling for further kinds of expertise from agony aunts, counsellors, doctors and nurses. They are of particular use to this study because they offer insight into what magazines publishers believed constituted adolescent interests, pleasures, fears and anxieties. Furthermore, they are one of the only places (beyond advertising) where menstruation is discussed in mass-market magazines.

Intended to function as a place where readers could write in and seek help, the problem pages, nurse and doctor columns, and agony aunt features held a prominent

³⁰⁸ McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.155.

place in girls' magazines from the 1930s onwards. Across the twentieth century, the increasing psychologisation of everyday life encouraged magazines to engage with the deeply personal interiority of their readers as an entertainment medium. According to Nikolas Rose, the psyche was opened up for 'exploration, cultivation and regulation in many ways and along many channels', as the 'vocabularies of psychotherapeutics' were no longer addressed solely to those who were 'unable to conduct life' but were 'deployed in everyday practice', saturating society and culture.³⁰⁹ They also offer personal examples of concerns, if we trust that each problem was written in order to seek help, and not for entertainment - something I return to at the end of this section.

The problem page can be viewed as an open forum for those with limited access to therapeutic facilities, and as a collection of health and wellbeing concerns curated by magazine editors with the intention of reflecting the ideological world constructed by magazine editors and the debates, preoccupations and anxieties of the time.³¹⁰ In McRobbie's words, 'from this perspective it might be argued that this "silly" form is in fact playing an extremely important role. It is listening and responding to a discourse which so far has found no other space in which it is able to speak for itself.'³¹¹ This is particularly true of menstruation, where representation in mass culture for girls was near enough non-existent.³¹² It is this absence that encourages me to take girls' articulations of menstrual-related worry, discomfort and pain in problem pages and doctors' columns seriously, and to view them as genuine expressions of emotion, and genuine calls for help and support.

³⁰⁹ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul The Shaping of the Private Self*, (Free Association Books, 1989), p.235.

³¹⁰ McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.155.

³¹¹ McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.156.

³¹² See analysis of 'how come the heroine never has a period' advert in chapter three.

Melanie McFadyean, the agony aunt at *Just Seventeen* girls magazine that ran from 1983 to 2004 argues that problem pages served a crucial function for millions of readers who did not have access to the world of counsellors or sex-educationists and who possibly did not have the kind of enlightened middle-class parents to talk openly about bodies or about the world of adolescent sexual encounters.³¹³ Yet McRobbie highlights that this approach should be employed cautiously, as ‘her assumption that all the problems are mechanically and automatically reflective of pain and distress blinds her to the other functions of the page’. McRobbie emphasised the pleasurable aspects of reading a problem page to suggest that McFadyean may have forgotten about the multiplicity of readings which these can produce (cynical, disbelieving, and humorous), and that this makes her a ‘naïve’ reader of her own page.³¹⁴

Problem pages are not always read in private and not always for the truth, and ‘most agony aunts know’ that at least ‘some letters are written collectively during the school lunch hour.’ McRobbie suggests that this does not necessarily detract from the importance of the question being asked, and that ‘indeed if Freud is right the joke element in writing as a group emphasises its significance, not for one person but for the group as a whole.’³¹⁵ Building on this line of argument, if a problem page concern about menstruation was written by a group of girls in an attempt to mock the problem page format, then it would still tell us something about the cultural position of menstruation; namely that it is not taken ‘seriously’ enough as an issue in society and culture, that girls felt magazine discussions trivialised or did not relate to their own

³¹³ McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.155.

³¹⁴ McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.161.

³¹⁵ McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p.162.

experiences, or that the girls themselves felt comfortable trivialising menstruation as groups of girls.

Although magazines positioned themselves as providers of expertise and authority, research has shown that readers sometimes negotiated and trivialised these voices, finding them humorous. This humour, much like the critiques of advertising offered in the previous section, was a key facet of women's agentic capacity, and conveying this humour was key to both their written and oral delivery of stories, memories and experiences.³¹⁶ An interview with Sally (1954), an avid *Jackie* reader in her youth, revealed how her friendship group recreated problem pages in French lessons instead of working.

Can I ask you to explain what you told me earlier before the recorder went on, about when you were reading Jackie in school or you were making up problem pages?

Mostly they were humour driven right, because we were so *bored* with the French. I hated French at A Level so we used to sit at these desks at the back of the classroom and Miss...We weren't listening to her at all. We were *Jackie* readers so we would be writing spoof problems, for example, 'my boyfriend thinks my back is hairy' or something like that, what do you think I should do?' and then we'd pass them to each other saying 'well I think you should get your back shaved or tell him to...blah blah blah blah. And sometimes it would be a bit more explicit about your breasts or something like that but nothing near the mark, but you know we'd be hooting, that sort of laughing where you can't suppress yourself, and she'd come up and down the aisles, Miss, and she snatched this thing and tore us apart. Told us we were perverts!³¹⁷

To say that Sally had passively read and internalised the information provided on the problem pages, as early feminist arguments suggested, would ignore the way that

³¹⁶ Frazer, 'Teenage Girls Reading Jackie', p.412. Part of the research conducted for my own MA dissertation revolved around women's own articulations of the pleasure girls derived from reading problem pages, and the place that problem pages held in their imagination.

³¹⁷ Interview with J, conducted on 1/08/2017, in Hannah Froom, MA dissertation, '*Woman's Mirror*, the 'New Woman', and Female Magazine Readers in the 1960s.', submitted to Cardiff University in 2017.

Sally and her friends later satirised problem pages and the content within them. The pages provided the girls with a 'humour driven' form of entertainment.³¹⁸

Ritchie emphasises the importance of acknowledging that 'while a journalist or advertiser may aim to communicate one particular meaning, readers can create others, even ones that were completely unintended', and Sally's testimony is evidence of this creation of meaning and significance.³¹⁹ Furthermore, the entertainment provided by *Jackie* did not stem only from the occasions when the girls were actually reading the magazine, chiming with Joke Hermes' assertion that 'readers' investments in texts are often not necessarily, nor directly, connected with the narrative structures of these texts'.³²⁰ Even when the magazine was not presently being read, the way the magazine was marked in their imaginations provided the girls with a route of escapism, enjoyment and the opportunity to redefine the classroom and the power relations contained within it. To return to Winship's assertion, magazines are read differently at different times in different situations and thus the pleasure derived from them also depends on the context in which they are imagined, discussed or read.³²¹ Perhaps it is possible to say that even when a physical copy of a magazine is not present or being read, girls' and women's magazines offer their readers the opportunity for escapism and entertainment. Magazines held a prominent enough place in the imaginations of this group of girls that they could find fun in recreating and mocking their pages.

³¹⁸ Sally, HF MA dissertation, interviewed by HF 4/8/2017.

³¹⁹ I explore my engagement with advertising in more detail at the end of this chapter. Quote taken from Rachel Ritchie, 'Young Women and *Woman*: Depictions of youthful femininity, 1954-1969' in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. by Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara, (Taylor and Francis, 2014), p.145.

³²⁰ Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (Polity Press, 1995), p.152.

³²¹ Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines*, p.52.

Floss (b.1956) also remembered problem pages in the 'women's magazines lying around at home.' She wasn't sure 'whether they were deliberately left around the house' in the hope she would pick them up to read, or whether they were just her Mum's copies which she left around the house. By questioning this, she emphasised her awareness that magazines were inherently disposable, but also her later reflections that they might have had another use and been used by her parents as a mediator or replacement for parent-child discussions of sex and the body. She followed this by saying that they 'always had a problem page' and described reading the problem page as 'your eyes going up when other people have mentioned the prime, what was her name, Virginia, Veronica Ironside? That rings a bell. [laughs] You'll have to look her up! And it was at the back of *Woman* or *Woman's Own*'.³²²

Peggy Makins, who wrote under the pen name Evelyn Home, suggested that problem pages were deliberately placed at the back of magazines to make readers 'unfailingly leaf through the dead wood of pattern order forms and the like in order to get to the personal problems'.³²³ Floss' account suggests her familiarity with the form, structure and content of the magazines, as she specified that she knew where to look for the problem page. Jess (b.1968) also liked problem pages. Jess' account evoked the excitement felt when, and tactile elements of, reading problem pages, and how the two were interrelated. She stated, 'I loved problem pages! [laughs] They were the ... yeah, we're all straight to the problem page. It was either do you save the problem page till last,

³²² Floss interview, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 13.2.18, track 1 [0:17:21]

³²³ Peggy Makins, *The Evelyn Home Story* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1975), p.15.

because you want it the most, or do you go straight to it? Yeah, I loved the problem pages.’³²⁴

Women’s reflections on magazines and problem pages testify to their importance in their lives as one part of their menstrual education and as a source of solace and entertainment and site for critical thinking during their girlhood. Problem page queries about menstruation are littered throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis, as a means of exploring menstrual discourse and experience in more detail.

Conclusion

Each of the approaches, sources and reflections outlined above aim to ensure that this thesis considers magazines and their readers as wholly as possible. As Andrews and MacNamara have stated, ‘a’ reading of the text, does not constitute “the” reading of the text’s meaning’.³²⁵ The emotional interiority of the magazine reader can offset this essentialism. The voices of magazine readers have, and continue to, illuminate fractures in the interpretations and conclusions of early media scholars. Testimony reveals that combining holistic magazine research with oral history interviews and Mass Observation Directives enables reader voices to shape the histories of the girls’ magazines and girlhood menstrual experiences more broadly.

³²⁴ Jess, BSF OH, interviewed by TL, 04.02.2020, track 1 [0:15:53]

³²⁵ Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara, ‘Introduction’, in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. by Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara, (Taylor and Francis, 2014), pp.1-3.

Chapter Three

Learning about Menstruation

Introduction

Anne (1957) told MO that she was worried her first period would arrive ‘suddenly’ at secondary school. Following in her friend’s footsteps, she had carried a towel ‘just in case’. The school she had attended provided girls with one ‘special lesson’ about periods, but had left the brunt of the responsibility to parents, instructing them to discuss sex and the body with their children using the educational materials they provided. Her religious parents felt she was too young, and so did not take up the school’s call for at home conversation.

Anne’s first substantial lesson about sex, menstruation and the body came when her mother was ‘taken ill with heavy periods just before the menopause’. She did not understand what her mum was going through, but was told ‘she was not seriously ill and it was nothing to worry about’. Feeling that this wasn’t quite right, she asked her grandmother to explain, who responded by asking her if she knew about what ‘happens to women every month’. Anne replied that she did not, causing her grandmother to become ‘nervous’ and ‘embarrassed’. She offered no further explanation. Anne did not have a conversation about periods with her mum until she had her first period at age fourteen. She stated, ‘I told my mother, and she reassured me, but I was upset about it because I felt it would be dominating my life’.

Anne believed she was prepared for menstruation, just ‘not very well’. She also believed that a lack of information meant menstruation ‘became something frightening and embarrassing’ for her. She stressed her belief that secrecy and embarrassment

around menstruation 'leads to harm'.³²⁶ Anne's attitudes about menstruation were shaped by interactions doused in reticence and shame, a lack of a consistent, adequate, or informative classroom based sex education, and by observing other experiences of (ill) menstrual health. These are themes present in much testimony about experiences of menstrual education and first menses in the period 1960–1980.

Whilst most women received some level of sex education or instruction about sex and reproduction at school, education relating specifically to menstruation was limited. Girls believed it was inadequate, misdirected, and mistimed. Girls rarely had an awareness of anatomical terminology, what a menstrual cycle was, or how they might feel, physically, psychologically and emotionally whilst they menstruated. Many women recalled brief and vague classroom discussions of sex and the body, or animal anatomy, delivered with distinctly religious, moral or gendered assumptions about sexuality that left them only partially informed about sex and menstruation before their first period. Others knew nothing, resulting in shock, confusion and fear.

Beyond class-room-based sex education lessons, schools also did not cater to the infrastructural practicalities of menstruating. This often compounded girls' assessment of first menses as a traumatic, shocking or difficult moment. A questionnaire conducted by the MWF in the late 1940s surveying school facilities and the provision and disposal of 'sanitary towels' revealed that there was a 'dearth of sanitary resources'.³²⁷ In 1949, the MWF published this report in *The Lancet*. They flagged that problems in schools were twofold, heightened by the 'inclusion of the 14-15 age - group of girls by the raising of the school leaving age' and by 'the

³²⁶ A2212, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

³²⁷ The Medical Women's Federation, 'The Supply and Disposal of Sanitary Protection in Schools', *Lancet*, 28 May 1949, 925-7.

displacement of the washable towel by one intended for immediate destruction' necessitating 'facilities for disposal'.³²⁸ The MWF found that of the 112 council schools which replied, 32 had no arrangements whereby children could obtain sanitary towels, 42 had no facilities for changing, whilst 75 had no means of disposing of soiled towels. Many schools had toilets without lockable doors, or doors at all, whilst others had mixed sex toilets with swing doors. Schools often had no sanitary bins, and the provision of towels was left to the foresight of students. This meant students were 'caught short', and/or had to wrap soiled towels in paper to take home. The MWF suggested that this lack of facilities for changing caused two main sources of distress, firstly, physical, in the form of chafing, soreness and discomfort associated with wearing a towel for too long, and secondly, an anxiety about soiling underwear if technologies could not be changed.³²⁹

The MWF concluded the report by suggesting that this was an 'easily remedied practice'.³³⁰ Yet, as Strange notes, the 'reticence surrounding menstrual bleeding' hampered the provision of adequate sanitary facilities and satisfactory teaching.³³¹ Building on Strange's work, this chapter suggests that by the 1960s, not much had changed regarding the facilities and education available to girls. Personal testimony suggests that insufficient facilities, inadequate education and emotionally volatile first experiences of menstruation were likely a part of girls' experiences up to thirty to forty years later.

³²⁸ 'Supply and Disposal of Sanitary Towels in Schools', p.925.

³²⁹ 'Supply and Disposal of Sanitary Towels in Schools', p.927. For further discussion of effects of wearing technology see next chapter.

³³⁰ 'Supply and Disposal of Sanitary Towels in Schools', p.927.

³³¹ Strange, 'The Assault on Ignorance', p.258.

Brumberg asserts that in 1950s America, girls were “coached” on the logistics of sanitary protection’ so they knew what to do when they saw menstrual blood.³³² This language of ‘coaching’ is an appropriate way of thinking about what menstrual education looked like for many girls in Britain in the period 1960-1980 too. For many girls, preparedness was equated with the acquisition of menstrual knowledge and a lack of preparedness demarked as frightening or traumatic. Girls had varying experiences and degrees of sex education, but in most cases school-based sex education was peripheral to their acquisition of knowledge about their bodies. The knowledge and advice most readily available to girls was instructional in focus, concerned with the practicalities of managing menstruation, specifically what techniques were most effective at hiding menstruation.

In order to understand their bodies, girls had to piece together information gleaned from a number of places, people and sources. This included, but was not limited to, school sex education lessons, teenage and adult magazines, and conversations or non-verbal exchanges of information with family members and friends. At the same time, they had to navigate spaces not built or equipped for them to manage their periods discreetly as advised. This chapter explores some of the places, people and sources girls learnt from, to build a picture of what, and how, girls learnt about menstruation, and how this affected their understandings and experiences of menstruation and selfhood more broadly. It also looks at how women retrospectively described the process of learning about and experiencing menstruation, highlighting that their understandings of the quality and content of present-day sex education, and

³³² 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 (1993), pp.99 and 127.

their appreciation of its focus on the interpersonal aspects of sex and relationships framed how they reflected on what was lacking from their own girlhood education.

This chapter begins by outlining the history of school-based sex education in Britain and the postwar period, exploring the extent of the institutionalised ignorance around sex and the body. Following this, it draws on women's recollections of their education to understand how girls responded to the education they received and how their present-day assessments have been influenced by the cultural circuit, and particularly their understanding of what sex education looks like today. Following this, it explores women's recollections of the role of family and friends in their acquisition of menstrual knowledge, and their assessments of their significance to their menstrual education too. It then explores women's descriptions of and concerns about first menses. Following this, it analyses magazine representations of menstruation, exploring the images and ideas girls were consuming. It looks at these representations in relation to ideas about the historic positioning of women's bodies in science and medicine, as this provides necessary understanding as to why menstruation has remained shrouded in secrecy, mystery and misinformation. Following this, it explores how these ideas have permeated beyond medical spheres, influencing the style, structure and content of advertising for menstrual protection in girls' magazines. By exploring each of these areas, this chapter aims to establish where, what and how girls learnt about menstruation, and how this affected their subjective experiences of menstruating. This contributes to historiography concerned with sex education in Britain, but goes beyond a study of policy by considering girls' perspectives and experiences in the period 1960-1980.

Insufficient Sex Education

In the postwar period there was an 'institutionalised ignorance' around sex, reproduction and the body'.³³³ The 1944 Education Act had left the content of school curriculums unspecified, and the decision about what to teach up to the discretion of individual schools, resulting in patchy and limited sex education.³³⁴ The Board of Education published pamphlets containing guidance on teaching sex education, which were readily available to local authorities for redistribution to teachers. Influenced by the immediate postwar context and desire to rebuild the nation, the handbooks portrayed sexuality as 'impulses' or 'urges' that should be channelled into marriage and parenthood.³³⁵ Reports conducted by the British Medical Association (BMA) in the 1960s suggested that sex education remained insufficient.³³⁶ As Davis has revealed, the quality and content of sex and antenatal education varied widely between regions and constituencies, as local authorities accepted varying degrees of responsibility for its provision.³³⁷

Medical professionals, public health experts, and lobby groups called on the government to initiate updated sex education policy at a national level. In 1963, the 'Half Our Future' Newsom Report was commissioned by the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) to consider 'education between the ages of 13 and 16 of pupils

³³³ Simon Sztreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (Cambridge University press, 2003), p.78.

³³⁴ James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, "The Ravages of Permissiveness": Sex Education and the Permissive Society', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:3 (2004), p.293.

³³⁵ Ministry of Education, *Health Education* (London: HMSO, 1956), 44 in Angela Davis, 'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything': sex education and the preparation of girls for motherhood, c.1930-1970, *History of Education*, 37:5 (2008), p.670.

³³⁶ Hampshire and Lewis, 'The Ravages of Permissiveness', p.295.

³³⁷ Davis; work reveals that 'women living in Oxford benefitted from a forward-thinking authority which offered a range of services, but it is clear that this was not the case nationwide', in Davis, 'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything', p.676.

of average and below average ability'.³³⁸ The report suggested numerous changes to education policy and delivery, namely the raising of the school leaving age to 16, and the sum of its parts served to stress the committee's commitment to ensuring young people received a 'greater share of the national resources devoted to education'.³³⁹ The report suggested that sex education was essential for adolescent boys and girls. It specified that sex education needed to consider the biological, moral, social, and personal, but also asserted the importance of religious influences on sexual morality, and positioned married teachers as most suited to delivering instruction.³⁴⁰ Despite the report stressing an urgent need for more sex education in schools, the Department of Education, renamed the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 1964 adopted what Hampshire calls a 'hands off approach'.³⁴¹ In 1965, the Royal College of Midwives published a report on 'preparation for parenthood', in which they too argued that 'there [was] still a need for considerable extension of this [sex education] teaching'.³⁴² A push from the BMA in 1966 to back a national policy on school-based sex education validated and further encouraged a medical and public health consensus that sex education was necessary, and that ignorance regarding sex constituted a public health problem.

The DES resisted plans for a national sex education policy because of a continued pragmatic concern regarding the topic's divisive nature and the likelihood

³³⁸ John Nisbet, Review of 'Half Our Future', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (General)*, 1965, 128:3 (1965), p.439.

³³⁹ A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England), 'Half Our Future: The Newsom Report' (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963), p.xiii. Accessed at <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/newsom/newsom1963.html> [16/02/2022].

³⁴⁰ Davis, 'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything!', p.671.

³⁴¹ James Hampshire, 'The politics of school sex education policy in England and Wales from the 1940s to the 1960s', *Social History of Medicine*, 18:1, (2005), p.89.

³⁴² Hampshire and Lewis, 'The ravages of permissiveness', p.295.

that discussion would polarise political and public opinion.³⁴³ Whilst the DES published updated guidance in 1966, and again in 1968, it resisted public health outcries for greater intervention.³⁴⁴ Avoidance further fractured the debate, and a once low-key conversation conducted mostly by civil servants and experts became the concern of front-benchers and tabloid newspapers. The *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* published headlines such as 'Children Age 8 to have Sex Lessons', and 'Sex Lessons for 5-Year Olds with Pictures That Tell All', stoking moral panic against the cause of those in favour of better sex education.³⁴⁵

The policy, curriculum and quality of school-based sex education was slow to change. In pamphlets produced in the 1960s, the MWF, with their scientised and sanitised understanding of menstruation, were still emphasising the need to supersede myths around water and bathing restrictions whilst menstruating. The persistence of these myths, Strange notes, is testament to the tenacity of slow-to-change custom in England.³⁴⁶ It was not until 1968 that official sex education guidance suggested children should be taught about human reproduction, or contained any reference to birth control, stating 'human beings...also reproduce and the relevant physical facts should be made known to pupils'.³⁴⁷ The instability of the conversation about, and delivery of, sex education throughout the 1950s and 1960s laid the foundations for the

³⁴³ James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, 'The Ravages of Permissiveness': Sex Education and the Permissive Society, *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:3 (2004), p291.

³⁴⁴ Hampshire and Lewis, 'The Ravages of Permissiveness', p.298.

³⁴⁵ Hampshire, 'The politics of school sex education policy in England and Wales from the 1940s to the 1960s', p.101, and *Daily Express*, 7 April 1966, *Daily Mirror*, 13 March 1968 in Hampshire and Lewis, 'The Ravages of Permissiveness', p.304.

³⁴⁶ Strange, 'The Assault on Ignorance', p.260 Attention paid to regional attitudes and menstrual cultures have illuminated specificities in experience. More of this would further enhance historical discussion.

³⁴⁷ Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook of Health Education* (London: HMSO, 1968), 69, in Angela Davis, 'Oh No, nothing', p.671.

turbulent discussion of the 70s and 80s which continued to revolve around whether parents or teachers should be entrusted to teach children about sex.

The situation stayed much the same throughout the 1970s. In 1971 the BBC released educational films for widespread use in classrooms. These films elicited a storm of criticism, resulting in correspondence directly between Charles Curran, Director General of the BBC, and P.M Harold Wilson, a House of Commons debate, and increasing numbers of parents exercising their right to withdraw their children from the classroom.³⁴⁸ Martin Cole's controversial 'sex-education' film *Growing Up* (1972), contributed to further shockwaves.³⁴⁹

In 1974 and 1975, Christine Farrell of the Institute for Social Studies in Medical Care conducted over 1500 interviews with 16-19 year olds to find out about how they learnt about sex and birth control. Her conclusions emphasised a lack of causal relationship between young people encountering early information sources and teenage sexual behaviour, and their dissatisfaction with their education. Farrell's commitment to exploring the correlation between the acquisition of sexual knowledge and teenage sexual behaviour reflected the centrality of debates about the potential for sexual knowledge to taint the minds of young people at the time of her research, and suggests her conclusions might have intended to pose a genuine, research-informed rebuttal to sensationalist claims proffered by moral traditionalists and tabloid newspapers.

³⁴⁸ For detailed discussion of BBC materials and cultural climate in 1971 see Chelsea Saxby, 'Rosemary Proom Misses a 'Sex Lesson': BBC Schools Broadcasting and the Private Family in 1970s Britain'.

³⁴⁹ David Limond, 'I never imagined that the time would come': Martin Cole, the *Growing Up* Controversy and the Limits of School Sex Education in 1970s England', *History of Education*, 37:3 (2008), pp.409-429.

The increasing discussion of sex education throughout the 1970s does not point directly to an increasing acceptance of the importance of sex education, only to the increasing visibility and controversy surrounding discussions at the time. The DES had previously preferred to limit its engagement with the issue of sex education, but this became an increasingly difficult as critics, the press and advocates raised its profile. In 1977 the DES published new guidance under the heading 'sex education', a clear departure from the more ambiguous 'school and the future parent' pamphlets it had previously produced. The pamphlet attempted to placate those in favour of and those against an updated curriculum. It mentioned masturbation and homosexuality for the first time, but continued to regard sex education as a moral issue. The report emphasised that parents had the right to withdraw their children from lessons, exemplifying the influence of traditionalists on the trajectory of sex education policy across the 1960s and 1970s.³⁵⁰

Memories of Sex Education

Farrell's research suggested that young people wanted a two-stage learning process whereby information was initially provided by adults, and then freely discussed between peers, but that they strongly felt this was lacking.³⁵¹ Personal testimony from women suggests that adequate and informative adult-led sex education was rarely a feature of their acquisition of sexual knowledge. Notions of ignorance, shame and misinformation frame recollections of sex education from women who grew up between 1960 and 1980. Whilst there was some differentiation depending on when or

³⁵⁰ Hampshire and Lewis, 'The Ravages of Permissiveness', p.309.

³⁵¹ Christine Farrell, *My Mother Said...The Way Young People Learn about Sex and Birth Control* (Routledge, 1978), p.124 in Davis, 'Oh no, nothing', p.670.

where women went to school, they rarely said that they had received an adequate sex education. As Charnock notes, 'teenagers had different understandings of the changes and milestones that needed to be passed in order to obtain maturity', and these were rarely reflected in sex education materials. In her oral history interviews, women recalled lessons in the biological and moral components of sex, only to dismiss them as inconsequential or largely irrelevant to their sexual development, 'misjudged in terms of content, ill-timed and poorly executed'. Charnock suggests that girls wanted, and believed they needed, to know about the 'physical, emotional, relational and social aspects of sex'.³⁵² These findings chime with Martin's and Young's assessments of the importance of decentring scientised understandings, and encouraging women to express how they feel about, and when menstruating.³⁵³

Women interviewed for the BSF interviews provided similar assessments. Analysis of women's reflections on sex education provided in interviews reveals how broader life experience shape and informs memory. Jo (b.1954) attended a secondary modern school in North West London near where she had grown up. In her interview, she recalled her mother's forward thinking attitude toward sex, manifest in her campaigning for contraception and abortion advice. Jo stated that she had known about pregnancy from the age of two and half, as her mother had explained an extended family member's pregnancy to her. She described her mother as feminist, and suggested her mother's perception of health had been overtly politicised, inseparable from her understanding of poverty, inequality and domestic violence. Jo's mother informed her about periods before she experienced her first, provided her with

³⁵² Hannah Charnock, '*Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity in England 1950 -1980*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2017, pp.56-57.

³⁵³ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: a Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Beacon Press, 2001) and Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience "Throwing like a girl" and other essays*, (Oxford University Press, 2005).

a sanitary belt on its arrival, and had taken her to the Brook Advisory Centre for the pill later in her teens to ensure she was engaging in safe sex. Jo talked to her best friend about periods and contraception frequently, and suggested acquiring the pill was fundamental to her sense of sexual autonomy, and her ability to navigate sexual relationships with this in mind. Her school based sex education, however, provided little in the way of knowledge, confidence or control. She recalled, 'I mean, in terms of the Facts of Life, we did the stickleback. I can tell you ... I can still tell you all about sticklebacks' reproduction!'.³⁵⁴ Mandy (b.1952) grew up in Solihull. She attended a local grammar school, where she recalled learning about frogs in sex education classes, 'we had reproduction of frogs, or was it some sort of animal?' She suspected she was about fourteen years old at the time, which suggests her recollections were of the mid-1960s, at the height of campaigns for an updated curriculum. She suggested any information deemed social was not taught at school, and had to be sought outside of school in books, magazines and newspapers. School was for the 'important things', like the 'three R's'. She was sixth-form-age before human reproduction was considered, and believed this was too late. Talking about her class as a collective, she stated 'we all know about it. What on earth are you telling us about it now? It might have been quite useful if you'd have done it instead of the frogs, when we were, like, about fourteen'.³⁵⁵ Confident that her experience was not unique in relation to her cohort, she critiqued the content, quality and timing of her sex education.

Zoe (b.1968) went to comprehensive school in Ipswich. She also commented on the timing and style of the education, suggesting both made it difficult for her to 'take it seriously'. Zoe was born in Dominica, and moved to

³⁵⁴ Jo, BSF OH, interviewed by DP 14.01.2021, track 1 [0:12:44]

³⁵⁵ Mandy, BSF OH, interviewed by KM, 13.03.18, track 1 [0:19:12]

England as a child. She attended primary school in Ipswich, where she and her twin were the only black students. She recalled her experiences of racial discrimination. In one instance she was told she could not be an angel in the school play because there 'were no black angels' in the nativity. This affected her mental health, experience of schooling and tainted the 'romantic' view of England she had held before her family moved. Zoe grew up not liking her body. She suggested she was 'a chubby child' and whilst this was celebrated in Dominica, and provided status her community, she knew that in England it was more valuable to be slim. She experienced bullying about her weight at school. She dieted, and refused to eat anything but vegetables at school which she referred to as the 'anti-carrot protest'. Fuelled by these experiences, she described her teenage self as 'anti-school'. She was 'shocked, surprised and upset' by her first period, and felt that periods and sex were taboo in her family.

Zoe had a baby when she was fifteen, which she noted as the first time she considered her life experiences in terms of health. Zoe grew up to hold a particularly spiritual understanding of her body and mind. These experiences of discrimination, disillusion, and their importance to her later beliefs frame much of her interview, which might suggest why she felt the school's approach to sex education could not engage her. She suggested that biology, sexual health and 'general things around the body' were taught 'to' and 'at' her, emphasising how 'detached' and 'separated' she felt from the types of information she was presented with at school. She recalled the giggly atmosphere in the classroom; 'we were at that age, and just very giggly about it really, we weren't really taking it in.' She critiqued the focus of the education, 'I can't remember talking much about the emotional side of health, or the psycho-social-spiritual side of health,

it was...erm...yeah, it just seemed very factual and lots of illustrations, and short videos about sex.'³⁵⁶

Floss (b.1956) suggested her 'PHSE' at a secondary school in Gloucestershire was 'biology focussed'. She recounted her male teachers' awkwardness when explaining the menstrual cycle, and highlighted the irony of this by exclaiming 'he was the biology teacher!'.³⁵⁷ Floss used the phrase 'PHSE' to describe her experiences of school-based sex education in the 1960s, but the framework for 'Personal, Social and Health Education' was not published until 1999.³⁵⁸ It is likely that Floss' familiarity with the phrase PHSE came from her working experiences and interactions with her children and grandchildren, which in turn informed her of more recent approaches to health education. Floss had attended University in Southampton, where she trained as a nurse and health visitor. She had worked in health care for a number of years by the time she was interviewed, and had become a health educator at college and degree level during the 1990's. Floss explicitly drew on her experiences as a health educator as a frame of reference throughout her interview. She also mentioned that she had married a GP, and was a mother and grandmother at the time of her interview. She discussed the differences in parenting between generations of women, her understanding framed by both her professional endeavours and her own family life. Floss' awareness of the phrase PHSE, and her attribution of this phrase to her own health education experiences reveals both the difficulty of recalling information when there are not publicly available modes for doing so, the role of the cultural circuit in

³⁵⁶ Zoe, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 06.12.19, track 1 [0:05:56]

³⁵⁷ Floss, BSF OH, interviewed by KM, 13.02.18 [0:22:17]

³⁵⁸ Big Talk Education, 'SRE and RSE' A history of Sex Education in the UK', September 2020, available at <https://www.bigtalkeducation.co.uk/rse-information-and-support-for-schools/sre-rse-history/#:~:text=In%201999%20the%20new%20Framework%20for%20Personal%2C%20Social,%E2%80%98Relationship%E2%80%99%20education.%20This%20was%20when%20SRE%20was%20born.> [Accessed 16/05/2021].

facilitating the formation and narration of memories, and the way individual memories are refracted and reworked through an oscillating engagement with past and present.³⁵⁹

Kirsty (b.1953) grew up in Oxford. Kirsty attended the 'crappy secondary modern' on the council estate where she grew up, and left school age fifteen after attaining her CSE qualifications. Aware of how her class position impacted her schooling and her future trajectory she stated, 'working-class girls, you either worked in a factory or you worked in a typing pool, or you worked in a shop, and that was, that was your future'. She got a job in a local factory before moving between the post office, telephone exchange and Blackwell publishers. After this time in employment, Kirsty left her job and joined the RAF because her home life had become 'unbearable'. Kirsty was sexually assaulted at age seven by three men who were acquainted with her brother, and from the age of twelve she was repeatedly sexually abused by her older brother. Kirsty had realised she was gay during her girlhood, but had not told her family. Whilst in the RAF she went 'even further back into the closet' in order to protect her career. She got married, and had two children. Kirsty had always wanted to attend university and knew she was bright, but also knew that her childhood and class position meant this was unobtainable. In her adult life she was invited to join MENSAs, completed four O'levels, attended the Open University for two years and studied nursing at the University of Wales. When her children were teenagers she left Wales, came out, and became a nurse in London.

Kirsty's sex education was shaped by her experiences growing up in Oxford, whilst her reflections on the quality and content of the sex education provided in the

³⁵⁹ See chapter one, 'Methodology One: Oral History, Mass Observation and Histories of Girlhood Menstrual Experiences', pp.8-12.

interview were shaped by her broader life experiences. Kirsty suspected her primary school sex education might have been part of an experiment to trial newer types of sex education lessons in 1964. When asked if her school had provided any knowledge about health, she responded 'It did - Believe it or not!' revealing her awareness that her experience might have been an anomaly. She described the education:

I just remember a board with felt figures being stuck to the board – a male and female - and a picture of a womb, and how a baby ... - I can't remember if they actually went into how a baby is born... it all starts...but it was definitely sex education. I think it was an experiment because there were three men at the back of the room watching the teacher teach, and that's it. And it didn't go on for long, it might have gone on for a few weeks. And I think it was that school, or it might have been the secondary school.³⁶⁰

Local health authorities accepted different levels of responsibility for providing antenatal education, and Davis has noted that women living in Oxford in the period 1945-1970 benefitted from a 'forward-thinking authority, which offered a range of services' advanced in debates about and the provision of contraceptive advice.³⁶¹ This might have been why Kirsty had a sense that her school was part of a trial run of sex education lessons, and that her experience was different to other women's.

Notwithstanding, she also recalled more negative experiences of sex education led by teachers at her secondary school. She recalled a particular lesson about sex that stuck with her, where she was told 'when a man is having sex on you, you ... you won't be able to speak. If you asked him his name, he wouldn't be able to answer you because he's so in the moment, and, you know'. Implicitly suggesting this was deeply inappropriate, her recollection highlights the persistence of heteronormative gendered assumptions about sexuality, male sexual impulses, and female passivity throughout

³⁶⁰ Kirsty, BSF OH, interviewed by DP, 06.03.2020, track 1, [0:30:56].

³⁶¹ Davies, 'Oh no, nothing', p.676.

the twentieth century. Kirsty referenced the ‘me too’ movement further through her interview, suggesting her recollection was shaped by high profile cultural conversations about consent and sexual assault at the time of her interview, and by her own experiences of assault and abuse during her youth. The cultural importance of ‘me too’ at the time of Kirsty’s interview, coupled with her experiences of assault might explain why the inappropriate comments made by a teacher had been so prominent in her memory, and why she felt able to discuss them in the interview.

This context illuminates the potentiality for the inappropriate discussion to have a compounded traumatic effect on Kirsty. Kirsty also specified that her school had not covered female pleasure, LGBT relationships, or periods, and that these were topics that mattered to her and should have been covered in school.³⁶² For Kirsty, the sex education lessons were partly inadequate because they did not cover queer relationships, forcing her to look elsewhere for information and validation about her own sexuality. By contrasting her own sex education with a discussion of topics that she wished were covered, that are also topics most publicly discussed in relation to current-day sex education, Kirsty highlighted the discrepancies between the two, and uses present-day debates to revisit and reshape her memories.³⁶³

Like Kirsty (b.1953), Jess (b.1968) also remembered having biology lessons and separate classes led by outsiders, but at her secondary school in Colchester. She couldn’t say exactly where the educators had come from, but she believed they were ‘local education type people who went round doing that’, and ‘council people, probably’. She described the experience as, ‘ladies who

³⁶² Kirsty, BSF OH, interviewed by DP, 06.03.2020, track 1, [0:35:35]

³⁶³ Terrence Higgins Trust, ‘Ssh no talking...LGBT- inclusive education Sex and Relationships education in the UK’, (July 2016), <https://www.tht.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-07/Shh%20No%20talking%20LGBT%20inclusive%20SRE%20in%20the%20UK.pdf> [accessed, 25/09/2021].

came in from outside the school to tell you about sanitary wear and how to use it, and to reassure you that the string wouldn't come off the tampon, and showed you how to put a condom on a cucumber'. The education was delivered to boys and girls separately and Jess suggested this 'kind of added to the whole thing of, you know, it not being something you could possibly ever talk about with a boy.'

The sex education delivered by outside authorities was instructional, based around demonstrative interactions or 'coaching' in how to manage menstruation and how to practice safe sex. When asked to expand on her experiences with external educators, Jess suggested, 'they were good at what they did, and they weren't shy, and they weren't stammering, and they were straight in there with the information.' Her statement suggests that she respected their ability to talk comfortably and confidently about sex and menstruation, and that this enabled her to have a more comfortable and enjoyable learning experience. This contrasted with her assessment of biology lessons 'where you learned about worms, and you had to try and apply it somehow!' She concluded her explanation stating, 'no, I would say I wasn't very well-educated about health.'³⁶⁴

When asked about how other pupils engaged with the lessons, Jess suggested there was 'loads of laughing' and that 'they had left it a little bit late for some of the girls, to be showing them how to do this, as well...But it wasn't particularly adequate. It didn't talk about human relationships at all, it was just all the practicalities of not getting pregnant really'. Jess offered a critique of the

³⁶⁴ Jess, BSF OH, interviewed by TI 04.02.2020 track 1 [0:08:49].

extent of the education, and like many of the women interviewed, believed the timing of the sex education was lagging behind the real-world experiences of their respective peer groups. If Jess wanted to know anything about sex or her body, she asked her mother and ‘always trusted her response’. She also valued the information on health in girls’ magazines such as *Jackie*, *Photo Love* and *Blue Jeans*, which she read when she was at secondary school. She enjoyed their coverage of puberty, growing up and adornment. Jess became a source of expertise amongst her school peers. Reflecting on this, she stated ‘I probably did realise at the time that my parents weren’t as strict as a lot of theirs, or maybe quite as old fashioned as a lot of theirs, and not as old as some of theirs as well...I was the one who was most likely to say it out loud or something!’³⁶⁵

Jess speculated that the education about periods was delivered separately, and earlier in her schooling, but stated ‘I mean, I’d already started mine at primary school anyway, but I imagine that we did that in year 7’. She did not know if any other girls had started their periods, because ‘you just didn’t talk about it’. By the time Jess was fourteen or fifteen, she talked more openly with her friends about menstruating, suggesting that menstrual invisibility was determined by the age of menstruator and the stage of schooling.

