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Bleeding Red: The Relationship Between Feminism, Brand Activism Skepticism, and Attitudes About Menstrual-Realistic Advertisements

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Abstract

Beginning in the early 2000s, menstrual product advertisers in the U.S. and other developed countries began to use red liquid in their advertising to represent period blood rather than the blue liquid used in the past, which is often criticized because it portrays stigmatizing representations of menstruation. These more "menstrual-realistic" advertisements instead communicate that bleeding is normal and arguably help correct past wrongdoings relating to the tainted history of stigmatizing menstrual product ads. This imagery has garnered mixed reactions from the public, including praise, disgust, and skepticism. Extant research demonstrates that consumers prefer media that align with their preexisting beliefs; yet, they may also be mistrusting of the appropriation of feminist ideals for commercial purposes (i.e., commodity feminism). Thus, an investigation of how consumers' liberal feminist and sexist attitudes relate to their perceptions of these types of ads was conducted. Specifically, this dissertation examined how consumers' liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, sexist attitudes, and stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation are related to their attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads and how their level of brand activism skepticism may also play a role in those ad perceptions. Results from an online survey of U.S. men and women (N = 794) revealed that the more participants reported liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, and the less they reported stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, the more favorable were their attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Contrary to what was hypothesized, however, benevolent sexism among both men and women was also positively related to favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Also unexpectedly, the more participants reported liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, the less skeptical they were of brand activism in menstrual-product advertising. Brand activism skepticism was also positively related to perceptions of menstrual product brands' credibility,

though brand activism skepticism did not mediate the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and credibility perceptions. The findings imply that consumers interpret menstrual-realistic ads similarly, but for different reasons, given that liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and benevolent sexist attitudes were most strongly related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. This data also suggests that menstrual-realism in advertising may not be viewed as "feminist" as many originally praised it to be. Given these findings, advertisers should be mindful about the potential ways in which consumers view and understand menstrual-realism in advertising.

Keywords: menstruation, advertising, stigma, commodity feminism, brand activism skepticism

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Chapter I: Introduction

Since their formative years, advertisements for menstrual products have been dependent on stigmatizing discourses surrounding menstruation and have a prolonged history of commercialization, spanning across the media of print in the 1920s, television in the 1970s, to eventually the age of the Internet. Throughout each era, menstrual product advertisements have portrayed menstruation shameful and disgusting and contributed to its stigmatized status by emphasizing secrecy, avoiding embarrassment, and the importance of staying fresh (Coutts & Berg, 1993; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016; Merskin, 1999). Menstruators have thus faced a plethora of stigmatizing and allegorical images about menstruation throughout their lifetimes. One common trope commonly used to depict menstrual blood and demonstrate product absorbency is the blue liquid. The blue liquid is criticized on the grounds that it represents hyper-hygienic bleeding and pushes the intense narrative that menstruation is inherently dirty and therefore must be kept a secret (Luke, 1997). Further, this trope is used to heighten the insecurities of the menstruator and relies on the narrow perceptions of menstruating bodies as sanitized, leak and odor-free, and most importantly, feminine.

In recent years, however, increasing amounts of menstrual activism, including the fight for menstrual justice and access to period products, have shifted conversations about what it means to bleed. Thus, a new trend in menstrual product advertisements has arrived (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). These advertisements push the narrative that bleeding is empowering, not shameful, and attempt to correct past wrongdoings relating to the tainted history of menstrual product ads. In particular, menstrual product brands are beginning to debut a new ad trope using a liquid that bears resemblance to period blood (i.e., more closely aligned to red liquid) as opposed to the blue liquid that was used in product advertising for decades. These are called “menstrual-realistic

advertisements" for the purposes of the current study. Major U.S. brands such as Kotex, Thinx, The Flex Company, and Always also experimented with using menstrual-realistic liquid and relying on feminist discourses and the basic tenets of menstrual activism. Considered a "bold move" by some, blood-like depictions in menstrual product advertising are meant to destigmatize menstruation and liberate bleeders (see Patel, 2020).

