

I, alongside billions of women, know the feeling of being ashamed of my period. Walking through the ‘lady product’ aisle at a store makes me feel guilty and uncomfortable. When in public bathrooms, I slowly unwrap a tampon as if the world would end if anyone knew what I was doing. Even when I talk about this topic to anyone else—especially boys—I often wonder if it would be better if I just stayed silent. I worry about ruining the mood. However, although I have experienced the shame that comes because of my natural cycle, I am lucky that that is *all* I have experienced. Around the world, women are ostracized when their period comes. Many do not know what is happening and are afraid of their own bodies. The impact this has on the females of the world—and, therefore, the whole world—cannot be underestimated. Why should something that half of the human population deals with be considered socially forbidden? When something completely normal is made into something completely taboo, something must change. I feel a personal connection with this issue because I have experienced the first hand effects of period stigmatization, but I wish to speak about it because I believe it is an important step to gender equality.

How can we fix an issue that has been implanted in our world for centuries? The menstruation stigma spreads across the world and is reacted to in completely different ways. Many cultures remove women from society while they are bleeding, either keeping them at home or secluding them in a separate area. Nepal and West Bengal are both examples of places in which women get kicked out religious institutes and schools when they are bleeding. Lack of education surrounding menstruation and cleanliness (and lack of products to use) causes an increase in diseases. When women are never taught about menstruation and they get their period, they quickly start to view their own bodies as dirty, unnatural, and an inconvenience. They start to hate what they have.

While the affects of menstruation stigmatism do differ from place to place, the lack of education surrounding menstruation in developing countries in particular is astonishing. In Iran, forty percent of girls thought that their periods were some sort of disease. A survey conducted by the UN’s sanitation agency (WSSCC) in India concluded “almost a third of women and girls had known nothing about periods, and over 70% thought menstrual blood was dirty” (George). This ‘dirtiness’ is a misunderstanding that causes self-hatred and can become an obstacle in health. “Women who do use cloths are often too embarrassed to dry them in the sun, which means they don’t get disinfected. Approximately 70% of all reproductive diseases in India are caused by poor menstrual hygiene - it can also affect maternal mortality” (Venema). This shame has a direct physical impact on women, causing wide-scale impact. As mentioned earlier, menstruation can also affect a woman’s participation in school. In fact, “Menstruation is the number one reason why girls in developing countries miss school, or drop out altogether” (Rubli). This furthers the education gap between women and men. Through all of these things, we can see that the stigma affects women’s mental, physical, and educational stability. It is not something to be taken lightly.

Periods should not be seen as strange or something that must be hidden. When no one is willing to talk about the issue, no one will be able to fully fix it. For this reason, I believe making period talk a normal thing in the western world will not only help our own culture but finally start more public conversations about helping the more endangered women around the world.

The question, of course, becomes how we can make period talk normal. A large part of it is dependent on families—mothers and fathers need to talk to their daughters *and* sons about periods and what exactly periods are. Movies need to stop using periods as the butt of the joke. And medical sources need to stop perpetuating the belief that menstrual cycles often cause mood swings. *Everyday Health* states “Premenstrual syndrome affects a high percentage of women of childbearing age, with many women feeling mood changes in the days before menstruation. And while menstrual

symptoms like irritability, anger, and mood swings are a monthly bother for most women, severe PMS can be emotionally debilitating for some.” Observing the medical definition of PMS emotional disorders (also known as PMDD), however, we can see that this is not true. “... looking at the most recent studies, we see that on average, three to eight percent of women suffer from PMDD” (DeLuca). This has been proven many times, but the fear of periods and lack of conversation causes even medical sources to continuously spread wrong information. However, while these are all ways to help fix the stigmatism, I want to specifically focus on changing the way advertising deals with menstruation.