This also affected access to disposal facilities. Jess did not remember seeing any facilities at her primary school, and mentioned a conversation she had recently had with a friend. ‘Actually, I remember talking to somebody recently and saying, you know, like, ‘What if we had started while we were in primary school? What would we have done with the sanitary towels?’ because

³⁶⁵ Jess, BSF OH, interviewed by TI 04.02.2020 track 1 [0:013:40].

obviously, now, we have bins in the girls' toilets so that they can use them.' Jess had a horrible feeling that 'we might have had to have, erm, used the teachers' toilet, and then everybody would have known, wouldn't they'. She could not remember any bins at primary school, but remembered bins at secondary school. She emphasised that these were on the walls just outside of the cubicles, hinting to the threat of menstrual visibility caused by having to dispose of technologies in a public space. She suggested that primary schools hadn't 'quite caught up with puberty', hinting to the discrepancies between past ages of first menses and the decreasing age of physical maturation by the 1970s. Jess was born in 1968, and started her periods before moving to secondary school. Whilst commentary about the declining age of maturation was in circulation since the late 50s, Jess believed that changes to age of physical maturation and the resulting concerns were a much more recent phenomena. She stated, 'I suppose children had been less well-nourished and it hadn't started happening that much, unlike now', indicating that age of maturation had continued to drop between 1970 and 2020.³⁶⁶

In her interview, Jess had discussed the food her family had eaten when she was a child and stressed that they did not have access to healthy foods due to their socio-economic status. She recalled that she had grown up 'fat', and had been bullied about her weight by boys in her community. At one point the local GP had instructed her mum to put her on a diet. Her mum did not, and Jess believed this was the right decision for her. Reflecting on why she was not put on a diet she stated that her mum had 'not wanted to give me the idea, that young, that there was such a thing as a diet, and that you had, and that it was

³⁶⁶ Jess, BSF OH, interviewed by TI 04.02.2020 track 1[0:33:53].

something to get worried. I think she thought I would just get taller and slimmer.’ Reflecting on her families socioeconomic status and eating habits more broadly she stated, ‘I don’t think they could afford to buy in more fruit more vegetables, you know, not have the fish fingers...I don’t think it was even an option really, because, you know, the mortgage to pay, and the low wages, and two girls to support. I mean we didn’t eat badly badly’.³⁶⁷ Despite contemporary discourses suggesting improved nutrition was driving earlier maturation, Jess’s recollections of her childhood suggest her family did not have access to nutritious foods due to their socioeconomic circumstance and that this meant she had not believed nutrition to be a factor influencing her own early maturation.

Tracey (b.1964) grew up in Ely, Cambridgeshire and also believed her comprehensive school education to be lacking. She spoke frankly about menstruation and the lack of available facilities at her school. She suggested this was something she realised ‘with hindsight’ after becoming aware of the style and standard of education her two daughters were receiving at school. Tracey highlighted that they had ‘a tutor that nurtures them’ and ‘advice on, on their health’, and that this made her ‘realise how lacking our education in that respect was’. Although they had better education, Tracey advocated for her daughters and the teachers at their school to have appropriate menstrual disposal facilities provided for them. Tracey had started her period’s age nine, whilst at junior school. She acknowledged that this was ‘very very young’ and also emphasised that she was the ‘only one in junior school to have breasts’. This made her ‘not a freak, but an object of interest’. She was shy about it, and found being ‘different’ ‘really hard’. She recalled using ‘old fashioned products’, that this ‘wasn’t conducive to a PE lifestyle in school’, and that on the days when she

³⁶⁷ Jess, BSF OH, interviewed by TI 04.02.2020 track 1[0:24:38]

was menstruating she would be the 'only one in school that couldn't have a shower on certain, you know'.³⁶⁸ She drew parallels between her experience and her daughters, stating, 'my girls went through the same thing, erm, whilst they were in primary school, they started their periods, and there wasn't even such a thing as a sanitary bin in the toilets – not even for staff!'. She conveyed her upset: 'I got on my high horse and campaigned until they got one, because I thought, "I'm not having them bringing stuff home, embarrassed, you know, carrying it round and about" so that was the thing I left in the primary school for them. I was determined.'³⁶⁹

Tracey felt strongly that she 'wasn't gonna have them [her daughters] go through' what she did, and she stepped in to advocate for the provision of better materials for all at the school. She suggested other women in her age group might have struggled to advocate for facilities, because of their own engagement with ideas about menstruation she described as 'archaic'. Tracey took a pragmatic approach and her testimony revealed her commitment to breaking down menstrual stigma. She treated the discussion in a matter-of-fact way, and suggested that the provision of appropriate materials was nothing more than a matter of common sense. She suggested that treating the issue otherwise 'just seems stupid and, and ignorant', something she just 'couldn't understand'. Tracey's account of her daughters' experiences in the early 1990s suggests a drastic longevity to Strange's assertion that infrastructure for menstrual management was not available.³⁷⁰

For many women, sex education lacked a nurturing or holistic consideration of personal and interpersonal aspects of sex and the body. This testimony chimes with that presented in Charnock's work, and with her broader argument that many women

³⁶⁸ Tracey, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 17.05.2018, [0:07:15]

³⁶⁹ Tracey, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 17.05.2018, [0:04:05]

³⁷⁰ Strange, 'The Assault on Ignorance', p.258.

felt their education was devoid of any discussion of subjective experience and wellbeing.³⁷¹ There are strong similarities between the testimonies of women explored here, despite differing experiences of sex education. Recollections of sex education emphasise their detachment from the content, as women either verbalised explicitly, or adopted language that conveyed that they felt like they were being talked at during sex education lessons, particularly when they were scientific or anatomical in focus. Girls rarely responded well to school-based sex education, or the teachers entrusted to deliver it. Whilst there might have been a degree of discomfort amongst the girls, there is a consensus amongst interviewees that the timing, content and delivery of sex education was unsatisfactory and that it needed to focus more on all of the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of sex.³⁷²

Conversations Beyond School

Daughters held conflicting feelings about learning about menstruation from family members and friends, palpable in the responses collated many years later. Girls' recollections of learning about menstruation from family members and friends were often tied to a commentary on the degree of communicative openness they had with each family member. Some women had open, talkative relationships with mothers, and found it easy to talk about menstruation with them, whilst others found it difficult to talk, but learnt from them in non-verbal ways. Others learnt from sisters, and those who did not have sisters often specified this in the interview to suggest this contributed to their lack of menstrual knowledge. Others specified that conversations with female members from their extended family were helpful, suggesting a degree of 'intimacy at

³⁷¹ Charnock, *Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity*, p.59.

³⁷² Charnock, *'Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity'*, p.51.

a distance' whereby they were comfortable discussing menstruation with women deemed trustworthy but who they could retain a degree of distance from. The testimony explored here reflects Charnock's assertion that mothers had their own ideas about how their daughters could manage menstruation, and non-verbal means of communicating this knowledge was often priority for both parties.³⁷³

Tracey (b.1964), who had campaigned furiously for adequate facilities for her daughters' school, reflected on how her family were an important source of support about menstruation. Tracey emphasised 'a very strong matriarchal line' in her family, her 'very close' relationship with her mother, and her mother's strong relationship with her grandmother.³⁷⁴ She stated, 'if you didn't have that, you'd be very lost, I think.'³⁷⁵ Echoing Tracey's sentiment about the importance of open communication between parents and daughters, Ivy (b.1963) suggested that 'today they would have more counsellors in schools...because...you know, you don't know the answer to everything, and it's perhaps maybe some things you wouldn't want to ask questions of your family...or you might not have a supportive family'. Ivy grew up and attended secondary school in Swansea. She had spoken with her mother about periods before she had her first, and her mother had provided her with a book. She described it as a 'horrible time' where you're 'getting to the end of being a child, an innocent child, and then you're sort of on the edge of going into puberty', articulating her sense of the liminality of her girlhood and teenage years. She suggested most information came from conversations with friends, and learning about each other's experiences, rather than conversation with her mother.³⁷⁶ This led her to stress the importance of 'that adult to give you extra support'. Floss (b.1956) also said that she did not really

³⁷³ Charnock, 'Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity', pp.225-232.

³⁷⁴ Tracey, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 17.05.2018 [0:02:21]

³⁷⁵ Tracey, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 17.05.2018 [0:04:05]

³⁷⁶ Ivy, BSF OH, interviewed by TL, 8.12.20 [0:44:38]

remember having a 'public health', 'social', or 'sex education' at primary or secondary school. It was the 'little group chats' between friends at 'fourteen or fifteen' years old whilst at school that were most important. She mentioned she had lessons on friendship at Brownies, Guides and Rangers, and questioned if this fell under the BSF project's definition of health, suggesting discussion of relationships, including friendships, fell under her understanding of expansive health and health education.³⁷⁷

Elaine (b.1957) was born in Stoke-on-Trent, and grew up in Rugby where she attended an all-girls grammar school. She answered the question 'can you remember when you first became aware of health?' by talking about her experiences of contracting an unidentified virus age eight, and her girlhood recollections of her mums' painful periods. She suggested that it was only recently that she was fully able to process, understand and label her mum's experiences for what they were. The development of medical understandings for menstrual-related complaints, and their increasing visibility beyond the medical sphere enabled her to understand something that she could not name as a child. She drew on these diagnostic labels to construct her account of the past. She stated, 'my mum suffered, all her life, with ... erm, well, I don't know whether it would be now, endometriosis or what it would be, but I remember my mum had incredibly heavy periods and always was, almost prostrated when she had her periods.'

Elaine was aware that a shared understanding of endometriosis had only recently developed in non-medical settings, and that this descriptor for experience was not available to her when she was younger.³⁷⁸ Like Anne (1957), whose story was

³⁷⁷ Floss, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 13.12.18 [0:17:21]

³⁷⁸ Elvo Brosens and Giuseppe Benagiano, 'Endometriosis, a modern syndrome', *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 133:6 (2011), pp.581-593 suggest Thomas Cullen was the first to describe endometriosis with the introduction of laparoscopy in the early 1960s, although the article suggests there is some debate regarding who the discovery should be attributed to.

relayed at the beginning of this chapter, she suggested there were times she was 'always aware' that her mum was unwell, but that this awareness did not result in her being fully informed about what her mum was experiencing. Menstrual health was an everyday part of their lives, but one which they could not name, understand or relate to as girls.

Describing her experience of learning about menstruation, Elaine said her mum had sat her 'down one day' in the 'best room'. When conducting interviews at home with teenage girls about their educational and employment experiences, Griffin noted that her home visits typically took place in either the 'best room' or the kitchen, areas of the home demarked as 'female' space.³⁷⁹ Elaine explained, 'the front room was the best room, you know, otherwise you lived in the other rooms.' In the 'best room' Elaine's mum showed her how to cut up nappies, and she described to the interviewer how she would fold them up to use as 'sanitary towels'. She went on, 'and then your mother boiled them – which must sound awful now, but it worked. It worked.' Elaine's account demonstrated that some women were still using makeshift towels to manage menstruation into the 1960s and that her mum's delivery of guidance encouraged her to understand menstruation as both a special occasion, and something suitable only for private discussion and management. Elaine also revealed her awareness of shifts in menstrual management disposal practices over time by flagging that her mother's methods of boiling cloths was outdated by modern standards.

Elaine suggested her aunt was an important source of information and reassurance who offered her alternative menstrual scripts. When she came on her period unexpectedly whilst on holiday her aunt had said, 'Congratulations! You're a

³⁷⁹ Christine Griffin, *Typical Girls? Young Women from School to the Job Market* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p.4.

woman now!'. Elaine reflected that this was a 'wonderful' and 'positive' thing', suggesting this discussion of menstruation meant a lot to her. This is particularly pertinent considering how she had watched her mum's gynaecological experiences and had very little knowledge of menstrual experiences that weren't tied to ill-health, pain or shame. Yet Elaine also acknowledged that she was likely unreceptive to conversation with her parents during her girlhood: 'I remember her trying to, getting very embarrassed, and this was some years, this, by this stage I was probably thirteen or fourteen, and her saying, "Well, I expect you know more than I do". And me saying, "Yeah, I expect I do!".' When asked if she thought she did know more or if she was trying to end the conversation she stated, 'I was probably trying to end the conversation. I was probably just as embarrassed as she was'... I think it was just, "No, no, we're not, we're not having this conversation", yeah.'³⁸⁰

Like Elaine, the positive affirmation Rachel (b.1944) received when she began menstruating stuck with her until the present day. She recounted, 'I must have been only just twelve, and told my mum, and she said, "Well, you know, you're a big girl". She was very, absolutely spot on. "You're a big girl now. You're grown up", you know. "Proud of you", and just gave me a sort of huge pack of sanitary towels'³⁸¹ Rachel questioned if starting her periods age twelve would be considered young now; 'that may not be young now, because that changes over the years, doesn't it'. Like Jess, Rachel believed menstruating young to be a more recent phenomenon, and something that led her to be an anomaly in relation to her cohort when she began to menstruate in 1956. She did not directly situate her experiences in relation to contemporary notions of a 'beanstalk generation' or show an awareness that starting her period age

³⁸⁰ Elaine, BSF OH, interviewed by TL 06.10.2018, track 1 [0:16:09]

³⁸¹ Rachel, interview, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 25.01.18, track 1 [0:30:19]

twelve was becoming both more common, and a cause for concern.

Rachel had attended a strict convent school. In her interview she recalled questioning her faith at roughly twelve years old, but still encountering strict ideas about sin at school that impacted how she thought about sex, and her relationship with her body. Her family were also strict Catholic, and Rachel felt she 'had to be secretive', and that the messaging from school and home compounded this. After returning home from school one day and informing her mother that a ten year old class mate was pregnant, Rachel's mother explained menstruation to her.

So I think that night I was having a bath, and my mother's bathing me, and came up to talk to me about this, my mum was sitting on the edge of the bath, and what she explained to me was about menstruation, erm, very little about having babies, but there was a lot about menstruation, and at the end of it, she said, "So you can see why I don't feel well sometimes", which, being my mother, was absolutely classic, you know, it was all about her. I always put that down to the fact that she's the youngest in her family, you know. So I knew about menstruation then, and I realised that this girl hadn't had a baby, because you had to menstruate before you could have a baby.

Whilst Rachel's first time learning about menstruation did not involve explicit mention of the risk of pregnancy, her understanding of sex as sinful framed her overall reflections on her experience of learning about sex and the body. Rachel felt menstruation was only 'half secret', in that it was secret from men. She acknowledged it was not secret between girls and women, who she described as being 'in the same boat together', but she found it difficult to extend this sense of commonality of experience, empathy and understanding to her own mother's experience of having periods that made her unwell. When asked to expand on how she felt about men finding out about menstruation, she suggested menstruation conflicted with her desire to 'look good' and to be 'admired'. It 'wasn't dirty, just, you know, wasn't feminine!'.³⁸²

³⁸² Rachel, interview, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 25.01.18, track 1 [0:30:19]

Mari (1958) relayed a similar story in her directive response. She explained that she had started menstruating age twelve, and that according to her mother she had 'funny turns' every month for some time. She stated 'I remember nothing of this, I think it was a product of mother's enthusiasm to make a drama out of anything remotely medical.'³⁸³ There is a shared sense of disapproval and discomfort at having conversations with mothers about menstruation, and about how their mothers reacted to, and framed conversations about, health-related issues. The accounts of Anne, Elaine, Rachel and Mari are testament to the difficulty menstruating people had talking and listening about menstruation freely, and the way negative conceptualisations of menstruation could be passed between generations of mothers and daughters.

Ivy (B.1963), whose experience was considered in the previous pages, recalled being bought a book by her mum as a girl, and subsequently going on to buy a book for her son, stating, 'I followed...followed my mother's example!'.³⁸⁴ The potential for open and encouraging conversation about menstruation to have positive material effects appears particularly acute when these experiences are contrasted with Tracey's and Jo's. Surrounded by a mother and grandmother who would talk openly about menstruation, and in her adult life committed to providing adequate menstrual management facilities at school for her daughters, Tracey's experiences suggest that positive attitudes about menstruation, and an ability to talk openly about menstruation with daughters, could have lasting benefits for generations of women and girls. Similarly, Jo's sense of sexual autonomy was aided by her mother's decision to talk openly about sex, menstruation and the body with her, and to accompany her to the Brook Advisory Centre to obtain contraception.

³⁸³ M1789, MOA, Menstruation.

³⁸⁴ Ivy, BSF OH, Interviewed by TL 8.12.20, track 1 [0:36:12]

Some mothers expressed interest in tracking their daughters' menstrual cycles. Rachel, who attended Catholic school and who had strict Catholic parents recalled that her mum tracked her cycle, but suggested that her mum's decision was less to do with her menstrual habits and organisation, and more to do with ensuring she remained a virgin and did not get pregnant, a sentiment that Lucinda McCray Beier reported in her oral history of working-class women living in Barrow, Lancaster and Preston between 1900 and 1970.³⁸⁵ Whilst Rachel was aware her mother tracked her cycle, Amanda (b.1974), who was born forty years later, told MO that her mum had 'a sixth sense about it...about three weeks before she sat me down, showed me some sanitary towels, and showed me how to use them.'³⁸⁶ Amanda speculated that she was twelve or thirteen when she had her first period. She was surprised when it arrived, but insistent that she knew about menstruation beforehand. She recalled being given a book about 'breasts, periods, sex and all that stuff' at age eleven, and suggested that this meant her period was a cause of celebration and that there was 'no stigma or embarrassment attached to the event'. Amanda did not reflect on why her mum was able to notice and track any pre-menstrual symptoms, but it is possible this related to her noticing discharge whilst washing, or noticing her daughter's mood. She did not mention these to Amanda, instead she quietly charted any changes, and worked out when was the best time to inform her daughter about menstruation before she had her first period.

Magazines sometimes acted as mediators between mothers and daughters. Floss (b.1956), whose recollections of finding magazines around the house were explored in the previous chapter, went on to describe a scenario where the magazine

³⁸⁵ Lucinda McCray Beier, 'We were Green as Grass': Learning about Sex and Reproduction in Three Working-class Lancashire Communities, 1900-1970, *Social History of Medicine*, 16:3 (2003) pp.468-470.

³⁸⁶ A2571, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

had encouraged her to talk to her mum. She asked her mum about masturbation after reading about it in an unspecified magazine and not understanding. She implied that she only did this because she suspected at age ten or eleven she was too young to know that this was an uncomfortable or taboo topic. She stated ‘you could actually say to your mum, “What's this about?”’. She could not remember a ‘Birds and Bees’ conversation, but hypothesised that it was ‘done by a drip feed’.³⁸⁷

In a copy of *Petticoat* from March 1972, a letter to Claire Rayner featured, titled, ‘my mother can’t help me’. In the letter, ‘Sue from Staffs’ explained that her class had been shown a film about the facts of life, but that she had been ‘absent from school at the time’. She wanted to know the meaning of ‘masturbate’ and ‘castrate’, because ‘her friends expected her to know’. She concluded, ‘I am not asking my mother, because once before she told me something in “baby talk”, which turned out to be wrong’. In her response, Rayner explained both terms, and stated that she was sending ‘a very useful list of books’ because there was ‘obviously a great deal’ Sue still needed to know.³⁸⁸

It is uncertain whether Sue was deliberately kept home from school sex education lessons, but given the reach of religious conservatism at this time, it appears this is possible.³⁸⁹ Her letter is markedly similar to testimony explored in this chapter, particularly in its discussion of parental anxiety and shame, and knowledge about sex as a form of social currency amongst peer groups. Sue wrote to Rayner as she knew that she would provide trustworthy and informative answers to questions her mother was perhaps unwilling or unable to answer. Played out on the pages of *Petticoat*, this

³⁸⁷ Floss, BSF OH, interviewed by KM13.12.18, Track 1 [0:19:19].

³⁸⁸ ‘Claire Rayner’, *Petticoat*, 21.03.1972, p.39.

³⁸⁹ Saxby, ‘Rosemary Proom’, pp.1-33.

discussion had the potential to reach many more girls who also wanted answers or who were not entirely sure whether to trust their mother's advice.

Another letter to *Petticoat*, this time featured in the 'Doctors Casebook' column, also asked for mediation in mother-daughter discussions. An anonymous letter asked if her mother's advice about the dark and 'scanty' menstrual blood she was passing was valid. She stated, 'my mother said that irregularities and abnormalities in periods at my age (sixteen) are nothing to worry about... can you help, please?'. The response read, 'your mother is perfectly right. Don't worry - your periods will probably settle down to a fixed pattern soon.'³⁹⁰ Reflecting the contemporary sense of intergenerational difference in menstrual knowledge, and the precarious role of mothers as authorities on menstruation, menstrual advertisers referenced mothers in their adverts too. In 1968, Tampax urged readers to 'ask a leading authority like your mother', establishing mothers as authorities on menstruation, and particularly internally worn menstrual protection. This reflected anxieties about the liminality of pubescent adult-child, girl-women and their precarious and potentially 'dangerous' sexuality.³⁹¹ By contrast, in 1973, an advert for Nikini adhesive pads encouraged girls to ponder 'who knows more about your period? You or your mother?'. Advertising a product that did not spark as much concern about teenage sexuality as Tampax, the advert focussed more on the notion of intergenerational difference than co-operation. Whilst Tampax drew on discourses of intergenerational communication, Nikini suggested that girls' lives were fundamentally different to their mothers. Both adverts, however, attempted to situate their respective brands as mediators between mothers and daughters ³⁹²

³⁹⁰ 'Doctors Casebook', *Petticoat*, 6.03.1971, p.32.

³⁹¹ Fink and Tinkler, 'Teetering on the edge', pp.9-25.

³⁹² 'Ask a leading authority like your mother' Tampax, *Jackie*, 13.07.1968, 'Who knows more about your period? You or your mother?' Nikini, *Jackie*, 14.07.1973.

Problem page questions suggest that magazines were important sources of information and guidance for readers about menstruation, and that magazines and advertisers knew what readers wanted to know about. As mentioned in chapter two, it is difficult to gather specific information about what women remember about reading magazines during their girlhood in an interview setting. Yet it is also clear that many women stressed that magazines played a part in their education about sex and menstruation.

Frances (b.1966) remembered reading magazines with information about health in as a teenager. She suggested girls shared magazines amongst peers, stating 'there was a lot of sort of trading magazines and books that one shouldn't have, to try and find out about things! [laughs] But no one talked about, er, there was a lot of that, and obviously there was the teenage magazines and stuff like that.'³⁹³ She said her friendship groups would 'definitely' talk about the magazines between them, 'particularly if there was something quite scandalous' that they 'hadn't heard of before' and that this happened quite frequently, because she attended a 'restrictive' convent school. When asked if there was a specific magazine she liked to get information from, she stated,

we didn't, I didn't really buy them, but they used to circulate. I can remember *Jackie* being a big, er, a big thing, particularly as a teenager. And certain woman's magazines, I can remember friends bringing in women's magazines, with certain sort of like, I don't know, either round the gynaecological things or sex, or something, something that sort of intrigued, intrigued us when we were about fourteen or fifteen.³⁹⁴

Pat (b.1959) flagged *Jackie* as important, but suggested this was mostly because it was 'all about dealing with spots, and there were cartoon strips of girls meeting boys',

³⁹³ AR interview [0:11:58]

³⁹⁴ Frances, BSF OH, interviewed by KM 22.02.2018, track 1 [0:12:51]

and because she fell 'heavily in love' with David Cassidy. Her reflections show a more acute perception of *Jackie's* sexless conceptualisation of adolescent femininity and the ideological parameters of the magazine more broadly, clearly informed by her current-day reflections on her younger self. For Pat, it was *Cosmopolitan's* coverage of sex that got her 'smack between the eyes' when she was fifteen. She said, 'it talked about sex, like properly.' Asked if she liked the agony aunt pages in *Jackie* however, Pat replied 'of course. Well, isn't that how we learned back then? You know, it's the only exposure we got to something that was outside of our own school or own social circle.'³⁹⁵



3.1: Libresse Advert, *Jackie*, 02.03.1974

³⁹⁵ Pat, BSF OH, interviewed by TL, 08.04.2018, track 1 [2:10:51]

Whilst *Jackie* rarely discussed menstruation in agony aunt columns, it did contain adverts for products that mimicked their style and structure. Aware that magazines were often central to girls' friendships, education and imaginations, advertisers for menstrual products tapped into such themes. A Libresse advert from a March 1974 copy of *Jackie* took up half the magazine page, running from top to bottom (Figure 3.1). It featured an image of agony aunt Pauline Richards sat writing at a desk, and the accompanying tagline, 'Pauline Richards discusses more of your intimate questions about periods.' The topics included 'thoughtless friends' and 'mum knows best?'. The inclusion of friends and family in an agony-aunt style advert about period's nods to the typical function of the agony aunt as a mediator in interpersonal relationships, demonstrates an awareness of how girls learnt about menstruation at the time and reflects the wider cultural preoccupation with intergenerational difference and the liminality of adolescent girlhood.

The first query about thoughtless friends states, 'I am the only girl in our form who has started her periods. They all stare at me and start giggling behind my back when I have my period, especially when we do gym. I get even more upset then they hear those disposal bins clanking in the cloakroom. Please help me if you can.'³⁹⁶ The advert plays on girls' concerns about being found out to be menstruating, but also engages with contemporary concerns regarding early maturation and a lack of appropriate infrastructure. The second question reads, 'My mum always buys me those sanitary towels which need a belt. They're so big and bulky and I'm sure they show. I'm embarrassed to talk to her about it, but I did mention Libresse to her and she just said I should keep on with my usual brand. What can I do?'. Richards's response informs readers that 'a lot of mothers automatically buy their own brand for

³⁹⁶ 'Pauline Richards Answers some of your intimate questions', Libresse Advert, *Jackie*, 02.03.1974

their daughters', because they use their own experience as a gauge. The advert suggests that because Libresse towels were 'a fairly new idea', mums did not 'realise that they're ideal for girls like you', highlighting intergenerational discrepancies in available technologies and preferences, whilst simultaneously reinforcing and challenging mum's role as expert in the dissemination of menstrual knowledge. Richards states that Libresse towels were 'slim' and 'absorbent', and encouraged the reader to tell her mum she was being sent a sample. Richards reassures the reader, 'when you've tried them for yourself, I'm sure she'll understand why you want to change to Libresse.'³⁹⁷ The advert points toward the commonality of intergenerational involvement in daughters' menstrual management practices, and the influence of mothers' experiential knowledge on how daughters managed menstruation.

This style of advert, which could qualify as an advertorial, would be a fruitful marketing strategy for Libresse. In the reply to questions they could present their new adhesive towels as the cure to any menstrual-related concerns. A 1977 *Chemist & Druggist* periodical explored the importance of agony aunt style advice in advertising for garnering sales for menstrual technology brands. Written by Lilia-White's 'Sister Marion', a pseudonym which referred to the Sister Marion department at Lilia-White, the feature reflected on the important role and 'great store of knowledge accrued' by their advice features, which enabled 'the company to provide expert and sympathetic advice on a wide range of questions'. The article directly referenced the impact of the 'permissive society' on 'attitudes and freedom in thought and expression', and 'earlier maturity and the incidence of sexual activity at a younger age', but emphasised a residual 'shyness, particularly amongst young girls', reflecting both questions found in the Libresse agony aunt advertorial. They believed the 'Sister Marion' feature within

³⁹⁷ 'Pauline Richards Answers some of your intimate questions', Libresse advert, *Jackie*, 02.03.1974.

their adverts was a 'trusted source of information, held in similar regard to the advice columns operated in women's magazines', and that there was an 'almost universal rule that people prefer to consult an anonymous and dispassionate figure rather than have an open discussion with people they know.' The report went on, 'advertisements and advice at point of sale now appear to be the main sources of information influencing choice of products'.³⁹⁸

An article titled 'sharing the sanpro cake' featured in *Retail Chemist* in 3rd November 1977 stressed that the '15-24 age group' was 'potentially the most important' for menstrual technology manufacturers because it is 'then that the habits of a lifetime are formed'. The article reflected on the potential of negative experiences of using tampons at this age on a lifelong aversion to tampon use, and the influence of mother's own menstrual management practices and advice to girls' practices. Conversely the article acknowledged that girls' could change their menstrual management techniques if informed about alternatives early enough. If girls' were provided with such information, 'half the battle was won' for manufacturers. This acknowledgement of the influence of mothers' menstrual management practices, and of brands attempts to sway girls' brand loyalties 'early enough' are detectable in the Libresse advert.³⁹⁹

The Sister Marion/ Lilia-White 'sanpro' feature in *Chemist & Druggist* also acknowledged the persistence of myths regarding water based restrictions. It cited a recent letter from a girl asking about washing hair during menstruation, and went on to emphasise the importance of education to 'banish the harmful and cramping effects

³⁹⁸ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/22/14/2, Sister Marion, 'Sanpro: what young girls ask', *Chemist & Druggist*, 9 April 1977, p.503.

³⁹⁹ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/22/14/2, 'Sharing the sanpro cake', *Retail Chemist*, 3 November 1977, p.8.

of thoughts like this'.⁴⁰⁰ Another agony aunt-style Libresse advert published in *Jackie* in March 1973 includes the question 'How often do you think I ought to change my sanitary towel. Also is it alright to have a bath every day when I have my period?'. The response reads, 'It's amazing how old-wives tales die hard. Personally I think there's nothing better for you than relaxing in a lovely warm bath when you have your period. If you're feeling a bit achey, spoil yourself with one of those gorgeous bubbly herb baths. You'll feel much fresher and better for it, and it won't interfere with your period at all'.⁴⁰¹ Advertisers were once again tapping into contemporary concerns about substandard education and the proliferation of outdated ideas about bathing restrictions that did not match up with the modern, 'hygienic' menstrual movement.

Strange has noted that well into the 1960s, the MWF were still publishing guidance that emphasised the need to 'supersede the fallacy of water restrictions', and we can see that advertisers, and question-and-answer columnists, had also taken up this cause around and after this time. Writing for MO, Charlotte (b.1951) recalled, 'when I first started my periods, my mother told me I shouldn't have a bath or wash my hair whilst menstruating. I can't remember any reason being given but reading teenage magazines of the day reassured me that this was ok!'.⁴⁰² In 1967, *Honey's* 'Medicine Chest' featured a query from a girl who often had 'rows' with her mum who believed she should not bathe or wash her hair during her period, and 'objected' to her 'using internal sanitary pads'. She asked, 'is she right?'. In response, an unspecified medical professional suggested there was 'no medical reason she should not bath or wash at this time', and instead encouraged her to be 'more scrupulous' when menstruating,

⁴⁰⁰ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/22/14/2, Sister Marion, 'Sanpro: what young girls ask', *Chemist & Druggist*, 9 April 1977, p.503.

⁴⁰¹ 'Pauline Richards Answers some of your intimate questions', Libresse advert, *Jackie*, 31.03.1974.

⁴⁰² C1786, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

and to consider using deodorants 'for this area'. Distinctly euphemistic, the advice given in the Medicine Chest was likely fuelled by the influx of advertising for intimate deodorants in women's and girls' magazines at this time.⁴⁰³

Tampax also mimicked agony aunt columns in some of their adverts. In a copy of *Woman's Mirror*, a magazine produced for the 'new (adult) woman' in 1966, an ad answered questions about lingering superstitions. Whilst Libresse were keen to highlight differences between generations, the dispelling of myths in menstrual advertising transcended generational boundaries. These myths included, 'will plants die if I touch them during my period? is it safe to bathe during my period? Can anyone tell if I'm having my period? and can unmarried girls use Tampax?'. The format was similar, as Tampax answer each question one by one. The answer to the question about bathing went as follows: '*of course it is*. Avoiding water is just another of those age-old superstitions! Actually it's *most important* to bathe, for you perspire more freely during your period. That's why so many girls prefer Tampax internal sanitary protection - for Tampax lets you *bathe, shower, even swim*, with its complete protection!'.⁴⁰⁴

Loughran notes that 'older traditions of feminist scholarship criticised the individualisation of female unhappiness on the problem page, and its failure to recognise that 'women's problems may have political origins, be politically structured or politically transformable.'⁴⁰⁵ Perhaps the ability of problem pages to be adapted into an advert, and thus monetised for corporate profit without much alteration to the structure, format and content, testifies to the validity of some of these concerns. Yet

⁴⁰³ Daisy Payling, 'Scents and Non-scents: Mediating expertise in the campaign against vaginal deodorants, c. 1969-1975', paper given at EAHMH Sense and Nonsense conference, University of Birmingham 27-th 30th August.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Personal Questions answered about superstitions', *Woman's Mirror*, 30 October 1965, p.46.

⁴⁰⁵ Tracey Loughran, 'Intimacy at a distance: Emotional Labour and the "Psychological Turn" in British Problem Pages, c.1960-1980, p.2.

as Loughran notes, this does not take away from the function of the problem pages, and the genuinely helpful advice offered to girls, often unavailable via other means. If problem pages provide insight into the 'day-to-day experience of ordinary people', and advertising, as Millum notes, provides an insight into 'cultural meanings above and beyond the sales message' that typically reflect 'the most readily understood and available messages for the consumer', then the collision of the two, and the voices and concerns presented in such forms should be taken seriously as one of the loudest forms of authority and representation available to girls at the time, born in part from existing accounts of lived experiences and proliferated by the cultural circuit.⁴⁰⁶ It is evident *Libresse* believed that an advert that mimicked an agony aunt Q+A providing information and 'reassurance' about periods was the best way to encourage girls to buy their product. Menstrual advertising was one way that ideas about menstruation entered into and proliferated across the cultural circuit, making up one part of girls' larger, albeit patchy, menstrual education.

Remembering First Menses

For many girls knowledge of menstruation did not precede the arrival of their first period. For others a degree of knowledge was acquired beforehand, easing some anxiety, but not completely offsetting worries. Whilst some eagerly anticipated the arrival of their first period, and treated it as an aspirational marker of entry into womanhood, others feared or resented it. They recalled feeling unprepared, and much too young to consider themselves a woman. Many felt a mix of emotions and continued to do so into their adult lives.

⁴⁰⁶ Loughran, 'Intimacy at a distance', p.12 and Millum, *Images of Women*, p.11.

When recalling their first period many of the MO respondents made explicit reference to childhood and womanhood, and the way that menstruation altered their perception of and relationship with each life stage. This ties with Fink and Tinkler's notion of 'liminality' outlined in the introduction. Some presented the menses as a moment that made them aware of their reluctance to grow up and enter womanhood. Anne (b.1957) stated in the first paragraph of her written account 'I was upset because I did not want to grow up...I still felt like a child and was afraid of being an adult'.⁴⁰⁷ Winnie (b.1951) also thought about her relationship with childhood and adulthood, likely because her older sister explained menstruation to her as 'the time you become a woman'. She did not accept this explanation without critical consideration, and suggested she 'would rather stay as a child than go through this disgusting experience every month. She recalled feeling 'dirty, guilty, and uncomfortable', words commonly associated in popular culture with menstruation, particularly after the shift in conceptualisation towards a language of hygiene.⁴⁰⁸

By contrast, other women welcomed their first period and were eagerly anticipating the aspirational marker of maturity. Billie (b.1955) remembered 'feeling very different' about herself when she began menstruating. 'It was a sign of being 'Adult' which no-one could deny or take away from me, an awareness of the potential to bear new life which was very exciting.' She stated that some 'Sephardic Jewish communities hold a ceremony marking the first occasion' and described it as a time of 'great rejoicing'. Whilst she liked 'this idea', she suggested her more 'modest self' preferred 'the more private approach'.⁴⁰⁹ Doreen (b.1951) stated 'I was desperate to start periods because everybody else I knew had been having them for years. I felt

⁴⁰⁷ A2212, Response to Menstruation Directive (1996).

⁴⁰⁸ W1918, MOA 'Menstruation'.

⁴⁰⁹ B2197, MOA, Menstruation.

different because I didn't menstruate, so it was a great relief to me when it happened.'⁴¹⁰ Her testimony is reflective of the ways that womanhood and menstruation were constructed as synonymous in contemporary society and culture, and how the absence of a period, or starting late, made Doreen feel 'different' to her peers, altering her self-esteem, relationship with her body and her sense of her own identity, womanhood and belonging.

This notion is also found in the testimony of older respondents. Beier notes that when working-class women from Barrow, Lancaster and Preston growing up between 1900 and 1970 answered the question, 'how did you learn the facts of life?', they 'invariably' responded to the question with accounts of their first menstrual period, and that these experiences had been traumatic because they had not been told that it would happen, or that it was normal or healthy.⁴¹¹ Bernice (b.1919) was thirteen when she started her periods in the 1930s. She wrote, 'the shock of starting periods frightened me to death...I woke with blood running down my legs...I was terrified, thought I was dying, bleeding to death, dashed downstairs to tell mum.' She was informed by her mum to 'calmly put something on', and replied, 'On, where?', revealing the extent of her ignorance. She 'didn't know where blood was coming from', and suggested the 'next puzzle' was 'where to fasten something and more to the point what to fasten on.' Her story-writing was conversational, as she relayed the events in real time with inserted speech, helping her to orate the extent of her shock and confusion at the time. She concluded the story of her first menses with the statement, 'this great shock is just as vivid today in 1996 as it was in 1931 when I was thirteen

⁴¹⁰ D826, MOA 'Menstruation'.

⁴¹¹ Beier, 'We were Green as Grass', p. 467.

years old. At no time did I ever receive instruction about my periods as it was referred to, or indeed about sex in any way.’⁴¹²

Many subjects organically mentioned menstruation and the shock that accompanied their first period when asked the question ‘how did your relationship with your body change as a teenager?’ in oral history interviews. Elaine’s (1957) interview revealed the extent to which the shock at menstruating uprooted her life. She believed the shock of menstruation was a formative moment during her girlhood that was closely linked to the development of her obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). She contemplated this tentatively in her testimony,

I think it was, I think, erm, I think my relationship with my body changed absolutely, well, everything changed with [pause] I don't know, with menstruation. It was, I, it was a terrible shock. Terrible, terrible shock. Erm, and also, I think the other thing was, was sex education. I was, erm, I found it terribly shocking. I was very naïve, completely naïve. You know, I've never had older brothers, older sisters, anyone who'd ever given me any frightening stories. I had had friends who were, you know, who would talk about things, but it was all, erm, a terrible, terrible shock. And I've had, I've suffered badly from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder my whole life, and I can relate it to it starting then. Definitely. I can definitely, although my best friend sort of says she thinks before then, but I think her memory's playing tricks, because certainly the first obsessive thoughts I had were, erm, “I'm a virgin, I'm gonna stay that way until I get married”. I was completely, I found it so shocking, erm, and whether it did or it didn't, in my mind it triggered my OCD, definitely. That's when I started with my obsessive thoughts, I'm absolutely sure. Erm.⁴¹³

Initially, Elaine found it hard to articulate her thoughts on how much menstruation affected her life, as indicated by the repetition of phrases like ‘erm’, ‘I don’t know’ and ‘terrible shock’. She suggested this was a formative moment for her subsequent experiences of OCD, but was careful not to sound absolutist, acknowledging that she has discussed this with her ‘best friend’ who held a different opinion to her. She

⁴¹² B736, MOA ‘Menstruation’.

⁴¹³ Elaine interview, BSF OH, interviewed by TL 18.6.18, track 1 [0:25:26].

reasserted the authority of her experiential expertise by challenging her friend's understanding in a light-hearted manner, by suggesting her memory was 'playing tricks'. Elaine's most memorable 'obsessive' thoughts clustered around the need to remain a virgin until married and whilst she acknowledged that she was not completely sure this was her first experience of obsessive thoughts, she concluded by stating she was 'absolutely sure' that menstruation impacted the thoughts she experienced. Whether or not this was the 'first' time Elaine experienced OCD is not as important as the sense that it was one of her most memorable experiences of obsessive thoughts, that subsequently shaped a lot of her life experiences, memories, and how she remembers and narrativises her life story.