Yet, as explored throughout this study, the decision to use more realistic red liquid to represent period blood in these advertisements, instead of the traditional blue liquid, is met with a spectrum of reactions including praise, disgust, and criticism. For example, in an article about Kotex using menstrual-realistic fluid to represent period blood, People magazine cited that the approach was plauded on social media with comments such as *"Thank you for using red liquid!!! So real"* and *"It's so unbelievable how some brands are still using blue liquid to represent period blood…it's 2020? Thank you thank you thank you"* (Pasquini, 2020). Contrastingly, menstrual-realistic depictions have also been the source of controversy. For example, a New Zealand period product brand named AWWA released a 90-second ad for its period underwear brand with the goal of portraying menstruation "honestly," and yet it was rejected and banned by Facebook who argued that its content violated the platform's advertising policy against "shocking, sensational, disrespectful, or excessively violent content" (Templeton, 2021). Another menstrual-product brand Libra also depicted red-stained underwear and blood on a woman's legs in a television commercial selling pads. Despite the campaign's intent of promoting gender equality and the demystification of menstruation, viewers nonetheless made over 600 complaints that the commercial was inappropriate, which was the highest number of complaints for any ad in Australia in 2019 (BBC, 2019). While it is important to note that broadcast rules and

regulations differ depending on geographic region, these occurrences demonstrate that pervasive, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation are persistent.

While menstrual-product brands continue to push menstrual-positivity to those who menstruate, the literature also argues that brand activism toward social issues can also lead to consumer backlash because their virtue-signaling efforts may be viewed as inauthentic (Eyada, 2020, Mirzaei et al., 2022). Specifically, woman empowerment messages in media and feminist ads have long lacked credibility because corporate social efforts have been viewed as disingenuous. Goldman, Heath, and Smith (1991) labeled this trend as commodity feminism. Commodity feminism refers to the way that feminist ideals and icons are appropriated for commercial purposes. Goldman and colleagues maintain that, for decades, advertisers have been trying to relate the liberation of women to the sale of corporate services and goods. Their theoretical ideas also suggest that other feminist principles such as independence, liberation, and bodily autonomy are exploited solely for the purposes of advertising. At its core, the commodity feminism framework implies that if a woman wants to be liberated, she must first make a purchase (i.e. the "correct" consumer purchase; Crouse-Dick, 2002; Goldman et al., 1991). As such, commodity feminism holds critical ties to menstrual-realistic ads as they rely on celebratory bleeding on liberated, feminist terms. However, in reality, menstrual-realistic advertisements are created by large corporations that have a tainted history of relying on menstrual shaming and thus, may be seen as disingenuous. Moreover, the new wave of "liberated" menstrual-product advertising has been criticized because the underlying motives ultimately intends to manipulate users for bigger profits with "faux activism" and continue to rely on narrow understandings of menstruating bodies as feminine (female) bodies (Bobel & Fahs, 2020; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020)

There are thus a wide range of attitudinal responses to menstrual-realistic ads. As mentioned previously, one dimension of feedback includes acclaim and admiration, demonstrating that individuals are generally aware that the social stigma of menstruation holds women and girls back (refer to Pasquini, 2020; Patel, 2020). Deviating from positive feedback, others view menstrual-realistic ads as a source of squalor and filth, deeming it as inappropriate for public spaces (BBC, 2019; Templeton, 2021). Another assessment includes skepticism, ingenuity, and accusations of "faux activism" (Bobel & Fahs, 2020; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). Therefore, the conditions that lead individuals to have a particular attitude about menstrual-realistic ads warrant attention, given the contradictory nature of responses that they have evoked.

The Current Study

The purpose of this proposed study is to understand how liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and attitudes about menstruation and women are related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads, and how consumers' level of brand activism skepticism may distort these attitudes. Previous literature indicates that individuals show a preference for advertising that is consistent with their previously existing values and beliefs (Green, 1999; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Tucker et al., 2012); yet they are also skeptical of claims of social responsibility (Eyada, 2020, Mirzaei et al., 2022). Thus, this dissertation argues that liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, attitudes toward women, and attitudes about menstruation are three important antecedents of attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads, given that the use of menstrual-realistic fluid is meant to uplift and empower women while at the same time, normalize menstruation and facilitate a conversation about periods (Pasquini, 2020; Patel, 2020; Terlep, 2020). Concurrently, advertisers are increasingly appropriating feminist ideals and repackaging them in a way that could be advantageous to their brand (Goldman et al., 1991), and therefore, consumer skepticism toward

socially responsible advertising are on the rise (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Since negative perceptions of company hypocrisy tend to weigh heavily in persuasive outcomes (Baumeister et al., 2001), it is also necessary to consider brand activism skepticism and egotistic-driven beliefs as potential factors in how people perceive menstrual-realistic ads.

