



CRIMSON WAVES: NARRATIVES ABOUT MENSTRUATION, WATER, AND CLEANLINESS

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Abstract

In 2017, pad brand Bodyform® launched the ‘Blood Normal’ campaign.¹ By depicting realistic-looking blood, the campaign marked a first for a disposable menstrual product. In the advertising video, blood was shown trickling down the thighs of a showering woman. Despite its novelty, the image of the bleeding woman in water calls back to longstanding debates about menstruation, water, and cleanliness. In this article, I discuss the visual and cultural history of this imagery, exploring how Bodyform’s campaign compares to older narratives. Drawing from ethnographic material, critical menstrual literature, and historical research, I investigate how the seemingly groundbreaking ‘Blood Normal’ campaign leans on decades of links between periods, water, and cleanliness.

Keywords: menstruation; women’s history; branding; advertising; cleaning

1. The entire short film can be viewed on Bodyform® UK website: <https://www.bodyform.co.uk/our-world/bloodnormal/>

Introduction to Menstruation Cultural Histories

Menstrual product companies increasingly appropriate popular culture and artistic depictions of periods. My study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to investigate the ways in which late-capitalism embraces and co-opts feminism in depictions of menstruation (Fraser, 2009; Weeks, 2011; Zeisler, 2016).² Further, I argue, despite the many attempts to rebrand contemporary menstruation as ‘normal blood,’ traces of patriarchal attitudes towards periods as unclean linger in depictions of menstruation.

An introduction to examples of associations made between water and menstruation in religious texts, historical discourse, and myths, serve as historical backdrop to my focus on contemporary depictions of menstrual blood and water in mythology, popular culture, advertising, and art. For contemporary examples, I chose from Anglo-American visual culture prior to Essity’s campaign, which was created in London in 2017 by the advertising agency, Abbot Mead Vickers BBDO, for the Scandinavian multinational corporation, and circulated heavily on social media platforms in Northern Europe and Scandinavia. In this article, I discuss examples prominent in mainstream culture around 2010, which was accompanied by an explosion of media interest and analysis of the advertisements and artworks such as by social and political scientist Lauren Rosewarne (2012) and lawyer and activist Jennifer Weiss-Wolf (2017). This article further adds an art historical theoretical framework to the debate about menstruation as a trend, by analyzing and comparing the iconography of the images in the tradition of sociologist Ervin Goffman’s (1979) work on gender displays and commercial realism, and scholars of education Shire Agnew and Susan Sandretto’s (2016) insistence on the importance of critical literacy analysis of the advertising texts of menstruation.

² This article is part of a wider Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship research project about the visual history of menstruation since 1950, which is in progress in 2018 and open to collaboration and debate.

While the historical sources are numerous and scattered resources of menstrual discourse from many decades, each source contributes to my interpretation of the selected images for the study presented in this article. Ethnographic material from Scandinavia provides insight into the historical background for Swedish Essity's campaign, religious texts and decrees help explain the prevalence of menstrual taboos, and critical menstrual scholarship contextualizes advertising beyond the aims of profit. Although several scholars (Jutel, 2005, Mandziuk, 2010, Treneman, 1988) have analyzed menstrual product advertising, in this article I seek to contribute a deep critical reading of a small sample of images contemporaneous to the unusual 2017 Bodyform campaign (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figures 1-2. Still shots from Abbot Mead Vickers BBDO (advertising agency) for Essity, Bodyform® 'Blood Normal' ad, 2017. Art direction by Nadja Lossgott, written by Nicholas Hulley, and directed by Daniel Wolfe through Somesuch (production company).