Other women showed disdain for menstruation, but this was far more muted, and their responses were characterised more so by a sense of indifference. Bertie (b.1956) stated she was 'taken aback' by her first period in 1968, and framed the changes to her body as 'inconvenient and embarrassing rather than exciting'. Carol (b.1960) was thirteen when she started to menstruate in 1973, and stated she knew 'nothing about it, except what was taught in biology lessons. All I had heard from friends was that if you didn't start when you were supposed to you had your insides scraped.' She recalled that her mum was embarrassed when she started, and summarised her own emotional reaction in the phrase, 'it was a great shock to find myself bleeding'. She reiterated further into her response, 'I felt shocked that I'd started. I didn't tell anyone'.⁴¹⁴ Gillian (b.1963) started her periods aged 13 in 1976, and situated her account of first menstruation by explaining her visceral embodied

⁴¹⁴ C41, MOA 'Menstruation'.

reaction to writing the response. She stated, 'writing this now my stomach is churning at the thought of how horribly, excruciatingly embarrassed I felt.'⁴¹⁵

Marjorie (b.1965) began to menstruate in 1975. She did not write extensively about her emotional reaction to beginning to menstruate, stating she 'didn't feel differently about her body', but that she did remember 'trying to ignore them, i.e. not use sanitary towels for the first few months, as though that would make them stop.'⁴¹⁶

Sheila (b.1951) provided a particularly short response to the directive,

Menstruation is a topic which affects all women, but I do not know if I feel that happy writing a lengthy piece about it. As far as I am concerned I have always found it to be an inconvenience, to be endured every twenty eight days. At times it has been a great nuisance, such as when I wanted to go on holiday and did not want to think about it. I have always suffered from 'painful stomach cramps for several days before a period and this can be very debilitating. I enjoyed the nine months during both of my pregnancies when I did not have to bother about periods, and now that I have been put through the menopause, as treatment for a medical condition, I find it much more convenient to know that I need not think about it anymore.'⁴¹⁷

Question-and-answer columns in girls' magazines suggest menstruation was still a source of anxiety for many in to the 1970s. A letter sent to *Jackie's* Dear Doctor column in July 1974 stated, 'I am the only girl in my class who has not yet had a period. I'm 15 and, as if that wasn't depressing enough, my mother says she thinks we should pay the doctor a visit soon. What worries me is what he will do or say. Can you give me some idea?'.

The response from the anonymous doctor read, 'there are wide variations in the age at which girls first menstruate, and, at 15 years, you are still within the normal limits. It may be that your mother was a later starter too. The family doctor will, no

⁴¹⁵ G2624, MOA 'Menstruation'.

⁴¹⁶ M2132, MOA 'Menstruation'.

⁴¹⁷ S2581, MOA 'Menstruation'.

doubt want to check on your general health and diet and to exclude anaemia as a possible factor, reassurance is all that you and your mother require at this stage.’ The *Jackie* doctor offered information that widened the reader’s understanding of a ‘normal’ age to start menstruating, intended to ease the subject’s emotional upheaval. Yet any explicit discussion of the emotions the subject might be experiencing was avoided. As outlined in chapter two this reflected both *Jackie*’s conservative stance and its commitment to using medicine as a vehicle for discussing taboo topics and making sense of menstruation for its readers. *Jackie* was not quite ready to hand the subject of menstrual knowledge over to women and girls in its entirety.

Whether having discussions framed in bio-medicalised ways or in social and everyday ways benefits girls more is hard to discern. There is likely a case for both. It was important that girls knew that menstrual-related ailments qualified as valid medical concerns, and that they needed to visit a doctor if they had any concerns, and *Jackie* played a part in stressing this. Simultaneously, they needed to see menstruation discussed as an everyday phenomena, represented in ways less laden with scientific imagery and assumptions, and with more encouraging and compassionate advice and tone than the medical columns. Women’s testimony stresses that girls certainly wanted more holistic discussions of sex, the body and menstruation, but that such discussions were often not available. This ties with Martin’s and Young’s conclusions that de-privileging scientific readings of menstruation might enable menstruators to embrace their bodies rather than condemn them.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁸ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: a Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Beacon Press, 2001), p.111 and Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience “Throwing like a girl” and other essays*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.102-103.

'Scientific' Advertising

Magazines and menstrual technology brands drew on the idea of 'science' as 'unveiling' women's bodies to discuss and depict menstruation for their readers. Although somewhat educational, the focus on concealment and invisibility expressed via scientific language and imagery reinforced menstrual stigma at a socio-cultural level, under the guise of authoritative medical statements. The advertisers were using veiled language around menstruation because they were assuming a shared level of understanding was already in place, although as testimony has revealed this was not always the case.

The pseudo-scientific and medicalised language and imagery used in these adverts was key to advertisers' ability to position themselves as authorities on menstruation. Yet this medicalised and scientific form and style often coexisted with a whole host of ideas about menstrual blood, bodies and habits more the product of myth and stigma than medical understanding.⁴¹⁹ The representations had very little to do with medical understanding and knowledge, but adopted and echoed the modes of presentation typical to medicine and other scientific disciplines, acting as avenues for access to medical and scientific knowledge for girls. This was because 'science' as a discipline, and scientific modes of presentation, had and continue to have immense

⁴¹⁹ One way that representations of menstruation still continue to perpetuate misinformation is the use of euphemistic language to describe genitalia, and blue liquids to depict menstrual blood in advertising. Because of the lack of representation and education regarding menstruation elsewhere in society, these adverts are used as educational tools for some. This can be damaging. In their report on menstrual wellbeing Plan UK highlighted how this can affect autistic people who may undertake literal interpretations of verbal euphemisms or unrealistic visual depictions, resulting in some not knowing where blood comes from, and expecting menstrual blood to be blue. This can cause added confusion and stress to the experience of first menses. in Dr. Annalise Weckesser, Gemma Williams, Dr. Angela Hewett, and Amie Randhawa, 'Inclusivity & Diversity- UK Expert Views', https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-ltp-learning-briefing-3pdf/download?token=BIB_vlpS (Accessed, 08/02/2021). p.5.

cultural authority. As Hustvedt states, 'science occupies a cultural position that can only be described as the 'locus of truth'.⁴²⁰

A full page advert for Lil-lets tampons featured in *Jackie* in 1971 (described briefly in the introduction to this thesis) reflects on the lack of representations and discussions of menstruation in mass culture (figure 1). The combination of bright, colourful imagery, and the bold text heading stating, 'How come the heroine never has a period?' work to draw attention to the product.⁴²¹ The language implies that those at Lil-lets were aware that there was a disparity between the lives of fictional female characters, and those reading about them. The advert is a microcosm of the invisibility of periods in *Jackie* and mass culture more generally.

Following on from the assertion that 'real life girls' have periods, the advert states, 'most of us would like to forget them'. The use of the first person plural, 'us', gives Lil-lets a human representative, who spoke for the brand, and to the consumer, as someone who also did not want to think about periods. This works to establish what felt like an equal power balance between the consumer and advertiser by implying a commonality of opinion and experience. This use of language in advertising serves, like teen magazines more generally, to create a sense of an imagined community of readers, who share values, opinions, and life experiences.⁴²² Lil-lets nod to the issue of collective disapproval of menstrual invisibility, taking it into account, only to discard it as overused and out of touch. The advert brings the radical notion of menstrual visibility to the fore, and encourages readers to see the injustice inherent in

⁴²⁰ Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking*, p.x.

⁴²¹ Lil-lets advert, *Jackie*, 31.07.1971.

⁴²² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), pp.5-7.

maintaining menstrual invisibility, only to dismiss these concerns again by reinforcing notions of secrecy and invisibility as most appropriate.⁴²³

The advert features an image of a young, slim, white woman, superimposed against a white background, taking up most of the left-hand-side of the advert. The image captures the model sat in an arm chair, resting an open book on the arm rest. She looks directly at the camera, her gaze directly addressing the magazine reader, giving the impression she had stopped reading momentarily to contemplate the question. Sat with her legs apart, and her foot up on the edge of the chair she takes up space. Her outstretched limbs, and stare at the camera denoted confidence. Dressed in a midi-length red velvet skirt, black cardigan, and black knee high boots, the colour of her skirt hints towards the theme of menstrual blood motivating the advert. The red of her skirt is as close as any advert in this sample of menstrual advertising was to denoting or depicting menstrual blood. The white background, and the white and blue Lil-lets logo, connote cleanliness and a clinical, sterile setting. This colour palette has persisted until the present day, despite the 2017 Bodyform & Libresse ‘#bloodnormal’ campaign which was a stand-alone attempt to depict menstrual fluid as red in advertising for menstrual products which featured on YouTube.⁴²⁴

The blue and white colour palette also features in the insert at the top right-hand-side. Intended to depict to the reader what happens when you ‘place a ‘Lil-lets tampon in a small glass of water’, the image makes visible the process of widthways

⁴²³ Angela McRobbie, ‘Post-feminism and popular culture’, *Feminist Media Studies*, 4:3 (2007), pp.255-264.

⁴²⁴ Bodyform, ‘Periods are normal, showing them should be too’, *Bodyform website*, <https://www.bodyform.co.uk/our-world/bloodnormal/> [accessed, 19/05/2021], Amelia Gill, ‘Is Blood ‘Normal’?: A Semiotic analysis of Bodyforms’ #BloodNormal campaign’, Dissertation submitted to School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds (2018), open access https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/download/downloads/id/303/is_blood_normal_a_semiotic_analysis_of_bodyform_bloodnormal_campaign.pdf [accessed 19/05/2021].

expansion. The glass beaker holding the tampon features in a number of Lil-lets adverts, and became an important part of their branding across the 1970s.⁴²⁵ To reference Jordanova, the advert ‘unveils’ the invisible nature of this process, which is hard to make visible and photograph.⁴²⁶ Set against a blue backdrop, there are two glasses, both containing liquid and a tampon. The glasses represent the vagina, and the clear liquid in the glasses represents menstrual blood. The tampon’s insertion into the cup represents the process of insertion into the vagina. Yet the language that accompanies the diagram made no anatomical references, nor did it describe what was happening, ‘See how it expands widthways all round...’ Where and what is left to the viewer’s discretion as the viewer must extrapolate, the need to do so encouraged and emphasised by the ellipses at the end of the sentence.

Alongside the glass containing the Lil-lets tampon is another glass containing an unspecified alternative brand of tampon. It differed to the one containing the Lil-lets tampon, because the technology had not expanded to fill the glass. This serves to highlight the superiority of Lil-lets as a form of internal sanitary protection, in comparison with ‘any other tampon placed in an identical glass’. The image uses signs associated with scientific research experiments and the image provides visual ‘proof’ in the form of a small, but fair, scientific study. The apparatus mimic the look of an experiment conducted in a controlled laboratory setting. One factor at a time is changed (the tampon brand), all other conditions kept the same (in this case, the glass used to test the products ability to expand widthways), mimicking the process of conducting scientific experiments, and resultantly ‘proving’ Lil-lets’ superiority.

⁴²⁵ Other examples include Lil-lets adverts featured in *Jackie*, 19.07.1971, *Honey*, 11.1973, *Honey*, 07.1975, *Honey*, 03.1976, *Honey*, 07.1976, *Honey*, 07.1977, *Honey*, 11.1977, *Honey*, 03.1978, *Honey*, 07.1978, *Honey*, 11.1978, *Honey*, 03.1979, , 07.1979, *Honey*, 11.1979,

⁴²⁶ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, pp.82-83.

The blue and white colour palette and the faux experimental set-up elicit a preferred reading of the image that bolsters the scientific and medical validity of Lil-lets. Yet the advert employs no medicalised, or scientific language and description. There is no mention of sex organs, and no mention of where, or how, a user might insert a tampon, how it works to absorb blood, in either lay terms, or their more medicalised, scientific equivalents. Euphemistic language is used to imply that the tampon will collect blood, as the tampons 'mould themselves gently to your shape. To fit you comfortably. To fit your shape exactly.' Widthways expansion, girls are taught, works so the user can 'forget about leakage and odour'.

Sold in 'discreet little packs', the ease with which the products can be hidden is positioned as desirable, further reinforcing the need for secrecy. The final paragraph of text states, 'maybe we can never be as lucky as the heroines in the novels. But with Lil-lets, at least our period problems can be written off'. The aspects that enhance the desirability of the products advertised simultaneously uphold a notion of menstruation as undesirable, pushing the agenda that it is the responsibility of the user to maintain its invisibility. This also undermines the attempt made with the strapline to scorn the invisibility of periods in magazines and mass culture more broadly.

The 'how come the heroine has a period?' advert is an example of the wider cultural position of menses and a commentary on this silence. But it is one that ultimately, contributes to the culture of secrecy, misinformation, and shame. This is unsurprising, as advertisers tended to only make use of tropes, and ideas that they were sure would already resonate, to some degree, with those who might look at

them.⁴²⁷ If complete secrecy wasn't desirable, there would be no market for internally worn protection.

Similarly, a Lil-lets advert from 1971 unveils the process of menstrual technology absorption.⁴²⁸ Another full page advert features an image of a tampon inserted into a glass beaker, against the same blue backdrop (Figure 3.2). Instead of comparing Lil-lets with a different brand, the advert shows two hands holding the material used to make a tampon in the palm of their hand, its purpose to render visible what and how much material is compressed and shaped in the making of their tampons, backing up Lil-lets' claims regarding the absorbency and discreetness of their product. The image is accompanied by the text 'all this absorbency...compressed in this tiny tampon...blossoms out widthways to fit you perfectly.'⁴²⁹ The assertion that the tampon 'blossoms' widthways evoked a naturalness to this process, and relies on longstanding ideas about the 'female reproductive system' and women as closer to nature than men. As Jordanova states, 'this distinction between women as natural and men as cultural appeals to ideas - with a long history – about the biological foundations of womanhood.'⁴³⁰

The advert not only evoked this 'long history', but actively asserts and relies on scientific modes of understanding and the binary opposition of man and woman, through its form, style and content. The blue background and glass beakers evoke scientific, medical and thus, by association, masculine ways of seeing, which are

⁴²⁷ Trevor Millum, *Images of Women: Advertising in Women's Magazines*, (Chatto & Windus, 1975), p.7.

⁴²⁸ 'Now the safe period' Kotex Advert, *Jackie*, 1st November 1969.

⁴²⁹ Lil-lets advert, *Jackie*, 03.07.1971.

⁴³⁰ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.19.

contrasted with a discussion of menstruation and the menstruating body as nature. The former is presented as making sense of and unveiling the latter.⁴³¹

All this absorbency... compressed in this tiny tampon... blossoms out widthways to fit you perfectly.

That's why thousands of women every month are switching to Lil-lets—the modern tampon.

Lil-lets are specially made to expand widthways to mould themselves to your shape. To fit you comfortably. To fit your shape exactly. So you can forget about leakage and odour. You'll quickly discover that Lil-lets efficiency gives you a new kind of personal confidence.

There are three different absorbencies to choose from: Regular, Super and Super Plus. All are easy to insert and easy to dispose of. And all come in discreet little packs.

Write for a free pack of Lil-lets and an illustrated booklet that will answer all your questions about periods. The address is:- Sister Marion, Dept. L/3489W, Lila-White (Sales) Limited, Churford Mills, Birmingham, 8.

Lil-lets expand widthways to fit you perfectly

Lil-lets
TAMPONS

Figure 3.2: Lil-lets advert, *Jackie*, 3.07.1971

⁴³¹ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.89.

The advert draws on scientific modes of vision to educate readers about the product, enabling Lil-lets to bolster their claims to absorbency, safety and ultimately emotional security, in the form of ‘personal confidence’.⁴³² For Lil-lets, it is science that makes sense of menstrual management, and they evoke science in an attempt to bolster their credentials as an authority on the matter. This advert, like the others consulted, relies on notions of menstrual secrecy, and essentialist, binary understandings of womanhood, reproductive organs and prescribed gendered identities. Scientific modes of understanding unveil the process of menstrual management, whilst never departing from the social scripture that required menstruation to remain invisible and its discussion euphemistic.

This ‘unveiling’ occurred in other menstrual technology adverts too. A Kotex advert from 1969 (Figure 3.3) contains a black and white diagram, intended to show the different layers and materials that went into their adhesive pad. This deconstruction of adhesive pads features in a number of Kotex adverts.⁴³³ The diagram mimics a scientific cross-section, hinting to established ways of depicting layers of material. An arrow points at the diagram, marking its unique selling point is that it was the ‘only towel with a blue polyfilm backing’. The inclusion of the types of materials in the product distinguishes Kotex’s adverts from other brands. Yet the material was listed specifically because its USP, ‘NEW BLUE polyfilm’, helped provide ‘safety’ from leaks.

⁴³² Lil-lets, *Jackie*, July 3 1971.

⁴³³ ‘Play Safe’ Kotex ad, *Petticoat*, 25.11.1967, ‘Take Care’ Kotex, 11.03.1967, ‘Now the safe period’, *Jackie*, 1.11.1969,



Figure 3.3: Kotex advert, *Jackie*, 1.11.1969

Titled, 'now the safe period', the advert adopts language used by contemporaries to demark the 'safe period' whereby girls could have sex with the lowest risk of pregnancy. A letter to the 'Petticoat doctor' from March 1971 asked 'why is the safe period safe?', suggesting the euphemism was a part of the cultural circuit at this time. The doctor replied, 'a girl is most likely to become pregnant during the time that the egg is on its way from the ovary to the womb', roughly 14 days before the next period is due. The doctor warned that 'no time is one hundred percent safe', but that the bleeding phase of the cycle was 'said to be the safe period'.⁴³⁴ Much like the Lil-lets advert, the Kotex advert relies on both scientific modes of representation to depict their product, and euphemistic discussions of sex and menstruation to appeal

⁴³⁴ 'Petticoat Dr', *Petticoat*, 20.03.1971.

to girls. Whilst magazines and the adverts that featured in them provided girls with information about menstruation not offered in sex education lessons or via interactions with family members, discussions in magazines, particularly advertising, were still laden with euphemism and contradiction, simultaneously ‘unveiling’ menstruation whilst reaffirming the need for secrecy and concealment.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the places, spaces and people that informed girls’ understandings of menstruation and their bodies. Using personal accounts, it revealed that inefficient school-based sex education hugely impacted girls’ experiences of menstruation. A common theme uniting personal testimony taken from women who experienced girlhood at various points in the period 1960-1980 was a desire to convey that sex education lessons in schools rarely made them feel equipped for, or knowledgeable about, menstruation. Personal testimony suggested that school-based sex education was mostly inadequate, misdirected and ill-timed. Girls reported gathering information from a range of sources in an attempt to educate themselves to a level they believed was satisfactory, which was rarely achieved.

Women remembered that magazines were important sources of health education, but often struggled to remember specific examples of images, articles, adverts or conversations that aided their education. They could, however, remember that magazines had a wealth of information related to health, as they understood it at the time. Magazines simultaneously offered respite from menstrual-related stigma and shame, and reinforced it through discussions in both advertising and editorial content. Across the 1970s, scientific modes of representation proliferated in menstrual

advertising, however these adverts also contained euphemistic discussion of sex, menstruation and menstruating bodies. They also featured alongside other adverts concerned with depicting intergenerational discussions.

Many women held conflicting views about the significance of first menstruation, concerned both with menses as a traumatic event, potential hygienic crisis, and with its potentially celebratory role in signifying maturation and a step towards womanhood. Responses to this experience varied, but older women were most likely to describe their experiences of first menses as particularly traumatic, whilst younger women displayed more of an indifference. These attitudes often persisted into adulthood. Women attributed their menstrual education to a range of sources, and stressed they were simultaneously influenced by family members and friends and magazines and repelled by these conversations. Reflective personal testimonies allow for a history of sex education and of menstrual experience that centres girls' perspectives. It also centres girls' assessments of those entrusted to deliver this education, whether that be teachers, journalists, editors, publishers, advertisers or their family members, challenging the typicality of these voices in shaping discussions of sex education and its effects on children, and subsequently the histories produced about them. Women's recollections reveal the importance of discussions of menstruation centred on feelings, sensations and emotions.

Chapter Four

Menstrual Technology, Clothing and the Body

Introduction

Menstruation is experienced in the body, and as Tomi-Ann Roberts states, the body 'is always already embedded in particular interactional and socio-cultural discourses.'⁴³⁵ Building on this sentiment, this chapter begins by exploring the socio-cultural discourses perpetuated about menstruating bodies in adverts for menstrual technology. By exploring what bodies appear in advertising, how they are dressed, and the language that accompanies them, this chapter explores how menstrual adverts, like the magazines they featured in, contained discourses that pointed to the wider socio-cultural parameters of appropriate feminine presentation for young girls growing up in the period 1960-1980. In Millum's words, the adverts contained 'cultural meanings above and beyond the sales message', constructing a social world around the product.⁴³⁶ Incorporating a history of fashion photography and dress into an analysis of images of menstrual adverting, this chapter reveals the 'social world' menstrual technology brands were constructing around their products.

Looking at these adverts in relation to other elements of the magazine reveals how menstruation was constructed and presented as inherently feminine, in the same way as an interest in fashion, body image and dress was by the magazine as a whole. Imagery and text worked in tandem to reproduce preferred understandings of how the menstruating body should be managed and dressed, and these interests were

⁴³⁵ Tomi Ann Roberts, 'Introduction: Menstruation as Embodied', in Palgrave Handbook of *Critical Menstruation* (Palgrave, 2020), p.177.

⁴³⁶ Trevor Millum, *Images of Women: Advertising in Women's Magazines*, (Chatto & Windus, 1975), p.11.

described using a language of choice, free will and independence that chimed with broader discourses of self-discovery and self-fulfilment that characterised mass-cultural discussions of girlhood in this period.⁴³⁷ Analysis of menstrual adverts complicates narratives of the 1960s as a period of rapid, successive and seismic transitions in culture and society. The use of fashion and photography styles typically associated with the 1950s in 1960s menstrual advertising, and the consistency with which menstrual discourse perpetuated ideas of invisibility across the period 1960-1980 challenge the idea that the 1960s was a period defined by drastically different ideas, aspirations, aesthetics and lifestyles from the previous years. Discourses of shame and uncleanness that positioned the menstruating body as abject continued to feature in advertising, and to be a very real part of the subjective experience of menstruation.⁴³⁸

Posing a further challenge to notions of 'permissive' society, testimony describing experiences of wearing menstrual technology suggest that notions of free will, choice and opportunity that many menstrual adverts adopted were rarely characteristic of girls' experiences of bodily autonomy and using menstrual technology. In some cases products were chosen by the girls' mothers as a result of economic circumstance, limited knowledge or a lack of open, verbal communication. Mothers had their own ideas about how their daughters could manage menstruation, and non-verbal means of communicating this knowledge was often the priority. Some experienced pain at various and multiple points in their menstrual cycle. Others experienced pain because of ill-designed and ill-fitting menstrual technology that physically hindered their ability to move freely. Stories of ill-fitting, uncomfortable and

⁴³⁷ Tinkler, 'Are you really living? If not, 'get with it!' The Teenage self and Lifestyle in Young Women's Magazines, Britain 1957-70', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4, pp.597-619.

⁴³⁸ Roberts, 'Introduction: Menstruation as Embodied', p.177.

ineffective products are a common feature of women's testimony, as are stories of makeshift products made from cloth or tissue. In some cases cloths were not a makeshift stand-in, rather the only form of protection used for a large part of adolescence, particularly amongst the older women in the sample. Women's accounts of girlhood menstrual management reveal the discrepancies between advertising discourse and real-world experience, and complicate understandings of the sixties as a liberal and permissive moment. Girls' lives, as Tinkler notes, were not defined by notions of opportunity, independence and choice.⁴³⁹ Whilst Tampax adverts adopted these discourses throughout the 1960s, personal testimony reveals that girls' menstrual management practices were not either.

To understand women's reflections on their girlhood menstrual management practices, this chapter draws Joanne Entwistle's phenomenology of embodied dress practices.⁴⁴⁰ A phenomenology of embodied dress outlines and evidences a way of studying the relationship between the body, clothing and the social world. As Kevin Stagg suggests, histories that take into account bodies provide a narrative with the potential to unite 'experience and representation'.⁴⁴¹ The phenomenological presupposition that the body forms our point of view of the world, and its particular application to suggest that we come to know the world through our sensory perceptions of dress, space and society, bridges the gap between studying historical representations and experiences. This approach acknowledges that whilst the menstruating body is always situated in society, steeped in cultural meanings and

⁴³⁹ Penny Tinkler, 'Are You Really Living?' If Not, 'Get With It!' The Teenage Self and Lifestyle in Young Women's Magazines, Britain 1957-70', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4, pp.597-619.

⁴⁴⁰ My definition of dress comes from Entwistle's work, and refers to everyday clothing and adornment practices. See Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Polity Press, 2015), p.3.

⁴⁴¹ Kevin Stagg, 'The Body' in *Writing Early Modern History* (Hodder Arnold, 2005), p.216.

understandings of appropriate behaviour regarding menstrual etiquette and management, it is also simultaneously an embodied existence, located within specific temporal and spatial relations unique to the individual. The body is at once navigating, and determined by, social structures and discourses, and at the same time the site of perception, sensation and personal and social identity; thus the individual is always wrestling with notions of 'appropriate behaviour' and 'authentic selfhood'.

This chapter aims to demonstrate how, as Canning states, if the body is understood as 'a complex site of inscription and of subjectivity and resistance', it can offer an 'interesting and intricate way of retheorising agency' that moves away from debating structures versus agentic individuals, determinism versus free will and authenticity versus cultural inscription.⁴⁴² Using phenomenology to understand menstruation, this chapter suggests that the bleeding body was, in phenomenological terms, an important part of the 'environment of the self'. In other words, the body was an important part of the everyday context within which menstruating girls came to understand themselves, and their place in the world.⁴⁴³ Starting with the body and exploring accounts of personal experiences of menstruation it is possible to write a history of menstruation that accounts for the interaction between the body, clothing, space and place, and thus the interaction between the individual and wider society. Personal testimony from women about their experiences of menstruating and choosing, wearing and disposing of menstrual products shed light on the ways that menstruation and wearing menstrual technology altered women's embodied experiences of menstruation, dress and the wider world.

⁴⁴² Canning, 'Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn', p.397.

⁴⁴³ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.331.

A phenomenology of dress has the potential to enrich a study of menstrual embodiment, and a study of menstrual embodiment may also work to enrich a study of dress as an embodied and situated bodily practice. In *The Fashioned Body*, Entwistle explores the experiential dimensions of the 'fleshy' body in the world. In her work on fashion, dress and embodiment she stresses the importance of acknowledging how structures and rules relate to actual embodied practices when it comes to getting dressed. Her work has been a useful starting point for thinking about how to approach understanding menstrual embodiment. For Entwistle, dress is a natural point for exploring the relationship between the body, experience, self-expression and the social world, as it is a visible aspect of the body. Her work stresses how 'dress is fundamentally an inter-subjective and social phenomenon, linking the body to individual identity and both to social belonging'.⁴⁴⁴ She states that 'dress is the visible form of our intentions' but also 'the insignia by which we are read and come to read others, however unstable and ambivalent these readings may be'. There are 'social and moral imperatives of dress', and clothes are often spoken of in moral terms. In other words wearing them can be 'done' correctly and incorrectly, and this is highly dependent on space and social setting. She highlights how very few individuals are immune to a social pressure to dress themselves appropriately.

Particularly relevant here are the examples given of instances where people are likely embarrassed by certain mistakes of dress. Her examples include finding a fly undone or discovering a stain on a jacket.⁴⁴⁵ Building on Entwistle's work, this chapter takes menstrual blood and stains as its example. It acknowledges that blood-stained trousers that immediately indicate a person's 'status' as menstruating are

⁴⁴⁴ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.337.

⁴⁴⁵ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.335.

perhaps marked as even more embarrassing and disruptive to the social order, and it attempts to think about the relationship between experiences of menstrual management and embodied dress practices.

Dress, as Entwistle states, is the 'visible' aspect of the body, but menstrual technology is an (ideally) invisible way of dressing the body. The menstruating body is marked even more shameful when bleeding and dressed, or bleeding and undressed, than the dressed or undressed body is when it is not bleeding. Menstruation has the potential to alter how the body is dressed, experienced, and clothed, and how it moves through the world and is interpreted and treated by others. A decision to ignore menstruation was, and is, considered transgressive and/ or radical, shameful, abnormal, disruptive and empowering. Yet personal testimony reveals that girls were not intentionally being radical, subversive and disruptive by not conforming to menstrual etiquette norms. Often their non-conformity was unintentional, or born of lack of accessible facilities or technologies, a result of stigma and the culture of concealment. Building on this sentiment, this chapter explores how menstruation, and the cultural assumptions about menstrual etiquette, altered girls' experiences and understandings of the body and dress. It also explores how menstrual technologies altered girls' dress practices, acting as another layer of dress marked with meaning that connect the body to the social world.

Postwar Fashion and Fashion Photography

The history of fashion photography in the postwar period offers necessary context for interpreting the images in menstrual advertising featured in girls' magazines between 1960-1980. Comparison between images of fashion models and images reproduced

in Tampax advertising reveal similarities in the dress, posing of models and composition of image, suggesting trends in fashion and fashion photography were important to the branding and marketing of menstrual advertising brands. Tampax advertising can be viewed as indicative of the trends, changes and developments in both fashion, fashion photography and idealised understandings of girlhood femininity across the 1950s and 1960s. Over the course of the 1960s, Tampax continued to develop the images it used of women and the way it talked about menstruating bodies and femininity. Early images typically depicted still bodies, reflective of 1950s haute couture fashion and photography. Into the 1960s, these images began to coexist alongside images of models in very different clothing styles, captured in motion. Images of highly stylised and posed haute couture looks co-existed with images of poolside relaxation and working life until 1974, when Tampax adverts no longer featured haute couture style images and stuck to using images of women running, jumping, scuba diving, swimming, driving and horseriding.⁴⁴⁶ This was made possible by a combination of factors, such as a shift from large studio cameras to smaller, lighter cameras that allowed faster photography,⁴⁴⁷ developments in menstrual technology, and developments in women's fashion and fashion photography within the wider postwar context of changing gender and social roles and increasing opportunities for women and girls.

Changes between 1950s and 1960s styles of fashion and photography have been presented as a revolutionary disjuncture by those who lived through the 1960s; exemplary of the power the swinging sixties narrative holds in popular culture and

⁴⁴⁶ Tampax ad, *Honey*, 07.1960, p.76, Tampax ad, *Honey*, 11.1960, p.35, Tampax ad, *Honey*, 03.1962, p.40, Tampax ad, *Petticoat*, 07.1966, p.28, Tampax ad, *Petticoat* 07.1967, p.31, Tampax ad, *Jackie*, 04.11.1967, Tampax ad, Tampax ad, *Jackie*, 25.03.1972, *Honey*, 07.1976, p.16, Tampax, *Jackie*, 08/07/1972.

⁴⁴⁷ Shinkle, 'The Feminine Awkard', p.208.

personal conscience. Reflecting in 1988, professional photographer Patrick Lichfield presented the 1960s as a drastic launch into a new society.⁴⁴⁸ Despite *Vogue* magazine launching 'Young Party Ideas' in the 1950s, a feature defined by its 'pioneering aesthetic' and deliberate attempt to carve space for the youth market in 1953, it presented the 1960s not as a natural continuity with their earlier dedication to youth culture, but as a drastic break from it in the feature.⁴⁴⁹ Becky Conekin's re-evaluation of fashion photography in 1950s and 1960s Britain has complicated understandings of this period as one of rapid changes, and her findings inform much of this chapter. She suggests that whilst 'the 1950s look of aristocratic, haughty grandeur - where the models looked 30, even if they were 20 - gave way to the demotic, nice, young look of the 1960s' where models were seen to 'run, jump and climb', this was not a seismic shift. Rather, she defines it as a nuanced and gradual shift, because many photographers stood by their preferred methods.⁴⁵⁰

Standing still was the preferred pose of much fifties fashion photography. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and Stephanie Hermsdorf mark this stillness as an ultra-reactionary moment in fashion photography, which had hitherto typically been 'a transgressive object of some kind' offering 'pleasure rather than reality' achieved in some kind of way 'through breaking a rule'.⁴⁵¹ Eugenie Shinkle has suggested that 'awkwardness', as a critical idiom, can shed light on the history of fashion photography. In this context, 'awkwardness' refers to both the 'awkwardness' within the image,

⁴⁴⁸ Patrick Lichfield, *In Retrospect* (Widenfield and Nicolson, 1988), pp.20-21.

⁴⁴⁹ Becky Conekin, 'From Haughty to Nice: How British Fashion Images changed from the 1950s to the 1960s', *Photography and Culture*, 3:3 (2010), p.293.

⁴⁵⁰ Conekin, 'From Haughty to Nice', p.285

⁴⁵¹ Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe & Stephanie Hermsdorf, 'A Thigh-Length History of the Fashion Photograph, An Abbreviated Theory of the Body', *Bomb*, 25, (1998) <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/a-thigh-length-history-of-the-fashion-photograph-an-abbreviated-theory-of-the-body/#:~:text=A%20Thigh-Length%20History%20of%20the%20Fashion%20Photograph%2C%20An,the%20Body%20by%20Jeremy%20Gilbert-Rolfe%20%26%20Stephanie%20Hermsdorf>). accessed, 07/10/2020.

produced via the relationship between the model, photographic frame and the camera, and the way the image is perceived by the viewer. How the image looks and how it feels are of equal importance, as meaning is communicated via signifying practices and embodied, visceral reactions to shape the meaning of the image. Shinkle suggests that the 'feminine awkward' emerges most openly in fashion photography during periods when gender norms are most in flux, 'interfering with the trajectories of desire to which fashion images typically give rise' and challenging changing expectations of how a feminine body should look and how a feminine subject should behave.⁴⁵² This approach offers ways of exploring how fashion photography both 'participates in, and unsettles' the production of gendered bodies. Given the wider context of a 1950s pushback against women's socio-economic role, this approach makes sense of images of 1950s haute couture fashion and of the images contained in the Tampax adverts. Bent elbows and peplum dresses offset familiar lines and curves associated with the female form, whilst the rigidity of the pose implies it would not be held for very long, and gives, as Shinkle notes, the model a 'more prominent presence as a formal element in the photograph' as this complex silhouette is integrated into the composition of an image.⁴⁵³

As photographer William Mortensen outlined in his 1956 book *How to pose a model*, 'the model...must be adjusted in the flesh; her body and limbs must be shaped to the image the photographer has in mind'.⁴⁵⁴ The relationship between the feminine body and camera was about stillness, but it was also a deliberate attempt to create what Shinkle describes as a 'coherent, orderly body and well proportioned picture'.

⁴⁵² Eugenie Shinkle, 'The Feminine Awkward: Graceless Bodies and the Performance of Femininity in Fashion Photographs', *Fashion Theory*, 21:2, (2016), p.202.

⁴⁵³ Shinkle, 'The Feminine Awkward', p.203.

⁴⁵⁴ William Mortensen, *How to Pose a Model* (in Shinkle, 'Feminine Awkward', p.205.

For photographers like Mortensen, femininity was 'a closed loop - controlled by the gaze of the camera and contained, like the body itself, by the boundaries of the photograph'. In this vein, the body was to be conceived of as two-dimensional.⁴⁵⁵ Postwar London model Cherry Marshall recalled the postwar ideal as, 'expensively dressed, by hook or by crook, aloof, disdainful, never without immaculate gloves and hat, she projected an image of a wealthy woman of the world, looking more like thirty than twenty one'.⁴⁵⁶ As Shinkle states, the body was 'fully controlled by the boundaries of the photographic frame and the confines of white upper-middle class femininity'.⁴⁵⁷

Yet the outfits or images that featured in fashion photography should not be taken as indicative of changes to women's prescribed social role. Entwistle warns of the flattening and essentialising effects of 'zeitgeist' theories of fashion trends which interpret clothing as responses to social and political changes. This is a common framework for interpretations of Dior's New Look, but one that over-simplifies, as the the New Look can be traced back to before the Second World War.⁴⁵⁸ Richardson and Kroeber examined fashion plates over three centuries finding no conclusive evidence that social change influenced change dress style.⁴⁵⁹ Whilst some connections can be established sometimes, the *Zeitgeist* theory should not be used to reveal what Bell has called a 'mechanical causality'.⁴⁶⁰ What can be concluded, however, is that a concern with bodily containment described in menstrual advertising at this point was

⁴⁵⁵ Shinkle, 'The Feminine Awkward', p.206.

⁴⁵⁶ Cherry Marshall, *The Cat-Walk*, (London, 1978), pp.67-68 in. Conekin, 'From Haughty to Nice' p.285.

⁴⁵⁷ Shinkle, 'The Feminine Awkward', p.205.

⁴⁵⁸ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, p.63.

⁴⁵⁹ J Richardson and A.L Kroeber, 'Three Centuries of Women's Dress: A Quantitative Analysis', in G. Willis and D Midgley (eds), *Fashion Marketing* (Allen and Unwin, 1973) in Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, p.63 v

⁴⁶⁰ Quentin Bell, *On Human Finery* (1976) in Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, p.63.

partially embedded in the agenda of much fashion photography too and was reflective of idealised versions of femininity found in girls' magazines.

The 1960s did see a partial democratisation of modelling, however, whereby class became less of a barrier to opportunity for white women in Britain. The new type of models of the 1960s, such as Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton, exemplified a new kind of modelling undertaken by women 'with real emotions', who were 'active, assertive and boldly sexual', a summary that typifies how contemporaries conceived both modern selfhood and the shifting role of the model both on set and in public imagination.⁴⁶¹ Diana Crane noted that by 1967 close ups of models in bathing suits became a popular feature of *Vogue*, as did emphasis on a distinct aesthetic of youth and youth culture different from the aspirational maturity of fifties fashion photography.⁴⁶² Conekin notes how in July 1961 *British Vogue* featured a photograph of Tania Mallet happily swimming with a dog for a summer holiday beauty feature. An oral history interview with Mallet revealed her assessment of the changing nature of modelling, stressing 'her distance from high-end fashion that marked her as belonging to a new generation'. Mallet herself stated she felt 'a fish out of water...I had long, sort of blonde hair which just hung down and all the girls I was working with had beehives and were so soignée. And they walked around looking like fashion plate'.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ Shinkle, 'The Feminine Awkward', p.207.

⁴⁶² Diana Crane, 'Gender and Hegemony in Fashion Magazines; Women's Interpretations of Fashion Photographs', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 40:4, p.545.

⁴⁶³ Tania Mallett interview, in Conekin, 'From haughty to nice', p.291.

Hidden Histories of Technology

Conekin asserts that 'fashion magazines might not seem like the most obvious place to look for histories of technology'.⁴⁶⁴ Unravelling this assumption, her article explores the significance of the moped captured in a 1967 image of Twiggy and the 'deep affinity' between fashion and technology, namely how they are both predicated on change and point to the 'global and gendered histories of post-World War Two mobility.' Her discussion of gender and technology in the 1960s brings together the panic amongst contemporaries during the 1890s middle-class cycling craze, and the mobility and freedom that the twentieth-century bicycle brought many middle-class women. In the 1890s, conservative critics were concerned with the 'freedom's mobility might afford women', whilst the *BMJ* debated the pros and cons, 'obsessed with the way straddling a bicycle might sexually stimulate her'. Modification to the bicycle to make it more suitable for women to ride whilst wearing skirts enabled cycling to become a potent symbol of subversive behaviour.⁴⁶⁵ Referring again to the image of Twiggy, Conekin suggested that 'by 1967 no one seemed to be concentrating on either form of pleasure a young mod woman might experience.'⁴⁶⁶

As Conekin demonstrates, there is a hidden history of technology embedded in fashion photography and dress that is not instantaneously obvious, even when the signs and signifiers (in this case the moped) are very much visible in the image. Just as Conekin problematised the conception that women's magazines might not seem the most obvious place to look for histories of technology, this thesis suggests this

⁴⁶⁴ Becky E. Conekin, 'Fashioning Mod Twiggy and the Moped in 'Swinging' London, *History and Technology*, 28:2 (2012), p.209.

⁴⁶⁵ 'Mr Honda insisted that his moped should be, like the Lambretta, easy to 'sit down on from the front'. Overtly recognising the female consumer, Honda told his design team 'we want customers wearing skirts to buy this. Don't put the tank where it gets in the way'. Conekin, 'Fashioning Mod Twiggy', p.213 and Lambretta advert, *Honey*, 07.1960, p.46.