The rationale for conducting such a study is four-fold. First, while there are a plethora of studies concerning menstruation's meaning in culture and society, a thorough search of relevant literature revealed there are only a handful of studies to date that focus on menstruation and media from a quantitative perspective (see Chrisler & Levy, 1990; Erchull et al., 2002; Erchull, 2013; Merskin, 1999; Sparado et al., 2018). Moreover, no study to date has focused on menstrual-realistic advertising, despite them representing a shift from relying on misogynist and stigmatizing discourses about menstruation to envisioning bleeding as empowering and liberating. Therefore, this study will contribute to the small yet growing body of knowledge relating to menstruation and the media and provide a starting point for future research concerned with menstrual-realistic ad depictions.

Few studies have also examined men's attitudes about menstruation. The literature predominantly focuses on young women's perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with menstruation. The exclusion of men from health and gender-related discussions, especially feminist issues that are predominantly thought to be "women's issues," are common not only in research (Courtenay, 2000) but also in sexual and reproductive health education (Power, 1995). However, the removal of men from menstruation research and education sends an implicit message that menstruation is an experience that is and should only be exclusive to women, potentially having a range of negative effects on anyone who menstruates. To that end, this study seeks to understand the perspectives of both men and women and their attitudes about menstrual-

realistic advertisements. The inclusion of both men and women in this study will fill in a second major research gap.

Additionally, media and advertising research faces growing criticisms that it focuses on its effects on consumers in terms of information processing and desired marketing objectives (i.e., purchasing intention) based on the advertising strategy, which suggests that cognitive or affective appeals are superior to the consumers themselves (Aitken et al., 2008). While this type of research is useful to understand the effectiveness of the executional strategy of the advertisement from a psychological perspective, it is also necessary to examine the contexts within which consumers relate to commercial information (Aitken et al., 2008). Therefore, this study does not intend to study the psychological effects of menstrual-realistic ads, as the reasons for individuals' attitudes about a particular trope in advertising also deserves attention. This study will therefore view the consumer as the focal point of this research (i.e., audience reception) and how their response to these ads may differ depending on their related beliefs and worldviews. Therefore, this study will fill in a third major research gap and potentially facilitate a conversation about why a greater emphasis should be placed on the relationship between the consumer and how they receive and formulate attitudes about different advertisements, rather than the psychological effects of those advertisements.

Lastly, from a practical advertising and marketing perspective, understanding the conditions that lead individuals to either positively or negatively evaluate this novel marketing trope will help advertisers in the future effectively market to different populations and illuminate different marketing strategies that may or may not be effective. As previously mentioned, advertising that uses women empowerment and social justice messaging is often accused of "faux activism" or "woke washing" (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020; Sobande, 2019) by

commercializing feminism to sell a product, thus potentially leading consumers to become skeptical of their claims or damage their brand equity and potential for real social change. Therefore, this study will potentially reveal why some people react positively to realistic depictions of period blood, and why this approach may not work on others. The findings of this study may also be extended to other types of social activism in advertising such as LGBT rights, Black Lives Matter, or the environmentalism movement.

The following chapter outlines the relevant literature, which additionally provides the theoretical underpinnings for the hypotheses. Chapter 2 also reviews studies relating to menstruation, feminism, the appropriation of feminist ideals in popular media and advertising, and brand perceptions. The methodology section follows in the subsequent chapter, followed by the measures used in the study and the data analyses procedures.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Extant literature argues that consumers have high expectations of the brands and companies they deal with, starting with how they perceive and formulate attitudes about their advertising (Barnes, 2003; Mehta, 2000). Consumers perceive advertising based off their previous values, attitudes, and beliefs, and tend to prefer attitude-consistent messaging (Green, 1999; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Klapper, 1960; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Tucker et al., 2012). For example, an industry survey revealed that nearly two-thirds (62%) of consumers globally prefer to purchase from brands that share and reflect their purposes and values (Accenture, 2018). Therefore, to understand how people formulate attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, it is necessary to situate the current study in the limited effects paradigm.