The best products are the ones that shown as the ones that can be hidden easily. The majority of period products are advertised using shame. However, this is not the way it has to be. Rather than focusing on embarrassment, I believe these products should be advertised using the sense of joy that periods can bring. In my personal experience, alongside many of my female friends, sharing period information is a good way to connect. Girls on their periods immediately feel empathy for each other (if they get cramps or any other period related pain) and are often brought closer. For younger girls, periods are a way of showing that they are maturing and becoming a woman. For older women, periods can also be a wonderful present for those worried about pregnancy. So why is it that when so many positive things could be focused on, advertisements solely focus on embarrassment? And, more importantly, what would an advertisement that treats periods as normal, incredible things look like?

It is not surprising that most of the tampon advertisements of the past are filled with sexism and shame for the female body. The 1940 advertisers rarely using the word “period” and never mention “blood”—but it was during a time when women were already significantly oppressed. That does not make it acceptable, but it does make it understandable. In an age of sexism, lack of understanding for the female body and mind was normal. Even still, it is important to look at and analyze past tampon advertising to understand trends throughout time. I will use examples from Tampax and Kotex that highlight overall methods of tampon and pad advertising. The pictures chosen were not the only ones I analyzed, but they are the prime example of trends. Both of these brands were (and still are) two of the biggest tampon/pad companies.



**DIVE  
INTO  
SUMMER**

ENJOY EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THE SUN-SWEPT DAYS, THE VELVET NIGHTS. BE CONFIDENT, COMFORTABLE WITH THE COOL, CLEAN, FRESH PROTECTION OF TAMPAX

REGISTERED AND PAT. U.S. PAT. OFF. DESIGN, TRADEMARK, © 1965 TAMPAX, INC. TAMPAX IS A TRADEMARK OF TAMPAX, INCORPORATED, BUCKLE, MASS.



Some people think exercises are boring. But not you. You invent your own. You never skip a stretch just because it's one of "those days" and you never have to change your pace, thanks to Tampax tampons.

They give you sufficient protection...more than enough for your normal needs. They're soft and highly absorbent. And gently expand in all directions—length, breadth and width—to fit your inner contours.

Tampax tampons are comfortable because the slim, pre-

fabricated container applicator glides the tampon correctly into position where it can't be felt.

And unlike plastic applicators, the Tampax tampon applicator



MADE IN U.S.A. BY TAMPAX CORPORATION, PLYMOUTH, MASS.

can be flushed away. In fact, both the Tampax tampon and its applicator are completely flushable and biodegradable. Disposal is a lot more convenient and discreet.

Of course there are no deodorants in Tampax tampons. Deodorants are not necessary and may be harmful. When a tampon is in use, embarrassing odor can't form.

Protection, convenience and safety are sound reasons why millions of active women use Tampax tampons. Shouldn't you?

**TAMPAX**  
tampons

The internal protection more women trust

It is almost impossible to not see the trends in Tampax advertisements. Women always wore white as a way of showing the effectiveness of the product. White has the symbolic significance of purity, so the idea of getting soiling the white with blood brings forth the idea that periods, if shown, ruin purity. In almost every advertisement, there was someone swimming. This example never truly made sense, for blood does not leak into the water. These advertisements are spreading misinformation. In the case that the woman was not swimming, she was guaranteed to be doing something athletic. And, no matter what, she would be smiling. All of these things were directly implying that a woman on her period could be the same as a woman off of her period. This is not inherently bad, but when it is in every advertisement it lent itself to the message that periods should be hidden.

The first advertisement never says anything directly relating to periods—in fact, if it were not for the brand name, there would be no proof that it was even a tampon advertisement. In the advertising world, it is almost impossible to find a product so hidden within its own advertising. Marketing is all about branding. Companies want their product to be as visible as possible so that it remains in everyone's minds, but this advertisement instead decided that discretion was the best way to market itself. This marketing method speaks directly to the amount of hiding that goes into period-related products.