⁴⁶⁶ Conekin, 'Fashioning Mod Twiggy', p.211.

stands true of girls' magazines too. On closer inspection, magazines are in fact one of the most obvious places to look for a history of technology. This is true for a history of homeware, dress, and especially true for a history of menstrual technology, as magazines are one of the only ways to access a history of socio-cultural discourses about something deliberately hidden from view and deemed unsuitable for discussion. The hidden history of menstrual technology is also a history of the relationship between one form of technology, dress, and the body. Arguably histories of menstrual technology are even less obvious or visible in fashion and advertising imagery, as in the case of internally worn menstrual protection, the invisibility of the product in the image is the very reason the image works to promote the product.

Building further on Conekin's analysis, a history of menstrual technology is also very much a history of women's mobility and embodied experiences of the world. The images and text included in menstrual advertising projected the importance of movement, travel, sports and swimming to 1960s feminine adolescence, identity and lifestyle. The image of Tania Mallett swimming with her dog, and the multiplicity of later Tampax adverts analysed below (fig 4.10), that replicate similar styles of image by featuring models swimming also point towards a hidden history of menstrual technology, and its impact on girls' ability to move their bodies freely in water whilst menstruating, something which recurred in advertising into the 1970s. This was a drastic challenge to longstanding popular understandings of cyclically induced water and bathing restrictions. Yet the history of menstrual technology is not solely one of developments. The voices of everyday users reveal that menstrual technology often actively contributed to negative menstrual experiences because it was ill-designed and ill-fitting, and because it was heavily stigmatised.

Contemporary perceptions of tampons provide some context as to why young girls struggled with menstrual technologies. Conekin has explored how medical personnel (*BMJ*) and mass-market magazines (*Queen*) became concerned with the effects of women's access to the new technology of the bicycle, namely, their pleasure and sensory experiences. This suggests another area where a history of embodied experience is implicated in wider discourses. Building on her conclusion that the image of Twiggy indicates that commentators were no longer concerned about the link between one form of technology and women's pleasure, incorporating a history of menstrual technology into this story of the 1960s suggests that concerns regarding girls' pleasure, sexuality and technology were by the 1960s centred around internal sanitary protection, displaced from one form of typically middle-class technology in the 1890s, to another by the 1960s. This shift then had the potential to impact girls' embodied experiences of menstruation, dress and internal and external sanitary protection.

In *Under Wraps*, Vostral highlights that the opinions physicians held regarding tampons in the 1930s and 1940s, 'were based on deeper assumptions about women and their bodies'. These assumptions, Vostral notes, included 'the sanctity of the hymen as a symbol of virginity, the penis as the only acceptable entity to enter the vagina, and the exclusive knowledge of physicians as experts about women's vaginas and their bodies.' The doctors stated that tampons 'should never be used by virgins', and that this use would bring about 'pelvic consciousness' and 'undue handling of the genitals.' Vostral suggests that because the technology was hidden, physicians believed they might elicit a transgression of appropriate outlets for sexuality, which were prescribed as being limited to heterosexual marriage. Vostral quotes physicians who stated, 'if traditionally, even the physician is not supposed to invade the vagina

during menstruation, let alone the husband or consort, why should the woman be authorized to do it by herself by an unskilled technic?' This was of particular concern 'because users of tampons were younger and often unmarried',⁴⁶⁷ reflecting contemporary concerns manifest in the attention paid to lowering age of maturation and the 'beanstalk generation'.⁴⁶⁸

Much of the inflammatory language used by the physicians requires consideration: namely the suggestion that doctors were 'invading' vaginas on inspection, a graphic and violent denunciation laden with connotations regarding who has power and who is powerless, and that implies a menstruator requires 'authorisation' or permission from persons with more authority to insert a tampon. This offers an implicit insight into the doctor's own perception of the power relations between practitioner and patient. The fact physicians referred to the tampon user as 'an unskilled technic', highlights that tampons were, as Vostral notes, 'technologies, and as technologies - including knowledge, practice and artifacts - they were generally believed to belong to the domain of men'.⁴⁶⁹ This once again evidences how science was positioned as masculine, and necessary for 'unveiling' women's bodies.⁴⁷⁰

In 1963, Manchester members of the MWF expressed concern over a leaflet published by the Central Council for Health Education, which recommended tampons 'as a "satisfactory" form of sanitary protection for young women' without any caution as to the real danger of such a practice. The practitioners did not elaborate on the

⁴⁶⁷ Sharra L. Vostral, *Under Wraps: A History of Menstrual Hygiene Technology* (Lexington Books, 2008), p.97.

⁴⁶⁸ Fink and Tinkler, 'Teetering on the Edge', pp.9-25 and Todd and Young, 'Baby-boomers to 'Beanstalkers'', pp.451-467.

⁴⁶⁹ J Milton Singleton and Herbert F. Vanorden, "Vaginal Tampons in Menstrual Hygiene", *Western Journal of Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (April 1943): pp.146-149 in Vostral, *Private Technologies and Public Policies*, p.97 and 98.

⁴⁷⁰ Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Century* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp.92-93.

nature of the danger, but Strange suggests that these concerns likely centred around questions of modesty and sexuality due to the fact many girls were 'presumably virginal' and of an 'early age.'⁴⁷¹ Alternatively, it is possible concerns were centred around young girls' abilities to maintain adequate hygiene standards when utilising equipment typically reserved for medical professionals or older women. Freidenfeld notes that debates in the *BMJ* centred around concerns that using tampons to absorb menstrual blood differed from their typical use amongst medical professionals as a means of providing support or administering medicine, and this in turn raised questions about the likelihood of infection if the rules of sanitation followed by physicians and nurses were not followed by younger menstruating users.⁴⁷² This would situate concerns more in the realm of 'hygiene' than sexuality. It is equally likely that these concerns intersected, as the age, and associated powerlessness and naivety of girls elicited contemporary concern regarding their burgeoning maturation, sexuality and cultural capital posed a threat to long embedded hierarchies.

⁴⁷¹ Strange, 'The assault on ignorance', p.264.

⁴⁷² Lara Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth Century America* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), p.170.

Deconstructing Tampax Advertising

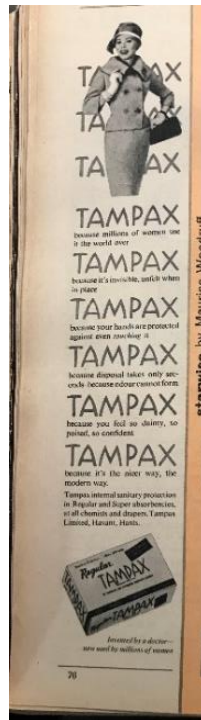


Figure 4.1: Tampax advert, *Honey*, 07.1960

In July 1960, *Honey* featured an advert for Tampax internal protection (Figure 4.1).⁴⁷³ This was *Honey*'s first year of publication. Printed in black and white, the advert ran from top to bottom of the left-hand side of the left page of the magazine. A photograph of a very smartly dressed woman overlay the large, bold font at the top of the advert. Her image is cut exactly around the outline of her body, blocking certain letters and working to ensure she is the focal point of advert. The contour of her outfit,

⁴⁷³ Fan Carter, 'A Taste of *Honey* Get ahead femininity in 1960s Britain' in *Women in Magazines Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. By Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinburg (Routledge, 2016), pp.183-197, p.183.

an extension of her body shape, is emphasised further by the tight, structured double-breasted skirt, and by her static, highly manipulated, unnatural pose. Her waist is cinched, and her shoulders and hips wider in equal measure. Heavily accessorised, she wears a hat, white gloves, a brooch on her jacket lapel and a small handbag on her wrist, which is placed on her hip. She embodies “dainty” confidence and poise, exuding a look of maturity and glamour, typical of 1950s haute couture.⁴⁷⁴ Repetition of the Tampax logo is interspersed with sentences reminding the viewer of Tampax’s perks: Millions of women use it globally, it is invisible and unfelt, you don’t really have to touch it on insertion, it’s easy to dispose of and odour free, and ‘you’ll feel so dainty, so poised, so confident’, because its ‘a nicer way, the modern way’.⁴⁷⁵

The description concerns the sensory aspects of menstrual management, and the relationship between internally worn menstrual technology, the body, and clothing. The advert indicates that there might be something wrong with touching the tampon whilst inserting it, and also that Tampax’s appeal lies in its invisibility and the fact it can not be felt by the user. These instances of discomfort with touching genitals challenge narratives of the 1960s as an era defined by sexual liberation and bodily autonomy. Tampax was sold based on the premise that it could prevent a user from disrupting their relationship with the body as experienced when not menstruating. By being invisible and not altering the fit or sit of clothing worn by the user, their relationship with clothing could also remain unchanged, as there was no need to adjust what they might wear on the days when they were menstruating. It specified its ability to help subjects remain odour free, again referencing the senses and their relationship

⁴⁷⁴ Becky E. Conekin, ‘From Haughty to Nice: How British Fashion Images changed from the 1950s to the 1960s’, *Photography and Culture*, 3:3 (2010), p.285 and Eugenie Shinkle, ‘The Feminine Awkward: Graceless Bodies and the Performance of Femininity in Fashion Photographs’, *Fashion Theory*, 21:2, (2016), p.205.

⁴⁷⁵ Tampax ad, *Honey*, 07.1960.

with embodied selfhood and the social order. Playing into longstanding ideas about both personal hygiene and menstruation needing to remain undetectable, the advert professed that Tampax could ensure there need not be too much disruption to routines of dress, or to the user's day-to-day experience. The last two points - 'you'll feel so dainty, so poised, so confident', because its 'a nicer way, the modern way' - acted as a textual translation of the image in the advert.

Another Tampax advert (figure 4.2) featured in *Honey* four months later also typified notions of feminine composure and the body as mannequin. On the right hand side of the right page of the magazine, the black and white Tampax advert is headed 'then in you walk with poise'. Below the text is a black and white image of a slim, white model, wearing a black A-line dress. She stands in front of a white backdrop, demonstrating she had posed for the photograph in the tightly controlled studio setting, under the instructions of those behind the camera. Her black A-line skirt extenuates her petite waist and that fact her shoulders and hips are of equal proportion. The style of dress and the pose, much like the other Tampax advert, closely mimics Dior's New Look and the composition of other images featured in the magazine, and images of haute couture fashion more broadly (figure 4.3).

and hair

photocopiers, overhead digital book

slender
beauty
starts
with

GUALIME

Nature's newest beauty treatment

A two-way treatment. For complexion beauty. For slender beauty. Gualime is all fruit juice... the juice of golden guavas and cool green limes.

Gualime leads your skin from the inside with the natural Vitamin C it needs (more in a teaspoon than in two pounds of fresh apples). And, at the same time, Gualime restricts the tannic acids that lead to extra inches... helps to keep you slender... beautifully so.

MADE BY FRUIT BLENDS

3/-

Price
12 bottles
per bottle
per bottle

PASCALL-KNIGHT LTD.
LONDON

CONTINUED

metabolism—rather like a running fire where much of the heat goes up the chimney. On the other hand, a person who eats little and yet still tends to gain weight has a slow metabolism. This is more like a slow-burning fire that conserves heat and uses it only for essential purposes. But she may give about it she doesn't think carefully about what she eats.

You can't change your metabolism—you were made that way. If you already have a tendency to put on weight, you will always have it. But you can fight this tendency by being more active and by changing your eating habits. If you want to be slim, you must never be greedy or eat sweet and starchy food. You must stimulate your appetite into choosing the right food. You have to use your I.Q. and wake up your willpower. It takes time to change your food tastes but it's all a matter of practice.

Appetite doesn't control the food you need, but it does control the food you want to eat. If your appetite works efficiently, you choose the essential foods in the right quantity. Most animals have perfect control of appetite, but humans aren't so lucky—they need willpower.

At the base of the brain, in a small area called the hypothalamus, lie the nervous centres that regulate the appetite. Many otherwise normal people have appetites that don't conform with body requirements, and so they are overweight. The mechanism in the brain that controls the appetite has been compared with a thermostat. In fact, it is sometimes called the "appetite."

It is "set" at a particular level, and, when food is needed, the appetite produces a desire for food. When you have eaten enough, the appetite "shuts off" and you have no desire to eat more. The efficiency of the appetite tends to be lowered by insufficient exercise.

Flour and sugar, especially the refined varieties, lack many of the chemicals essential to health, and they tend to confuse the appetite, too. When they are included in the diet, it cannot always work efficiently, and sometimes the appetite registers satisfaction when, in fact, the food is sufficient only in energy. Then the excess energy is stored in the form of fat. Sometimes the appetite seems to break down as a result of many years of eating refined sweet and starchy foods.

Before you can slim, you must have a motive—a pretty powerful one, because it must overcome all obstacles. Usually, girls want to slim to improve their appearance. Elegant women, with perfect figures will be a source of inspiration to them. So, too, will lovely clothes. Only slim girls can wear a stunning sheath dress and look really chic and lovely in it—without brimming over in all the wrong places!

Look at yourself in the mirror, and think what your silhouette will look like with a couple of inches off each line. If you are relaxing at home and you want to reach for the biscuit tin... don't. And never listen to people who say "That one won't make any difference." Remember it always does.

Next month, Successful Slimming.

then
in
you walk
with
poise

Figure 4.2: Page 35, *Honey*, 11.1960



Figure 4.3: *Dior New Look Dress, 1947*

By tying the shape of product to the shape of the wearer and her clothing, Tampax outlined its version of appropriate menstrual management and of feminine presentation which encapsulated and blended dress, demeanour and body shape. Internal sanitary protection became important for exuding elegance, as exemplified by the threat of a ‘cumbersome’ pad. As evidenced by the other advert on the page, cumbersome was not by *Honey’s* standards, glamorous, on-trend or feminine. The opposite side of the same page featured a strikingly similar advert for Gualime slimming fruit juice. This advert features another black and white, highly stylised image of a model wearing a fitted black dress. She is posed, conjuring associations with

mannequins.⁴⁷⁶ Here is an example of an editorial decision to place two similar adverts on the same page. The symmetry of the page is visually appealing, and the double references to elegance, demeanour and body shape makes *Honey's* distinctive 1960s construction of idealised young, fashionable femininity immediately visible.

Dominant trends in fashion and photography appear to have informed both the images used in the Tampax advertisements and those in other adverts in *Honey* too. Yet the merging of haute-glamour fashion with adverts for weight loss substances and sanitary protection mean that Mortensen's 'two-dimensional' images of glamour that were key to fashion spreads, were also, for the reader, the potential consumer and user, about the eating, drinking and bleeding body that wore the clothes. Both the adverts for Tampax and for Gualime present an outline of what appropriate feminine presentation looked like and what an appropriate feminine body looked like; namely slim, white, contained, dainty and poised. Simultaneously, they also offered a representation and what Hall would describe as a 'preferred reading' of what the reader might do with her body; namely manage its weight closely by purchasing natural juice drinks, and manage its menstruation effectively by wearing Tampax internal sanitary protection.⁴⁷⁷

Not all magazine representations of feminine styles of dress in 1960 were inspired by haute couture, confirming Entwistle's assertion that because 'fashion cuts both ways', we will 'always find exceptions to the rule' of trends.⁴⁷⁸ The July 1960 copy of *Honey* included an editorial feature about 'getting to know him', that contained

⁴⁷⁶ 'Slender Beauty Starts with Gualime', Gualime Advert, *Honey*, 11.1960.

⁴⁷⁷ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse', *Paper for the Council of Europe on "Training In The Critical Reading of Television Language"*, University of Lancaster, (September 1973), <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP07.pdf> [accessed 16/02/2022].

⁴⁷⁸ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, p.63.

numerous black and white and colour images of different fashion styles (figure 4.4). Many images of women wearing hourglass New Look-style dresses feature, but other styles feature too, including one image of a woman wearing blue and white gingham dungarees and flat, open-toed sandals. She stands in front of a motorbike, a symbol of mobility and freedom, and the guy she is 'getting to know', facing the camera directly with her feet apart and hands on her hips. Although posed, her stance and outfit drift from the 1950s haute couture styles produced elsewhere in the spread and in the tampax adverts, reflecting the way that editorial and advertising content often conflicted.⁴⁷⁹



Figure 4.4: 'And you're the girl he adores', *Honey*, 07.1960

⁴⁷⁹ 'And you're the girl he adores', *Honey*, 07. 1960. Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity', p.25-39.



Figure 4.5: Compilation of adverts from *Honey* 07.1960

Across the 1960 sample, the images of women that featured in all kinds of advertising in *Honey* more closely reflected the depictions in the Tampax and Gualime adverts analysed than the images in the more dynamic and colourful editorial 'getting to know him' (figure 4.5).⁴⁸⁰ This tentatively suggests that at the outset of the 1960s,

⁴⁸⁰ These include adverts for 'The loveliest blondes use Sta-blond', Sta-blond shampoo ad, 'We came from the USA in our maidenform bras', Maidenform bras p.18, 'Making a big splash!', Trend

1950s styles were still successful advertising tropes for a wide array of brands including Tampax. If 1950s styles were the most immediately recognisable, even as new styles were being introduced, then it made sense for Tampax to draw on these discourses and images. As Millum stated, advertising tends to opt for a series of the most readily understood and available messages for the consumer.⁴⁸¹ In addition to this, a style preoccupied with physique, clean lines, and tight or figure-enhancing clothing, was fitting for a tampon brand that wanted potential users to imagine and see just how invisible, undetectable and therefore necessary their product was. Whilst this reproduction of images and styles typical of the 1950s is not surprising, acknowledging that advertising images were slow to change contributes to a nuanced understanding of the 1960s as a decade of change, undercutting narratives of the period as a seismic shift in aesthetics, ideals, consumption and lifestyles.

Swimwear advert, p.47, 'Freshness is a feeling', Mum Mist perfumed spray deodorant, p.67 all in *Honey*, 07.1960.

⁴⁸¹Millum, *Images of Women*, p.7.



I didn't have to look very far for Tampax advantages

- Invisible in place
- Comfort in place
- No chafing, no irritation
- Easy, gentle insertion
- Comfort during the heaviest applications
- No odor
- No embarrassment
- No itching, pins, pricks
- No need to remove during bathing
- Lasts longest
- Extract can be locked in hand
- More peace, more self-assurance
- Confidence on any occasion
- Complete freedom of activity

Tampax internal sanitary protection is available in your choice of 2 absorbencies: Regular and Super wherever such products are sold. Tampax Limited, Havert, Penna.

TAMPAX
TAMPAX
TAMPAX

Invented by a doctor—
now used by millions of women

21

Figure 4.6: Tampax advert, *Honey*, 03.1963


wading ... or working ...

YOU FEEL THIS COOL, THIS CLEAN, THIS FRESH WITH TAMPAX

You by a lovely pool—sun-dappled, blue-shadowed. You crisp and efficient at the office—unhampered, unconcerned. Tampax guards your secret so well... can't be seen or felt. In or out of the water, it never interferes. No wonder millions use it. Worn internally, Tampax is the modern way.

TAMPAX ... so much a part of your active life

Tampax internal sanitary protection is made only by Tampax Limited, Havert, Penna.

3

Figure 4.7: Tampax advert, *Honey*, 07.1962



Figure 4.8: Tampax advert, *Honey*, 07.1963

Over the course of the 1960s Tampax adverts became more common in *Honey*, and more varied in style. Quite different images and ideas about feminine dress and behaviour coexisted under the brand's name. Acknowledgement of working life, images of relaxation, and text that focussed on feelings and emotional states (unhampered, unconcerned, relaxed) differed from the images and text that emphasised composure and poise. Full page colour adverts containing images of women engaged in activities on location outdoors, working, and relaxing as opposed to still and inside a studio began to feature (figure 4.7, 4.8). Yet this contrasted with the definition of girlhood and womanhood presented in other adverts produced by Tampax in the same year (figure 4.6), suggesting that Tampax needed to maintain a degree of variation in the depictions of femininity it presented. These images still coexisted with haute couture glamour images. In one advert Tampax was still promoting

- in bullet point format - its invisibility, safety, and ease of disposal, and it was still depicting Tampax products as an essential component of feminine 'poise'. In other adverts from 1962 and 1963 it was promoting 'more self assurance, more confidence on any occasion', and 'complete freedom of activity'.⁴⁸²

This concern with freedom and relaxation was new to the sample, and seemingly quite oppositional to the notions of stillness and poise depicted in the images and promoted in the text of other adverts. The newer adverts differ from the others in quite obvious and drastic ways, including the colour imagery, size, style of image, and fashion worn. There is no mention of poise, and the text accompanying the image instead picks up on different things. Figure 4.7 and figure 4.8 both emphasised that Tampax aided relaxation in the context of the reader's busy life. 'Cool, clean and fresh', as opposed to 'poise and grace', became the preferable and profitable state of being. These were feelings that could, according to Tampax, be understood and felt in the body (figure 4.7 and 4.8). This suggests that in some ways, Tampax began to alter how it referred to menstruation in some adverts in the 1960s, but that these ideas did not immediately replace longer-standing ideas typically presented in its advertising. Mimicking the discourses and images circulating in other parts of a publication produced for teenage girls, the advert fitted pretty much exactly with the ethos of *Honey*.

Connotations of an active or busy life evoke an understanding of bodies on the go, moving through and taking up space. Notions of feeling relaxed are almost oppositional to the poise and stillness discussed previously. These quite different depictions of aspirational femininity reflect how magazines functioned as indicators of

⁴⁸² Tampax ad, *Honey*, 03.1963, p.21.

cultural conversation and culturally circulating ideals, repackaging and representing the multiple and often contradictory discourses in circulation at any one time. As Andrews states, it is perhaps ‘the insight into the structure of feeling that analysis of media texts offers, that enables us to problematize and complicate the standard histories of any given period, offering instead strands of the complex and contradictory nature of change.’⁴⁸³ The changing images, language and ideas in Tampax adverts suggest ideas regarding appropriate feminine presentation and menstrual management were expanding and altering, culminating in a cacophony of ways of being in the early 1960s each as difficult to articulate and actualise as the other. Yet the coexistence of 1950s and 1960s styles of fashion and fashion photography in menstrual advertising are one example of why it is simplistic to pinpoint a moment where 1950s styles gave way to the 1960s and where newer notions of femininity replaced the previous depictions.

⁴⁸³ Andrews and McNamara, ‘Introduction’, in *Women in Magazines Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. by Ritchie, Rachel, Hawkins, Sue, Phillips Nicola and Kleinburg S. Jay (Oxford, 2016), p.8.

Nothing holds you back



Wherever you go, whatever you do, you're confident, comfortable, carefree with the cool, clean, fresh protection of Tampax tampons. This is modern tampon protection, the kind that belongs to the young, the alert, the active. It comes makes you feel more a part of the party.

You get total freedom with
TAMPAX
tampons

TAMPAX TAMPONS ARE MADE ONLY BY TAMPAX LABORATORY, INC., U.S.A.




Fig 4.9: Tampax advert, *Honey*, 07.1967



Fig 4.10: Tampax advert, *Jackie*, 19.07.1969

In a Tampax advert from 1969 (figure 4.10), a large image of a woman swimming underwater was printed on a full page advert, a format typical of Tampax

advert at the time (figure 4.9), and strikingly similar to the image of Tania Mallett discussed above. In the image a model wearing a white swimming costume swims with both her arms stretched out in front of her and smiling with her eyes open, despite being under the surface of the water. The prevalence of blue and white in the photographs replicate the blue and white theme of the advert as a whole, which also featured two more images, one of the same girl at the wheel of a boat, and another of her sat on a fence wearing a white shirt dress. The large image dominates the picture and is the most visually striking element of the advert as a whole. With the camera positioned below her, the image has the intended effect of making the viewer feel as if they are further under the water than the model in the image. The blue and white photograph offers a visual representation of how it felt to be 'clean,fresh,cool', as stated in the advert's tagline situated in text form in the top right of the advert. The blue and white also connotes medical sterility, further reinforcing the advert's effective depiction of 'clean, fresh,cool'. Swimming in a white bathing suit, the model is the ultimate proof that with Tampax tampons, menstrual blood will disrupt neither the 'clean,cool,fresh' composure of the image, nor the 'total freedom, total comfort' of the model pictured swimming or the user. The advert poses a direct challenge to ideas about bathing restrictions and rest when menstruating.⁴⁸⁴ The prevalence of white clothing in adverts for menstrual technology served to reinforce Tampax's ability to protect the user. Playing on the fact that, as Entwistle stated, stained clothing is both 'embarrassing' and 'disruptive', and aware that this was particularly true of menstrual blood, Tampax continued to use images of models wearing white for the whole period 1960-1980.

⁴⁸⁴ 'It's a clean cool fresh world', Tampax ad, *Jackie*, 19.07,1969.

A Tampax advert from 1971 mentioned Tampax's history as a medical and technological innovation (Figure 4.11). This advert offers a somewhat alternative perspective on medical involvement in the menstrual technology industry, mainly through its allusion to the importance of female physicians to the development of Tampax's internal menstrual protection. Titled 'a long story', the advert features as a column running from the top to the bottom of the right hand-side of the page. Under the heading it features an image of a model wearing a long-sleeved, ankle-length white coat, black boots and a white beret, stood facing and smiling directly at the camera, with her hands on her hips.

Underneath the image are three paragraphs of text where Tampax establishes its credentials as an authority. It explicitly states that a doctor developed its tampons more than 30 years ago, that it was the first 'hygienic internal sanitary protection', and that Tampax have devoted their research and technology only to producing tampons. It concludes, 'We don't make sanitary pads or facial tissues, just Tampax tampons. The best possible tampons.' By comparison, other products and brands appear new, unrefined, unreliable, unhygienic, and uncommitted to prioritising the needs of tampon users. Tampax positions itself as a brand with a long and dedicated history of creating internal sanitary protection and making women 'comfortable' and 'free', as opposed to a company jumping on trends or trying to expand its target market and sales. Each statement bolstered the claim that Tampax was the 'best, safest and easiest' to use.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁵ 'A Long Story', Tampax advert, *Jackie*, 13.03.1971.

A
long
story



It began more than 50 years ago when a doctor developed the first commercial tampon. The first hygienic method of sanitary protection, Tampax tampons. Since that time, we've devoted all our research and technology to making that tampon the best, safest and easiest to use. We don't make sanitary pads or facial tissues, just Tampax tampons. The best possible tampons.

Today, millions of women in 118 countries spend the world's best Tampax tampons. They rely on their comfort and convenience. No other brand can make a similar claim.

Pads, hushies and hushies come and go. Scores of other tampons have seen the light of day and faded. Tampax tampons are here and now. And still just beginning a long story of comfort and freedom for modern women throughout the world.



Imported by S. J. Green
New York, N.Y. 10017-4000

TAMPAX TAMPONS AND AIDS COLORED BY
TAMPAX LIMITED, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

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Figure 4.11: Tampax advert, *Jackie*, 23.07.1971

Like in the other images, dress plays an important role in indicating the cultural value of the product being marketed. The text and image work in tandem to imply that the model's dress alludes to medical uniform. The white, unfitted, medical coat was ubiquitous as doctor's uniform throughout the twentieth century, and whilst the model in the image is wearing a double breasted and tailored white coat, there are similarities.⁴⁸⁶ Her outfit, looked at in light of the discussion about Tampax's links with medical researchers provided in the accompanying text, is a playful and highly fashionable nod to medical clothing, inviting the reader to consider the connotations of medical uniform as a style of dress, and the authority of Tampax as a consumer product made by 'experts' in white coats. Floor length clothing was a leading trend in the early 1970s. This was reflected in other clothing choices in menstrual advertising, and magazines more generally at this time (see figures 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14).



Figure 4.12: Lil-lets advert, *Jackie*, 16.11.1974

⁴⁸⁶ Thanks to Beth Jenkins for studying the image and suggesting that the Tampax advert did not feature actual medical uniform. For more on the link between work, clothing and embodiment for professional women see Beth Jenkins, 'Gender, Embodiment and Professional Identity in Britain, C.1890-1930', *Cultural and Social History*. 17:4 (2020), 499-51.

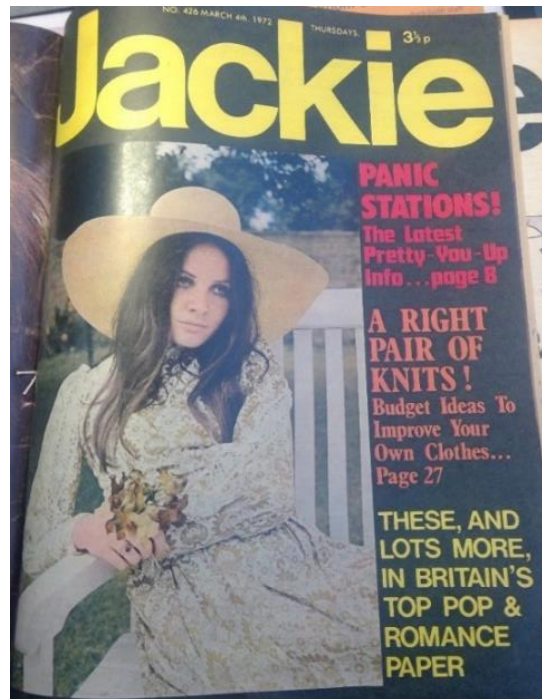


Figure 4.13: Front Cover, *Jackie*, 4.03.1972



Figure 4.14: Kayser Advert, *Honey*, 11.1971

Analysis of the text suggests that Tampax once again reflects contemporary trends in fashion and photography. Underneath the description of the history of Tampax, the advert states 'Fads, fashions and fancies come and go. Scores of other tampons have seen the light of day and faded. Tampax tampons are here and now. And still just beginning a long story of comfort and freedom for modern women throughout the world'.⁴⁸⁷ 'Fads, fashions and fancies' refers not only to the market for tampons, but also to the maxi dress, and the cyclical nature of magazine coverage and fashion trends. One purpose of magazines was to show readers current fashions, and aware of this, Tampax situated itself as trendy, using models wearing fashionable outfits. Tampax suggested its products were the 'here and now'; on trend and most desirable, and ultimately linked to girls social capital at this time.

Tampax merge discussion of the significance of the communicative aspects of adornment with a discussion of the practicalities of dressing the menstruating body. Tampax not only reinforce the role that (fashionable) clothing plays in serving as a visual metaphor for identity, but imbue menstrual protection with the same capabilities and characteristics. Like dress, menstrual technology is positioned as a means of 'performing identity' and another link between not only 'individual identity and the body' but identity and social belonging. Menstrual technology, like dress, is positioned as an intersubjective and social phenomenon.⁴⁸⁸

Notions of 'comfort and freedom' described in the advert function as aspirational ideals of desirable feminine selfhood. Yet they also simultaneously suggest there might be practical concerns influencing girls' purchase decisions. It appears that Tampax is aware that comfort is a large factor influencing what menstrual protection

⁴⁸⁷ 'A Long Story', Tampax advert, *Jackie*, 13.07.1971.

⁴⁸⁸ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.337.

girls wear. It is the practicalities of dress that Entwistle suggests are often overlooked in studies, including how choices made regarding what to wear are influenced by routine and mundane concerns and practices, including comfort. Tampax was aware these were important factors influencing consumer decisions, and it was also aware of what Entwistle has called the 'strong social and moral dimensions that serve to constrain choices people make about what to wear'.⁴⁸⁹ Girls wanted to pass as not menstruating. This involved not letting on they were menstruating, and continuing to move through the world and take part in activities they engaged in when they were not menstruating. In many cases, freedom, in relation to menstruation, meant freedom from uncomfortable, visible menstrual technology, being discovered as menstruating, and freedom from worrying about this.

Adverts for menstrual technology played on wider notions of appropriate feminine dress, presentation, and subjectivity. The adverts were concerned with the sensory interaction between menstrual technology and the menstruating body, picking up on the way it felt and looked, the way it enabled secrecy, and invisibility. As stated in the introduction, this does not allow us to understand how it felt to experience menstruation and menstrual technology. It can only point towards the socio-cultural discourses that girls had to navigate. Personal testimony about experiences of choosing, wearing and disposing of menstrual technology provide the way in to understanding how it really felt to manage menstruation and menstrual stigma on an everyday basis.

⁴⁸⁹ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.338.

Theorising Menstrual Embodiment

As outlined at the outset of this chapter, phenomenological approaches to dress can enrich our understandings of menstrual embodiment'. In 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', Entwistle theorises a way of studying dress as an embodied practice. Phenomenology proposes that the body is the site of subjectivity. Our sensory perceptions inform the way we perceive, understand and move through space. In other words, our bodies, situated in specific temporal and spatial dimensions, form our selfhood and inform our point of view of the world. As Entwistle summarises, 'our experience of the body is not as inert object but as the envelope of our being, the site for our articulation of the self'.⁴⁹⁰ For Entwistle, dress is a fitting way of exploring the relationship between the body, experience, identity and the social world because it is a visible aspect of the body in the world. But as she notes, sociological theories of the body and embodiment have often overlooked dress, and theories of fashion and dress have frequently ignored the body, both fields ignoring the symbiotic relationship between the two. Her work stresses how dress is fundamentally an 'inter-subjective and social phenomenon, linking the body to individual identity and both to social belonging'.⁴⁹¹ But Entwistle stresses this is not in the sense sometimes argued by theorists who 'err too much on the side of voluntarism, dress as freely willed, expressive and creative.' Entwistle's account of embodied dress stresses that, on the contrary, identity is managed through dress in rather more mundane and routine ways: 'the dressed body is not a passive object, acted upon by social forces', but 'actively produced through particular, routine and mundane practices'. Too much attention and weight has been given to the notion of 'dress as a statement of who I am' and not

⁴⁹⁰ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.335.

⁴⁹¹ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.337.

enough to the social and moral dimensions that constrains the choices people make about what to wear.⁴⁹²

Exploring dress as an embodied practice foregrounds a history of experience, and centres the routine and mundane 'everydayness' of menstruation, wearing menstrual technology and dressing the body accordingly. Exemplifying how a phenomenological account of dress might look, Entwistle draws on Umberto Eco's account of wearing jeans a size too small. Eco notes how they feel on the body, how they pinch and restrict movement, and how they elicit awareness of the lower half of the body - how they come to constitute an 'epidermic self-awareness' unfelt before:

I lived in the knowledge that I had jeans on, whereas normally we live forgetting that we're wearing undershorts or trousers...as a result I assumed an exterior behaviour of one who wears jeans. ...Not only did the garment impose a demeanour on me; by focussing my attention on demeanour it obliged me to live towards the exterior world.'⁴⁹³

Eco's account records the ways that the relationship between the body and dress, and the feelings and sensations it elicits, has the potential to mediate the experience of selfhood, particularly if the clothing feels uncomfortable. Eco's account of wearing jeans prompts Entwistle to state that dress has the potential to 'impinge upon our experience of the body and make us aware of the edges, the limits and boundaries'.⁴⁹⁴

Entwistle's approach is useful in a number of ways. The idea of how we dress influencing how we experience our body and then also how we experience the spaces we move through, is a useful way of approaching records of experiences of wearing

⁴⁹² Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body' P.338.

⁴⁹³ Umberto Eco, "Lumbar Thought." *Travels in Hyperreality*. (1986) in Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.334.

⁴⁹⁴ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.334.

menstrual technology. Social and moral codes impinge upon the menstruating body, including, but not limited to, a need for secrecy, invisibility, routine care, and hygiene, no indication of pain or discomfort, limited disruption to daily practices and functioning regardless of discomfort and pain. These are reinforced by publicly circulating discourses in the media, medicine and school, and via discussions between individuals on a much smaller scale. Menstrual technology is prescribed as key to managing menstruation in a way that aligns with these social codes. Further, if we want to write of the ways dress is embodied in mundane and routine practices undertaken to avoid embarrassment, then menstruation offers a key example of how this is the case. Menstruation is mundane and routine, in that it is on average, a monthly occurrence that those who experience it cater for, even if the experience does not feel comfortable, or easy for the individual. Furthermore, ideas of embarrassment and stigma play a crucial role in how the menstrual body is managed. This management is very much about, and performed through, dress. Stained clothing can be embarrassing, but if that stain is menstrual blood, the revelation of a person's 'status' as menstruating, through what is perceived of as poor bodily management, 'hygiene' and dress, has a whole new set of connotations, with the potential for shame and embarrassment.

That is not to say that routine/mundane aspects and the more expressive elements of dress are mutually exclusive or are always weighted equally and understood as static entities by an individual. The weight given to mundane and to expressive elements can be unstable and changeable, with one taking precedence over the other at different points, in ways often specific to social settings. Further to this, thinking in terms of the tracking and management of menstrual cycles, people do not menstruate for a whole month, so whilst these mundane elements might be of

utmost importance for a portion of the month whilst menstruating, there might be other points where an individual is able to think less about the routine and mundane factors associated with menstruation and is free to wear clothing they might not otherwise wear, perhaps leaning into a more expressive style of dress. Taking this further, just because menstrual technology and blood might not factor directly into decisions to wear certain clothes at a point in the cycle when a person is not bleeding, menstruation, and the fact that it becomes an invisible bodily process at this point in the cycle/month, might still inform the choice of dress in that moment. For example, white trousers might be seen as an expressive element of dress. The decision to wear white trousers at a point in the month when a person knows there is limited chance of menstrual blood threatening the cohesiveness of an outfit suggests that menstruation is still factored into this decision. The two different understandings of dress as mundane and expressive are potentially interrelated, and like the relationship between the body and clothing, share a symbiotic role in dress practices, which are both moulded and combined by the individual into a practice that works for them.

Embodied Menstrual Management

Dress is for Entwistle the visible aspect of the body that makes us aware of its 'edges, limits and boundaries'.⁴⁹⁵ Menstrual technology, then, is an (ideally) invisible way of dressing the body. As revealed in the personal testimony, menstruation and in particular the menstrual technology used to conceal and manage it, made girls aware of the 'edges, limits and boundaries' of their bodies, acting as another layer of dress marked with meaning that connected them to the social world. This section uses

⁴⁹⁵ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.334.

personal testimony from girls about their subjective experiences of using menstrual technology to suggest that these routine, mundane and required, yet perceived as shameful elements of menstrual management were also a part of the embodied experience of dress for many. They are equally as important to accounts of dress as interpretations of dress as expression of personal identity. MO material reveals the ways that menstrual technology altered girls' experiences of the dressed body and the world. Ill-fitting, uncomfortable products often elicited an 'epidermic self-awareness' that many women felt worthy of mentioning in their responses to the menstruation Directive.⁴⁹⁶

Subjective experiences of bleeding, wearing sanitary protection, attending school, participating in P.E. lessons and swimming are some examples of everyday experiences of menstruation provided in the MO testimony that it is possible to approach from a phenomenological perspective. By drawing on the personal testimony of girls who experienced menstruation, this section aims to show how menstruation had the potential to alter how girls dressed the body, how they experienced wearing clothing and menstrual technology, how they felt about their bodies, how they experienced their selfhood and how this was intrinsically linked with how they moved through public and private spaces such as the home, school and other public spaces.

The Directive asked respondents to describe their uses of sanitary products, and exactly how and why this use had changed over time. This prompted individuals to talk about the availability, size, absorbency, comfort and fit of technology. Yet the number of references in the responses to the feel of products and the bodily sensations the products elicited suggests that this was an extremely important aspect of the

⁴⁹⁶ Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.334.

experience of menstruation for the girls and women who responded to the Directive, and something they deemed important to write about, more so than the Directive alone indicates.

The narrative of Angela (b.1974), who was twenty two when she wrote her response in 1996, offers the opportunity to explore the history of menstrual experience in phenomenological terms. Whilst her response falls outside the date range of this thesis, it is particularly interesting because it demonstrates continuity in some aspects of experience over time. Her testimony is worth quoting at some length as it reveals the connections between different aspects of menstrual experience, and how this experience affected her embodied sense of self. To return to phenomenology, this account of her experience of bleeding, choosing, positioning, wearing and disposing of menstrual technology and of choosing, wearing and staining clothing evidences the ways that menstruation impacts the experience of dress, and also, that how a person dresses influences how they experience their menstruating body and the spaces they move through. The account also evidences the numerous social and moral codes that impinged upon the menstruating body, namely the need for secrecy, invisibility and to participate in day to day activities regardless.