The Limited Effects Paradigm

Individuals prefer to receive information that bolster previously held convictions that are set by their peer groups, societal influences, and general world views. Such an assumption rests in Klapper's (1960) minimal-effects model, or limited model. The limited model, at its core, argues that media only have a small amount of power in shaping individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the world because there are a variety coping mechanisms that individuals use to filter such content. Rather, most of the time, media simply serves as a reinforcer or sustainer of existing thoughts and ideas. Klapper's work ultimately demonstrates that media users prefer attitude-consistent messages while at the same time, circumvent or disfavor counterattitudinal content. Therefore, individuals tend to have positive attitudes about information that reinforces their preexisting world views. At the same time, they do the opposite with contradictory information; individuals tend to have more negative attitudes about information that does not conform to their preexisting beliefs.

The theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) is often used as an explanation as to why persuasive processes are integrally based on an individual's expected preference for cognitive balance. The original and most enduring prediction derived from cognitive dissonance theory is that individuals are motivated to favor attitude-consistent information, and disfavor information that is attitudinally inconsistent (i.e., dissonant), as individuals have a general preference for cognitive elements that are logically consistent with their beliefs, values, or attitudes. The theory explains that when a person either consciously or unconsciously realizes conflicting attitudes, thoughts, or beliefs, they will experience mental discomfort. To avoid discomfort, they will strive for cognitive equilibrium and gravitate toward messages that are sympathetic to their previously held conceptions. Thus, the reduction of dissonance can be achieved by rejecting or disfavoring pieces of information that go against their core beliefs.

The effects of advertising, therefore, can be interpreted under the lens of the aforesaid frameworks. The literature shows that advertising effectiveness is congruent with consumers' identities and self-concepts. For example, one such study found that advertising messages that closely aligned with the way that consumers viewed themselves were evaluated more positively than self-concept incongruent ads (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). Brand preference and purchase intention were also shown to be influenced by the self-congruency of an ad. The authors argued that advertising appeals that are consistent with consumers' sense of selves serve to satisfy their desire for self-consistency and cognitive equilibrium, and bolster self-esteem (i.e., avoiding cognitive dissonance). The self-congruency concept is especially important in value-expressive ads, or ads that use product symbolism to create an image of the product or product user (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Some ads for menstrual products, especially menstrual-realistic ads which aim to break gender stereotypes and empower women, often convey a holistic company impression and

insinuate that the brand can elevate the consumers' sense of self (Havens & Swenson, 1988; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016).

Studies have also shown that consumers are more likely to show a preference for advertisements that align with their own identities and world views. For example, African Americans with a strong ethnic identification have been shown to react more favorably to ads that promote cultural diversity and feature African Americans in positions of dominance (Green, 1999). It is also logical to expect congruent results with brand activism advertising campaigns, which often promote products through social issues and harness the brands' power to inspire social change (Eyada, 2020). For example, consumer responses to advertising that claims environmental and "green" responsibility (eco-ad appeals) have been found to be the most effective among individuals who have positive attitudes about environmental protection, a core value and belief (Tucker et al., 2012). In a separate study, consumers who reported that they are more proactive with their environmental behaviors were also more likely to evaluate green advertising as necessary, just, and valuable to society (Haytko & Matulich, 2008). The aforesaid studies ultimately demonstrate support for the minimal effects model, and suggests that consumers' core beliefs likely to influence their preferences for certain types of advertisements and advertising appeals.

Positioning Periods in Advertising and Challenging Stigma in the Marketplace

Since the primary focus of the current study is to understand attitudinal responses to menstrual-realistic advertisements, it is also necessary to situate this research in the broader sociocultural meanings of menstruation and the symbolic weight that the word "menstruation" carries. For people who menstruate, menstruation is a source of social stigma (refer to Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013; Johnston-Robledo & Stubbs, 2013; Kowalski & Chapple, 2000;

Patterson, 2014). According to sociologist Erving Goffman, the word *stigma* is defined as a differentiating mark that sets people apart from others. Social stigmas convey that the stigmatized have a defect of character that spoils their identities (Goffman, 1963). Those who are stigmatized are devalued due to the differentiating mark that they carry. Consequently, those who do not bear the stigma feel threatened by those who are stigmatized, which can enhance their own sense of superiority and self-worth. Empirical studies in social psychology (Deaux et al., 1995; Frable, 1993) have determined that the characteristics of stigmatized conditions that are the most abhorrent to other people are: (1) peril, which is the perceived danger of the condition to others (e.g., HIV, COVID-19), (2) visibility, which is the obviousness of a mark (e.g., a limb or facial difference), and (3) controllability, which are beliefs about the degree of responsibility the stigmatized has of the condition (i.e., whether or not the mark is by chance or intentional; e.g., obesity due to an underlying health condition vs. obesity as "self-inflicted").