Menstruation is considered taboo in many societies based on ideas about menstrual blood being dirty. However, perceptions about uncleanliness have changed depending on the knowledge and products available for management, from self-made solutions such as moss or cloth in the nineteenth century, to mass-produced cotton-patents like applicator tampons in the 1930s (Al-Khalidi & Southampton, 2000; Freidenfelds, 2009). In modern Scandinavian history, many did not consider blood a reason to change clothing or behavior, instead women used cloth or nothing as detailed by Swedish historian Denise Malmberg (1991). The Norwegian Ethnographic Study also reveals that in the 1800s women bled directly onto clothes, legs, and floors.³ From about 1900, this practice changed, spurred on by a new interest in hygiene and sanitation from powerful institutions such as medicine and education, and a stronger public interest in having a modern, efficient, and clean body (Freidenfelds, 2009; Shuttleworth, 1990). Decrees from the national health institutes in Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States in the twentieth century advocated for baths, toilet paper, and hygiene (Strasser, 2000). These would encourage self-made menstrual management solutions such as knitted garments, while also providing potential for the early entrepreneurs in the field (Vostral, 2008). From menarche (first period), Scandinavian girls in the early-twentieth century were instructed in knitting rectangular squares, which they in turn pinned to their underwear. The knitted pads—or, in the case of North America and Europe, cloths—would in turn be either washed or discarded (Freidenfelds, 2009). Thus, social expectations connected women's cleaning labor with women's intimate hygiene.

The craft and care taken within this self-care system, reveals the amount of time and energy devoted to controlling menstruation, in a time before the system was commercialized and production mechanized. However, after the Second World War, the market for commercial and disposable sanitary pads revolutionized the menstrual experience. In Scandinavia, pad producers Saba® became successful and, at its peak, had over 700 employers in a tiny Norwegian village, until the Swedish Cellulose Company (SCA: today Essity) bought it. In the United States, Kotex® took over the national and, later, international, markets with advertisements centered on elegant women in evening dresses (Mandziuk, 2010).

³ Norwegian Ethnographic Survey, 'Survey about Hygiene in Older Times: Question 169', 1993, Norwegian Folk Museum.

Soon, others were inspired by the booming business, and commercially available disposable tampons became available in European countries and the United States, all effectively cashing in on the idea that menstrual blood should not be visible.

British Bodyform is, in fact, a small part of a multi-conglomerate Essity, which is based in Sweden and has produced the best-selling menstrual products in the Nordic countries since the mid-twentieth century. In Europe, Essity has had to contend with increasing competition. The German tampon o.b.®, standing for *ohne binde* (without pad), was invented in 1936 and became a popular choice for young women, whereas the later applicator-tampon took care of concerns about touching blood or body parts, in addition to situations when hands could not be washed.⁴ In late-twentieth century, smaller businesses developed the rubber menstrual cup and eco-feminist organizations started promoting reusable cloth pads. Start-ups from the United States focused on menstrual underwear and clothing in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with THINX® and DearKates® making headlines for ‘unapologetic’ and ‘controversial’ campaigns featuring anatomical language, mentions of blood, and non-models of different sizes and genders—but no blood (Company, 2017; Dockterman, 2014; Lewin, 2016; Smiley, 2016; Stone, 2014).

By the 2010, Essity’s long formula of promoting Swedish relaxed attitudes to bodies in their advertising was under threat from increased competition and media literate consumers. In order to capture the changing market, a more creative advertising strategy was necessary. Parallel to this, the Birth Control Pill and other hormonal solutions made menstruation obsolete for many women, and some doctors argued aggressively against periods altogether (Mamo & Fosket, 2009; Segal, 1999). Bodyform and Essity chose to focus on creativity, with AMV BBDO creative partners Nadja Lossgott and Nicholas Hulley teaming up with director Daniel Wolfe, whose 2014 movie told the story of a young Pakistani girl who runs away with her White boyfriend. Lossgott, Hulley, and Wolfe already had stellar reputations as visual and narrative risk takers, and brought their talents to the ‘Blood Normal’ campaign. Their highly artistic and hyper-real video might suggest that commercial menstrual discourse was changing,⁵ however, examining

⁴ o.b.® is a *digital tampon*, inserted with fingers (*digits* in Latin). Applicator tampons are inserted via cardboard or plastic tube.

⁵ Essity was not alone in changing creatively in the 2010s: Tampax® utilized crude humor in their ‘Mother Nature’ campaign; Always® used feminist social science

the building blocks of this iconography reveals a different narrative.

The Dangerous Menstrual Bath

If, as feminist anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) suggested, dirt is simply “matter out of place,” then the process of cleaning the dirty body is a moment of intense personal improvement (p. 36). The shower or bath promises to exonerate smells, external pollution, and bodily excretions. Society deemed visible menstruation as taboo and the bodily process and the bodies that menstruate unclean (Stein & Kim, 2009). Moreover, many believed that women had to expel excess blood from their bodies, that it was dangerous to stop the flow once it started, and that feeling cold or wet might facilitate cessation (Freidenfelds, 2009). One might assume that a bath or shower would provide a solution for those who perceived menstruation as dirty. Not so. For most of the twentieth century, many menstruating women were told—and told each other—not to bathe, nor get their hair wet, or swim for fear of illness or death (Warsh, 2014).