Opening her response, Angela stressed that 'learning the facts of life changed her entire outlook on life'. She could not specify '*how*', *or* what she changed 'from, and to', reflecting Fink and Tinkler's notion of adolescent 'liminality' and the complicated emotional landscape that accompanied physical maturation.⁴⁹⁷ In biographical statements littered through her response, Angela revealed that she was ashamed of puberty to the point where she could not bathe as she did not want to look at herself;

⁴⁹⁷ Fink and Tinkler, 'Teetering on the Edge', pp.9-25.

that her parents were not open about sex; and that when she did learn about periods from a conversation with friends, her mum was furious. She recalled feeling like her mum wanted to protect her, and also that she had very little interest in learning about sex and periods from her mum. She wondered if it was 'terror at not being a child anymore', and informed MO that she still felt 'immense regret' that she was no longer small. She described her teenage Anorexia in terms of a regression of childhood, and stated that after 'several years of introspection' she believed these experiences were linked.

Angela and her two best friends 'developed quite early'. Angela's friends had been told about periods by their mothers. One friend wore a bra age nine, and it was in their company Angela first learnt about and discussed menstruation. Angela's mum was 'furious', and Angela believed that her mum did not expect her to 'start' as early as her friends, and had subsequently avoided the conversation. She explained that after this interaction 'she sat me down and told me about periods, and I think I was pretty embarrassed'. Following this she described the culture surrounding menstruation at school, where the onset of a peer's first menses became a form of gossip, and 'felt sorry for those that it happened to'. When a peer confided in Angela about their first period she felt 'honoured', and viewed them as 'older, and more mature'.

Angela's first period arrived during her 'top year of junior school'. She had a 'funny tummy ache', and found blood in her knickers. She immediately told her mum, but did not want her dad to find out. Angela recalled that she 'couldn't handle the physical aspects of it', because 'junior school is not really equipped for menstruating little girls!'. Despite the fact Angela and other girls' in her peer group had begun to menstruate, the school did not adequately cater to their needs. The year of Angela's

first period was likely 1984 or 1985. Writing about the impact of menstruating whilst at junior school, she wrote,

I had heavy periods but I would have been far too embarrassed to take a change of towel with me. Once I had to ask a teacher for one, and I could have sunk through the floor I was so embarrassed. To cope with the inevitable flooding I used to wear up to 6 pairs of knickers, so that I wouldn't end up with the tell-tale stains on clothes or chairs (my friend mentioned earlier wore a pink skirt once during her period and was the laughing stock of the whole school). I couldn't work out how to get rid of them either. Mum said I had to wrap them in something and put them in the toilet, which was fine when I could subtly do it at home, but when I was staying with my best friend (who had *not* started her period), it was just not an option. I used to wrap them in tissue and keep them in my bag until I could get home and throw them away...The worst time was when I went on school journey to the Isle of Wight. We stayed in a small hotel, which had its own swimming pool. I had my period while I was there, and I couldn't even contemplate not going in the pool. For a start it would have singled me out from everyone else, but also, I wanted to swim, and have fun like the others. I had never heard of tampons at this stage. So I wore a sanitary towel, and several pairs of knickers underneath my swimming costume. Looking back, I can't believe I did it! I was climbing up the slide, and a boy (who had created the name of "Big V..." for me already as I needed a bra) climbed up behind me and say 'ugh, why have you got pants on?'. The *shame* of it! I don't think he knew enough to recognise the bulge that must have been there – thank god. I discovered tampons a year or so later, at secondary school. By this stage I was no longer on my own, and periods were not so shameful.⁴⁹⁸

Conveying a sense of shame during, and whilst reflecting, on her menstrual experiences was an important aspect of Angela's writing. She viewed carrying a towel and having to find a place and take a moment to change it too difficult. This stigma resulted in her being underprepared and having to ask a teacher for a towel which revealed her status as menstruating, another hugely shameful experience for her. As her status as menstruating became visible, she desired to 'sink through the floor' and make herself invisible. The blood, or as she calls it, the 'inevitable flooding', is described as something she coped with, connoting difficulty and mental struggle

⁴⁹⁸ A2685, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

compounded by her sense that she was unique in relation to her cohort, marked as difference due to her physical maturity and its impact on how she negotiated her environment. Because of the stigma Angela associated with menstrual technology and the process of changing it, and because she did not want to be 'found out' at junior school, she preferred to wear six pairs of knickers to avoid 'tell-tale stains' on her clothes and the chairs she sat on. Both her clothes, and the objects she interacted with, in this case the chair, in the spaces she moved through, became deeply personal; both potential threats that could reveal that she was menstruating, which in turn could alter not only her sense of self but her interpersonal relationships and her social position. The significance of the chair to this narrative, and the implication that seeing menstrual blood on the chair would be both deeply humiliating for her, and an invitation for others to judge and re-evaluate her, reveals how the body and the senses were a key element of how individuals experienced menstruation, and how it affected how they came to see themselves and how they viewed and participated in the world around them. This intersected with age of first menses and subsequent level of schooling, the threat of menstrual visibility and feelings of isolating and difference more intense at junior than secondary school.

Items of dress are important points of reference with a symbolic dimension in Angela's testimony. She wrote about her experience of wearing multiple pairs of underwear whilst menstruating, denoting her embodied attempts to adhere to notions of menstrual invisibility. By referencing her friend's experience of leaking on to a pink skirt and becoming the laughing stock of the whole school, she re-emphasised once the potential part that clothing played in revealing their status as menstruating and therefore disrupting moral codes regarding menstrual management and dress. It also reveals the likelihood of stigmatisation, embarrassment and social exclusion for the

girls if menstruation was not managed appropriately, particularly at primary school where menstruating girls were an anomaly and not the norm.

Both friends 'failed' to ensure menstruation remained undiscussed and invisible, one by asking a teacher for a towel, and the other by bleeding onto her skirt. Both girls were breaking moral codes around dress as a result of menstruation. Her friend broke moral codes of dress by wearing, even unwittingly, a stained item of clothing, double burdened by the fact it was stained with menstrual blood. Angela also broke moral codes of dress in multiple ways, firstly, by not wearing any menstrual technology and instead wearing 'several pairs of knickers' under her school uniform, a way of dressing the body she would not participate in had she not been menstruating. Secondly, she did this again by wearing several pairs of underwear under her swimming costume, partly so that she could avoid singling herself out as menstruating to her peers by having to be seen sitting poolside, and partly so she could enjoy herself and go swimming. Whilst the multiple pairs of knickers under her school uniform might have remained invisible, this was not the case for the swimming costume.

For Angela, in this particular moment at the swimming pool, the need to adhere to moral codes of menstrual etiquette overruled the need to adhere to moral codes of dress. Wearing several pairs of pants under a bathing costume on a school swimming trip diverts from 'appropriate' or preferred dress, but for Angela, it was okay to break this code as long as it could ensure her status as menstruating was not revealed. It is possible to see this as her hierarchically organising social codes, and thus in turn challenging them, by deciding that the social and moral instruction to keep menstruation hidden was, in this moment, more important to her than adhering to dress codes, which Angela presents as less stigmatising. Whilst this is an example of rule-breaking and agentic capacity, the prose never presents this decision as an

empowering one, and it should not be historicised as one either. As the testimony evidences, breaking the moral codes of dress because of menstruation was in and of itself a cause of stress for the girls even if it was something they felt compelled in the moment to do. Angela uses direct speech to report the questions her underwear elicited from a boy who had already commented on her body, and nicknamed her 'big V' because of her breasts. She reflects on his inquisitiveness by saying 'ugh the *shame!*'. She had typed her response, and used italics on the word shame for emphasis.

This decision to prioritise menstrual etiquette and usurp dress etiquette, was a case of desperation and perceived necessity, emphasised by the references to shame and embarrassment but also by the references threaded through the response as a whole. Angela introduces the swimming pool story as 'the worst one', and concludes with retrospective disbelief that she ever made this decision, both indicative of the place this story holds in her psyche and how it should be approached and interpreted. A degree of relief is suggested as she states she believes the boy who commented did not know about menstruation and therefore could not, in part because of the culture of secrecy, connect the dots between her period and her clothing choice. Angela states that it was not until secondary school that she began to feel better about menstruation, encouraged by the fact that more people were menstruating by then, so it was more talked about, and that she had more awareness of these discussions too. She states that by secondary school, 'periods weren't so shameful'. Presented as objective truth, this is likely a reflection of both growing older and socialising more with others who menstruated, access to appropriate menstrual management facilities, and of her personal development and growth in understanding and confidence.

Angela discovered tampons after being advised by a friend. Before trying them she asked her mum who was ‘very anti the whole idea’ because, ‘she was of the generation that thought you could not use tampons if ‘you were a virgin’. Angela’s mum phoned the mother of one of Angela’s friends to ask about them, and to ask why her daughter was using them. After this Angela was allowed to use tampons, although she ‘gave up after about thirty minutes’ during her first attempt. Reflecting on her later decision to wear tampons, she stated, ‘it was quite an amazing feeling actually - freedom; control! I haven’t looked back since’.⁴⁹⁹ Her narrative here draws on key words used in advertising for menstrual products, both during the period in which she grew up, and the period in which she was writing her response. Her response suggests that finding and using tampons really changed her experience of menstruating for the better. It also reveals, as retailers and chemists stocking tampons, and tampon manufacturers suggested, that mothers menstrual management practices were hugely influential to girls’ own, and that if girls were acquainted with new forms of technologies early enough, existing brand loyalties could be challenged and newer loyalties formed.⁵⁰⁰

Other responses also suggest that staining, visibility, feel, and the type of technology were all a part of the same experience of shame and fear. Beverley (b.1960), was thirteen when she had her first period whilst on holiday. She referred to the threat of visible menstrual blood and its subsequent effect on sociability and ‘reputation’:

I would have to whisper to my mother that I wanted a towel, I remember once or twice when she did not have any ~~she cut up~~ and could not afford

⁴⁹⁹ A2685, MOA, ‘Menstruation’.

⁵⁰⁰ Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, WBA/BT/11/22/14/2, ‘Sharing the sanpro cake’, *Retail Chemist*, 3 November 1977, p.8.

to buy them - she cut up pillowcases or sheets folded them in strips and I would have to use them with pins holding them in place, more often or not it would slop and blood would come through my jeans...when I was 14 and I was sitting on a washing machine with jeans on, and it had come through, all my friends - laughed and teased me, I could not go out again for weeks.⁵⁰¹

Bertie (b.1956) was thirteen when she started her periods in 1968. She lived away at an all-girls boarding school. She stated 'I clearly remember the start of my first period...I was in the gymnasium taking part in a P.E lesson with classmates when a friend quietly took me to one side and pointed out that I had blood on my knickers'. She was 'sent back to quarters' to get 'cleaned up'. She describes older styles of towel as 'thick, uncomfortable and probably visible in the wrong circumstances', so she switched to tampons as they were cleaner and more comfortable.⁵⁰² This was a sentiment echoed by Carol (1960) who began to menstruate at thirteen years old too. She said 'it was excruciating when a towel came loose and wandered up your back...I was always worried that people could see a towel when I was walking along' and that she felt 'very self-conscious'.⁵⁰³ The depth of the effect of stigma and shame was also something Billie (1955), who began menstruating age twelve reflected on. She stated 'I remember feeling as if I looked different and that everyone must be able to tell' and that she 'used to despise girls who gave away when they were menstruating'.⁵⁰⁴ Her account stressed the extent to which girls often felt an 'epidermic self-awareness' whilst menstruating, and without meaning to, the extent to which socio-cultural notions of secrecy and shame could be internalised by girls, impacting on not only their subject position but also how they viewed and interacted with other girls, reinforcing patriarchal

⁵⁰¹ B2031, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁵⁰² B2728, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁵⁰³ C41, 'Menstruation'.

⁵⁰⁴ B2197, MOA, 'Menstruation' and Entwistle, 'Fashion and the Fleshy Body', p.334.

ideas about women and girls as each other's competition. Each of these narratives provides a sense of the difficulty of navigating menstrual stigma, particularly in public spaces. They also emphasise the tension between effectively managing menstruation by wearing menstrual technology, and adhering to dress codes that required menstrual technology and blood to remain invisible.

Like Eco's account of wearing ill-fitting jeans, Barbara (b.1953) also focussed on the sensory aspects of wearing ill-fitting technologies on the body. Similarly, Barbara said that 'tampons were great for an active self-conscious teenager. Nobody could tell when you were having a period, you could go swimming...I'd hated the up* of the sanitary belt, which dug into my puppy fat and the bulky towels which were too big for me, but there weren't many different brands of towels.'⁵⁰⁵ Barbara had used a 'shiny pink sanitary belt' at the onset of her first period in 1965, which was bought by her mum and stored in the airing cupboard for the 'fateful day'. Her mum had never used tampons so she had bought them herself aged sixteen, and used them for a long time, until fears of toxic shock syndrome became widely publicised after its initial discovery in the US in 1978, and concerns over its increased likelihood in women wearing internally worn sanitary protection were solidified in 1980.⁵⁰⁶ The menstrual technology available to her when she started her periods is contrasted with what she describes as a 'thriving, lucrative market' for pads in 1996 at the time of writing, when there is a stream of 'constantly developing new materials and products.' She specifies that she started using Nikini pads when she was fourteen, which were an improvement

⁵⁰⁵ B215, MOA 'Menstruation'. I am unable to make out the word the writer uses here, but I believe it refers to the fit and feel of the product on the body.

⁵⁰⁶ Sharra L. Vostral, *Under Wraps : A History of Menstrual Hygiene Technology* (Lexington Books, 2011), p.7.

on earlier products. She describes it as a ‘thinner pad more like today’s slim towels which fitted into a pocket in a nylon bikini brief’. Described as ‘far more comfortable and easy to carry around’ when a period was due, the account gives a sense of what mattered to her, namely a thinner pad that fitted neatly and comfortably into underwear so not to disrupt the body’s relationship with clothing, and easy to carry around, so not to disrupt the way she carried herself through the world.

Yet whilst Barbara much preferred tampons, both her daughter (eighteen in 1996), and her daughter’s friends who knew about both towels and tampons when they started menstruating, preferred towels, branding tampons too intrusive, again reinforcing that the relationship between menstrual technology, the body and selfhood was inherently personal, that different forms of menstrual protection were preferable at different life stages and that girls sometimes had practical concerns that stopped them from using tampons.⁵⁰⁷

Like Angela (1975) and Beverley (b.1960), Bethan (b.1963), who started her period in 1975, did not use internal protection initially. She wore towels for ‘several years’ after her periods started. She described them as ‘horrid things, like wearing a nappy!’ She stated:

I kept trying with Tampax, but found trying to insert them to be very uncomfortable. It was only the fact that I wanted to play squash with a friend one day and didn’t want to be lumbered with a horrid bulky towel that I finally gritted my teeth and locked myself in the bathroom, with a box a Tampax and thought ‘I’m damn well doing to do this’ and eventually I did. It took a while before I could wear them comfortably, but I persevered and haven’t looked back since. Indeed, when I recently had a major operation and was told not to use them for the first period I had afterwards, I hated every day of that period with a passion.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ B215, MOA, ‘Menstruation’.

⁵⁰⁸ B2638, MOA, ‘Menstruation’.

The language used here mirrors the way that pads were described as cumbersome in Tampax adverts, and the way that Tampax was marketed based on the ease of insertion, and relative disconnect between touching the product and managing a period. Bethan looked forwards and backwards in her narrative, situating her own experience in relation to her mother's a generation before. Like other women who replied, she compared products she had used growing up with those available in the present day, concluding they were much better in the present. 'My mother tells of wearing towels that were large and so coarse that if you had to walk for any distance while wearing them (which she did, living in a village off the main bus routes) they would rub the inside of your legs raw (this would have been in the years just after the war)'. Bethan framed her own experience of wearing menstrual products as a relative improvement in comparison to the experiences her mum had. This framing suggests that she had talked about menstruation with her mum, and undermines the idea of an all-pervasive culture of secrecy.

Bethan's mother's experience of menstruating during adolescence was compounded by her lack of access to appropriate forms of menstrual technology and by the landscape and infrastructure of where she lived. Bethan recalled how walking in towels for any distance would cause her mum extreme discomfort, as the size and coarseness would rub the skin on the inside of her legs raw. In terms of spatiality, she suggested that her mum lived rurally, in a village away from main bus routes. This resulted in a need to walk everywhere, and also discomfort, pain and wounding to her body from sanitary products. The visceral pain described is striking and shocking. Having no choice but to walk whilst wearing ill-fitting sanitary equipment that tore her skin suggests that this experience of pain was something chronically and cyclically felt by her mother, which she could not avoid, but could have been avoided by access to

more comfortable menstrual technology. Her experience of menstruation and wearing menstrual technology altered her experience of the body, her day-to-day emotions and sensations, causing her pain. Further, her experience of her day-to-day life and the spaces she moved through was also made more difficult, informed by her experience of painful, ill-fitting menstrual products deemed necessary for managing menstruation.

The narrative provides a sense of the intergenerational difference between the two women's lives, one whose girlhood was in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, with limited access to services, transport and technology that could help her avoid injury, and another whose experience of illness inhibited her from managing her body in the way she wanted to and actively contributed to a harder, more taxing period of recovery from ill health. But the narrative also highlights similarity between the two women's experiences. Whilst the narrative is self-aware and reflects on the ways menstrual technology had made relative improvements between generations, both stories suggest that menstrual technology still had the potential to cause discomfort and disruption and painful physical and emotional experiences for its users.

In some ways, tampons did offer girls a degree of freedom and control. Accounts evidenced how words from advertising were drawn on to describe what the transition from ill-fitting belts and pads did for their confidence, day-to-day sensory and embodied experiences and for their ability to participate in activities, view, occupy and move through space. Kathleen (1951) began menstruating age thirteen, and her decision to start using tampons later into her teenage years was related directly to her dress practices, and her desire to wear miniskirts. She stated:

My mother gave me sanitary towels, which hooked on to a belt type of thing, and I loathed this. I felt this great wedge of cotton wool or whatever it was between my legs and I felt uncomfortable... my friends all felt the same...as

I got further in to my teen years, out working, wearing mini-skirts and so on, I started wearing tampons which felt less intrusive and more comfortable.⁵⁰⁹

Her desire to wear mini-skirts can be seen as reflective of late 1960s fashion trends. Whitney (1970) began menstruating age fifteen, and was grateful when her first period arrived because she was aware this was late, and did not want to be the last in her class. She used 'bulky standard' towels recommended to her by her mum for the first few years, and stated 'this meant I was not comfortable wearing certain clothes, especially tight ones', because of the fact that towels would alter the fit and appearance of tight-fitting clothes.⁵¹⁰

Many of the girls' early choice of protection was recommended or chosen by their mothers. Janet (b.1959) was twelve when she began to menstruate. She never told her mother, which she regretted, particularly because it meant she had to buy towels from a machine in the girls bathroom at school whilst most of her peers relied on their mothers to buy them products. Janet's mum found out because she found stains on Janet's clothing. This allowed her to interject and provide her with sanitary towels and a belt to wear going forward. The fact she never deliberately revealed her periods to her mother again suggests that attempts to uphold a culture of secrecy were made, but that means of communication beyond verbal, specifically involving dress, enabled this to become shared knowledge. Janet disliked the towels, describing them as dreadful and the process of using a belt 'distasteful', going on to say that her life was vastly improved at age sixteen/seventeen when she discovered Tampax, which, although experienced as painful and intrusive initially, became her preferred way of

⁵⁰⁹ K798, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁵¹⁰ W2731, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

managing menstruation until she wrote her response to the Directive.⁵¹¹ The adverts discussed earlier in this chapter, with their emphasis on invisibility, clean lines and fashion trends, do seem to reflect girls' desires to not have their clothing practices disrupted by menstruation or menstrual technology.

This testimony has shown that whilst, at a socio-cultural level, menstrual stigma debilitates women, the menstrual technology available to women also debilitated women on a day-to-day basis, complicating their relationship with their body, dress and space. The women who responded to the MO Directive remembered the stigma, shame and embarrassment felt as a result of pressure to adhere to social codes regarding appropriate behaviour, and the way that the technology they wore impinged on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. For these women and girls menstrual technology also played a huge part in how they experienced a period, making it even harder to manage and navigate. Each of these testimonies has revealed the ways that a phenomenological approach to the menstruating body and to menstrual technology is a fitting way of understanding menstrual embodiment. Both the menstruating body and the menstrual technology and clothing worn offers a way into understanding how menstruation impacts everyday experiences of embodiment and selfhood, dress and the way girls understood, occupied and moved through spaces such as school in their everyday life. The way these women write about their menstruating bodies and menstrual technology tells us a great deal about their embodied experiences of selfhood and society.

There is a tendency in discussions around menstruation to talk about menstrual discomfort although it arises solely from stigma and not from aspects of embodied

⁵¹¹ J2703, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

experience. By using phenomenology and putting the experience of wearing menstrual technology back in to the picture, this chapter reveals how poorly designed, ill-fitting or ineffective technologies have compounded women's uncomfortable menstrual experiences, alongside social attitudes and shame, and suggests that perhaps, some of this stigma and shame could have been alleviated via material changes to the technologies worn by girls.

Conclusion

Looking at adverts for menstrual technologies, and the images used to represent invisible menstrual technologies, reveals how the relationship between menstruating bodies and menstrual technology was linked to wider notions of appropriate forms of dress, feminine presentation and subjectivity. Adverts were concerned with the sensory interaction between menstrual technology and the menstruating body, picking up on the way it felt and looked, and the way it enabled secrecy and invisibility. As stated in the introduction, this does not allow us to understand how it felt to experience menstruation and menstrual technology. It can only point towards the socio-cultural discourses that girls had to navigate.

Personal testimony about experiences of choosing, wearing and disposing of menstrual technology provide the way in to understanding how it really felt to manage menstruation and menstrual stigma on an everyday basis. Approaching these accounts of experience in a phenomenological vein, and paying attention to articulations of feelings, sensations and emotions, it is possible to explore the relationship between menstrual technology, clothing and the body and to consider how each altered girls' subjective sense of self and the way they moved through the world.

The phenomenological supposition that the body forms our point of view of the world, and its particular application to suggest that we come to know the world through our sensory perceptions of dress, space and society, bridges the gap between representation and experience. This approach acknowledges that whilst the menstruating body is always situated in society, steeped in cultural meanings and understandings of appropriate behaviour regarding menstrual etiquette and management, it is also simultaneously an embodied existence, located within specific temporal and spatial relations unique to the individual. The body is at once navigating and determined by social structures and discourses, and the site of perception, sensation and personal and social identity. Whilst menstrual stigma debilitated girls, the girls who wore technologies in order to circumvent feelings of shame were further debilitated by the products designed to aid them.

Chapter Five

Premenstrual Discomfort, Pain, and Pain Management

Introduction

During the interwar period, medical researchers discovered that menstruation and ovulation were separate rather than concurrent events. This facilitated more understanding of the function of menstruation and hormonal processes within the female reproductive system. The MWF took responsibility for the task of formulating a

newer, more positive language of menstruation, reflective of these scientific shifts.⁵¹² They suggested that previous medical research had tended to focus on hospitalised and ‘incapacitated’ menstruating women, setting severe pain and menstrual discomfort as the standard. They believed this had drastically skewed the picture of how most women experienced menstruation, and in turn, justified women’s ostracisation from the public sphere. The MWF explored and collated findings from responses to surveys and questionnaires completed by young girls about their day-to-day experiences of menstruation. By shifting the locus of research away from medical institutions and hospital wards, the MWF challenged this conceptualisation, and championed an understanding of menstruation as everyday health as opposed to periodic illness and disability.

Strange has suggested this new framework recast menstruation in a ‘superficially positive light’. The MWF avoided disseminating information about negative, debilitating or disabling experiences, and pain was presented as unusual. MWF guidance suggested that ‘if a girl suffers from pain or any other disability, it is a sign that there is something wrong, and it is essential that a doctor should be consulted. The underlying conditions are much more easily cured at the onset’.⁵¹³ This inadvertent stigmatisation of certain menstrual experiences as non-normative was particularly damaging for women disposed to menstrual discomfort. Strange argues this notion of normative healthy menstruation created a taboo concerning discomfort which simply became ‘hidden’ in response to narratives of modern womanhood.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹² Julie-Marie Strange, ‘The Assault on Ignorance: Teaching Menstrual Etiquette in England, c.1920-1960s’, *The Social History of Medicine*, 14:2 (2001) pp.247-248.

⁵¹³ CMAX, SA/MWF H.51/2 in Strange, ‘The Assault on Ignorance’, p.265.

⁵¹⁴ Strange, ‘The Assault on Ignorance’, p.265.

Strange notes this alternative emancipatory rationale of menstruation as health over 'un-wellness' 'mapped out very precisely the social script surrounding menstruation' and femininity. Although the MWF's research was hugely insightful, contributing to filling gaps in knowledge about menstruation, it is possible to see that these female doctors were operating within a culture that still prioritised secrecy and discretion. Across the 1920s-1960s, MWF guidance still prioritised menstrual etiquette and concealment, and menstrual discomfort remained taboo, allocated to the margins of what constituted 'healthy' menstruation.⁵¹⁵ Menstrual health and concealment became affiliated with appropriate feminine behaviour, and by proxy, any displays of menstrual discomfort with deviance from desired menstrual scripts.⁵¹⁶

This chapter testifies to the assertion that menstrual discomfort remained taboo despite and in part because of the newer language of menstrual health and hygiene espoused in the early to mid-twentieth century. Building on Strange's study of the impact of MWF discourses in the period 1920–1960, it explores how these discourses persisted in to the period 1960–1980, and permeated beyond official medical circles via advertising and mass culture consumed by girls. To understand the cultural reach of taboos surrounding menstrual discomfort and pain, it looks at representations of menstrual discomfort in adverts for over-the-counter painkillers reproduced in girls' magazines. The adverts for painkillers reveal that brands used a mutable definition of pain that encompassed the physical and the emotional, and that they relied on normative understandings of the incompatibility of menstrual pain with ideals about menstrual health and feminine behaviour.

⁵¹⁵ Alice Billington, 'Period Dramas', *History Workshop*, 7 January 2019, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/period-dramas/> [accessed, 30/06/2021].

⁵¹⁶ Barbara Brookes and Margaret Tennant, 'Making Girls Modern: Pakeha women and menstruation in New Zealand, 1930-1970', *Women's History Review*, 7:4 (1998), p.368 in Strange, 'The Assault on Ignorance', p.264.

Literature guiding this analysis includes Jordanova's analysis of advertising for antidepressants and premenstrual tension medication featured in *World Medicine*, a periodical produced for GPs, and Jane Ussher and Janette Perz's work on 'premenstrual embodiment'. Jordanova found that in the 1980s, changes in women's mental disposition were heavily pathologised, understood to be related to anxiety, depression or the menstrual cycle, and positioned as 'disruptive phenomena to be understood and acted upon by medical science'. Adverts aimed at GPs treating women experiencing 'mental disturbances' relied on language and imagery that suggested a 'profoundly manipulative association' between women, domesticity, family and the social order. GPs needed to treat women's mood changes, because it was believed that the accompanying social disturbances and disruption to family life had no end of detrimental, deviant effects.⁵¹⁷

Ussher and Perz's work on 'premenstrual embodiment' deals with conceptualisations of pre-menstrual discomfort today, and they specify that women are now diagnosed with 'PMS' or "pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)". PMDD is the most recent diagnostic category to be included in the DSM-IV, and is defined by extreme psychological distress and debilitation, for which roughly 8-13% of women meet the criteria in 2020.⁵¹⁸ Ussher and Perz state that roughly 75% of women meet the criteria for PMS, which constitutes the same 'conglomeration of symptoms [as PMDD], just experienced to a lesser degree'. They believe that the pathologisation of (pre)menstrual discomfort positions the menstruator's 'fecund body' as the *cause* of distress, which in turn constitutes the process of 'subjectification', where women come

⁵¹⁷ *World Medicine*, 27 November 1982, p.2, in Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Century* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.146.

⁵¹⁸ DSM-IV is the Fifth Edition of the 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders'.

to recognise themselves as a PMS sufferer and their bodies as abject. They note the attention that has been paid to ‘women’s internalisation of the idealized “good wife and mother”’ and suggest this, combined with consistent over-responsibility within the home, can result in patterns of self-silencing and self-sacrifice, which can lead to psychological distress and seemingly explosive displays of emotion when premenstrual.⁵¹⁹ They believe that this anger or discontent is pathologised, because women are deemed out of control, resulting in legitimate emotion being dismissed as PMS.⁵²⁰ Premenstrual tension (PMT) does not appear in their chapter, reflecting the instability of medical terminology and categories when reproduced and reworked both inside, and outside official medical settings. Ussher and Perz’s work highlights a longevity to the gendered medical understandings of menstruation and (pre)menstrual discomfort as a disruption to women’s social role and family dynamics.⁵²¹

The adverts for over-the-counter analgesics marketed to girls in the 1960s and 1970s relied on similar associations between femininity and domesticity, but also offered alternative depictions that acknowledged girls’ roles as wage earners. This analysis aims to shed light on the ways these stereotypes were transmitted and marketed to the user not the prescriber, beyond medical circles and the medically trained readership of *World Medicine*, to the girls reading mass-market magazines.

Representations are analysed within their wider cultural context. Whilst these adverts contributed to the invalidity of menstrual discomfort and pain, these

⁵¹⁹ Jane M. Ussher and Janette Perz, ‘Gender Differences in Self-Silencing and Psychological Distress in Informal Cancer Carers’ *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34:2 (2010), pp.228-242, Jane M. Ussher, Janette Perz, ‘Resisting the Mantle of the Monstrous Feminine: Women’s Construction and Experience of Premenstrual Embodiment’, in *The Palgrave Handbook Of Critical Menstruation Studies* (Palgrave, 2020), and Jane M. Ussher, ‘Women Centred psychological intervention for premenstrual distress’, *InPsych*, 39:1 (2017), accessed at <https://www.psychology.org.au/inpsych/2017/february/usscher/> (28/05/2021).

⁵²⁰ Ussher and Perz, ‘Resisting the Mantle of the Monstrous Feminine’, p.216.

⁵²¹ Jordanova, *Medical Visions*, p.146

discussions, however flawed, offered teenage girls a rare opportunity to see depictions, discussions and explanations of menstrual pain. Magazines legitimised discussion of menstruation and menstrual pain, circulating within a wider socio-cultural context that expected menstruation and menstrual discomfort to remain invisible. Readers who experienced menstrual discomfort, which MO material reveals to be a large proportion, had little opportunity to explore and understand their experiences beyond the magazine. Further, magazines discussed and defined the other spaces and places where it was socially acceptable for girls to be open about menstruation and to obtain further knowledge, treatment and relief. They signposted and sent self-help literature, contained adverts for over-the-counter painkillers, and recommended visits to a GP, NCT or sexual health centre, offering girls visible discussions of, knowledge about, and solutions for their experiences of pain and discomfort.

Whilst this is a narrative about agency and the acquisition of knowledge, it is also one about menstrual stigma, the inaccessibility of health information and services, and the dangers that inherently follow a cultural obsession with concealing menstruation, and ignoring and invalidating menstrual concerns. Magazine discussions of period pain were not enough to protect girls from stigmatisation and marginalisation, with very real consequences for their health and wellbeing. As outlined in the previous chapters, embodied menstrual management was difficult, had restrictive effects on day-to-day life, and persistently reinforced the notion that visible menstruation was indicative of a breakdown of individual control and transgression of suitable gender roles.⁵²² As Jordanova states, prevailing understandings of femininity often relate to ‘deep-seated gender stereotypes possessing cultural currency’. Central

⁵²² Jane M. Ussher, Janette Perz, 'Resisting the Mantle of the Monstrous Feminine: Women's Construction and Experience of Premenstrual Embodiment', in *The Palgrave Handbook Of Critical Menstruation Studies* (Palgrave, 2020), p.215.

to the perpetuation of these gendered stereotypes is medical theory and practice.⁵²³ Menstrual pain and (pre)menstrual experiences have occupied, and continue to occupy, the periphery of medical research and treatment. In some instances, this has resulted in medical negligence and unnecessary invasive medical procedures.⁵²⁴ To avoid one form of social marginalisation, girls were encouraged to remain ignorant about, and ignore or underplay period pain and other gynaecological concerns, which could, in turn, facilitate alternate and additional forms of social marginalisation born from the experience of either acute or chronic illness.⁵²⁵ Accounts of menstrual discomfort explored in this chapter describe girls' experiences of this medical, and cultural, ignorance and invalidation.

Testimony suggests that women found it very difficult to articulate their own menstrual discomfort and pain, and that if they did articulate how they were feeling, their articulations were often invalidated by others, including medical professionals entrusted to help. There are accounts of negligence, traumatic procedures, and chronic painful experiences. Although less extreme, many responses about menstrual pain were defined by reflections on the validity of their own pain, or that of other women. Numerous accounts suggested that women felt discomfort observing other women's articulations of menstrual pain. Offering little sympathy or empathy, and sometimes actively critiquing the way other women talked about, responded to, or

⁵²³ Jordanova, *Medical Visions*, p.148.

⁵²⁴ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast Feminism, Sex and Morality* (Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005), pp.64-65, Hilary Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, (Fourth Estate, 2003), Ussher and Perz, 'Resisting the Mantle of the Monstrous Feminine', p.215 and Erin A. Frost and Michelle F. Eble, *Interrogating Gendered Pathologies* (University Press of Colorado, 2020), p.8.

⁵²⁵ See Havi Carel, *Phenomenology of Illness*, (Oxford University Press, 2016), for discussion of 'illness as a series of losses' which looks at the relationship between illness, subjectivity, social marginalisation and identity.

rendered visible painful sensations, the women offered stigmatising assessments of the validity of other menstruators' pain.

Testimony reveals that menstruating women occupied a complex and contradictory position as casualties of a culture that invalidated menstrual discomfort and pain, and purveyors of the same discriminatory and stigmatising ideas. A culture of invalidation encouraged women to invalidate their own pain, and others' too. Women internalised these attitudes and perpetuated them, facilitating a subject position where women could be oppressed and marginalised by ableist attitudes regarding health and femininity, and perpetrators of the same ableism and sexism. As Javier Mosoco states, 'halfway between the world of emotions and the realm of sensations, the history of pain refers back to the history of experience; that is, to the history of what is at once familiar and strange, one's own and another's, individual and collective'.⁵²⁶ Whilst the mainstream magazines tell a story of an increase, even if slight, in detailed and informative representations of periods, gynaecological health and menstrual pain across the 1960s and 1970s, women's words tell us that teenage girls and adult women still had a complicated relationship to understanding and articulating their own pain, and relating to the pain of other women. As Mosoco states, the presence of pain does not in and of itself guarantee its social perception', and menstrual pain and discomfort is a prime example of this.⁵²⁷

Depictions of Premenstrual Discomfort

⁵²⁶ Javier Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History* (Palgrave, 2012), p.2.

⁵²⁷ Moscoso, *Pain*, p.4.

The language and imagery used to depict pain and menstrual discomfort in adverts for over-the-counter painkillers was explicitly linked to emotional experience, particularly notions of 'off days', depression and tension, reflecting longstanding medical assumptions about the link between mood swings, female anatomy and femininity.⁵²⁸ Ali Haggett suggests that references to nerves and anxiety' had been related in 'some way' to discourses about women and menstruation before 1960.⁵²⁹ In 1955, Dr Cassells were subtly marketing their products as an answer to menstrual woes such as feeling 'run down and nervy'. The same year, the first blockbuster tranquilisers went to market, followed by Valium in 1963. Analysing adverts for over-the-counter analgesics in newspapers, Haggett found that the marketing of analgesics like Anadin was cross-generational, and not always gender-specific. Her work undercut historical assumptions that married middle-class women were the main targets for, and users of, over-the-counter pain medication.⁵³⁰ Whilst Haggett's work reveals adverts in newspapers were not always gender-specific, analysis of girls' magazines in the period 1960-1980 reveals that Anadin was widely advertised to a younger audience in gendered, ungendered, cross-generational and generation-specific ways. Many of the Anadin adverts printed in *Jackie*, *Honey* and *Petticoat* relied on gendered medical assumptions about the pathologisation of female mood swings and social roles to appeal to girls.

A number of painkiller brands featured in my sample of magazines, including Anadin, Feminax, E.P, Dalay and Aspro. Adverts for Anadin pain relief first appeared

⁵²⁸ Anadin Advert, Women's Own, 03.03.1955 in Ali Haggett, *Desperate Housewives: Neuroses and the Domestic Environment 1945 – 1970* (Pickering and Chatto, 2012), p.156-157 and Tiffany Watt Smith, *The Book of Human Emotion* (Wellcome Collection, 2016), p.25, and Jordanova, *Medical Visions*, p.134-159

⁵²⁹ Haggett, *Desperate Housewives*, p.2.

⁵³⁰ Chapter 6 in particular, Haggett, 'For Ladies in Distress: Representations of Anxiety and Depression in the Medical and Popular press', in *Desperate Housewives*, pp, 129-180.

in my sample in *Honey* magazine in 1961, *Petticoat* in 1966, and *Jackie* in 1969. Launched in the US in 1932 as Anacin, Anadin rebranded for sale in the UK as an over-the-counter analgesic for headaches, high temperatures and 'lifting depression'. As notions of mental illness expanded to include a wider array of symptoms and experiences, depression, nervousness and tension became states that medical companies could claim to help. As Haggett states, companies encouraged the pursuance of calm in individuals of all ages, and Anadin devised the concept of the 'tense, nervous headache', which remained a well-known catchphrase across the 1960s and into the 1970s.⁵³¹ Anadin added numerous different sensations and symptoms to a continually evolving list of ailments it claimed to ease, purporting to soothe nerves, tension and pain, to ease depression, and in some adverts, period pains too.

Despite this, neither the catchphrase the 'tense, nervous headache', nor 'tensed up depressed feelings' were linked with explicit mentions of period pain until after 1971. Until this point, Anadin stuck to only inferring the association between 'tense, nervous headaches', menstrual discomfort and self-medicating for menstrual woes by using words typically associated with menstrual-related issues. This affiliation of a language of psychological and nervous disorders with the feelings and sensations experienced during menstruation is testament to the mutability of both the language of stress and nerves outside of official medical cultures, and to the continually evolving ways in which Anadin marketed their products in order to remain relevant.

Anadin's decision to begin explicitly branding their products as period pain relief could also be read as an indication of the increasing visibility of menstruation and associated symptoms in both mass culture and wider society at the time. Equally, it is

⁵³¹ Haggett, *Desperate Housewives*, p.161.

likely that increasing competition from period painkiller brands spurred the decision, as adverts for Feminax started to appear in *Petticoat* in 1966, and *Jackie* in 1971.⁵³² When *Anadin* did market explicitly at girls experiencing menstrual pain, their visual and textual depictions of the target user relied on normative understandings of who experienced a ‘tensed up depressed feeling’, what *she* looked like, and on gendered assumptions about the role unpaid domestic labour and paid employment played in girls’ need for pain relief.

An advert for Anadin featured in *Honey* in 1962 (figure 5.1) instructed users ‘how to relieve tense, nervous headaches’.⁵³³ The advert featured a sketch of a side profile of a white woman’s head. Like the menstrual advertising discussed in chapter one, the image mimicked a scientific ‘cross-section’, displaying the muscles in the head and using labels to pinpoint where the ‘pain’, ‘pressure’ and ‘tension’ were originating. The illustrated head is gendered, signified through the long hair and dark red lip. This reflects how gender has been a central medical metaphor, and illnesses tagged as ‘male’ or ‘female’. As Jordanova states, ‘depression, anxiety, sleeplessness and migraine’ are all likely to be associated with women.⁵³⁴

Anadin’s visual depiction and description of the brain harked back to Victorian phrenological modes of visual representation. The Victorian ‘science’ of phrenology rendered visible not only the inside of a person’s brain, but their ‘faculties’ (personality and character) too.⁵³⁵ As Roger Cooter states, ‘phrenology’s reference to brain physiology for the understanding of psychological therapy reassured physicians that special medical *cum* scientific knowledge was required to deal with the insane’ and

⁵³² ‘Feminax takes the pain out of your calendar’, Feminax advert, *Jackie*, 4.03.1971.