While menstruation is more like a discreet source of stigma, rather than visible stigma, it is nonetheless a stigmatizing mark that coincides with Goffman's (1963) arguments above. First, menstrual blood is viewed as immanently different from other bodily fluids, such as breast milk (Bramwell, 2001) and semen (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004). Other bodily fluids are seen as less disgusting and more "pure" than menstrual blood, as menstrual blood is more likely to be positioned as a waste product rather than bodily secretions (Bramwell, 2001; Curtis & Biran, 2001). This idea is evidenced in menstrual rituals and hygiene practices (e.g., the term "feminine hygiene product"), which imply that menstrual blood is a dirty and polluting substance and should be avoided at all costs. Given cultural repulsions to menstrual blood, a menstrual leak (i.e., stain) may be viewed as a stain on one's identity (Goffman, 1963). In one such study, Lee (1994) found that most young interviewees, all of whom had experienced menstruation,

expressed that they were fearful of leaking during their periods. The principal investigator argued that noticeable signs of menstruation, such as accidental stains or leaks, are symbols of women's impurity (Lee, 1994). Menstruation renders menstruators (girls and women) different from those males who have privilege and are typically not bound by menstruation. For example, the literature argues that when young girls reach menarche (i.e., their first experience with menstruation), they are treated differently than before, particularly by their parents and peers (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996). Newly menstruating girls are urged to act like "mature women" in ways that restrict the freedom that they had once experienced pre-menarche. Moreover, there exist many cultural stereotypes about the menstruating woman, such that it causes them to be physically disabled, not feminine, or psychotic (Chrisler, 2008; Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013; Marván et al., 2008).

As such, menstrual blood has powerful symbolic weight that can escalate menstruation as a stigmatized condition. While there are few established theories about why people are averse to menstrual blood, most of the literature theorizes that before the science of menstruating monthly was widely understood, many could not comprehend how women could bleed up to one week at a time without being seriously weakened or dying (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). Because men did not experience menstrual bleeding first-hand, they became afraid that direct contact with menstrual blood may pollute them by association. Remnants of these ideas have persisted into the twenty-first century and have nonetheless contributed to the mystery of the menstruating body. For example, both menstruators and non-menstruators alike continue to have negative beliefs about and attitudes about menstruation (Chrisler et al., 2015), and it is still perceived as a threat around the globe. One way that we cope with our anxieties about menstrual blood is evidenced in medical terminology, where menstruation is often referred to as a "waste" to be

"discarded" (Chrisler, 2013), in medical research, in which some medical researchers are arguing that menstruating once per month is unnecessary and unhealthy (refer to Johnston-Robledo & Stubbs, 2013), or in everyday sexual practices, where it is considered culturally taboo to have sex while menstruating for the sake of the non-menstruating partner (Fahs, 2014).

The powerful social stigma of menstruation dictates that menstruation should not be discussed in the public sphere as a means of avoiding the inherent embarrassment of such discussions (Kissling, 1996). Women are generally aware of their stigmatized status and as such, try to pass as non-menstruators. One of the most well-cited consequences menstruation's stigmatized status is the hypervigilance and self-consciousness associated with being outed as menstruating. For example, Oxley (1998) reported that women who are currently menstruating engage in concealment behaviors such as wearing loose-fitting clothing, and avoiding swimming, wearing light-colored pants, and sexual activity while menstruating because they are concerned about how others would react if they were to see their menstrual blood. These views of menstruation are also supported by other literature, arguing that most people believe that menstruation should be hidden away from the rest of the world and not even discussed with people within the same household (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1983). Because women are taught about the social stigma of menstruation at a very young age, they come to naturally believe that it is not accepted by others and hide all evidence of its existence (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000). The expression "culture of concealment" (Houppert, 1999) explains how menstruation is shrouded in secrecy, demonstrating how menstruation is often rendered invisible in society. Thus, the concealment taboo refers to the unwritten rule of menstruation that it is something to hide, because being "outed" as menstruating will have serious consequences such as embarrassment and ostracization.