Further clues about this mythology come from the religious texts that explain in great detail how, but not why, women are unclean during menstruation. The Christian Bible (King James version: Leviticus 15:19-33) proclaims that women will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, and that anything she touches will also be dirty. Orthodox Jewish community rituals surrounding menstruation, or *niddah*, require immersion in a bath, the *mikveh* (Wasserfall, 2015). In Islam, women experiencing *haiz* are exempt from fasting and sexual relations (Mazuz, 2013). Hinduism, traditionally, considers menstruating women ritually impure. Japanese Buddhism ban women from temples during the monthly event or menstruation. In rural Nepal women have long been practicing the tradition of *chhaupadi*, isolating menstruators based on the belief that the blood was toxic (Dahal, 2008). In large parts of the world, women hide their blood in disposable products, which they buy and conceal in order to mask evidence of periods (Houppert, 2000). Some women buy and consume hormonal birth control for the sole reason of controlling or ending their menstruation altogether (Mamo & Fosket, 2009). Some countries emphasize that the lack of access to water and research in the viral ‘Like A Girl’ campaign; HelloFlo created long and funny YouTube videos centred on a girl’s first menarche; MoonCup experimented with a ‘tampon versus menstrual cup’ rap, etc.

sanitation is a severe crisis for girls and women (WaterAid, 2013). While there are exceptions, historical traditions and decrees about women's uncleanliness and ritual impurity during menstruation suggest that perceptions of women's hygiene are contaminated by menstruation.

Historian Laura Freidenfelds (2009) utilized interviews and analysis of medical texts as evidence that women feared stopping menstrual flow with cold or water. Evidence from Scandinavia suggests a whisper network between women, reinforcing the myth amongst each other whilst seldom completely adhering to the rules. Ancient texts convey fears concerning women touching things, including liquids, while menstruating. In ancient Rome, the philosopher and naturalist Pliny the Elder famously described the problem (77 AD):

Contact with the monthly flux of women turns new wine sour, makes crops wither, kills grafts, dries seeds in gardens, causes the fruit of trees to fall off, dims the bright surface of mirrors, dulls the edge of steel, and causes a horrible smell to fill the air.

As with the religious warnings, Pliny combined the assertion of menstrual uncleanliness with information about the dangers of the bleeding woman's touch. Women who touched certain materials would alter these objects in a negative way. Any menstruating woman can quite easily disprove such statements, but in one aspect Pliny is correct. Any bleeding person *will* affect water, indeed the water they use to clean the body. When blood mixes with water, the water turns red, pink, or rusty. There is no escaping the visual evidence of menstruation and its stains until the cycle moves on and/or stops. In a time before running water, menstrual blood in a bath would be evident. While a modern shower quickly disposes the blood, a bath will, over time, change color. In this way, the menstruator obviously alters the substance of water, exceeding beyond the acceptable borders of the internal bodily architecture.

Menstruation and Water Tropes in Popular Culture, Advertising, and Art

The preoccupation with water and blood has continued to confuse menstruators and non-menstruators alike. For example, centuries after Pliny's description, Scandinavian women born between 1900 and 1940 reported on the

dangers of bathing while bleeding, or of swimming.⁶ For girls and women living by the sea, this meant missing out on some of the highlights of the short summer. Despite secretly defying the warning ("who would ever know?"), they still complied when in the home, where a tub offered little privacy. The mythology is strikingly similar in many countries. Medical doctor Clelia Duel Mosher reported similar beliefs in the US in 1923:

Why should a woman alter all her habits of life so sharply at the time of menstruation? This alone is sufficient to account for many of her symptoms. At the time of her functional periodicity she needs more rather than less bathing, provided care is taken to prevent chilling of the surface, and provided she gradually accustoms herself, without fear or worry in regard to consequences, to rational bathing at this as well as other times. The average woman has been taught to have a phobia toward water at the menstrual period. (1923, pp. 54-55)⁷