⁵³³ ‘How to relieve tense nervous headaches’, *Anadin* advert, *Honey*, July 1962, p.56.

⁵³⁴ Jordanova, *Medical Visions*, p.144.

⁵³⁵ For examples of old phrenological drawings see George Coombs, *Phrenological Diagrams*. British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/phrenological-diagrams-by-george-combe> [accessed 07/0/2021].

offered a 'logical and comprehensible system' of (seemingly) exact causal relationships between physical and psychological factors.⁵³⁶ By pinpointing the exact location of the tension, nervousness and headache, Anadin offered the magazine reader a seemingly 'logical and comprehensible system' for unveiling the interconnection of the physical, psychological and emotional.



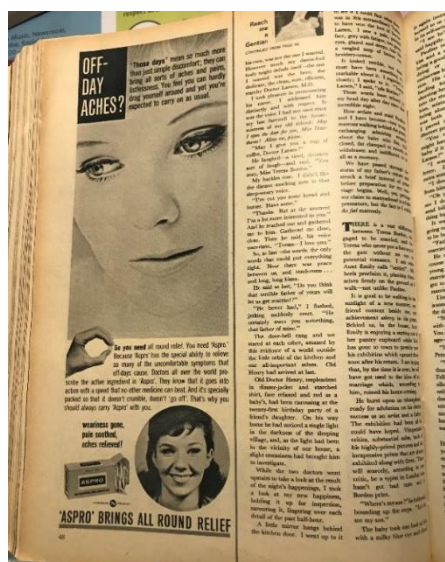
Figure 5.1: Anadin advert, *Honey*, 07.1962

In the same copy of *Honey*, an advert for Aspro pain relief featured titled 'Off-Day Aches?' (Figure 5.2). The phrase 'Off days' featured in advertising for Feminax, Anadin, E.P. and Aspro suggesting a euphemistic way of referring to (pre)menstrual discomfort picked up on and adopted by each brand.⁵³⁷ Whilst menstruation was not explicitly mentioned, it was signified by language and imagery coded as discreet ways

⁵³⁶ Robert Cooter, 'Phrenology and British alienists, c. 1825-1845. Part II: Doctrine and practice'. *Medical History*, 20 (1976), pp. 135-51.

⁵³⁷ 'Wonderful discovery of Feminax', *Honey*, 07.1965, 'Off Day Aches? Aspro advert, *Honey*, 07.1962 and 'Now you know what off days really are', *Anadin*, Jackie, 25th November 1972.

of talking about or visualising menstruation. The advert described symptoms such as ‘aches, pains and listlessness’, and whilst these are not symptoms limited to (pre)menstrual discomfort, the association with ‘off-days’ suggests these were symptoms included under its broad conceptualisation, and that the term functioned as a euphemistic description of menstrual discomfort.



(Figure 5.2: Aspirin Advert, *Honey*, 07.1962)

The advert featured a portrait photograph of a young, made-up woman staring at the floor. Her gaze does not meet the camera and her pursed lips give the impression of low mood. Affiliating itself with medical authority, the advert stated that ‘Doctors all over the world’ ‘prescribe’ Aspirin. Like other adverts for painkillers, it stated that the relief provided was ‘all round’.⁵³⁸ Equal attention was given to the physical, psychological and emotional effects of discomfort and of pain relief.⁵³⁹ The text accompanying the image stated in bold, ‘“Those Days” mean so much more than just

⁵³⁸ ‘How to relieve tense nervous headaches’, Anadin Advert, *Honey*, 07.1961, Anadin Advert, *Honey*, 11.1961 and Anadin Advert, *Honey*, 03.1963.

⁵³⁹ ‘Off day aches?’, Aspirin, *Honey*, 07.1962, p.48

simple discomfort; they can bring all sorts of aches and pains, listlessness. You feel you can hardly drag yourself around and yet you're expected to carry on as usual.' Symptoms like 'aches, pains and listlessness' are listed, but the viewer must use their intuition to identify 'those days'.

This euphemism both reflected and contributed to the ways menstruation was hidden from the everyday. The language used indicates how it was possible to make menstruation visible to those who had experiential knowledge, but not to others who had not grown up and internalised the language and culture of secrecy and shame surrounding menstruation. For those who menstruated and had felt themselves experiencing 'off days' coinciding with their period, the marketing of these painkillers as relief from menstrual-related symptoms, or 'off days', would be obvious. There is a highly gendered notion of secrecy and of intuitive bodily knowledge simultaneously on display for those who possess the language and experience to read it as such.

This notion of simultaneous visibility and invisibility can be seen in other adverts too. Featured in the same copy of *Honey* as the 'Off-Day ache?' advert, an advert for Dalay Tablets presented a short, nondescript offering of 'free relief', without outlining what the relief was from (Figure 5.3). The advert was small, featured in a column of adverts taking up the left side of the magazine page. The bold title 'Free Relief' was accompanied by a euphemistic paragraph of text.

Thousands of women and girls have come to believe - perfectly understandably- that, in their own particular case, there's no such thing as relief. Actually this is not so. Now that DALAY Tablets are obtainable and thanks to the fact that they combine, with pain relieving and sedative ingredients, a

valuable anti-spasmodic - relief, even in these more difficult cases, can very definitely be achieved.⁵⁴⁰



Figure 5.3: DALAY advert, *Honey*, 07.1962

This euphemism requires consideration of how the magazine reading experience was dependent on the knowledge and experience possessed by the individual, and the advert's context within the magazine as a whole. The invisibility of menstruation was often actually a key feature of discussions of it in magazines. Menstruation could remain invisible until made visible by the individual magazine reader, who through her embodied experiences of menstruation, and broader identification with an 'imagined community' of 'thousands of women and girls' who were menstruating persons and magazine readers, could read between the lines and infer meaning based on her own experiential knowledge.⁵⁴¹ Further, the DALAY advert featured in a copy of *Honey* that contained two other painkiller adverts, and three

⁵⁴⁰ 'Free Relief' DALAY advert, *Honey*, 07.1962, p.60.

⁵⁴¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), pp.5-7

adverts for menstrual protection, that each used similar language.⁵⁴² The meaning of each feature likely became discernible in the context of the other menstrual adverts.



Figure 5.4: Anadin Advert, *Jackie*, 13.03.1971

Yet adverts for Anadin featured in the early 1970s took a more direct approach to targeting menstruating girls. In 1971 an Anadin advert appeared in *Jackie*, headed in bold by the question, 'period pains?' (Figure 5.4). It also appeared in *Honey* magazine for the first time too in July of the same year.⁵⁴³ The advert took up a column roughly two inches wide, and half a page long, on the right-hand side of the magazine. The advert contained no images, only three paragraphs of writing. The text stated 'even women whose periods are "normal" can suffer headaches and other aches and

⁵⁴² Off day aches?' Aspro advert, *Honey*, 07.1962, 'How to relieve tense nervous headaches', Anadin Advert, *Honey*, 07.1962, 'You'll never look back', Lil-lets advert, *Honey*, 07.1962, 'Try Perfection in Protection', Sylvia Sanitary Towels, *Honey*, 07.1962, 'You feel this, cool, this clean, this fresh with Tampax', Tampax advert, *Honey*, 07.1962.

⁵⁴³ Anadin Advert, *Jackie*, 17th March 1971, and *Honey*, 07.1971.

pains, so often accompanied by a tensed up depressed feeling'. The language established a certain set of embodied experiences (tension, aches and pain) as normal female experience, whilst reinforcing that there was no such thing as 'normal' through the use of quotation marks. To suggest 'even' a certain group of people were experiencing something 'normal', marks those people and their experiences as abnormal. This technique created a gap for women to position their menstrual experiences of headaches, aches and pains as outside of 'normal' menstrual experience.⁵⁴⁴ By placing 'normal' in inverted commas, the advert suggests that no period can fit this definition, and that the concept of a 'normal' period is futile. As Anette and Graham Scrambler stated, medicine relies on concepts of 'normality and abnormality', which are highly 'contentious and contestable'.⁵⁴⁵ This advert is self-aware, attentive to the unstable boundaries of normality and abnormality and deliberately exploitative, working to apparently normalise the "abnormality" of periods and universalise a unique experience to guarantee sales. This, in turn, demarks menstruation, and by proxy, femininity, as abnormal.

Capitalising on the understanding that periods can cause discomfort, the advert positioned itself in alliance with, and as a compassionate friend of, the viewer, understanding that it can be hard to 'feel, look and act your best'. Yet this empathetic stance served to ensure that menstruation remained undiscussed and unnoticeable, as the advert instructed girls that they should continue with 'chores just the same'. It is presented by Anadin as objective fact, and has the effect of reinforcing

⁵⁴⁴ My approach here is informed by chapter four of Sylvia K. Blood, *Body Work: The Social Construction of Women's Body Image*, (Routledge, London, 2005), p.74, where she explores the contradiction inherent in the phrase 'most bodies are perfectly normal', featured in *More! Magazine* in the early 1990s in an attempt to represent 'ordinary women's bodies' in the magazine.

⁵⁴⁵ Annette Scrambler and Graham Scrambler, *Menstrual Disorders*, (Routledge, 1993), p.1.

understandings of an age - and gender-specific definition of appropriate feminine behaviour linked to domesticity and home making.

An advert for Duphaston premenstrual tension treatment that featured in *World Medicine* in 1983 used similar stereotypes. Taking a quote from an article by the doctor Katharina Dalton, it stated ‘the lynchpin of the family is the mother. When her life becomes a misery each month as the disturbances of a premenstrual syndrome recur, the consequences affect the whole family’. Both adverts used medical stereotypes regarding the pathology of female mood swings and reflect what Jordanova calls the ‘profoundly manipulative’ association between women and family.⁵⁴⁶ In *Images of Women*, Millum claims that Anadin marketed directly at women, because headaches allegedly prevented women from ‘dealing with the children and doing the ironing’.⁵⁴⁷ Haggett’s research provides an extended reading of such adverts, suggesting that Anadin identified a wide range of possible consumers for their product, sometimes marketing specifically at women and sometimes running gender-neutral adverts.⁵⁴⁸ Whilst adverts were not always gender-specific, the Anadin advert from 1971 chose to explicitly appeal not only to those women and girls with headaches, but to menstruating women and girls by mentioning periods and period pain for the first time. Anadin were not only signifying women’s current, and girls’ future social role through their marketing, but also the boundaries of appropriate (pre)menstrual and feminine etiquette. Anadin encouraged the viewer to cope with daily chores with no outward signs of discomfort or disruption, and positioned itself as the pharmacological intervention entrusted with ensuring this role was performed. Positing this notion to girls, Anadin outlined girls’ current and future trajectory.

⁵⁴⁶ *World Medicine*, 15th October 1983, in Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.146.

⁵⁴⁷ Trevor Millum, *Images of Women: Advertising in Women’s Magazines* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p.175 in Hagget, *Desperate Housewives*, p.161.

⁵⁴⁸ Hagget, *Desperate Housewives*, p.161.

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Figure 5.5: Anadin Advert, Jackie, 9.11.1974



Figure 5.6: Anadin advert, *Jackie*, 01.07.1972

In 1974 Anadin produced an advert titled, 'is every month going to be this difficult?' (Figure 5.5) The advert contained a black and white photograph that captured a young woman sat hunched, looking directly at the camera. With her head tilted, mouth closed, shoulders shrugged and arms hugging her knees, she looked unhappy. The mention of a monthly occurrence revealed its concern with the menstrual cycle. The image typified what a 'difficult period' looked like. Another *Anadin* advert (Figure 5.6) titled, 'now you know why they call it "the curse"' used a similar image of a young woman holding her head, staring out of shot with little expression on her face. Another advert that featured in *Jackie* in November 1973 (Figure 7) titled 'What they didn't tell you about being a woman', also featured an image of a young woman, slumped over holding her chin in her hands. This was a visual trope used by

Aspro as early as 1962 (Figure 2). All images fit with what Laura D. Hirshbein has suggested are, and were, commonplace visual representations of depression in twentieth-century American popular culture. Hirshbein noted that the cover for the 1995 copy of *Time* magazine featured a 'picture of a solitary woman looking down at a coffee cup', and suggested this was an image that 'seemed to imply that any woman who was alone without a smile on her face might be suspected of being depressed'.⁵⁴⁹

The text accompanying the Anadin advert (Figure 5) served to render audible the internal monologue of the model. The rhetorical question mimicked the questions found in adverts for menstrual protection and the agony aunt feature, suggesting Anadin's awareness of the style, format and function of menstrual technology advertising and the important role that agony aunt discussions played in informing girls about menstruation and their lives more broadly. The paragraphs of text underneath the image were presented as the response to the question, and drew on language that had been used more generally in analgesics marketing across the postwar period. It stated, 'periods can make you irritable and depressed'. The advice given in the advert: 'Don't let them.' Readers were informed that there were 'four medically approved ingredients' in Anadin tablets that worked together to leave you feeling 'bright and cheerful', notably traits women are expected to embody. The claimed impact on emotions was the reason 'why the Anadin formula is especially suitable for period pains'. Anadin succinctly suggested to readers that their analgesic could control girls' and women's emotional state, ultimately improving interpersonal relationships. The suggestion of emotional stability through self-medication was accompanied by other large, essentialising claims, including the statement 'having periods every month

⁵⁴⁹ Laura D. Hirshbein, *American Melancholy: Constructions of Depression in the Twentieth Century* (Rutgers University Press, 1980), pp.2-.17.

means that you are really a woman', that also picked up on the sense that menstruation loomed large in the imaginations of young girls as the marker of their entry into womanhood, as explored in chapter three.

There is a tension present in these adverts, magazines and in wider culture across the 1960s and 1970s, between the oversaturation of images of women as the embodiment of anxiety and depression, the invalidity of displays of any negatively coded emotions and the stigma surrounding mental illness. Advertisers began to use these images of depression, anxiety and nervousness to market their products specifically towards menstruating girls, affiliating hormonal or mood changes with pathologised understandings of mental instability and its threat to established gender roles. At the same time, adverts for menstrual protection in magazines were concerned solely with images of joy and movement. This suggests another tension. Menstrual technology brands and painkiller brands were reliant on opposing images of menstruation to market their products, and in turn girls were exposed to an assortment of multiple and contradictory messages about menstruation in their magazines.⁵⁵⁰

Adverts that relied on stereotypical images and understandings of the gendered nature of depression coexisted with other seemingly conflictual representations too. In 1974, the same year Anadin published 'is every month going to be this difficult?' in *Jackie*, Feminax published an advert titled, 'Jane's looking forward to her period' (figure 8).⁵⁵¹ The advert was situated in the top left corner of the magazine page, the

⁵⁵⁰ Penny Tinkler, 'Fragmentation and Inclusivity: Methods for Working with Girls' and Women's Magazines' in *Women in Magazines, Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. by Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips and S. Jay Kleinburg (Oxford, 2016), pp.25-39.

⁵⁵¹ 'Is every month going to be this difficult?', Anadin advert, *Jackie*, 11.11.1974.

text footed by an image of the Feminax packaging. The tagline read 'Because periods don't have to hurt'.⁵⁵²



(Figure 5.7: Anadin advert, *Jackie*, 17.11.1973)

⁵⁵² 'Jane's looking forward to her period', *Feminax* advert, *Jackie*, 24.07.1974.

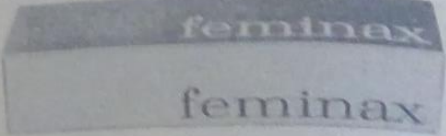
Jane's looking forward to her period.

On Tuesday week, Jane goes on holiday.
On Tuesday week, she also begins her period.
Which could make the start of her holiday something to dread instead of look forward to.
But it won't.

Because Jane takes Feminax every time her period causes her pain and discomfort.
She doesn't really know how Feminax works; all she knows is that she no longer suffers the way she suffered before she discovered Feminax.

Thanks to Feminax, Jane will enjoy her holiday.
Right from the start.

If you'd like our free booklet entitled "Pain & Your Period," write to Department J3, Nicholas Laboratories Limited, P.O. Box 17, 225 Bath Road, Slough, Bucks.



Nicholas

feminax

Because periods don't have to hurt.

Obtainable only from chemists.

(Figure 5.8: Feminax advert, *Jackie*, 07.07.1974)

Protagonist 'Jane' had carefully tracked her periods and knew her next coincided with a planned holiday. The ramifications of menstruating whilst holidaying was inferred, and it was assumed that readers who menstruated would be aware of the potential inconvenience. Feminax was presented as the way to avoid a ruined holiday. The reader was informed that Jane took Feminax 'every time' her period causes her pain and discomfort, a strategy that highlighted the usefulness of this product and its recurrent, monthly, place in the consumer's life. References to tracking

and planning periods emphasise the cyclical recurrence of the experience, an approach that encourages readers to keep coming back to Feminax.

Jane knew when she would be menstruating, but she did not 'really know how' Feminax worked, only that she doesn't 'suffer anymore' after taking it. Jane represents the average user, who lacks a scientific or medical understanding of menstruation or pharmacology. Why these products help her is unimportant, because Jane's ability to know that she feels better in her body is regarded as enough. This indicates a subtle nod by advertisers to the validity of women's sensory perceptions and understandings of their own bodies, yet simultaneously normalises a degree of ignorance about how the product works. The advert sells an image of agency, suggesting that a level of planning allowed teen girls a level of individual control over their body.

There are two tensions here. Firstly, this control is urgent. If Jane or the projected user lacks it, she risked revealing her menstrual discomfort. The advert is reliant on menstruation being perceived as difficult and disruptive. Acknowledgement of the wider cultural place of menstruation and reach of menstrual stigma reminds us why this control is necessary, making it difficult to interpret her planning as solely down to choice. Secondly, there is a tension here between experiential knowledge and scientific and medical knowledge. The advert explicitly states that the protagonist Jane does not know how Feminax works.

The advert was also concerned with stressing menstrual management practices. 'Looking forward' to a period denotes a preoccupation with time, with tracking internal bodily processes through external means, and with careful planning to ensure activities and occasions are not affected. This phrase was also, at first glance, more optimistic in comparison to older headings that centred phrases such as

'off days' and 'black days'.⁵⁵³ Not only was Jane looking forward to the future through careful planning, the phrase could be read as implying she was anticipating the arrival of her next period, because she has purchased Feminax. The discussion of pain and the potential for a ruined holiday in the main body of the text demonstrates that the advert was not reconceptualising how periods were perceived in their entirety; rather it positioned Feminax as the cure for pain and discomfort and as a positive force that enabled the consumer to feel good about something typically shrouded in negative connotations and presented as something to dread.

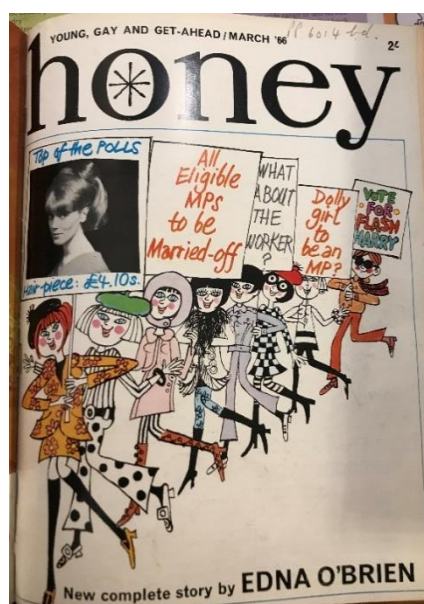


Figure 5.9: *Honey Magazine*, 03.1966

⁵⁵³'Off Day Aches?' Aspro, *Honey*, 1962 and 'Now you know what off days really are', *Jackie*, 26.11.1972.

Empowerment, liberation and freedom became notions closely associated with menstrual technology advertising. Mass-market magazines and advertisers co-opted, reworked and commercialised the language and aims of social justice movements to sell their products (Figure 5.9). Advertisers that published in magazines were reliant on a form of empowerment that favoured individualist and consumerist notions of equality that encouraged an individual to spend to ease their situation.⁵⁵⁴ Apparent shifts to more positive conceptualisations of menstruation present in adverts for painkillers should be considered in relation to this cultural climate, and the shifts in advertising viewed as offering insight into the most marketable and profitable preoccupations of the era.⁵⁵⁵ This language could be seen as an indication of the way the aims, principles and calls for collective societal change were co-opted and reformulated into individualist- consumerist terms in mass market magazines.⁵⁵⁶

An E.P. period pain tablet advertisement featured in *Honey* took a similar approach. Titled 'Let's face it... Why suffer every month like they did in the old days?' and accompanied by an image of a young woman smiling. 'The old days' reinforced notions of a modern product, suitable for a modern girl, symptomatic of the era in which young, get ahead femininity defined by freedom, comfort, and independence was portrayed as markedly different from previous generations. It goes on to say, 'Now, little E.P. Tablets, easy to take, and harmless (as your doctor knows), will give you quick soothing relief.' The reference to doctors imbued the company with a sense of scientific authority.

⁵⁵⁴ Sharra L. Vostral, *Under Wraps, A History of Menstrual Hygiene Technology* (Lexington Books, 2011), p.6

⁵⁵⁵ Maggie Andrews and Sally McNamara, 'Introduction to Part III, The Long 1960s Cultural Revolution?' in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present* (Routledge, 2014), p.8.

⁵⁵⁶ Penny Tinkler, 'Are You Really Living?' If Not, 'Get With It!' The Teenage Self and Lifestyle in Young Women's Magazines, Britain 1957-70', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4, p.614.

In another of EP.'s adverts, titled 'No 'off-days' for the modern girl', the tablets were presented as 'the modern answer to this problem' (Figure 4.10 and 4.11).⁵⁵⁷ The visual and textual elements work in conjunction to suggest a modern product. The text and logo are bold, and the image shows a fashionable woman, with short hair and heavy eye makeup, smiling. Her self-presentation denotes modernity, mirrored in the bold font. A description of the 'two ingredient' tablet is given: 'Ephedrine *to control* the causes of pain. Phenacetin *to stop* the pain itself.' Mirroring the level of scientific knowledge provided in the 'off-days' advert, other E.P. adverts also stated explicitly that their products contained 'no aspirin' and that this made them 'safe'. The description of pharmaceuticals reveals an attempt to garner reader trust and brand affiliation through the use of scientific - sounding terms that typically stem from institutions or individuals with authority. This reflects the discussion of menstrual technology branding in chapter three, and its reliance on scientific modes of representation to garner trust.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ E.P Advert, *Honey*, 03.1963.

⁵⁵⁸ 'No 'off-days' for the modern girl', E.P Advert, *Honey*, 03.1963.

Pro-Forma tablets can aid in the pursuit of ‘lovely womanly curves’, certainly positioned as aspirational for younger, pubescent or pre-pubescent girls. Yet the notion of ‘womanly curves’ being marketed to pubescent girls who have not finished growing is striking, and suggests a degree of exploitative and reckless marketing.

In the advert, Pro-Forma purported to offer women a ‘natural treatment proved to develop a full firm rounded bust without drugs, hormones, dieting, exercise or massage.’⁵⁵⁹ Originating in the USA, claims of ‘thoroughly tested’ medical and scientific trials, ‘300,000 satisfied women’ and ‘3000 doctors prepped with test samples’ were all used to encourage British girls to become part of this trend, to purchase Pro-Forma and attempt to modify their bodies so to not only appear, but ‘become’ more womanly. There is no discussion of pharmacology or how this product works if it is neither a drug nor a hormone tablet. FDA papers from 1968 reveal the organisation refused to approve the drug as safe, or effective for its intended use.⁵⁶⁰ The false claims suggest that pseudo-scientific backing had the potential for deception and danger, but also that scientific legitimacy was weaponized as a marketing strategy across a number of products marketed to girls in their magazines.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ ‘Wonderful NEW scientific discovery to develop lovely womanly curves’, Pro-forma advert, *Honey*, 03.1963, p.58.

⁵⁶⁰ FDA Papers, Volume 2, February 1968, p.26.

⁵⁶¹ Unfounded claims to scientific legitimacy have not decreased over time. These adverts share similarities with modern day marketing campaigns for diet and detox adverts that tend to now circulate on social media. For more on how weight loss discourses play out on social media under the guise of clean eating see Louise Morgan, “Having Been there...I Know How Hard It Is”: Relatability and Ordinarity in Clean Eating’. *Relatability and Ordinarity in Clean Eating*. Gender and Health in the Post-1945 World Seminar Series, 11 January 2021. Unpublished paper.

Authorities on Period Pain in Magazines

Laws suggests that cultural expectations influence where people turn for information and a diagnosis. Her critical analysis of discourses of pre-menstrual tension has provided a useful framework for approaching the voices of teenage girls who discuss their period in magazines. In *Seeing Red*, Laws explores the social process of being ill. She writes of how, as humans, we are always 'aware of the symptom of something - something that causes us pain or discomfort, something if taken to a doctor, would be considered seriously.' She separates this from 'illness', which she describes as a social process we may or may not enter into on experiencing feelings that could constitute a symptom. Embodied experiences provide a subject with knowledge unique to the self, including knowledge of any potential 'symptoms' that exist outside of medical categories but that can also be understood in relation to them. Laws cites a study undertaken in 1973 that investigated why people do or do not seek treatment for symptoms, and why they do at the time they do. Studying outpatient clinics of an eye and ear hospital in Boston, researchers found that attendance at the hospital had nothing to do with the seriousness of the symptom the person was suffering. Rather, presence at the hospital arose within the constraints of their social situations. Whether a person attended depended largely on the 'fit or lack of fit' of their symptoms with cultural expectations.⁵⁶²

Reading girls' magazines offers insight into the factors driving girls' health-seeking behaviours. Although magazines stigmatised menstruation, they offered girls

⁵⁶² Sophie Laws, 'Who needs PMT? A Feminist approach to the politics of pre-menstrual tension', in *Seeing Red: The Politics of pre-menstrual tension* Sophie Laws, Valerie Hey and Andrea Eagan (Introduction by Stevi Jackson) (Hutchinson, 1985), pp.29- 33.

a degree of sanctity. Reader letters, amongst other more stigmatising representations of menstruation, menstrual discomfort and mental health that featured in magazines, offer insight into the cultural expectations that impacted how girls sought knowledge about menstruation, and the means by which they obtained help for menstrual-related complaints. Teenage magazines helped readers to understand and articulate their pain, and provided the opportunity to have their concerns validated. The discussions of premenstrual discomfort that they featured also reveal the centrality of menstruation to contemporary ideological constructions of gender, femininity, and women's psychological and emotional health, and the centrality of each to contemporary understandings of menstruation. Analysis of articles and problem pages reveals where teenage girls sought information about menstrual discomfort, signalling that they chose these spaces and authority figures because cultural expectations regarding menstrual secrecy negated the accessibility and quality of medical information and medical professionals. There is what could be described as a 'self-help' attitude towards acquiring knowledge and advice that was in keeping with the magazines' individualist-consumerist positioning. This notion of self-help is key to considering why readers sought information about menstruation from magazines, and why the aforementioned over-the-counter painkillers would have been important, accessible and preferable methods of soothing menstrual-related ailments.

Ivy (b.1963) began menstruating in the early 1970s. As stated in chapter three, her mum had bought her a book about periods, and this constituted her education. She had very little conversation with adults at home or at school and listed her friends as her main source of knowledge about sex and menstruation. She had painful periods, and stressed that this caused her some emotional upheaval. She began to call them 'mood swings', but stopped and stated, 'not mood swings, but feeling really

irate sometimes'. She wanted to understand why she 'felt like that'. She suggested, 'you might have looked in magazines...erm, looking in the...you could learn a lot from the problem pages!'. She laughed when she mentioned the problem pages, indicating her awareness that they were a source of entertainment and often derided. Asked which magazines she liked, she mentioned *Jackie*, and suggested the Cathy and Claire problem page helped her with 'boyfriends and stuff' and that 'they used to talk about periods.'⁵⁶³

In 1970 an edition of *Petticoat* contained a letter from a reader asking for help with her irregular periods. It was published in a feature titled 'Can I help you? The *Petticoat* doctor answers your questions'. The reader wrote in to say that her periods, which occurred at three-monthly intervals, caused her 'a great deal of pain and discomfort'. She was concerned this might affect her in later life, and that her weight was contributing to the irregularity of her cycle. She commented that she felt depressed, mirroring the language seen in advertising for period pain relief, and ended her letter by saying, 'I am uneasy about this but I do not wish to visit my doctor, because frankly, he frightens me'.⁵⁶⁴

The reply contained a short discussion of thyroid glands and the menstrual cycle, urged the girl to visit her doctor, and emphasised that the advice given did not compensate for visiting a GP and receiving guidance or diagnosis from a trained authority. Similar advice was also present in a feature titled 'Girls only Talk: Menstruation' published in *Petticoat* four years previously. The article's author Caroline Richards urged girls to 'go and chat up your doctor if you have any sort of worry'. The doctor was referred to using he/him pronouns, and assumed male from

⁵⁶³ Ivy, BSF OH, interviewed by TL, 8.12.20, [0:49:23].

⁵⁶⁴ 'Can I help you?', *Petticoat*, 11.07.1970.

his given occupation. Richards suggested that 'he is used to dealing with this kind of difficulty, so you needn't ever feel embarrassed!'.

The article explained what happened during the monthly cycle. Subheadings separated the discussion into 'what it's all about', 'how it affects you', 'how to cope' and 'towels' and 'tampons'. The introduction to the article framed it as a ground-breaking and necessary educational tool, breaking 'through the silence barrier' and 'right out into the open' to 'blow the tops off some of those old Victorian fallacies'. Referencing the overlap in content about menstruation, the introduction concluded, 'like the old agony columns say, "a problem shared is a problem halved"'. The article told girls, 'luckily we can talk about it these days - a couple of generations ago the whole subject was hushed up, and thought of as an illness'.⁵⁶⁵ The article recommended 'Codural, EP or Feminax' from the chemist, and pointed to further literature that could help girls who experience period pains. This included Erna Wright's *Periods Without Pain*, which drew on methods of 'body-control used in natural childbirth'. The short publication included a chapter dedicated to 'understanding the works', and a number of chapters containing practical advice about 'how to sit, walk and stand'. These were divided under headings such as 'conscious controlled breathing', 'making your muscles obey you', and 'Dry-land swimming', and provided exercises for menstruators to complete for seventeen days before their next period. Dry land swimming consisted of lying stomach down on a pouffe or a coffee table and simulating breast stroke movements for six minutes at a time to ease pelvic tension. Under the 'Do's and Don'ts' section, menstruators were instructed, 'do not take any

⁵⁶⁵ 'Girls Talk: Menstruation', *Petticoat*, 30th July 1966, pp.28-29.

pain-killing drugs. The essence of this routine is your own conscious, controlled effort'.⁵⁶⁶

Questions about menstrual pain continued to be sent in to *Petticoat*, featuring in the 'doctor's casebook' feature, the 'can I help you?' feature, and in Claire Rayner's advice column.⁵⁶⁷ Analysis of reader correspondence suggests that magazine letter pages were a place where teenage girls felt comfortable talking about (pre)menstrual discomfort. Magazine discussions reveal that representations of menstruation and menstrual discomfort offered a mix of genuinely helpful and enlightening advice, and assumptions and prejudices that contributed to girls' and women's bodies being positioned as faulty and failing.

'JB from Edinburgh' wrote to *Honey's HELP!* column in 1972. She asked, 'my periods tend to be quite heavy, long - and often painful. As well as getting pains, I feel dreadful and headachey and find it difficult to concentrate on my work in the office. Is there anything one can do about this? I'm 17 years old by the way.' Familiarising her with medical terminology, JB was reassured that many girls suffer from 'painful periods, or dysmenorrhea'. The reply described painful periods, suggested painkillers would help and concluded 'if your periods have only recently become painful there may be some psychological reason behind it - you might be worried about your work or your boyfriend or under stress'. By suggesting the root of the pain could be psychological, the advice drew on longstanding notions of the link between menstruation and the vulnerability of the female psyche. The advice also suggested the reader might be in extra pain because 'old wives tales' about menstruation being

⁵⁶⁶ Erna Wright, *How to Overcome the Use of Drugs: Periods without Pain* (Tandem, 1966).

⁵⁶⁷ 'Doctors Casebook', *Petticoat*, 21.03.1970, Claire Rayner Advises, *Petticoat*, 21.03.1970, 'Can I help you?', *Petticoat*, 21.03.1970.

a 'messy', 'unpleasant' 'curse' made her ashamed. The column offered reassurance through a description of menstruation that said 'periods are just the natural shedding of the lining of the womb for a pregnancy that failed to occur, and are nothing to feel ashamed or distressed about'.

This description of menstruation might now be so embedded into our cultural understandings of menstruation that it appears beyond critique or deconstruction. Yet as Martin notes, medical constructions and depictions of menstruation and menopause rely on a language of 'loss and failure' which contribute to negative views of both and reinforce essentialist ideas of menstruators' primary function as childbearers. Medical texts typically inform students that 'when fertilisation fails to occur, the endometrium is shed, and a new cycle starts', information not dissimilar to the description offered in *Honey*. This language of loss, Martin suggests, harks back to older understandings that menstruation was 'the uterus crying for a lack of a baby'.⁵⁶⁸ Reproducing a similar notion, the *Honey* response went on to say, 'another common cause is a slight hormonal imbalance which your doctor can put right by prescribing a hormonal compound similar to the pill. Finally, if it's any consolation, the condition is usually relieved or completely cured by pregnancy.'⁵⁶⁹

In 1926, an article was published in the *Lancet* entitled 'Menstruation and Pain'. As Strange notes, 'this article seemed to suggest that if women behaved as nature intended, continual pregnancy and lactation would render menstruation obsolete'. Strange positions this *Lancet* article as evidence of lingering Victorian ideals, prefixing her discussion of it with the phrase 'as late as 1926'. Nearly fifty years later, the idea

⁵⁶⁸ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body, A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*, (Beacon, 2001), p.46.

⁵⁶⁹ HELP! Column, *Honey*, 07.29.1972

that fulfilling the biological-cum-social role of motherhood would 'cure' menstrual-related pain was being proposed to adolescent girls in mass-market periodicals.⁵⁷⁰

Honey's critique of menstrual discourses did not consider the centrality of medicine to perpetuating representations of menstruation as defect and the menstruating body as failing. It was the unspecified 'old wives tales' passed between those without official expertise or training that *Honey* suggested contributed to menstrual stigma, evidencing how science manifests in culture as the locus of truth and therefore beyond subject to scrutiny. *Honey* unwittingly reproduced longstanding medical metaphors whilst attempting to denounce the place of 'old wives tales' that positioned menstruation as abject.

Honey presented medical knowledge to readers in other areas of the magazine too, including a 'medical dictionary' that featured in the early 1960s. Written by a medical doctor who remained anonymous for 'professional reasons', the column took the notably gendered conditions, 'Depression', 'Headache' and 'Hysteria' and explored their medical meanings for the reader.⁵⁷¹ Dealing with medical ailments beginning with H, in 1962 the column covered headaches and hysteria in one sitting. The exploration of headaches mentioned migraines, stating that 'they are a common type of headache women get just before their period'. Next to the discussion of headaches and their relation to menstruation was the discussion of hysteria. Likely a deliberate editorial decision to include a discussion of headaches, periods and hysteria within the same text-box feature, the example provided an extended definition of hysteria and stated that 'hysteria is far more common among women'.

⁵⁷⁰ Julie Marie Strange, 'I believe it to be a case depending on menstruation': Madness and Menstrual Taboo in British Medical Practice, c.1840-1930', in *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed. by Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp.102-116.

⁵⁷¹ Medical Dictionary, *Honey*, 11.1961 and 03.1962.

It also suggested that sufferers 'respond to or avoid, their difficulties with a convenient loss of some bodily function - and they are completely unaware of faking.' There is an explicitly moral, judgemental tone, which is extended to the description of how symptoms of hysteria might present in a sufferer: 'these hysterical attacks often come in front of a good audience, and the "victim", you will notice, picks a soft spot to land on'. 'Neglect' is suggested to be the most appropriate treatment, because 'as soon as everyone goes away, the symptoms disappear as well!'. Sufferers of hysteria were presented as a homogenous category, othered further through the use of 'they' to collectively demark and ostracise. This distinguished the medical doctor in medical literature from the women who are suffering, drawing on and reasserting the cultivated gulf between scientific modes of seeing and feminised modes of suffering described.⁵⁷²

Yet not all discussions in magazines involved reaffirming existing power dynamics between girls and their doctors, and mass culture and medicine. In Claire Rayner's advice column featured in *Petticoat* in March 1970, Jo from Slough wrote in to ask, 'What can I do about period pains?' In the response Jo was directed to write to the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) in London for information on classes in relaxation for 'girls with your problem'. The reader was informed that the NCT 'runs excellent and most successful courses', and that she would find 'life much easier' once she had enrolled on them. This advice can be read as an important intervention in healthcare education and provision that differed from the longer explanation of pain offered in

⁵⁷² For more on Victorian understandings of menstruation as madness see Julie Marie Strange, 'I believe it to be a case depending on menstruation': Madness and Menstrual Taboo in British Medical Practice, c.1840-1930', in *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed. by Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp.102-116 and Carol Smith Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.167-216.

Honey's HELP! column and subsequent advice to identify stressors, take hormone tablets or have a baby.

Yet the methods of easing period pains offered by the NCT and advised by Claire Rayner were the same methods being offered to women who wanted help ease pain in childbirth.⁵⁷³ As a *Petticoat* reader, Jo would have likely been anywhere between ten and twenty, so to enter and liaise with a centre known for its work with older, pregnant, mostly middle-class mothers, would have implications for an unmarried teenager and likely be inaccessible to anyone not middle-class. Contemporary fears regarding teenage sexuality often centred round the threat of underage pregnancy outside of wedlock. As Beier found in her study of Barrow, Lancaster and Preston, teenagers were aware of the 'shame pre-marital pregnancy could inflict 'and above mothers wanted to protect their maturing daughters from the shame of pre-marital pregnancy'.⁵⁷⁴ Contemporary attitudes were scathing, and those who found to be pregnant were shamed and often ostracised from families and wider communities.

Evidence of the stigmatisation of teenage pregnancy was present in the same magazine that offered the advice to visit NCT centres. One week previously, an article entitled 'Girls in Trouble, The Unmarried Mother' explored the 'problems, conflicts and crises' of teenage girls who became pregnant outside of marriage. Whilst the article gave space to the voices of young mothers to tell their own version of their experiences of young motherhood, it repeatedly emphasised the perseverance of societal

⁵⁷³ Claire Rayner Advises, *Petticoat*, 21.3.1970.

⁵⁷⁴ Beier 'We were green as grass', p.468-469.

prejudice. It also actively contributed to it through the sensationalist naming of the article as 'girls in trouble'.⁵⁷⁵

Writing to MO nearly 30 years later, Bernice (1919), commented that she was 'glad todays girls' were not brought up ignorant of the facts of life, but questioned if openness had gone 'overboard'. She asked 'with all the very young unmarried mothers about, who can say?', reflecting her internalisation of the social and moral codes defining the era in which she grew up. This response came the year following Boris Johnson's 1995 *Spectator* column about 'ill-raised, ignorant, aggressive and illegitimate' children of single mothers, suggesting a contemporary climate of hostility towards women who were raising children in alternate ways to the nuclear family ideal.⁵⁷⁶ Thus whilst Rayner knew it would be helpful for teenage girls to liaise with the NCT, navigating not only menstrual stigma but stigma regarding teenage sexuality might have been difficult for teenage girls, more so than gleaning advice and information about period pain from problem pages, articles and advertisements.⁵⁷⁷ The culture of menstrual concealment extended and applied to menstrual pain too. Alongside magazines, women's recollections of their experiences of menstrual pain are testament to this.