Advertisements are considered cultural artifacts that play an important role in the social construction of meaning (Merskin, 1999). Ads for menstrual products have traditionally exploited the "culture of concealment" and convey the social stigma of menstruation. For example, common themes found in advertising include the emphasis of secrecy, avoiding embarrassment by concealing menstruation, and staying fresh and odor-free (Coutts & Berg, 1993; Erchull, 2013; Merskin, 1999). Ads for pads, tampons, and other menstrual management products often proclaim how well the products will hide one's period by playing off menstruators' fears that they will be discovered as menstruating by highlighting specific product features such as crinkle-free or discreet product packaging or odor-negating product benefits. Negative attitudes about menstruation are also reflected through advertising discourses by portraying menstruation as a "hygienic crisis" that requires coping strategies by choosing the right product for effective protection (Havens & Swenson, 1988). Moreover, ads for menstrual products have often been criticized for portraying unrealistic depictions of periods, such as overly happy, carefree, and feminine women (Erchull, 2013; Liu et al., 2021). As previously mentioned, the stigma of menstrual blood is often conveyed through the blue liquid. The tradition of the blue liquid emerged to balance audience's possible disgust reflexes at seeing any menstrual blood-like substance. Others noted that the blue color itself is directly related to cleaning products such as soap or bleach, further perpetuating the need to stay fresh and clean while menstruating (Patel, 2020). Therefore, the blue liquid is criticized because it euphemistically promotes hyper-femininity and reinforces the idea that menstruation should only be done behind closed doors and hidden away from the rest of the world (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013; Luke, 1997; Merskin, 1999; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020).

Advertisements are not the only form of communication about menstruation's meaning in society, and thus, it is often communicated through the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of menstruators and non-menstruators alike. Feminist scholarship has suggested that menstruators often internalize the stigma of menstruation, which requires them to engage in self-policing (or self-surveillance) and to change their attitudes and behaviors to hide all evidence of their menstrual status from others (Chrisler et al., 2015; Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013; Ussher, 2004). While different cultural contexts hold different beliefs about and attitudes about menstruation, particularly in Western contexts, when menstruators become aware of their stigmatized status, they come to adopt negative attitudes about menstruation and their reactions are typified by feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000). Therefore, because strong cultural messages are sent to menstruators that their bodies are unacceptable as they are, they tend to endorse others' cultural views of the stigma of menstruation and come to believe that they must nevertheless hide their menstrual cycles and instead, present to the world a sanitized, deodorized, fresh, feminine body (Roberts, 2004).

The literature overwhelmingly shows that those who hold a negative attitude about menstruation (i.e., adopting the stigma of menstruation) are much more likely to view anything related to menstruation (i.e., menstrual products, advertisements, their own menstruation, other menstruating people) negatively than those who do not maintain the stigma. For example, one study found that those who held negative attitudes about menstruation were less likely to report interest in using an alternative to pads or tampons (e.g., the menstrual cup; Grose & Grabe, 2014). In this study, the authors concluded that the negative sociocultural attitudes about menstruating bodies was likely to deter many from using alternative products that require more contact, comfort, familiarity, and acceptance of their bodies. Related studies came to similar

conclusions. For example, Holland et al. (2020) studied the effects of internalized body stigma and found that those who held stigmatizing views of their own menstruating body were less likely to seek preventative care, such as having a routine check-up with a gynecologist, even when they believed that there was something wrong with their health. Similar to Grose & Grabe (2014), Holland et al. (2020) concluded that pervasive, negative cultural views of menstrual periods were likely to impede menstruator's sense of autonomy, which could potentially make it more challenging to communicate with healthcare providers. Similarly, when people feel self-conscious while they are menstruating because they view menstruation as a source of social stigma, they are more likely to express interest in suppressing (i.e., using contraceptive methods to stop their menstrual cycle) their periods than those who do not view menstruation as shameful or disgusting (Chrisler et al., 2015; Johnston-Robledo et al., 2003). Moreover, the effects of the social stigma of menstruation are well-documented in experimental studies. For example, when others are reminded of a woman's menstrual status, they are less likely to like her and more likely to sit further away from her, "protecting" culturally sanitized views of how feminine women should look, think, and act (Roberts et al., 2002). Further, reminding someone of their own menstrual status (i.e., whether or not they are menstruating) has been linked to a decreased motivation to manage the menstruator's impression on others (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000), and poorer, diminished cognitive performances (Wister et al., 2013).