The second advertisement is actually one of the most shameless old advertisements, but it still has its problems. It does include a picture of the box it is trying to sell, so this is an improvement. Even still, no actual tampon is shown. The advertisement goes as far as to provide some health education about the negative effects of deodorant in tampons (though that was a pointed statement at other brands that use such methods). Instead of saying period, the advertisement says “those days” (note the ambiguity). The trend of pure white is still used alongside athletics and overly happy women. This, once again, displays the ideal of a woman acting ‘perfect’ while on her period. The advertisement also states “[d]isposal is a lot more convenient and discreet” further proving that hiding periods was the essence of Tampax advertisements.



## Why was I born a Woman?

**E**VER get mad at the world... at the unfairness of your lot? Ever hear a voice inside you whisper: "Better not go out... you won't have any fun?" And do you ever wonder why some girls always seem to keep smiling, no matter what time of the month it is? If only you could learn their secret! Well, you're not too old to learn! What you need is a lesson on how to grow a crop of confidence! How to be gay! How to be carefree!

### Stop feeling sorry for yourself

Remember... an ounce of confidence is worth a pound of make-up. And to be sure of yourself on "difficult days," you need the kind of confidence Kotex sanitary napkins give.

First of all, Kotex ends are flat and tapered. They never give away your secret... never make you self-conscious. And you know better than anyone, how important *one-foot* is. So do as most girls do and choose Kotex. You see, Kotex is made in *soft folds*... so naturally it's *less bulky*... *less apt to rub and chafe!*

Remember this too... there's a world of confidence in knowing that the new "safety shield" in every Kotex pad provides added absorption... gives you an extra margin of safety.

All in all, Kotex helps give a girl the comfort and the confidence she needs to put a smile on her lips... and a song in her heart!

**Be confident... comfortable... carefree with Kotex!**



Now's a girl to learn what to do, what not to do, on "difficult days"? The new book: "As One Girl To Another" tells all... gives answers to intimate questions. To get a copy FREE... Write Post Office Box 5434, Dept. FW-9, 919 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

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# Your Fear

of lost daintiness . . . *at times*

\* \* \*

This new way, that scientifically solves a real hygienic problem, will end it

**T**H**ERE** is now a way in personal hygiene that is safe and sure. That warrants immaculacy under any and all conditions.

The old-time method has been supplanted . . . scientifically.

Wear your lightest silks, your daintiest frocks without a second thought. Dance, motor, accept social invitations, any day, every day. Live your life unhandicapped.

The name is Kotex. It's made of cellucotton.

It deodorizes, is easily disposed of, ending all embarrassment.

It's at every drug store, every department store. You ask for it, without hesitancy, under its trade name—"Kotex."

8 in 10 women of the better classes have adopted it. Doctors urge it. Hygienic authorities employ it.

It will mean much to you . . . will make a great difference in your life. Going on with old ways is a folly.

# KOTEX

PROTECTS—DEODORIZES



- 1 Protection: 5 times as absorbent as cotton pads—and scientifically deodorized.
- 2 No laundry. Discard as easily as a piece of tissue.
- 3 Easy to buy, anywhere. You ask for them by name. Many stores keep them ready-wrapped—help yourself, pay the clerk, that is all.

*No laundry--discard easily*

Kotex shames in an even more direct way. With headers like “Why was I born a woman?” and “Your Fear of lost daintiness... at times” (once again, note the ambiguity), Kotex directly implied how women should be feeling on their periods: ashamed. Of course, their selling point was that they would fix this shame. If one bought their product, she would “[s]top feeling sorry for [her]self”. She would be proud to be a woman again. She would no longer fear losing her daintiness. The fact that women were expected to be dainty in the first place is already sexist, but stating “lost daintiness” as if no worse thing could happen to a woman—like she must hold utmost daintiness while she bleeds out of her vagina—is even worse. While it is true that tampons and pads were a miraculous thing that allowed women to do more on their periods and keep clean, they were not invented in order to erase periods altogether. The second advertisement says that if you use Kotex, you could “[l]ive your life unhandicapped”. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, handicapped means “having a physical or mental disability”. Unless this advertisement was implying that periods give women a mental disability (there is a large issue surrounding this as well, but advertisements do not tend to perpetuate this), it implies that periods give a woman a physical disability. If a period is going to be compared to a broken bone, then tampons and pads would be the cast for the vagina. But periods are *not* a disability. They are natural, and are actually a sign of good health. Kotex, by implying something was wrong with periods, just furthered the misinformation and shame surrounding them.