⁵⁷⁵ 'The Unmarried Mother', *Petticoat*, 07.03.1970, pp.6-7.

⁵⁷⁶ 'Boris Johnson said children of single mothers were 'ill-raised, ignorant, aggressive and illegitimate' in newly unearthed column' *Independent*, 28.11.2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/election-boris-johnson-articles-women-women-journalist-spectator-labour-a9221036.html>, [accessed 04/06/2021].

⁵⁷⁷ This is speculative. Further patient-centred research is required to make any further conclusions regarding young girl's experiences attending NCT and sexual health centres, and their interactions with and attitudes towards young motherhood. Caroline Rusterholz is currently researching the role of the Brooks Advisory Centre in girls' engagements with contraception. This is something that might come up in her research as it progresses.

Invisible and Invalid Pain

This section explores how individuals without medical expertise wrote about their everyday experiences of (pre)menstrual discomfort, and their accounts of their interactions with medical and cultural constructions of pain and discomfort. Responses to the MO Directive are useful for exploring accounts of individual perceptions, articulations and experiences of (pre)menstrual discomfort. They offer insight into how women remedied, prevented, treated, coped with, or ignored their menstrual pain, in their own words, offering bottom-up perspectives of everyday pain management and of interactions with medical personnel or ideas.

Leticia Fernández-Fontecha notes that ‘pain has become an important topic within the historiography of experience and the emotions, as shown by the proliferation of historical analyses of medical and physiological constructions related to suffering or the remedies that prevent and treat it.’⁵⁷⁸ Menstrual discomfort and pain offers an interesting case study, as it has often been misunderstood, invalidated or reworked by peers and medical professionals into signs and symptoms of mental illness, resulting in negligence and invasive medical procedures.⁵⁷⁹ In 2017 Kayla Webley Adler wrote for *Marie Claire* that ‘female patients’ symptoms are less likely to be taken seriously by doctors, and women are more likely to be ‘misdiagnosed, have their symptoms go unrecognised, or be told what they’re experiencing is psychosomatic.’⁵⁸⁰ Hilary Mantel’s memoir *Giving Up the Ghost* testifies to the consequences medical ignorance

⁵⁷⁸ Leticia Fernández-Fontecha, review of Rob Boddice, *Pain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.152 in *Social History of Medicine*, 31:3 (2018), pp.671-672.

⁵⁷⁹ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast Feminism, Sex and Morality* (Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005), pp.64-65, Hilary Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, (Fourth Estate, 2003), Jane M. Usher, Janette Perz, ‘Resisting the Mantle of the Monstrous Feminine: Women’s Construction and Experience of Premenstrual Embodiment’, in *The Palgrave Handbook Of Critical Menstruation Studies* (Palgrave, 2020), p.215 and Frost and Eble, *Interrogating Gendered Pathologies*, p.8.

⁵⁸⁰ Kayla Webley Adler, ‘Women are Dying Because Doctors Treat Us Like Men’, *Marie Claire*, (2017) accessed 12/12/2020 <https://www.marieclaire.com/health-fitness/a26741/doctors-treat-women-like-men/> in Frost and Eble, *Interrogating Gendered Pathologies*, p.8.

regarding menstrual pain. Writing of her experiences with medical practitioners in the 1970s, Mantel tells her story of undiagnosed endometriosis which resulted in a hysterectomy aged 27. Mantel described her pain as ‘nibbling’, ‘stabbing’ and ‘flitting’ and ‘double any ordinary pain’. She saw a nonplussed doctor, who on the second visit put her on antidepressants which impacted her psychological state enormously, resulting in time spent at a psychiatric hospital, but did not help her pain. After this point, Mantel was diagnosed as overambitious (for being a woman who studied law) and once again dismissed by doctors and psychiatrists until she self-diagnosed, returned to the doctors, and underwent an operation.⁵⁸¹ Making sense of these harrowing experiences helps us, as Tracey Loughran and Gayle Davis state, to ‘understand women’s expectations of their reproductive futures, their abilities to shape their own lives and the forces that constrained these choices even in this era of unprecedented freedom and choice.’⁵⁸²

There is continuity to such experiences spanning decades. Mantel’s experiences in the seventies suggests, as Diane E. Hoffman and Anita J. Tarzian did in 2001, that when women and gender non-conforming individuals seek treatment for chronic pain, they are ‘more likely to be inadequately treated by health-care providers, who, at least initially, discount [their] verbal pain reports.’⁵⁸³ Research has found that gender also influences how individuals articulate and express pain to health-care providers, but that health-care providers respond differently to these articulations too depending on the identity of the patient, resulting in disparities in treatment.⁵⁸⁴ In 1990,

⁵⁸¹ Hilary Mantel, *Giving up the Ghost*, (Fourth Estate, 2010), pp.155-232.

⁵⁸² Tracey Loughran and Gayle Davis, ‘Introduction: Agency and Invisibility in Constructions of Fertility’ in *The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History Approaches, Contexts and Perspectives*, ed. By Gayle Davis and Tracey Loughran, (Palgrave, 2017) pp.652-653.

⁵⁸³ Diane E. Hoffmann and Anita J. Tarzian, ‘The Girl Who Cried Pain: A Bias Against Women in the Treatment of Pain’, *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics*, 29 (2001): p.13.

⁵⁸⁴ Anne Werner, Lise Widding Isaksen, Kirsti Malterud, ‘I Am Not The Kind of Woman Who Complains of Everything’: Illness Stories on Self and Shame in Women with Chronic Pain’, *Social*

six years before the MO Directive was sent out, one study revealed that women were more likely to be given sedatives for their pain, whilst men were given pain medication, implying women were perceived to be feeling and experiencing anxiety rather than pain.⁵⁸⁵ This reflects reports by Hoffman and Tarzian who reviewed evidence from the American Medical Association's *Task Force on Gender Disparities in Clinical Decision-Making* and concluded that physicians were found to consistently view women's (but not men's) symptom reports as caused by emotional factors, even in the presence of positive clinical tests.⁵⁸⁶ Such attitudes do not appear worlds away from the attitudes described by historians of Victorian medicine and menstrual attitudes. The Anadin adverts analysed previously in this chapter testify to the longevity of nervousness, anxiety and depression being coded as feminine, and its affiliation between gynaecological and psychological health beyond medical spheres.

As Erin A. Frost and Michelle F. Eble state, 'biomedicine and public health as institutions have historical patterns of responding to particular kinds of bodies in unjust and inequitable ways'.⁵⁸⁷ In Britain, the findings of a 1957 study exploring the motivations and habits of individuals who purchased over-the-counter analgesics offers insight into the ways that pain was dismissed and diminished, not only in medical circles, but in other institutional ways throughout the 1950's. The study provides an interesting way in to thinking about the cultural expectations, stereotypes and prejudices that dictated how people understood pain in post war Britain. The study was conducted by motivational analysts interested in exploring the relationship between mass market advertising and consumer purchasing habits. The study wanted

Science & Medicine, 59:5 (2004), pp.1035-1045 and Hoffman and Tarzian, 'The Girl Who Cried Pain', p.17.

⁵⁸⁵ K.L Calderone, "The Influence of Gender on the Frequency of Pain and Sedative Medication Administered to Postoperative Patients," *Sex Roles*, 23 (1990),pp. 713-725.

⁵⁸⁶ Hoffman and Tarzian, 'The Girl Who Cried Pain', p.13.

⁵⁸⁷ Frost and Eble, *Interrogating Gendered Pathologies*, p.8.

to understand more about who was buying over-the-counter painkillers, and why they were doing so. The study's findings suggested that those who bought over-the-counter analgesics could be divided into two groups; 'anxiety-ridden hypochondriacs who were prone to exaggerate aches and pains' or 'aggressive, self-reliant types who scorned doctors and preferred to self-medicate'.⁵⁸⁸ The established categories are patronising and inherently reductive. They serve as a clear indication of the importance of critically analysing research processes and findings, the power dynamics inherent in their production, and of asking who is doing the observing and who is the observed, a research question at the heart of much contemporary feminist work.⁵⁸⁹

Contrary to intention, the 1957 study of painkiller purchase and usage offers historians more information about the prejudices, assumptions and inner worlds of those who conducted and concluded the research than it does about the habits, lifestyles and experiences of its subjects. It offers a great deal of information about how these researchers perceived people who bought painkillers to manage pain, and the cultural climate which allowed these ideas to fester and become a part of understandings of pain both at an institutional and at an everyday level. Both categories are laden with moral judgements about what constitutes a painful experience worthy of self-medication and whose pain is valid, evidencing the ways that individual experiences of pain could be trivialised, diminished, invalidated and misconstrued. Whilst there is no explicit reference to menstruation in the 1957 study, MO accounts reveal that some of the respondents often bought over-the-counter

⁵⁸⁸ V. Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (Pelican, 1957), p.63.

⁵⁸⁹ Erin A Frost and Michelle F Eble, state in *Interrogating Gendered Pathologies*, p.5 'Feminist technoscience scholars, as well as this collection are concerned with how biomedical knowledge is produced, what that knowledge means for particular kinds of bodies, and challenging any inequalities that happen- and are reified- as a result'. Nikita Aashi Chadha warned against 'white saviour' approaches within the period poverty movement' in 'Lets Talk. Period: Inclusivity and Diversity UK Expert Views', (2018), p.6.

painkillers for their period pains. This was a result of fear and/or distrust (not scorn) of medical personnel and as a method for helping with their very real and severe (not exaggerated) painful experiences. Teenage girls' magazines from the sixties and seventies were littered with advertisements for painkillers that often made explicit reference to pre-menstrual symptoms or painful periods, suggesting brands had a clear idea of their target market and that these products were being bought to help with menstrual-related issues. The categories outlined in the 1957 study cannot account for these experiences.

Despite and because of its prejudice and scathing assessment, the findings of this study offer a useful way of assessing the importance of painkillers at the time, and of the cultural positioning and power of teenage girls. The girls who wrote to magazines for help managing period pain do not easily fit in either category suggested by this study. It is plausible that the group of 'self-reliant types who scorned doctors and preferred to self-medicate' should be re-considered, and space made for teenage girls who may well have decided against a visit to the doctor, and preferred to self-medicate, but did so because of the weight of cultural expectations that made other means of support inaccessible. The way women reflect on their experiences of period pain in MO testimony reveals how women's pain has been trivialised. The motivational analysts' assessment of those who bought over-the-counter painkillers as either 'anxiety ridden hypochondriacs who were prone to exaggerate aches and pains; or 'aggressive, self-reliant types who scorned doctors and preferred to self-medicate' we can begin to see the culture within which women's pain existed. Clearly, pain was dismissed and diminished, not only in medical circles but in other institutional ways, through the research studies and findings of motivational analysts and advertisers too.

Articulating Menstrual Pain

In *Pain - A Cultural History*, Mosoco emphasises the important role social recognition plays in enabling individuals to understand, articulate and feel okay about their pain, stating, 'for those who are in pain, the probability that their experience will be culturally meaningful increases depending on whether it can be imitated or represented...That the pain is conscious or unconscious is not as important as whether its presence is socially recognized'.⁵⁹⁰ Mosoco's comments attest to the significance of representation and shared knowledge for an individual's ability to understand, process, experience, and express pain. In Emma Sheppard's words, 'Pain, like all emotions, is shaped socially; our understandings of pain are social, as are our expressions; our understandings of pain are rooted in our gendered, racialized, sexualized identities - and others' readings of our bodyminds through those same prisms'.⁵⁹¹ MO testimony about period pain can reveal to us what happens to sufferers when pain is not socially validated and rarely represented. It also offers the opportunity to explore how the intersections of an individual's identity shape both the individual's personal understanding and experience of pain, and others' responses to it. The responses reveal how a lack of social recognition of menstrual pain perpetuated stigma, and inhibited conversation, with the potential for real and damaging effects on health resulting from the stigmatisation of menstrual pain. Menstruation was taboo, its presence supposed to remain invisible and undiscussed. The words of MO

⁵⁹⁰ Mosoco, *A Cultural History of Pain*, p.8.

⁵⁹¹ Emma Sheppard, 'Chronic Pain as Emotion', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 14:1, (2020), pp.5-20.

respondents reveal the potential for harm, stress and negligence born from both the stigmatisation and minimisation of menstrual pain and menstruation more broadly.

Embodied menstrual management was difficult, had restrictive effects on day-to-day life, and persistently reinforced the notion that visible menstruation or pain was indicative of a breakdown of individual control and transgression of suitable gender roles.⁵⁹² To avoid one form of social marginalisation, girls were encouraged to remain ignorant about, ignore or underplay period pain and other gynaecological concerns, which could, in turn, facilitate alternate and additional forms of social marginalisation born from the experience of either acute or chronic pain.⁵⁹³ MO testimony about (pre)menstrual discomfort shows what happens to sufferers when pain is not socially validated. It allows us to explore the ways invalidation affects women's sense of self and their place in society, and how a lack of social recognition of menstrual pain feeds an inability to establish 'intersubjective truths' across gendered lines.

Eliza (b.1963) begun menstruating in 1975 and 'always died of a really bad tummy ache'. Yet she never medicalised her experiences, stating 'I don't think I have a medical problem' and that 'it's just one of those things'. She disliked the pill, which she mentioned as a potential option for helping ease period pains. She talked of her concern about the broader health-related issues and side effects associated with taking the pill. She believed it was the 'cause of a lot of health problems in women'. She made a decision aged 16 to never take it, and had 'accepted the responsibilities that come along with this'. This demonstrates the significance of adolescence to the potential and actual trajectory of women's lives. It is testament to the importance of

⁵⁹² Jane M. Usher, Janette Perz, 'Resisting the Mantle of the Monstrous Feminine: Women's Construction and Experience of Premenstrual Embodiment', in *The Palgrave Handbook Of Critical Menstruation Studies* (Palgrave, 2020), p.215.

⁵⁹³ Havi Carel, *Phenomenology of Illness* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p.8

girls being able to enact agency during youth. Her decision at 16, is still valid to her as an adult. She states that 'stuffing copious amounts of tablets' didn't 'do the job', nor did visits to the doctor who was 'useless'. She bought 'over-the-counter things like Paracodol or Paramol' which are 'as good as it gets.' A voluntary hysterectomy was ruled out. 'I wouldn't consider a hysterectomy as I believe that complications are likely to arise and I could be left worse off.'⁵⁹⁴ The importance of choice to this respondent is huge, and her weighing up of her preferred choice with the potential negative health consequences offers an example of the precarious position women and girls face when trying to take control of their reproductive health, as the threat of causing their own ill-health through difficult and multifaceted personal decisions is ever-present.

Linda (b.1961) opened her response by stating that her reaction to the Directive was to give a 'wry smile'. She went on to say that she had had a hysterectomy in January and resultantly no longer needed menstrual products. She recorded 'mixed feelings', but stated the 'main one' was that she was glad she had been given the 'all clear'. She stated, 'I don't know yet whether I would say I'm pleased that I'll no longer be having periods.' She concluded, 'I suppose so, in one way, but in another way, my choice about whether to have children or not has been taken away - mostly I resent not having this choice'.⁵⁹⁵ Eliza's strong desire to not have a hysterectomy, in contrast to both Mantel's and Linda's story of loss, provides a poignant example of how empowering reproductive choices can be for women, and how devastating a lack of such choices can be too. As Laws has stated, there is a 'deep conflict between a need to control our bodies, especially fertility, and the need for our bodies to be left alone.'⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ E2538, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁵⁹⁵ L796, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁵⁹⁶ Laws, 'Who needs PMT? A Feminist approach to the politics of pre-menstrual tension', p.18.

Whitney (b.1970) started her period in 1985. She stated ‘a few months after my period started (age 15), I began to get period pains. At first I took aspirin or paracetamol, but as the months went on, they stopped working and I needed hot water bottles, hot baths and had to leave school on several occasions.’ Menstrual discomfort impacted her teenage years, and she tried multiple ways to manage her pain. She visited a doctor, who prescribed ‘some really strong painkillers’ called ponstan forte, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agent with analgesic properties typically used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and muscular, traumatic and dental pain, headaches, post-operative and post-partum pain, which she stated ‘usually did work, and really helped.’⁵⁹⁷ She exclaimed ‘goodness knows what side effects they have’ but concluded ‘I don’t care, they were the only thing which worked. My periods continued to be painful until I went onto the pill at the age of 22’. Her grandmother had told her that she needed ‘to have a child’, as she had ‘suffered terribly before the birth of her first, but afterwards never had any pain again’. Whitney reflected on this anecdote, and concluded, ‘I don’t know if I really believe this!’.⁵⁹⁸

Whitney’s decision to stop taking the pill led her back to more painful, irregular periods. She summarised this as going ‘back to normal’, displaying a degree of acceptance of recurrent pain as a part of her day-to-day life. Sheppard has suggested that ‘thinking about chronic pain through crip lenses’ embraces perversity, difference, disability and chronic pain as ways of being in the world. The term ‘crip’ is rooted in disability activism, and functions as a reworking and reclamation of the derogatory phrase ‘cripple’. A crip lens is a key tenet of disability studies, and works to destabilise the hegemony of approaches and perspectives that position disability as abject and

⁵⁹⁷ Description for ponstan forte taken from Electronic Medicines Compendium website, <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/1732/smpc> [accessed, 04/06/2021].

⁵⁹⁸ W2731, MOA, ‘Menstruation’.

disabled bodies as impaired. A crip lens does not define disability through the gaze of able bodied persons, but aims to explore the experience of disability in a way that centres the gaze, voices and day to day lives of disabled persons.⁵⁹⁹ This perspective, as Sheppard notes, reveals the inadequacy of 'ableist social understandings of pain' that shape 'how pained bodyminds express and live with pain', and how ableist understandings of pain are 'inadequate when it comes to theorizing about pain.'⁶⁰⁰ In normative terms, 'chronic pain is understood as a failure', a discourse which positions those living with it as abject, deviating from a norm where pain is not present.⁶⁰¹ Whitney's narrative challenges this framework, instead tying more closely with Sheppard's assertion that chronic pain can be characterised as a 'reliably unreliable experience'. Whitney's 'normal' was characterised by the reliably unreliable presence of pain, rather than by its absence.

Bethan (b.1963) also mentioned self-medicating with paracetamol. She specified that the morning of day one of her period was painful for her, displaying her embodied intuition and knowledge regarding her menstrual cycle and her self-help approach to alleviating the pain.⁶⁰² As stated in an NHS survey of home cures and chemists undertaken in 1953, over-the-counter products offered a 'type of medical independence' with which individuals could 'try, at least, to dose away their ailments'.⁶⁰³ MO respondents reported self-medicating in a number of ways, many influenced by their mothers. Wanda (b.1951) stated that after being taken to the doctor by her mum in the 1960s and being given no advice beyond taking aspirin, 'the only useful thing she [mum] ever came up with was gin to ease period pains and that did

⁵⁹⁹ Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013), pp.1-27.

⁶⁰⁰ Sheppard, 'Chronic Pain as Emotion', p.6.

⁶⁰¹ Sheppard, 'Chronic Pain as Emotion', p.9.

⁶⁰² B2638, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁶⁰³ NHS Survey of home cures and chemists, 1953 in Haggett, *Desperate Housewives*, p.167.

seem to work. (It was only a small amount, so it can't have been an alcoholic haze that blotted it out!).⁶⁰⁴ Helen's (b.1961) 'mother's mother, swore by gin, and sometimes used to give it to her as a young woman.' She recalled coming home from school early sometimes as a teenager.

Once I almost passed out. I was 15, my grandfather had died a few days previously and I was in great pain, my teacher noticed I was ill although I had said nothing and half carried me to the school nurse who made me a hot water bottle and let me lie down. Mum arrived but we had to walk the 20 minute journey. I had hoped she would get us a taxi. I think her attitude was that it was just a part of life to be endured. When I was older she allowed me to carry paracetamol to take if I needed it.⁶⁰⁵

Differing opinions between mothers and daughters regarding how much menstrual pain had to be endured also featured in Kathleen's (b.1951) account. She knew how long her mum's periods lasted, and that she had to take painkillers sometimes, 'but she never made a fuss - so I didn't either at that age.'⁶⁰⁶ Testament to the longstanding way women's menstrual pain has been culturally positioned, Doreen (b.1951) stated her mother had always concealed her own pain and PMT. Doreen displayed similar attitudes to her mother. She stated that girls who took to lying down with hot water bottles because of period pains were 'rather indulged', indicating a slightly amplified version of Eliza's (b.1963) belief that period pains needed to be brushed off as 'one of those things'.⁶⁰⁷ The responses suggest that girls looked to their mothers for guidance on how to manage menstruation, and that even if mothers and daughters did not communicate directly about menstruation, that girls implicitly learnt from them, and saw them as a source of authority on the topic.

⁶⁰⁴W1813, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁶⁰⁵ H2577, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁶⁰⁶ K798 MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁶⁰⁷ D826, MOA, 'Menstruation' and E2538, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

Accounts that speak of self-medicating with painkillers or alcohol and just enduring pain help make sense of why Beverley (b.1960) positioned her interactions with doctors as abnormal. She wrote about her encounters with medical professionals to try and help alleviate her pain, which when combined with PMT left her 'right on the edge'. 'Nothing came of' being referred to a clinic, which led her to try 'normal things' like vitamin B6, primrose oil and diet management into early adulthood. She too believed having children eased her pain, but that after her third child, it got worse again.⁶⁰⁸ The positioning of self-help methods as 'normal', suggests these methods might have been commonplace, everyday practices for many women and girls. The inferred suggestion that it was abnormal to see medical personnel for period-related problems reflects the cultural position of menstruation outlined previously in this thesis and the inaccessibility of institutional guidance and input.

Some women linked expressions of period pain to 'appropriate' performances of femininity. Bertie (b.1956) recalled 'very bad period pains at one point in (her) teens' but received very little sympathy, as 'mother's attitude was that it was feminine weakness to give in to it'. She saw a doctor about her pain when she was fifteen, and stated 'all he could say was that a pregnancy would sort me out, rather unhelpful advice at the time'.⁶⁰⁹ Barbara (b.1953) also believed that visible displays of discomfort were 'too feminine'. She stated that she worked with 'dozens of women menstruating, menopausal, HRT with gynaecological problems or who have undergone hysterectomies' suggesting both a sense of community, some sort of shared experience and a degree of authority on the subject. She went on to say that 'when necessary they talk and support, but basically just get on with their lives', mirroring the

⁶⁰⁸ B2031 MOA, 'Menstruation'.

⁶⁰⁹ B2728, MOA, 'Menstruation'.

‘just carry on’ language Eliza used. Barbara presented her observation that it was the ‘very girly women’ who were the ‘complainers and the dying ducks’, writing that ‘they revel in aspects of their femininity’. She positions discussions of menstrual pain as hyper-femininity, something she distances herself from in her narrative, perhaps an indication that she invalidated her own experiences and suffered in silence, or that because her own cycle was just not that painful, she could not empathise with those whose experience was different from her own.⁶¹⁰ For her, ‘what hurts more is the cost of sanitary protection’. She moves the conversation towards politics, recalling her political engagement having signed ‘several national housewife’s register petitions’ over the years, having ‘supported the Co-op’, and ‘distributed petition leaflets and lobbied MPs to end the unfair 17.5% tax which costs women nearly £30 mil a year’.

Fluctuating rates of value added tax (VAT) stemmed from Britain’s integration into the EU and common market in November of 1973. Across the period 1970-1990 VAT ranged from 12.5%, to 15% and up to 17.5% in 1991-92 on ‘non-essential luxury items’, which included menstrual technology. In 2000, a successful campaign led by MP Dawn Primarolo reduced the tax rate on menstrual products to 5%.⁶¹¹ Writing four years before the motion was agreed, Barbara relayed statistics and her personal investments in petitioning, namely that the tax was an unjust economic burden for menstruators. Although an active campaigner for women’s rights, in her response Barbara pitched other women’s personal expressions of pain against her own political engagement and organising with the goal of enacting structural change for women. For Barbara, these two forms of self-expression were incompatible.

⁶¹⁰B1215, MOA, ‘Menstruation’.

⁶¹¹ House of Commons, *Value Added Tax (Reduced Rate)* (23 November 2000 S.I2000, No. 2954) [Online] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmstand/deleg4/st001123/01123s03.htm> [accessed 21/02/2022].

Barbara's testimony offers a way into understanding how experiences of premenstrual discomfort have been tied to feminine gender identity and social roles more broadly. Here, as in wider society, appearing to revel in aspects of 'femininity' is derided. Social capital has a precarious relationship to femininity and interests, behaviours, and traits typically coded as such, which are simultaneously positioned as desirable and scorned. This dismissal of the existence of extreme period pain, noticeable displays of pain, the branding of it as the preserve of 'very girly women', and the subsequent distancing from the notion of 'girly women', indicates a set of beliefs and ideologies that do not allow women space to be multifaceted – more specifically, to be in pain, and able to articulate it, and politically engaged, capable of work and performing femininity 'appropriately'. As stated by Laws, dividing women from women and a woman against herself are important functions of patriarchal ideology. Central to a male view is that there are good women and bad women.' Laws suggests that whilst having women in the bad category would seem to imply a form of rebellion' but that the women in this category are presumed to be there because 'underneath they are saintly but become ill for reasons and exhibit irrational or bad behaviour.'⁶¹²

To be either visibly unhappy or visibly in pain because of a period, and to be comfortable with articulating it, was to be 'girly' and equated to being weak and disruptive. Women who made such judgements recognise that displays of pain can result in stigmatising assumptions, discrimination and judgements, but do not reflect on the ways the judgements they pass contribute similarly. Menstrual discomfort had a precarious relation to notions of femininity and social capital. This chimes with Laws'

⁶¹² Sophie Laws, 'Who needs PMT? A Feminist approach to the politics of pre-menstrual tension' in Sophie Laws, Valerie Hey and Andrea Eagan (Introduction by Stevi Jackson) *Seeing Red: The Politics of pre-menstrual tension, Explorations in Feminism* (Hutchinson, 1985), p.20.

assessment that the ‘norms to which women are expected to conform are not always consistent. We are expected to be feminine, but in order to be accepted in male-dominated spheres of public life we must conform to male codes of conduct.’⁶¹³ The difficulty inherent in articulating and validating the experience of period pain added a further dimension of pain to girls’ experience of menstruation and their relationship to cultural scripts regarding menstrual invisibility that continued to shape their adult lives.

Conclusion

Advertisements for analgesics relied on longstanding medical modes of understanding and representation to depict (pre)menstrual discomfort and pain. These modes of understanding and representation were, like much medical understanding at this time, reliant on distinctly gendered understandings of illnesses and their sufferers. Adverts for pain relief in girls’ magazines used implicit and explicit imagery and language to denote that their products could help with (pre)menstrual discomfort, tied very much to gendered medical assumptions about femininity, mental instability and domesticity. The adverts used coded, euphemistic language to maintain an appropriate degree of secrecy when discussing menstrual-related discomfort, and relied on longstanding tropes used to sell over-the-counter painkillers to women, tying menstrual discomfort in to the narrative surrounding women’s use of over-the-counter analgesics. Analysis of adverts for different painkiller brands in different magazines reveals the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of (pre) menstrual discomfort, invisible to some readers, yet hyper-visible to readers whose embodied experiences of menstruation helped them to decode the message.

⁶¹³ Laws, ‘*Introduction*’, in *Seeing Red* p.12.

In their own words, MO respondents wrote about the extent to which the menstrual concealment imperative shaped their day-to-day lives, their embodied selfhood, their identity and their intersubjective relationships. How MO respondents described and judged their own experiences of menstrual pain, and also how they described and judged other menstruators' articulations, reveals a great deal about how they were expected to perform both their femininity and health. They were encouraged to ignore, conceal and underplay period pain and had limited ways to treat it that did not involve a consideration of unpleasant and unknown side effects. Testimony reveals that many respondents constructed narratives that stressed the invalidity of their own pain and that of other women too, denying and underplaying the extent they personally felt it, or deliberately cherry-picking when to share or show it.

As Sheppard suggests and MO testimony about menstrual pain reveals, there is 'no simple rule for what constitutes an excessive display [of pain]; what counts as excessive depends on the observed *cause* of pain, and the observers' reading of the pained person's bodymind.'⁶¹⁴ MO testimony reveals the precarious position of menstrual pain in the cultural imagination of women in postwar Britain, how it was perceived as something to be endured and not displayed in excess, and how observation of this pain could prompt stigmatising readings of peers. The comments of women on their own pain and that of other women necessitate a return to Mosoco's assertion that when pain is not socially validated, it becomes very difficult to establish intersubjective truths.⁶¹⁵ Menstrual pain was simultaneously individual and collective, defined by the individual but also mediated heavily by cultural perceptions, its invisibility and invalidity contingent on both. The Directive responses are a product of

⁶¹⁴ Sheppard, 'Chronic Pain as Emotion', p.11.

⁶¹⁵ Javier Mosoco, *Pain A Cultural History*, p.8.

this culture that 'ignored, invalidated and humiliated'.⁶¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, and very sadly, some respondents carried these attitudes about themselves, and other menstruators too.

⁶¹⁶ Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, p.209.

Conclusion

In 1996, sixteen-year-old Dawn from Bristol (b.1980) reflected on her experiences of menstruating, and on how she felt writing about menstruation, in the knowledge that her words would be preserved at the MOA. Her account encapsulated the benefits of recording menstrual experience as she stated,

I think this subject will always remain a very personal and private matter in one way or another... There is certainly much education and awareness of menstruation nowadays and greater communication between friends and family about the experience, but like anything to do with such intimate parts it is not the sort of thing for a casual conversation with anyone and everyone. As regards to its inclusion in MO I'm sure it is extremely worthwhile and a worthy use of the archive for information about experiences unobtainable elsewhere, so despite embarrassment in writing I don't mind really.⁶¹⁷

Dawn believed it was important to record her experiences of, and thoughts about, menstruation because she knew accounts like hers were incredibly rare. She emphasised her belief that menstruation was an inherently 'personal and private' topic, so much so that she admitted she felt some embarrassment whilst writing about it. She made sure to emphasise her sense that 1996 was a time when there was 'greater communication', 'education' and 'awareness' about menstruation, situating her experiences within and in relation to an earlier historical context she believed was further defined by notions of privacy, intimacy and embarrassment. In some ways, she felt she was more fortunate than previous generations, but she also emphasised there were still codes of conduct to be obeyed, and that menstruation was still not a 'casual' topic. Dawn's reflections on menstruation offer a glimpse of a distinctly youthful subject position, and a distinctly personal take on the cultural position and invisibility of

⁶¹⁷ D2739, MOA 'Menstruation'.

menstruation in Britain in 1996. Dawn knew that her response challenged this cultural invisibility, and so she wrote despite her embarrassment.

Dawn's experiences of growing up in the late eighties and earlier nineties lie beyond the purview of this thesis, but as the youngest person to write about menstruation for the MOA, her account of girlhood - written during girlhood - was, and is, somewhat of an anomaly. It is also highly similar to the reflective accounts of women born up to forty years earlier and who described their experiences of menstruating in the period 1960-1980. These accounts suggest there was historical longevity to girls' articulations of menstruation as a private, intimate and embarrassing matter, framed in terms of invisibility, and that this language persevered.

The notion that menstruation could be embarrassing or shameful was not unique to Dawn. Nor was her assertion that accounts of menstrual experience were near enough 'unobtainable'. Reflecting on her own youthful experiences, Gillian (b.1963), who was born seventeen years before Dawn, recalled, 'writing this now my stomach is churning at the thought of how horribly, excruciatingly embarrassed I felt.' Reflecting on the writing process, she stated, 'a quick comment on this subject and its inclusion in an MO Directive. Why not? I've probably never typed the word 'embarrassed' so many times in the space of an hour or two'.⁶¹⁸

Born fourteen years earlier than Gillian, and thirty-one before Dawn, Tanya (b.1949) reflected on the process of writing about menstruation, stating, 'I can well understand that it might be hard to find out such information any other way...put it this way, if we had been invited to talk on the topic, I don't believe you'd have got so much information!'.⁶¹⁹ Whilst these personal reflections cannot testify to the myriad of

⁶¹⁸ G2624, MOA 'Menstruation'.

⁶¹⁹ T1843, MOA 'Menstruation'.

understandings of, and attitudes about menstruation among girls who grew up in Britain between 1960 and 1980, they provide a level of insight into everyday experiences of menstrual experience during adolescence, adulthood, and in some cases old age, hitherto non-existent on the same scale. Whilst Dawn, Gillian and Tanya experienced girlhood in different decades, their testimonies are laced with similar language for articulating their menstrual-related experiences.

MO testimony provides a rich and rare source base invaluable to historians who wish to explore menstruation, and more generally histories of gender, embodiment and subjectivity, in a way that centres 'ordinary' voices otherwise unaccounted for. They offer the opportunity to explore the extent to which publicly circulating discourses, and similar ideas and concerns, shaped girls' menstrual understandings, attitudes and experiences across a fifty-year period. It also provides the opportunity to reflect on how people construct accounts of their lives. Reflective personal testimony encourages questions about how people remember and how memory functions, particularly when individuals try to remember topics dubbed private. It also encourages reflection on how telling one's life story makes an individual feel, and how, as Tanya stated, remembering and writing, and remembering and speaking can be two very different tasks.

Spoken accounts of menstruation, as Tanya suggested, might not have elicited as much information from her about the specificities of menstruation, because of the culture of secrecy. Yet because oral history methodologies collect spoken accounts of personal experiences from living persons, and *because* accounts are often constructed and delivered with this culture of secrecy in mind, they are a useful source

for exploring historical accounts of menstruation and menstrual secrecy.⁶²⁰ Oral histories of menstrual experiences offer alternative narratives to their written MO counterparts, whilst their collection contributes to accumulating source bases about areas hidden from history.

Alongside sources that centre personal testimony, this study draws on mass-market magazines to study representations of menstruation in circulation between 1960-1980. These representations are mostly found in advertising for menstrual products, but also in problem pages and feature spreads. These representations reveal how discourses of menstrual invisibility were constructed and disseminated on a mass scale. There is little opportunity to access subjective accounts of experience from studying magazine representations alone, bar the problem pages which allow refracted glimpses of personal experiences. By studying magazines in conjunction with oral histories and mass observation testimonies, this thesis gives attention to both representations and experiences. It considers if and how it is possible to access historical accounts of personal 'experience', whilst also exploring historical experiences of magazine reading to better understand how representations of menstruation functioned in girls' lives, were consumed by girls and impacted girls' subjective experiences.

Access to sources that could facilitate this study of representation and experience was impacted by COVID-19. Access to archives was restricted at points, limiting interaction with magazines and curtailing sample size, whilst the ability to interview people face-to-face about their experiences was compromised by isolation measures. This thesis would have explored representations and experiences of

⁶²⁰ For more on this see chapter one.

menstruation, and the relationship between individuals and the representations consumed more thoroughly had the COVID-19 pandemic not been so disruptive. Conducting oral history interviews specifically about menstruation and magazines would have provided more detailed accounts of menstrual experience, and provided the opportunity to probe for further information where necessary. Some areas where this might have been fruitful include exploring the sensory aspects of menstruation in more detail.

Whilst this thesis explores pain, touch and sight (visibility / invisibility), other multi-dimensional sensory elements of menstruation are neglected by comparison. This includes, odour and smell. Some personal accounts do talk of concerns regarding odour, and adverts often described their products as a means of managing menstrual related body odour, and this is touched on in this thesis. Notwithstanding, the impact of concerns about odour is one area that a study of embodied menstrual experience could centre more explicitly. The emergence of scented towels and tampons advertised in girls' magazines across the period 1960-1980, and sold at popular retail chemists such as Boots across the period, and Femfresh's direct correspondence with Boots about their certainty regarding success if they were to enter into the menstrual protection market in 1971 provides some context that could aid future study, and highlights the kinds of mass-market representations, and top down materials might be integrated into a study alongside personal testimony more attuned to the role of odour in shaping women's articulations of their menstrual experiences too.⁶²¹

Another area that requires further exploration beyond what is covered in this thesis is the relationship between menstruation, the risk of pregnancy, and

⁶²¹ WBA/BT/BH/CPD/5/2/9, Walgreen Boots Alliance Archive, G.W.T Cummins, C.C.N Bilton, P. McDougall, Roger Helmer, 'Tampons' Femfresh correspondence, 4th February 1971.

contraceptive practices amongst menstruating girls. Whilst there is little exploration of any potential warnings about pregnancy at the onset of menses provided in this thesis, and most testimony explored here suggests concerns regarding risk were much more implicitly navigated, warnings from mothers about pregnancy have been noted in studies of girls' lives both pre 1960 and extending into the 1960s. The invisibility of the link between menstruation and risk in this thesis is both a product of the source material consulted and the approach to material adopted in this thesis. Questions relating to menstruation were limited in the BSF oral history schedule, and no questions specifically about risk were included. Interviewees were asked if they or their mother kept track of their dates, which occasionally brought up discussions about risky behaviour and mothers who charted dates to ensure pregnancy was avoided, but rarely did women describe explicit warnings about pregnancy from mothers at the onset of first menses. This was likely because such a question was not asked, and because questions where women were most likely to talk about menstruation centred on describing the changing body during adolescence and sex education at school. Women sometimes described acquiring contraception during their girlhood in their oral history interviews, and some of those experiences are relayed in this thesis, but this was not always equated with first menses explicitly.

Similarly, the MO directive on menstruation did not ask respondents about contraception. Some respondents did describe their experiences and motivations for accessing contraception, and it was particularly interesting to read about the experiences where discussions of contraception were linked explicitly to attempts to ease uncomfortable, painful periods. A subsequent publication would provide the opportunity to explore these themes in more detail. It is particularly interesting that some women did not equate their acquisition of contraception to their sexual practices,

but to their uncomfortable and painful periods. This suggests a newer line of enquiry into girls' contraceptive practices that foregrounds menstrual pain as an alternate motivation for accessing contraception. Notwithstanding, that is not to say that contraception and risk, and contraception and attempts to ease menstrual pain are mutually exclusive motivations for seeking contraception. This study would explore girlhood contraceptive practices, and particularly girl's experiences of the contraceptive pill in a new light, that not only charts its role as a form of birth control, but also its role as a means of easing uncomfortable, painful and debilitating menstrual complaints. The Brookes Advisory Clinic would provide a wealth of information on girls' motivations for and experiences of acquiring contraception, and perhaps further study would render menstruation visible in this existing source material too.

Notwithstanding these limitations and blind spots, by situating the menstruating body at the centre of its study, this thesis has made attempts to unite histories of menstrual representations and experiences, and to explore how these representations impacted girls everyday menstrual management practices. It has explored how menstruation and puberty as biological events impact cultural scripts about postwar girlhood, menstrual invisibility, and declining age of maturation. Knowledge of these wider discourses has, in turn, impacted engagement with and analysis of magazines and personal testimony. This thesis has explored how such discourses have impacted women's formative girlhood experiences, their menstrual attitudes and sense of self, and how they have later articulated these experiences as adult women.

Magazine representations of menstruation, and accounts of subjective menstrual experiences like MO and oral history are different types of sources, each with unique benefits for actualising a history of menstruation, subjectivity and constructions of girlhood in Britain, 1960-1980. Used in conjunction, they enable an

exploration that takes into account the most prominent culturally circulating discourses about menstruation in the media, the minutiae of personal experience of menstruation, and the ways that accounts of experience are shaped by the memories, emotions, and dispositions of the individual, and the conditions in which they are elicited.