Throughout history, however, a small yet growing number of women have become aware of this stigma and its effects, and have persistently challenged the status quo to radically shift the temporal, political, and social context of women's reproductive health. In the United States, the menstrual-activism movement was founded in the late 1960s by feminist spiritualists who refused the status quo of menstrual negativity. Drawing upon cultural feminist ideologies of the

power of womanhood, these feminists worked to reframe menstruation as a power unique to the female experience and embrace it as a "natural difference" (Bobel, 2010). Other early preoccupations of the menstrual activism movement, aside from resisting menstrual negativity, included challenging problematic interventions attempting to "treat" symptoms of menopause, resisting PMS jokes that stereotype and keep women small, taking women's health complaints (i.e., vaginal dryness, hot flashes, migraines related to PMS) and addressing menstrual and reproductive health as an important dimension of reproductive health (Bobel, 2010; Golub, 1985).

A turning point in the menstrual activism community coincided with the occurrence of the toxic shock syndrome (TSS) outbreak in the 1980s, most of which were associated with menstruation (CDC, 1990). The outbreak occurred when cases of TSS were reported among menstruating women who used superabsorbent tampons, which caused the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* to live and flourish in some women, killing many (Vostral, 2008). Soon thereafter, the menstrual activist movement built its foundation upon the menstrual care industry, calling for the elimination of unnecessarily fragrant and/or superabsorbent products and advocating for the FDA to finally regulate menstrual-product safety, therefore thrusting the woman's reproductive health movement into the mainstream (Bobel, 2010).

Since then, the radical menstruation movement sprouted in the 1990s, which seeks to address the roots of menstrual stigma, refuse menstrual concealment, and reframe patriarchal narratives of women's bodies as "failing" or an "inconvenience to men" (Bobel, 2010). For activists affiliated with this form of menstrual activism, it seemed to be a radical departure from previous forms of menstrual activism because refusing the norms of menstrual concealment was considered a radical move. Since then, forms of radical menstruation activism that resists *hiding*

menstruation include, but are not limited to: gathering for women's "Bleed-Ins," which is an organized ritual of sharing period stories and/or distributing "menstrual graffiti" on pieces of paper, manufacturing new menstrual products that collect menstrual blood rather than absorbing it (i.e., the menstrual cup), and painting art with one's menstrual blood (Bobel, 2010; Bobel & Fahs, 2020).

There recently has been a *more* urgent shift around menstrual culture, which attempts to cultivate a robust resistance to the patronizing narratives and polluting effects of the social stigma of menstruation (Bobel & Fahs, 2020). The menstrual activism movement is not new, as explained in the previous paragraphs (Bobel, 2007), but it has recently been thrust into mainstream, high-circulation news organizations, social media accounts, policy initiatives, and relevant to the current dissertation, advertising, indicating a shift in priority around the fight against the silence and shame around women's bodies. It challenges the androcentric view that menstruation is a nuisance or a "curse." The current and renewed interest in menstrual activism seeks not only to promote menstrual health, but works to view the menstruating body not as insignificant or shameful, but as something laudable, crucial, and politically relevant (Bobel & Fahs, 2014). It promotes a culture of caring for the menstruating body and critiques and questions gender norms. Moreover, the menstrual activism movement is a vital part of the feminist movement itself, as it calls for remedies to the grievances and inequalities in women's lives and challenges generations of silence and shame that obstruct the quality of menstrual health, menstrual products, and reproductive health education.

As with most resistance movements, the menstrual-activism movement is also being repackaged to sell products, specifically in menstrual-product advertisements. The goal of the "new era" of menstrual-product advertising is to celebrate and liberate bleeding and channel

menstrual positivity by using feminist discourses, while simultaneously recognizing past menstrual-product advertising wrongdoings (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). As mentioned in the previous chapter, one relatively new advertising trope includes using red liquid that is more realistic-looking and more closely aligns with actual period blood rather than the inorganic blue liquid trope. In this study, these ads are referred to as menstrual-realistic. Contrary to the use of the blue liquid which distorts the ordinariness of menstruation through the erasure of menstrual blood, the red liquid is meant to challenge menstrual taboo, remove its stigma, and make it easier to talk about the menstrual experience (Pasquini, 2020). The effort to promote the empowerment of menstruators through the use of the red liquid trope has been praised by many social media users and menstruators alike (Pasquini, 2020), and criticized by others because it potentially appropriates, distorts, and commodifies the menstrual activism movement for the purposes of selling a product (Bobel & Fahs, 2014; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020).