Despite Mosher's (1923) and others' efforts to educate girls and women, anecdotal, commercial, and cultural evidence suggests that bathing remained off-limits officially, while defied privately. Many women, like Mosher, continued to energetically argue against the unspoken rule of not washing—for example, the positive counter-narratives evident in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Boston Women's Health Collective & Norsigian, 1973); Anne Cameron's (1981) novel *Daughters of Copper Woman*; Dianna Cohen's (2015) *The Curse*, a collection of stories and poems; comedian, activist and academic Chella Quint's (2000) *Adventures in Menstruating* zine, and indeed most of the critical literature about menstruation, which became available in the 1970s, and is having a renaissance today.⁸ In what follows, I examine tropes relating to menstruation and water in popular culture.

Horror in the Shower

Horror, both the feeling and genre, is a contemporary menstruation and water trope in popular culture. Many will recall titular character Carrie showering

⁶ Norwegian Ethnographic Survey, 'Survey 169: Hygiene in Older Times', 1993, Norwegian Folk Museum.

⁷ For more on Mosher see *Kiss and Tell: Surveying Sex in the Twentieth Century* (Ericksen & Steffen, 1999).

⁸ For analysis of menstrual politics and activism since the 1970s, see Chris Bobel (2010).

in the opening paragraphs of novelist Stephen King's (1974) book, and the opening sequence of director Brian de Palma's (1976) movie of the same name. Carrie's menarche marks the onset of spookiness, telekinesis and angst, climaxing in her own gothic bloody revenge at the school prom (Coykendall, 2000). The shower scene is an example of the menstrual history of water aversion. Carrie is unaware, as were many girls in the 1970s, of what menstruation is before her own menarche (Brumberg, 1993). The shock of publicly bleeding from between the legs in the shower room at school becomes a trauma. Although Carrie (played by Sissy Spacek) is in the shower, she will, according to her mother and society at large, never be clean again. The blood marks her as a sexual and dangerous being, with the story rendering her an actual killer. The bloodstains carry beyond the shower, making water and soap useless. Carrie's innocence has been corrupted by blood, literally taking and spilling over her. The depiction of the scene in the movie, and in the remake in 2013, is also a rare example of realistic looking menstrual blood being shown on screen, predating contemporary advertising by decades (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Still shot from *Carrie*, 1976. Directed by Brian De Palma, written by Stephen King (novel) and Lawrence D. Cohen (screenplay), produced by Red Bank Films, and released and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer films.

Carrie's hand touches her blood, which is running down her thigh, and clearly visible escaping down the drain. It is a detailed and visual rhythm realistic depiction of menstruating while showering. Menstrual blood in *Carrie* is depicted as real and solid, but it is also buying into the tropes of *the shower of angst* so frequently used by female (and sometimes male) characters after rape, murder, or

other traumatic events.⁹ The trope is that menstrual blood must be washed away in order to make the victim or perpetrator clean. But the narrative suggests that showers do not accomplish cleanliness of evil. The blood may be draining away, and the water soaking the character, but the metaphorical stain of the sin remains; rendering everything unclean and scary. King is not the first (male) author to connect blood and horror. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) exploited the same combination of fear, bodily liquids, and the claustrophobic limits of the shower room. Countless films and books have set their bloody crimes in the shower; a symbolical place of cleanliness, naked bodies, and peace (Briefel, 2005). These terrifying bloody showers contrast distinctly with the pink, soothing atmosphere of the menstrual cleaning process depicted in both menstrual product advertising and art works.

Advertising Cleanliness

Since *Carrie*, Bodyform's 'Blood Normal' campaign, as well as other advertising that normalized menstruation as bloody, are prominent advertisements today (Jones, 2016). Earlier menstrual advertisements focused on their products' ability to give consumers "that shower-fresh feeling," thus directly suggesting that menstruators should pay close attention to hygiene. Similarly, the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) programs supported by the United Nations and the annual Menstrual Hygiene Day events testify to the importance of educating and advocating for more clean water, toilets, and menstrual product management tools around the world, including in disaster zones and refugee camps (UN Water, 2017). However, menstrual product advertising campaigns focused instead on women showering in private and beautiful bathrooms.