Using these sources, this thesis has charted a ‘bottom-up’ history of menstruation in Britain in the period 1960-1980. Building on, and deviating from, studies of medical, political and educational discourse from the period, it offers a subject-centred perspective on the history of menstruation that prioritises ordinary women’s reflections on their menstrual experiences. Using magazines and testimony in conjunction, this thesis has explored everyday representations and experiences of menstruation, and the relationship between them. By doing so, it revealed that in the period 1960-1980 menstrual discourse was dominated by notions of concealment and invisibility, and shaped by notions of permissiveness and an emergent youth culture, and that this impacted how girls experienced menstruation, and how they have since presented their experiences orally and in writing.

A focus on subjects’ own recollections of sex education reveals that whilst most women received some level of sex education or instruction about sex and reproduction at school, education relating specifically to menstruation was limited. Girls’ accounts of learning about menstruation suggest school-based sex education was inadequate, misdirected and mistimed. Its focus on animal anatomy, or its distinctly religious and moral undertones, did not provide girls with the information they believed they needed to understand menstruation or sex. Situated within the wider historiographic landscape, this assessment chimes with Charnock’s finding that when women recalled lessons in the biological and moral components of sex, they typically dismissed them as inconsequential or largely irrelevant to their sexual development, and believed what

they needed to know about was the 'physical, emotional, relational and social aspects' of sex.⁶²²

Furthermore, women's recollections and assessments of their sex education follow a similar line of thought to Martin and Young, who suggested that phenomenological approaches to menstruation, which privilege attention to and discussions of the feelings and sensations elicited by menstruation, and ultimately treat menstruation in its wholeness, might go some way toward destigmatising menstruation and menstrual bodies.⁶²³ Such accounts also reflect Young's questioning of whether having a 'full, accurate and complete understanding of the physiology of menstruation' is the most fruitful way of educating people who menstruate. Women's recollections of a desire for holistic education during their youths, one that was attuned to emotions and relationships, adds weight to her assertion that prioritising an understanding of menstruation closely tied with 'internal bodily processes', physiology and medical science may itself 'contribute to a sense of alienation women have from the process.'⁶²⁴ Anatomically focussed attempts at education were derided by girls who were in favour of more personal and emotionally driven explanatory narratives.

Such findings contribute to scholarship about the history of sex education in Britain in the postwar period. Whilst studies of sex education policy, materials, and lobby group debates have provided crucial context to my exploration of girls' experiences of school-based sex education, the personal accounts explored in this thesis provide crucial texture to these histories of sex education too. Focussing on

⁶²² Charnock, *Girlhood, Sexuality and Identity*, pp.56-57.

⁶²³ Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, p.111, Iris Marion Young, 'Menstrual Meditations', p.97.

⁶²⁴ Young, 'Menstrual mediations', p.102.

accounts of girls' experiences of school-based sex education, and thus on the reception of the materials and associated changes as opposed to their creation and implementation, this thesis moves beyond 'top down' contributions, by amplifying the voices of women whose experiences are usually unaccounted for in histories of sex education.

Girls typically had very few investments in school-based sex education. Women chose to emphasise that during girlhood, in order to understand their bodies, they had to piece together information gleaned from a number of places, people and sources. When advice came from friends or family members it was often shrouded in shame, secrecy and concealment. These feelings were amplified for girls who learnt about menstruation because they were privy to their mother's ill menstrual health. Notably, girls tended to recall occasions where menstruation was framed in a positive light by parents or in-laws, and suggested that these were significant and hugely valuable moments that enabled them to reconceptualise how they thought about menstruation. That women particularly remember being offered positive affirmations about menstruation testifies to the prevalence of negative language, attitudes and understandings at the time, and the potential lifelong value of positive menstrual affirmations.

Women suggested that more often than not interactions with people and places beyond school-based sex education lessons were most significant to their acquisition of menstrual knowledge, flagging magazines, family and friends as important sources. Without stressing that one had increased importance over the other, they implied each constituted one part of a wider puzzle that was their menstrual education. Girls often recalled feeling underprepared for their first period, sometimes demarking their experiences of first menses as scary or frightening. Girls' words

suggest the concerns expressed by the MWF across the period 1940 - 1960 regarding education and infrastructure remained a problem across the period 1960 -1980.

Women's recollections of magazines stressed the importance of advice on sex, menstruation and relationships in their sex education, but also that they could not remember specific examples of content. Whilst these representations posed important challenges to longstanding taboos such as bathing, and encouraged intergenerational conversation, the advice offered was shaped by the wider impetus for menstrual concealment, and for brands to target and retain brand loyalty from a generation of teenage menstruators. Thus menstrual representations in magazines often implicitly reinforced taboos about the need for secrecy.

The voices of magazine readers illuminate fractures in the interpretations and conclusions of early feminist media scholars who suggested magazines were dangerous sources with damaging effects on their readers. Women's reflections on magazines suggest they were important sources that catered to their broad and holistic understanding of health during girlhood by including the physical, psychological and the emotional, despite their contradictions and tensions.

Analysing the ideological constructions of menstruation in magazines revealed a complex mix of genuinely helpful advice and stigmatising assumptions about menstruation. Analysis revealed that representations were born from, and reflective of, what Andrews and Macnamara deem the 'tensions, anxieties and preoccupations' of the era. In particular, adverts were made up of 'cultural meanings above and beyond the sales message' that often used scientific modes of representation and fashionable imagery to demark menstruation as shameful, dirty, and in need of concealment, but also as harbouring liberatory potential for self-actualisation,

empowerment and independence facilitated through the purchase of menstrual products.

Part of the reason why these adverts presented menstruation in this way was because the sale of technologies relied on the cultural profusion of menstrual invisibility. One way advertisers could bolster this interpretation was by drawing on longstanding medical ideas and images, or what Jordanova terms medical and scientific 'modes of representation'. Yet this medicalised and scientific form and style often coexisted with a whole host of ideas about menstrual blood, bodies and habits more the product of myth and stigma than medical understanding. The representations had very little to do with medical understanding and knowledge, but adopted and echoed the modes of presentation typical to medicine and other scientific disciplines. This was because 'science' as a discipline, and scientific modes of presentation, had and continue to have immense cultural authority, positioned as 'an agent of the true inner nature of things'.⁶²⁵ Women, by contrast, were historically understood as the subjects of the medical gaze, their bodies, and menstrual cycles filled with secrets which required science to render them visible.

Brands like Lil-lets did this by replicating images and methodologies of laboratory-based science experiments to 'prove' the superiority of their forms of menstrual protection and to offer readers insight into processes of menstrual concealment that were usually internal and therefore invisible. Analgesic companies like Anadin, and Feminax in popular mass culture reproduced medical narratives that affiliated menstrual discomfort with tension, nervousness and emotional states. These visual and textual depictions of the prescribed analgesic user relied on, and upheld,

⁶²⁵ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, p.92.

contemporary understandings of appropriate feminine behaviour, and medical stereotypes, metaphors and theories that regarded changes in temperament and mood during menstruation as inherently pathological and disruptive to contemporary understandings of women's roles and girls' future roles.

Alongside advertisements infused with medical ideas and imagery, menstrual technology brands also affiliated themselves with the feminine world defined and described elsewhere in the magazine, by utilising imagery that replicated the magazine's wider concern with youth culture, and particularly fashion, dress and feminine presentation. Adverts used similar styles of imagery to other parts of the magazine, replicating the clothing, styles of fashion photography and language closely associated with popular images of women in circulation in the 1960s and 1970s. Working in tandem, the images and text tied fashion trends, dress, menstrual technology and the menstruating body together, so that the message suggested these were synonymous with feminine selfhood. By doing so, brands like Tampax presented menstruation as an inherently feminine issue and experience that, like all aspects of the feminine body, required routine management and surveillance.

Simultaneously and contradictorily, effective menstrual management was also presented as an opportunity to cultivate an independent, empowered self. Notions of free will, choice and 'liberation' were closely tied to notions of modern selfhood in other areas of the magazine beyond advertising too. As explored by Tinkler, girls' magazines packaged and sold 'discourses on the late-modern self' characterised by notions of choice, fulfilment, self-discovery, realisation and reflexivity. Although elusive, these were fraught ideals, the boundaries between self-awareness and self-surveillance

blurred.⁶²⁶ These adverts, like the magazines they featured in, contained discourses that pointed to the wider socio-cultural parameters of appropriate feminine presentation and ways of being at the time they were in circulation.

Building on scholarship emerging from multiple disciplines, including sociology, phenomenology, fashion and photography studies, these findings apply novel interdisciplinary approaches to understand the way representations of menstruation functioned at a socio-cultural level, and how girls understood and experienced menstruation in their day-to-day lives. A history of menstruation in the period 1960-1980 contributes in new ways to an ever-expanding body of scholarship concerned with challenging the 'swinging sixties' and 'permissive Britain' narrative, revealing that menstruating girls' experiences were defined by stigma, shame, and discomfort. Women remembered the stigma, shame and embarrassment felt as a result of pressure to adhere to social codes regarding appropriate behaviour, and the way that the technology they wore caused them discomfort and impinged on their ability to dress and to participate in day-to-day activities. For these women, reflecting on their menstrual experiences during girlhood required them to reflect on the way menstrual technology hugely impacted how they experienced a period, making it even harder to manage and, paradoxically, to hide.

A phenomenological approach to the menstruating body and to menstrual technology is a fitting way of understanding menstrual embodiment. A study of the menstruating body, menstrual technology and clothing offers a way into understanding how menstruation impacted girls' everyday lives, and how menstrual technology altered girls' menstrual management practices. The way women talk about their

⁶²⁶ Tinkler, 'Are You Really Living?', p.598.

menstruating bodies and menstrual technology offers the opportunity to see where women's accounts of experience reflected or deviated from the ideals espoused in the magazines they read - often out of desperation - not choice.

Furthermore, women's accounts of their experiences of premenstrual discomfort reveal how menstrual concealment imperatives shaped their day-to-day lives, selfhood, identity and interpersonal relationships. How MO respondents described and judged their own experiences of menstrual pain, and also how they described and judged other women's articulations of pain too reveals a great deal about how they were expected to perform both their femininity and health. They were encouraged to ignore, conceal and underplay period pain and had limited ways to treat it that did not involve consideration of unpleasant or unknown side effects. Testimony reveals that in many cases the respondents constructed narratives that stressed the invalidity of their own pain and that of others. MO testimony reveals that girls' menstrual pain was rarely validated. Girls utilised a number of self-help methods to treat their pain and rarely reported positive interactions with medical professionals. Pain was perceived as something to be endured and not displayed in excess, and resultantly many girls grew up to hold opinions that contributed to stigmatising assumptions about other menstruators and inhibited them from relating to, or sympathising and emphasising with other menstruators who experienced painful periods. Menstrual pain was simultaneously individual and collective, defined by the individual but also mediated heavily by cultural perceptions, its invisibility and invalidity contingent on both.

Situating these accounts in relation to current studies of menstrual health emphasises the relative stagnancy of healthcare provision and attitudes towards menstrual pain and the bodies of those who experience it, and illuminates the historical

roots of such attitudes and ideas. Whilst, as Alice Billington notes, menstruation is becoming ‘increasingly visible in the cultural zeitgeist’, ‘we are still living in a society in which many young people do not have adequate access to the products they need to allow them to attend school comfortably’.⁶²⁷ In 2018, global children’s rights non-profit Plan International UK conducted a report into girls’ experiences of menstruation in the UK. Their ‘Break the Barriers’ report stated that 49% of girls have missed a day of school due to their periods, whilst 10% are unable to afford products, the cost leading 14% to borrow from friends, 12% to improvise, and 19% to change to unsuitable or improvised alternatives.⁶²⁸ In an attempt to tackle this, from January 2020 onwards every state-maintained school and college in England has been able to order free period products for their students. This change was facilitated by Amika George and the ‘Free periods’ scheme. Yet research has since shown only 40% of institutions have signed up to the scheme.⁶²⁹ Scotland has become the first country in the world to make period products free for all, whilst in 2020, the Welsh Government announced that every college, primary and secondary school across the country would benefit from a £3.1m fund enabling them to provide free sanitary products for every learner who may need them.⁶³⁰ Inspired by Amika George, eighteen-year-old Molly Fenton

⁶²⁷ Alice Billington, ‘Period Dramas’, *History Workshop*, 7, January 2019, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/period-dramas/> [accessed, 30/06/2021]

⁶²⁸ Gwen Schemm, ‘Top 10 Facts about period poverty in the UK’ (15.07. 2019) <https://borgenproject.org/top-10-facts-about-period-poverty-in-the-uk/> [accessed 08/02/2021], Plan International UK, ‘Break the Barriers: Girls’ Experiences of Menstruation in the UK’, January 2018, <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-break-the-barriers-report-032018pdf/download?token=Fs-HYP3v> [accessed 16/02/2022]

⁶²⁹ Free Periods, N.D, <https://www.freeperiods.org/free-periods-in-schools> [accessed, 08/02/2021]

⁶³⁰ Claire Diamond, ‘Period Poverty: Scotland first in world to make period products free’, BBC News, (24.11.2020), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-51629880> [accessed, 30/06/2021], Welsh Government Press Release, “It’s just ensuring a girl’s period isn’t a barrier to her succeeding in life”, 3.01.2020, <https://gov.wales/its-just-ensuring-girls-period-isnt-barrier-her-succeeding-life> [accessed 30/06/2021]. Camilla Rostvik and Sarah Zipp note that Scotland’s decision follows other pioneering efforts. Most notably, Kenya provided free products in schools for years. Rostvik and Zipp, ‘It will take a lot more than free period products to end stigma around menstruation’, *The Conversation*, 11.12.2020, <https://theconversation.com/it-will-take-lot-more-than-free-period-products-to-end-stigma-around-menstruation-151711> [accessed, 30/06/2021]

from Cardiff has set up the 'Love Your Period' campaign, and now works with her local clubs, council and the Welsh Government on period poverty initiatives and campaigns against plastic period products.⁶³¹ These efforts follow decades of menstrual activism.⁶³²

Yet as Sarah Zipp and Camilla Rostvik highlight, 'the importance of education and challenging stigma is often overshadowed by product rollouts', which lately seem to garner most media coverage.⁶³³ There is growing evidence to suggest that a lack of knowledge about periods and how to spot associated health issues (endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome or PCOS, PMDD, primary ovarian insufficiency or POI) causes increased absences from and reduced performance in school, along with an increased vulnerability to debilitating health conditions. This is further exacerbated by medical stigma that typically takes the shape of disbelieving the articulations of menstruators. Such assumptions imply menstruators are imagining their symptoms, bolstering not only menstrual, but mental health stigma too. In 2021, the Guardian published an article about the multiple women who had written in to say they had been dismissed by doctors and 'fobbed off' with painkillers, suggesting further longevity to the theme of invalid pain discussed in chapter five.⁶³⁴ Combined with extremely long

⁶³¹ Love Your Period can be found on Instagram at @LoveYourPeriod. Thomas Deacon, 'The Cardiff Teenager fighting against period stigma and poverty', Wales Online, 29.11.2020, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/love-your-period-cardiff-molly-17635219> [access, 30/06/2021].

⁶³² Chris Bobel and Breanne Fahs, 'The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism', *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, (Palgrave, 2020), pp. 1001-1018 and Chris Bobel, *New Blood: Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation* (Rutgers University Press, 2010).

⁶³³ Zipp and Rostvik, 'It will take a lot more than free periods'

⁶³⁴ Sarah Marsh, 'I was told to live with it': women tell of the doctors dismissing their pain', *The Guardian*, (16.4.2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/16/painkillers-women-tell-of-doctors-dismissing-their-pain> [accessed, 01/07/2021].

wait times and a 'postcode lottery' when it comes to receiving a diagnosis, there is little support for menstruating persons.⁶³⁵

Yet schools in Wales have the option to opt in or out of menstrual wellbeing education that could indefinitely improve menstruators' knowledge about their bodies. Campaigns to make this education compulsory, led by Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales (FTWW) were voted down in January this year.⁶³⁶ The historical accounts of the insufficiencies of sex and menstrual education explored in this thesis testify to the importance of providing sufficient education to young people in schools and the ways that a lack of education can inform lifelong attitudes towards menstruation and menstruators. Further, it also testifies to the need to go beyond product rollouts when tackling menstrual stigma, highlighting that the way products are described and marketed can contribute to stigma, whilst the materials they are made from can sometimes contribute to women's health concerns and problems.⁶³⁷

As evidenced throughout this thesis, and by current investigations into menstrual wellbeing education, one of the main reasons for lack of access to resources and education is the persistent emphasis on menstrual invisibility. This facilitates stigma. 'Stigma', a Bloody Good Period representative reflects, "is

⁶³⁵ Endometriosis Task and Finish Group, 'Endometriosis care in Wales: Provision, care pathway, workforce planning and quality and outcome measures', Report submitted to the Welsh Government, 16th April 2018, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/endometriosis-care-in-wales-provision-care-pathway-workforce-planning-and-quality-and-outcome-measures.pdf> [accessed, 30/06/2021]. All Party Parliamentary Group on Endometriosis, 'Endometriosis in the UK: time for change APPG ON endometriosis Inquiry Report 2020, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/endometriosis-care-in-wales-provision-care-pathway-workforce-planning-and-quality-and-outcome-measures.pdf> [accessed, 30/06/2021], Lesley-Anne McKeow, 'Endometriosis inquiry underlines NI waiting times', BBC News N. Ireland, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-54593385> [accessed, 30/06/2021].

⁶³⁶ FTWW Admin, Menstrual Wellbeing Education: Bringing back the Amendment to the Education Curriculum Bill (4 February 2021), <https://www.ftww.org.uk/mentrual-wellbeing-education-bringing-back-the-amendment-to-the-education-curriculum-bill/> [accessed 09/02/2020].

⁶³⁷ Sharra L. Vostral, 'Rely and Toxic Shock Syndrome: A technological Health Crisis', *Yale J Biol Med*, 84:4 (2011), pp.447-459, WEN., 'New Tampon Testing Reveals Undisclosed Carcinogens and Reproductive Toxins', Natasha at WEN., <https://www.wen.org.uk/2018/06/07/new-tampon-testing-reveals-undisclosed-carcinogens-and-reproductive-toxins/> [accessed, 19/09/2021].

undoubtedly the biggest frontier' in starting conversations about menstruation.⁶³⁸ A study of girlhood menstrual experiences in Britain in the period 1960-1980 reveals that stigma and secrecy defined many past conversations, representations and experiences of menstruation too. Menstrual stigma plays a huge part in why it is so difficult to write histories of menstruation and menstruating people. Further research into the particularities of experiences of people of different ethnicities, religions, localities, gender identities, and neuro-divergent, disabled and/ or chronically ill persons is necessary to continue to explore histories of menstrual experience in postwar Britain, and for understanding how such ideas manifest today. Yet reading the historical accounts that do exist, both for what they do say, and for what they do not say - their blind spots and limitations – it is possible to understand some of the reasons why this stigma has persisted until today.

⁶³⁸ Dr Annalise Weckesser, Gemma Williams, Dr Angela Hewett, and Amie Randhawa, 'Inclusivity & Diversity- UK Expert Views', https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-ltp-learning-briefing-3pdf/download?token=BIB_vlpS (Accessed, 08/02/2021)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, Spring 1996 Directive, 'Women's Sanitary Protection & Menstruation'. Copy of Directive sent to women.

Part 2: Women's sanitary products and menstruation:

Please remember to start Part 2 with your two line mini-biographical note (age, sex, place of residence, occupation etc) and your M-O number, NOT your name.

This directive has been designed in collaboration with Alia Al-khalidi who is a postgraduate student at Southampton Institute. Her particular research interest is in the history of sanitary protection and menstrual product advertising between 1900 and 1950, but we would also be pleased have later accounts. She is very interested to know about women's experiences throughout their lives, so your own experiences as a woman are very much appreciated as well as those stories handed down by your older female friends and relatives.

Stories from your own life, anecdotes, beliefs and observations all welcome. Please give as much detail about your age or the age of other women, the year, if you are recounting stories so we know the context.

How old were you when you started to menstruate, and what year was that? Did it make you feel differently about your body? What names did you use to describe it then, and now?

Were you prepared for the experience? If you were, by whom? Did you know about sex and reproduction generally at that time? Did you receive any advice or information at school or in youth groups? Can you recall being shown films or being given any leaflets or booklets to help you? Any details you can remember would be appreciated.

Did you share the experience with friends and family or was it a secret? What beliefs did you have about it at the time (or now)? Did you (or do you) stop doing certain things? Did you feel unwell, or has the arrival of your period (not just the first time, but since then) been a cause for celebration? Please say if you have suffered from Pre-Menstrual Tension (PMT) and give any general observations you have on PMT.

If you have reached the menopause or have had a hysterectomy, what is your feeling looking back over your life? Are you glad you no longer have periods?

What about the history of your use of sanitary products? Which products did you use when you were young? Have you changed your patterns over the years since then? Can you explain why if this has been the case....maybe taking into account such things as the influence of advertising, the advice of friends and relatives, your own personal needs, the choice of products on the market. What other factors do you take into account- for example: availability, size, absorbency, comfort or style?

How does cost affect your choice of products? And what is your view of VAT being charged on sanitary products? What is your view on the advertisements - on TV and in magazines. Can you recall specific adverts now, or in the past?

What about buying sanitary products? Has the experience changed? Have you ever used mail order? Do you ask other people to buy them for you? What about disposal? Has that been a problem? How do you manage?

Please end by commenting in general on the subject and its inclusion in an M-O directive.

DS\19.2.96\Dir. No.47a

Appendix 2: Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, Spring 1996 Directive, 'Women's Sanitary Protection & Menstruation', Copy of Directive sent to men.

Part 2: Men's attitudes and experiences of menstruation:

Please remember to start Part 2 with your two line mini-biographical note (age, sex, place of residence, occupation etc) and your M-O number, NOT your name.

You may wonder why we are asking you, as a man, to comment on something that has always been thought of as a private matter for women in our society. My answer is that however remote you may feel from such an issue, menstruation is of concern to us all, and those of you who are close to women in your lives as friends, relatives or partners, will perhaps be aware of the time, costs and practicalities involved in this natural physical process. I hope you will feel able to offer something of your own feelings and experience in this directive, and if you decide that it is beyond your experience, you will take a few moments to tell us that. I am aware that this is a taboo subject for some people, but that makes it all the more interesting as a topic for Mass-Observation. I hope you agree. No doubt, if you don't you'll tell us.

This directive has been designed in collaboration with Alia Al-khalidi who is a postgraduate student at Southampton Institute. Her particular research interest is in the history of sanitary protection and menstrual product advertising between 1900 and 1950, but we would also be pleased have information from a later time and about wider social issues.

When did you first become aware of the fact of menstruation? Can you tell us how you found out and what you thought about it. How did it relate to other information about women's bodies and the "facts of life"?

Did you get information at school or through youth organisations? From your parents or relatives? From books, films or magazines? Or from women themselves? What words were used to describe it? What assumptions were made about women's health and well-being at this time of the month?

In your adult life, has menstruation been something you could discuss with women you feel close to? Do you feel you have shared this experience with your girlfriends, wives, sisters? Do you think your behaviour towards them changes while they are menstruating? Do you feel comfortable talking about menstruation with the women you are close to? Do you ever talk to other men about it?

Have you ever bought sanitary products, perhaps for your wife, girlfriend, sister, mother? Has that been OK? Any changes over time, please note. What is your opinion on costs, and on the VAT charge on sanitary protection?

What do you think about Pre-Menstrual tension? Do you know women who suffer from it?

What do think about advertising sanitary products? On TV? In magazines?

Please end by commenting in general on the subject and its inclusion in an M-O directive.

DS\19.2.96\Dir. No.47b

Appendix 3: Biographical Details of Selected Respondents to Spring 1996 Directive, 'Women's Sanitary Protection & Menstruation'.⁶³⁹

MOA ID	Age ⁶⁴⁰	Name ⁶⁴¹	Birth Year ⁶⁴²	Occupation ⁶⁴³	Location ⁶⁴⁴	First Menses Age ⁶⁴⁵	First Menses Year ⁶⁴⁶
A2212	39	Anne	1957	Author	London	14	1971
A2751	22	Amanda	1974	Clerical Staff	SE England	13	1986
A2685	22	Angela	1974	Personal Assistant	London	10/11	1985/6
B1215	43	Barbara	1953	Part Time Supervisor	SW England	12	1965
B2031	36	Beverley	1960	Environmental Studies	London	13	1973
B2638	22	Bethan	1963	Learning Resources Officer	NW England	13	1975
B2728	40	Bertie	1956	Local Government	London	13	1968
B736	77	Bernice	1919	Retired Publican	Yorkshire and the Humber	13	1932
C1786	45	Charlotte	1951	School Secretary	SE England	12	1962
C41	36	Carol	1960	Housewife	Scotland (Shetland)	13	1972
D2739	16	Dawn	1980	A-level Student	SW England	14	1993
D826	45	Doreen	1951	Self-employed social worker	SW England	15	1965
E2538	32	Eliza	1963	Housewife & Student	East Midlands	12	1975

⁶³⁹ This table only includes respondents cited in thesis. All 30 were AFAB and identify as female.

⁶⁴⁰ Mass Observers replying to the 1996 Directive gave their age at the point of reply.

⁶⁴¹ All names are pseudonyms.

⁶⁴² Dates of birth have been calculated backward using age at the point of reply in 1996; because exact dates were not provided the dates might be out by one year.

⁶⁴³ Most women provided their occupation in the biographical information accompanying their response and I reproduce their descriptions here.

⁶⁴⁴ Location given via region. MO respondents differed in how they described their location. Some gave the name of villages or towns, whilst others referred to the city, county or region. For consistency, I have organised them via region.

⁶⁴⁵ Some women suggested the exact age and year of their first menses, whilst others estimated a rough age for their first menses, enabling me to figure out what year this corresponds to. When women did not provide any indication of age I have left this blank.

⁶⁴⁶ This was not listed often, but consideration of the given age of first menses in relation to date of birth enabled me to roughly work out the year of first menses. Where this was not possible I have listed the likely decade.

G2729	18	Gemma	1978	A-Level Student	SW England	14	92
G2624	33	Gillian	1963	Part-time teacher	SW England	13	1976
G2640	43	Gwen	1953	Librarian	SE England	13	1966
G2776	23	Georgina	1973	Bank Staff	London	14	1987
H2577	35	Helen	1961	Primary Teaching Assistant	SE England	13	1973
J2703	37	Janet	1959	Computer Software Consultant	London	12	1970
K798	45	Kathleen	1951	Freelance Writer	East of England	13	1964
L796	35	Linda	1961	Contracts Manager	East of England	11	1972
M1879	38	Mari	1958	Craftsperson	Mid Wales	12	1974
M2132	31	Marjorie	1965	Freelance Editor	SW England	11	1975
S2581	44	Sheila	1951	Book-Keeper	Yorkshire and the Humber	N/A	N/A
T1826	38	Tina	1958	Staff Development Officer	Scotland	12	1980
T1843	46	Tanya	1949	Housewife	NW England	15	1965
W1813	45	Wanda	1951	Teacher	West Midlands	13	1963
W1918	45	Winnie	1951	Fire Control Operator	SW England	12	1963
W2731	26	Whitney	1970	Administrative Officer	London	15	1985
W2780	38	Winona	1958	Part-Time English Teacher	NE England	15	1973

Appendix 4: Interview schedule for Body, Self, and Family: Women's Psychological, Emotional and Bodily Health in Britain, c.1960-1990

Interviews conducted by Tracey Loughran, Daisy Payling and Kate Mahoney were semi-structured, made up of general, specific and probing questions. Schedule provides only an indicative list of topics covered and questions asked in the interviews.

Oral History Schedule

Area 1: Childhood & Growing Up

- 1. When and where were you born?**
- 2. What was your childhood home like? Can you describe the layout?**
- 3. What was your place in the family?**
 - What was your relationship like with your parents/ grandparents/ siblings?
- 4. Could you tell me what you understand by 'health'?**
 - Discussion on physical, psychological, emotional definitions
 - Establish contextual information about definitions & approaches
 - [Could lead into discussions about different 'agencies' dealing with health, e.g. dentists, opticians and so on]
- 5. When did you first become aware of health as a child?**
 - Were you aware of family members being ill?
 - Were your siblings sources of information? [Awareness of childbirth, new technologies, knowledge from school, etc]
- 6. Did you feel healthy as a child?**
 - Did this change at any time?
 - Did your interactions with doctors change when you became a teenager?

7. Where did you get information about health from as a child?

- Family (grandparents, parents, siblings)
- School
- Friends
- Youth organisations or clubs [Sport and leisure]
- Do you remember reading about health? [Magazines and books]

8. What were you taught about health at school?

- What kind of school was this, e.g. state/ private – religious - primary/ secondary?
- Was there any kind of pastoral care?
- Sex education: was it taught, and by who?
- Were girls and boys taught differently?

9. Which sources of information did you trust most, and how did this change over time?

- Who had most authority, and why?
- How did your relationships with parents, siblings and friends change?
- Did you feel that you had enough support?
- Who did you feel most comfortable discussing health with?

10. Can you describe a typical visit to a doctor's surgery as a child?

- Why did you go to the doctor's?
- Who took you?
- What do you remember about the surgery, e.g. physical space, waiting room, what you did while waiting?
- What was the doctor like?
- Who 'followed up' on the doctor's advice, e.g. collected prescriptions, made sure you took medicine?
- Did the care-giver ever directly challenge the doctor, or fail to follow-up guidance?

Area 2: Adolescence, Adult Life and Relationships

1. How did your relationship with your body change as you became a teenager?

- Do you remember anyone telling you about periods? [Secrecy – familial and social]
- Do you remember your first period?
- How did you feel about periods?
- What was your mother's attitude towards periods?
- Did you keep track of your dates? How?
- Did your mother keep track of your dates?

2. Do you remember your first romantic feelings towards someone?

- Crushes
- Adolescent relationships

3. What were attitudes toward sex like when you were younger?

- Parental attitudes
- Social attitudes

4. Where did you get information on sex and relationships?

- Family (grandparents, parents, siblings)
- School
- Friends
- Youth organisations or clubs
- Do you remember reading about sex and relationships? [Magazines and books]

5. When did you learn about birth control?

- What types of birth control were you aware of?
- What kinds did you use?
- Did this change over time? Why?

6. Do you have a long-term partner?

- How did you meet?
- How has your relationship influenced your perception of your self and your identity?
- How has it influenced your attitudes to health and wellbeing?

7. Tell me about your working life.

- [Probe different conceptions of work here – paid/ unpaid, inside/outside the home, ‘work’ versus ‘career’]
- How has your work influenced you mentally and physically?
- How do you feel your work has influenced your wellbeing?
- How has your perception of work developed throughout your life?
- Have you had to endure periods of stress at work? Have these changed over time?
- How did you contend with these? Which forms of support did you access? Who did you feel you could talk to it at the time?

8. What were your main social activities as an adult?

- How have these social activities changed or developed over time?
- What do you enjoy about these activities?
- Do you do anything that you feel keeps you healthy? Why? Have these kinds of activities changed over time?
- Who do you like to spend time with in your spare time?
- To what extent do your social activities inform who you are as a person?

9. Did you read women’s magazines in your leisure time?

- When and where did you read them?
- Do you remember which magazines?
- What sorts of things do you remember seeing/reading?
- Which parts of the magazine did you particularly like, and why?
- Were there bits you never read?
- Do you remember much about the advertisements in magazines?
- How do you think these magazines presented women and their lives?
- Do you think magazines influenced your own actions or opinions in any way?

10. When do you think that you became an adult?

- Relationship with parents
- Sexual relationships
- Moving out of home
- Working life

Area 3: Health & Medical Experiences

1. Do you have children?

2. If the answer is yes:

- How many children do you have?
- Did you expect to have this number of children? [Planning; difficulties in conceiving; miscarriage; fostering and adoption]

Pregnancy

- How did you feel when you first became pregnant? How did other people respond to the news?
- What did you know about pregnancy before you became pregnant? Where did you get this information from?
- What was your experience of pregnancy? [Different experiences in different pregnancies]
- Were you aware of any social pressures or cultural norms about pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing when you were pregnant?
- Did your family members support you?
- What was your experience of health professionals and services like?
- Who else did you approach for information when you were pregnant?
- Did you approach any organisations? Did you feel as though information was readily available?

Childbirth & new motherhood

- What was your experience of childbirth like?
- What are your thoughts on any medical procedures that you underwent as a result?
- How do you think you were treated by medical professionals at the time?
- What were your relations with health visitors like?
- What was it like becoming a mother for the first time?
- Had you heard the phrase 'the baby blues'? [Postnatal depression]
- Did having children change how you felt about your body?
- Did becoming a mother change your relationship with your own mother?

Bringing up children

- Before you had children, did you have specific ideas about how they should be brought up?
- Where did these ideas come from?
- Did these change as a result of having children? Why?
- Where did you find information about your child's health and wellbeing?
- Why did you feel as though you needed to find information?
- Was there ever a specific time when you felt especially concerned about your child's health?
- How did you see your role in looking after your family's health? What actions did you take to look after them? [Note: don't limit this question to asking about children]
- How has your caring role changed over time?
- Did you try to bring up your children in the same way you were brought up? Why (or why not)?
- In what ways do you think that you are like your own mother?

2. If the answer is no:

- Did you want/expect to have children?
- If no, then why not?
- If yes, then why do you think it did not happen?

- Did you take any medical advice?
- What were your experiences of health professionals and other services like?
- Did you consider fostering or adoption? [follow-up questions depending on whether this route was taken]
- Did you look for other sources of support? What were these?
- Did you feel under pressure to have children?
- Do you think family and friends treated you differently because you do not have children?
- Do you feel that people understood why you did not have children?
- Did not having children change how you felt about your body?
- Do you remember reading about or seeing depictions of childless women on TV or in films? How were these women portrayed?
- Do you think it is easier for women to be childless nowadays?

3. Could you describe a significant medical encounter from any time in your life [apart from childbirth]? This might relate to your own health, or to that of a family member or friend.

- a. What was your initial response to this situation?
 - How did you feel?
 - Did you know much about this type of situation beforehand?
 - What did you do to try to cope?
- b. Did you look for information or support?
 - Where did you look for this information or support?
 - What role did family and friends play?
 - Was support available from other groups or organisations?
- c. What were your interactions with medical professionals and health services like during this time?
 - Did these interactions change over time?
 - Did these interactions change how you thought about doctors and other health professionals?

- d. What were your interactions with family and friends like during this time?
- e. To what extent has this experience changed how you live now/ how you think about health and illness?

Area 4: Reflections

- 1. Can you describe a typical day in your life at the age of 14, 24, 34 and 44 to me?**
- 2. Can you describe a typical day in your life now to me?**
- 3. How would you describe your current state of health?**
 - [Consider how defined in relative or absolute terms]
- 4. How do you maintain this state of health?**
 - What are your interactions with health professionals?
 - Do you self-prescribe?
 - Do you take particular actions to maintain health?
 - Do you feel different pressures to live a certain way compared to when you were younger?
 - Could think about health behaviours here, e.g. alcohol consumption, smoking]
- 5. How do you feel about the process of ageing?**
 - What does ageing mean to you?
 - Do you feel that your relationships with family and friends are different now you are older?
 - How has the process of ageing influenced your views on your health, wellbeing and your body?

6. Have you heard the phrase ‘the change of life’? What does this mean to you?

- Follow-up questions if the interviewee has experienced menopause:
- Was this a significant experience for you?
- Did it influence your perspective of yourself and your body?
- Did it change any of your relationships?

7. How has your life been different to your own mother’s?

- How was your mother’s life different to your grandmother’s life?
- How do you think you have been affected by broader social and cultural developments concerning women?
- In your lifetime, do you think that feminism has had a positive influence on women’s lives?

8. How do you expect your life to change in the future?

- What are your thoughts and concerns on your future health and wellbeing?

Appendix 5: Table of Selected Oral History Interviews for ‘Body, Self and Family: Women’s Psychological, Emotional and Bodily Health in Britain, c.1960-1990’ Project.

⁶⁴⁷

Name ⁶⁴⁸	Y.O.B	Place of Birth	In Person/ Remote	Interviewer ⁶⁴⁹	Date of Interview
Ada	1957	Yorkshire and the Humber	In person	KM	10.03.18
Dorothy	1967	North West England	In Person	KM	5.02.18
Elaine	1957	West Midlands	In Person	TL	6.08.18
Floss	1956	South East England	In Person	KM	13.2.18
Frances	1944	London	In Person	KM	25.01.18
Ivy	1963	South West Wales	Remote	TL	8.12.20
Jess	1968	East of England	In Person	TL	4.02.20
Jo	1954	London	Remote	DP	14.01.21
Kirsty	1953	South East England	In Person	DP	6.03.20
Lisa	1963	South East	In Person	DP	9.12.19
Mandy	1952	East Midlands	In Person	KM	13.03.18
Mary	1945	South East	In Person	DP	12.12.19
Pat	1959	London	Remote	TL	8.4/9.4.21
Rachel	1944	London	In Person	KM	25.01.18
Tracey	1964	South East Wales	In Person	KM	17.05.18
Zoe	1968	Dominica	In Person	KM	6.12.19

⁶⁴⁷ Interviews are currently undeposited, but will be deposited at the British Library Oral History Collection in 2022. The table consists only of interviews consulted for this thesis, of which there are 16 in total. The project has collected a total of 91 interviews to be stored at the BL.

⁶⁴⁸ All names are pseudonyms

⁶⁴⁹ Initials here refer to Tracey Loughran, Daisy Payling, and Kate Mahoney.

Appendix 6: Table of selected interviews reused in this thesis, initially conducted for my MA Dissertation, Cardiff University, 2017.

Name ⁶⁵⁰	Y.O.B	Place of Birth	Interviewer	Date of Interview	Year of First Menses
Sally	1954	South West Wales	HF	7.08.2017	1960s

⁶⁵⁰Pseudonym

Appendix 7: IPC Cosmetics and Toiletries Survey 1977-1978. 'How Sanitary Products used in last 3 / 4 weeks were obtained'.

SANTITARY PROTECTION

How Products used in last 3/4 weeks were Obtained

151.

	ALL WOMEN 13-64	AGE							SOCIAL CLASS				REGION					
		13-15	16-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	A8	C1	C2	DE	London & South East	South West & Wales	Mid-lands	North West	Yorks/ Hlnd & North	Scot-land
Unweighted base	1433	102	141	253	426	336	167	8	248	322	524	339	525	193	231	150	199	135
Weighted base for percentages	1398	104	145	247	397	329	169	7	194	380	494	330	511	189	222	148	197	131
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Boots	37	33	42	40	35	36	38		47	44	32	30	42	42	48	20	21	33
Other Dispensing Chemists	28	35	27	26	28	29	27		26	22	32	29	28	25	18	40	23	39
Total Chemists	64	65	69	65	63	63	65		72	66	63	59	70	67	66	60	44	72
Drug Store/Drug Mart	4	5	4	3	6	5	5		2	4	5	5	6	5	2	2	6	1
Grocer or Supermarket	20	17	17	19	22	23	19		18	19	21	22	16	17	19	23	37	15
Department Store or Woolworths Marks & Spencer, British Home Stores or Littlewoods	5	7	3	6	5	4	6		3	6	5	5	3	7	8	6	3	7
Any other kind of Shop or Market Stall	3	2	3	2	3	4	2		1	2	3	5	2	3	6	5	2	1
Hairdresser	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Agent for Direct Selling Organisation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Received as a Gift	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other ways	*	1	-	*	-	*	-		1	*	*	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
Don't know	5	4	3	6	5	4	5		5	4	3	6	5	3	1	3	9	7
Base too small for percentages																		

* = less than 0.5%

IPC COSMETICS AND TOILETRIES SURVEY 1977/78

IPC COSMETICS AND TOILETRIES SURVEY 1977/78

* = less than 0.5%

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