Decades later, with all the improvement on many fronts of feminism, one would imagine that these issues would have gone away. Tampon and pad advertisements would already be straightforward and no longer based on shame. But while there is improvement—Kotex and a new company called “Hello Flo” have made major strides in the advertising world—the problem is still far from fixed. Tampax, in particular, has not changed.



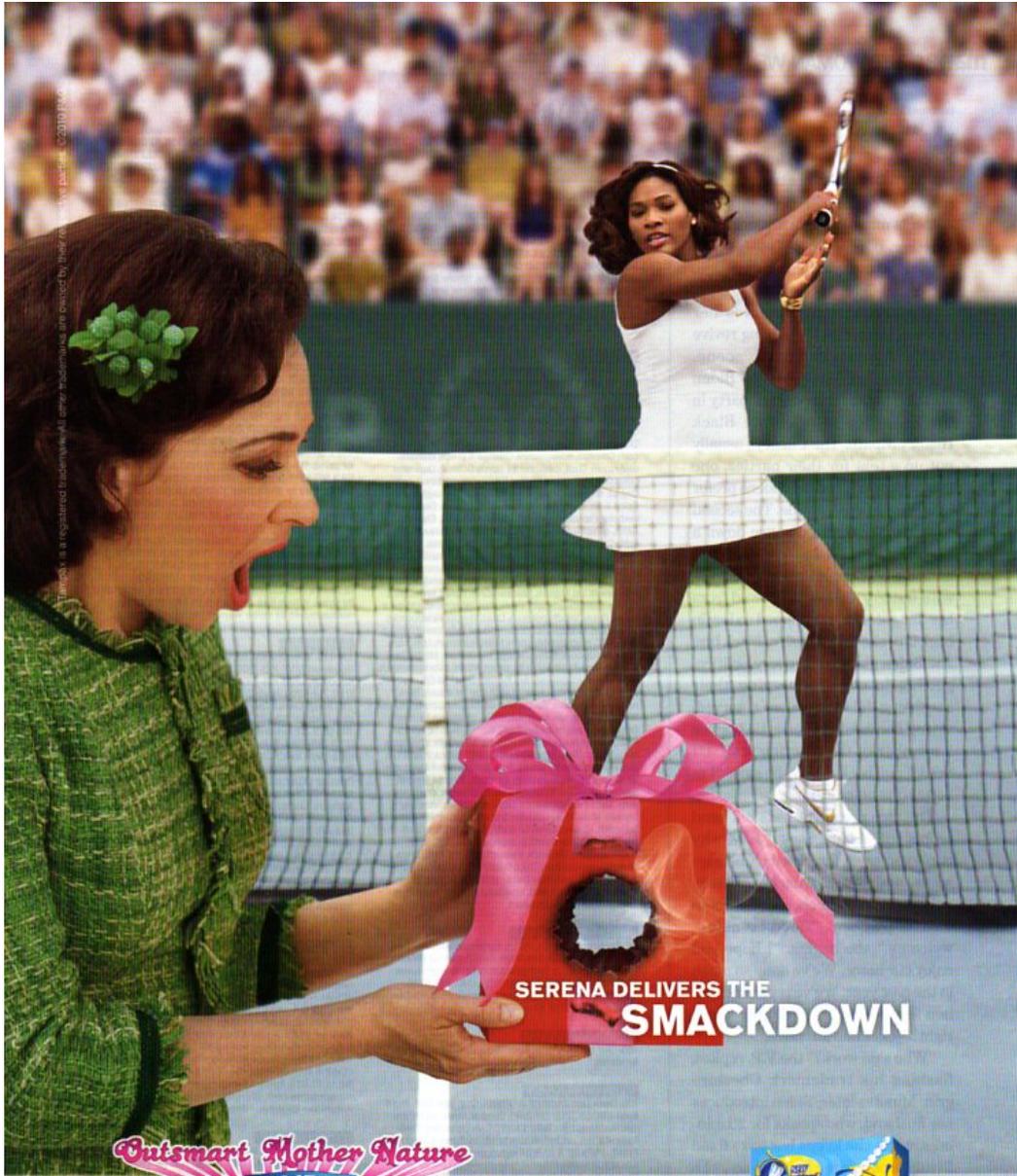
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**SERENA DELIVERS THE SMACKDOWN**