Essity, in the 1990s when it was still the Swedish Cellulose Company, also aligned with blood-as-normal tropes, although with more focus on fashion and fun, notably through the iconic jingle 'Whoaaaah Bodyform' performed by singer Stevie Lang in a series of TV advertisements.¹⁰ By the 2010s, Essity was one of the first multinational corporations to recognize that the culture of periods

⁹ See TV Tropes Org for more: <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ShowerOfAngst>

¹⁰ SCA's (now Essity) Bodyform® campaign during the 1990s, available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asXw2a4kQLc>

was changing, spurred on by activists and artists like Quint, artist and poet Rupri Kaur, drummer and famed freebleeder Kiran Gandhi, and entrepreneurs like Miki Agrawal (THINX®), and Arunachalam Muruganatham (whose story is told in the 2018 movie *Pad Man*). A re-launch of the same products, starting with an ironic social media video explaining menstruation to a male viewer, followed by a video showing bloody athletes and the slogan ‘No blood should hold us back.’ The ‘Blood Normal’ campaign was created after Essity had been writing and joking about the media ban on showing menstruated blood, and climaxed with the launch of the campaign on social media in 2017. The 20-second video showed in the UK (a longer version is available in Sweden) starts with a white hand emptying a test tube full of red liquid onto a pad, and continues with a collage of period culture: a woman dressed as a pad for Halloween, a man buying Bodyform in a shop, and the shower scene. The latter, a clear reference to *Carrie*, utilizing an identical shot of blood running down a White women’s thighs in a white steamy shower.



Figures 4-5. Still shots from *Carrie* and Bodyform®.

The video ends with the words “Periods are normal, showing them should be too,” which ironically seems to balance on the edge of admitting that stains are now acceptable slips, making the constant necessity for Bodyform itself debatable.¹¹

Established brands like Kotex® (Kimberly-Clark, 1929), Tampax® (Tambrands Inc. from 1931, until Procter & Gamble, 1997) and Bodyform have been reinventing and modernizing their marketing strategy since the 1920s, aiming always at new generations, faithful only to the momentary culture and interests of girls and women of reproductive age (Mandziuk, 2010). In contrast, newer

¹¹ Bodyform also carries a series of thinner pads, designed to be used during light days or in-between menstruation. The red liquid in Bodyform’s advert was not actually blood, but rather a mixture of corn syrup and food coloring, as real blood would have been “unhygienic” (Gil, 2017).

brands, such as menstrual cup company Lunette® (2004), have no such historical baggage. Menstrual cups, with their light environmental and economic footprint, have re-emerged as a viable alternative in recent years. When Lunette® created its largest advertisement campaign to date, artistic visions of menstruation and water dominated. The August 2017 ‘Periods are Cool. Period’ campaign featured international artists, bathrooms, and pink liquids and lights.¹²

In three short videos, musician, artist and activist Madame Ghandi, model and activist Juliet Atto, and blogger Flora Wiström talked candidly on camera about their experiences with menstruation and the cup. The films were directed by Swedish artist Arvida Byström in her characteristic style, which combines pastel colors, intimate close-up shots, and collages. The continuous use of pink hues references traditional femininity, presented in an avant-garde fashion, while the collage technique hints at vaginal shapes in flowers, liquids, and words.¹³ The shower or bath features prominently in all three one-minute films. Atto starts her video in the (empty) bathtub, and later stands next to a sink and shower. She pours a glass of water, which overflows, and is then soaked up by a mop. The first shot of Ghandi shows her turning on the sink, where she is later washing a pink menstrual cup. A piece of pink underwear hangs to dry in the shower, while another panty lays bloody on the floor. Ghandi cleans the latter in the same sink. Pink soap is squirted into an empty bath. Wiström pours blood down the sink, and is seen sitting on the toilet, which she flushes. Soaked in pink, the videos are feminine and delicate, presenting a comforting and intimate crimson world of sacred bathrooms. The voiceovers focus on the environmental, economic, comfort, historical and personal reasons for using a menstrual cup, but the visual landscape is based around and in the clean confines of one room dedicated to cleaning and intimate hygiene. The portrayal is attractive and unique as far as conventional advertising goes, but a menstrual narrative around the process of cleaning is not new (see Figures 6-10).