*Outsmart Mother Nature*  
**TAMPAX**

A champion like Serena Williams doesn't let Mother Nature's Monthly Gift interrupt her game. That's why she trusts Tampax Pearl® plastic with a new and improved LeakGuard® braid.

**STOPS LEAKS BETTER**  
 THAN THE NEXT LEADING BRAND



SCORE A FREE SAMPLE AT [TAMPAX.COM](http://TAMPAX.COM)



As evident from these advertisements, Tampax is still using the same methods to sell their products. The advertisements do have a modern look to them, but that is almost all that has changed. Water and athletics is still used, as well as white clothing. There is almost no red in any of the advertisements, and the wording is still carefully chosen. There is improvement—the first advertisement does say period. However, it also says that Tampax “helps keep your period invisible”. Again, the selling point is that no one will know you are on your period. The second advertisement revolves around the idea of *defeating* your period, as if it is a monster. She *beat* Mother Nature. She won because she was, or at least is assumed, able to act like her period was not there. The third advertisement once again revisits the whole

swimming fiasco, although it addresses it slightly differently than before. The woman is shown topless and the catchphrase “Embarrassments happen. Leaks shouldn’t” creates a connection between embarrassments and leaks. It is not directly stated—in fact, it almost seems as though they are saying that leaks are not embarrassments. But how could that be the case? If it was not for embarrassment, then why would it be *so very important* to hide leaks? In this case, leaks are being treated far worse than just an embarrassment. Again, periods are shown to be something that must be hidden at all costs.

Modern day advertisement goes far beyond pictures in a magazine or newspaper, however. The problems that exist in the picture advertisements have carried through into commercials. White clothing, swimming, unbelievably happy women—it is all there. This, combined with wording and other subliminal messages, keeps the shame alive. One of the most questionable ‘techniques’ used, however, is that of leaving out any red liquid. Obviously no one expects advertisements to use real blood, but the fact that an advertisement is showing how well their pad soaks up liquid with blue, thin water is a bit odd. The only explanation for this offered is that these companies believe that their products will sell better this way. In other words, they can sell their products better by hiding the reality of periods. This has been called into question by various news sources, and some companies have responded. Hello Flo created two advertisements that both became viral for not avoiding the real subject. However, even still, neither of these advertisements used fake blood. One of them, First Moon Party, is based on the idea of shaming the daughter for pretending to get her period. These advertisements did shamelessly use words like vagina and blood, but they still are not fully opening up the discussions that need to happen. Kotex created a series of advertisements literally poking fun at Tampax advertisements (women in white dresses with strange blue liquid)—which also pokes fun at their own advertising history—and yet still never fixed any of these things. In fact, at the end of their advertisements, they show a pad that *has blue liquid on it*. So while various companies may have recognized the issue, none of them are going to the full way to normalizing periods. The shame is still continuing.

Instead of selling by shame, advertisements need to start selling period products by recognizing them as normal. They do not need to be marketed as something private and secret. We do not need smiling women in white; rather, we need women we can relate to. Advertising is based off of what the company things will sell, so, as consumers, we must support the companies that do show improvement.

Women do not need to be pitied, laughed at, or feared when they get their period. Young girls need to learn not to be ashamed of their natural cycle—but rather to embrace it. Instead of using menstruation as one more method of body shaming, it should be understood as a point of connection. After all, it makes us all blood sisters.

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