¹² The ads can be viewed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8jC72B_BG4 (Lunette, 2017). See Monki’s website for the campaign at <https://www.monki.com/we-are-monki/monki-thinks/periods-are-cool-period/>

¹³ Pink has long been ridiculed by art critics, and also reclaimed by feminist artists. For more see chapter 2 in Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981), *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, and Sylvia Bovenchen, ‘Is there a feminine aesthetic?’ (Robinson, 2001).



Figures 6-10. Still shots from Monki x Lunette x The Cup Foundation, 'Periods Are Cool' campaign, 2017. Directed by Arvida Byström, produced by Carl Sander for Tarot Pictures (production company), art directed by Sara Hernandez, and copywritten by Amina Kesraoui.

Contemporary Artists' Attention to Menstruation

Some artists have critiqued socialized notions of menstruation as unclean, and tend to refuse the discourse that insists that periods are grimy. Early examples include Judy Chicago's 1971 lithograph *Red Flag*, and Judy Clark's 1972 *Menstruation* series, both featuring depictions of blood but in different ways.¹⁴ The menstrual shower has also been a site for exploration by artists. In 2015, artist and poet Rupi Kaur was famously banned from Instagram for a series of artworks showing menstrual blood (Saul, 2015). The series, photographed in part by the artist and her sister Prabh Kaur, was swiftly republished after a public outcry about the ban. The *Period* series (2015-2017) includes images from everyday menstrual experiences, including one shower scene (see Figure 11).

¹⁴ On Judy Chicago see Fields (2012), and see Battistan (2013) on Clark and the London scene.



Figure 11. Rupi Kaur, 'Untitled', from 'Period' series, 2015. Kaur's Instagram account.¹⁵

In the bird's eye perspectival self-portrait photograph (Figure 11), Kaur's legs are visible from knee to toe. A long trickle of blood runs from thigh to heel. The white shower tiles reveal splashes of blood. The steam blurs the image slightly.¹⁶ Neither glorifying nor minimizing the showering experience, this is the only image in the series taken from the vantage point of the menstruator. Whereas other depictions show Kaur's body from afar, the shower scene positions the onlooker in the space of the artist, presenting the possibility of both self-portraiture and radical empathy.¹⁷ Whereas both the *Carrie* and advertising scenes are shot at a distance by other people, Kaur's art places the viewer within the experience of menstruating.

¹⁵ See Kaur's (2018) entire 'Period' series at <https://rupikaur.com/period/>

¹⁶ Created after the remake of *Carrie* in 2013, and before the new Bodyform® campaign, Kaur's *Period* series circulated before large corporations normalized menstrual blood.

¹⁷ Radical empathy, or compassion, is a term coined by philosopher Khen Lampert (2006), and refers to an alternative socio-educational reality where compassion is at the basis of society.

Conclusion. Period

Promises of modernity has always been at the heart of menstrual advertising (Freidenfelds, 2009). As a marketing concept, modernity utilizes images of youth and beauty, capitalizes on trends, and promises a generation-specific product. For menstrual product companies, such as Essity and Procter & Gamble, a legacy of dated advertising haunts their brands. Tampax®, Bodyform® and o.b.® are not identical, but they have all sought to constantly reinvent themselves through the branding strategies pioneered by Procter & Gamble and other multinational corporations in the late-twentieth-century through consumer market research (McCraw, 2009). Market surveys indicate what a selected sector of society thinks about a topic, and the constant reappearance of cleaning themes in menstrual advertising might, therefore, be tied to (some of) the public's reported feelings about menstruation. Reminiscent of the market surveys conducted in the early-twentieth-century, people may, in fact, report one feeling whilst practicing another. The difficulty of knowing exactly how viewers respond to the images discussed in this essay also reflect the challenges of conducting thematic-based historical research using visual culture ephemera such as advertising. Nevertheless, following Goffman's (1979) pioneering study of gender in advertising, paying close attention to nonverbal or textual clues enables critique of the ways in which advertising emphasizes and promotes gender roles.

As the advertising campaigns of companies like Bodyform change due to market research, artists and activists continue to build alternative interpretations in dialogue with shifting cultural norms. Artists have challenged the idea of commercializing menstruation, but today find their pioneering work distilled and cleaned up in the advertising funded by multi-national corporations. While Bodyform turns to the shower to dispel menstruation taboos, in a move tying blood to dirtiness once again, artists refuse the age-old folklore of Pliny by complicating the menstrual discourse beyond questions of women's hygiene.

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