As previously mentioned, there are negative consequences for endorsing the stigma of menstruation, such as a decreased acceptance of alternative menstrual products (Grose & Grabe, 2014), a desire to suppress menstruation (Chrisler et al., 2015; Johnston-Robledo et al., 2003), poor cognitive performances (Wister et al., 2012), or negatively viewing oneself while menstruating (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000) or others who are menstruating (Roberts et al., 2002). At the same time, those who do not endorse stigmatizing beliefs or feel more positively about menstruation tend to have the opposite outcomes; they are less likely to want to suppress menstruation (Chrisler et al., 2015; Johnston-Robledo et al., 2003), more likely to show an interest in alternative menstrual products such as the menstrual cup (Grose & Grabe, 2014), more likely to perform better academically (Wister et al., 2012), and more likely to feel positively about themselves (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000) and others (Roberts et al., 2002) while

menstruating. Moreover, the literature shows that those who hold positive attitudes about menstruation from a sociocultural perspective are more likely to have biologically correct knowledge about menstruation (Eswi et al., 2012; Rabiepoor et al., 2017; Sparado et al., 2018). The aforesaid studies collectively provide evidence that people who do not hold stigmatizing beliefs about menstruation tend to have more desirable outcomes relating to menstruation. Moreover, individuals tend to favor advertising that reinforces their preexisting views, which is supported by the limited effects paradigm (Green, 1999; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Klapper, 1960; Tucker et al., 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to extend this argument to individuals' attitudinal responses to menstrual-realistic ads. Specifically, the current study theorizes that people who do not hold stigmatizing beliefs about and attitude about menstruation are more likely to have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements because menstrual-realistic advertisements challenge the menstrual taboo and are designed for the purposes of empowering menstruators (Patel, 2020; Pasquini, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H_1: The less individuals endorse stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.

Women's Suffrage and Liberal Feminism: "Doing Feminism" in the Marketplace

The women's movement was viewed by supporters as a social movement for increased participation by women in social and political life as feminist theory became first articulated in the late eighteenth century (Delmar, 2018). Emerging as a "movement for women's liberation," feminism negotiated the relative and shared positions that women and men occupied in the political, social, and economic spaces. Mainly, the movement recognized that the woman's sphere was inherently unequal to men's with the goal of redefining gender justice (Fraser, 2017).

Thus, in this context, feminists – those who agreed with and identified with the women's movement – were encouraged by fellow feminists to address issues that were traditionally considered appropriate only for women's attention, enter arenas not generally considered "womanly" by others, and used emancipatory ideologies to challenge their own oppression (Moses, 2012).

In the West, feminists organized around the idea of gender inequality, but also placed a larger emphasis on reproduction and sexuality to enhance reproductive rights in the United States (Moses, 2012). A deeper picture of women's struggles, the reproductive rights movements recognizes that certain biological realities such as childbearing, menstruation, or breastfeeding hold women and girls back from achieving gender equality. As part of a patriarchal society, these events are not only biological traumatic events, but are also culturally constructed by the ignorance of both men and women (i.e., the idea that the family plays a central role, with women being responsible for organizing hierarchical, male-dominant families; de Beauvoir, 1989). The apparent disadvantages of the female body thus claimed the attention of women organizers in the West who called to remind us that women's interests had been shaped by their positioning in multiple social hierarchies, and not just by their sex.

The state of feminism today, however, is complicated. Since its formation, the feminist movement has evolved, and many new forms of feminism have emerged. As argued by Love and Helmbrecht (2007), twenty-first century Millennial and Gen-Z women who identify themselves as part of the most current wave of feminism tend to perceive the movement as disjointed and decentralized. Arguably, the newest members of the movement are slowly discovering what it means to "do feminism" or "be a feminist," while also coming to understand that the feminism of previous generations are not synonymous with their own values and beliefs. In today's

fragmented feminist environment, several branches of feminist thought have emerged, such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, eco-feminism, among a plethora of others (Beasley, 1999). Thus, feminist thought is not monolithic. Rather, today's feminism is diverse and reflects a highly personalized ideology. Consequentially, modern feminists (liberal feminists or others) today are often the target of much scrutiny from their predecessors for not doing feminism "the right way" and are often accused of devaluing the original meaning of the word *feminism* by focusing too narrowly on individualism, but not necessarily on feminism as a political movement (refer to Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017; Snyder-Hall, 2010, Yu, 2011).

While each form of feminism deserves individual attention, the present study adopts the perspective of liberal feminism. A liberal feminist ideology is appropriate for this study because it predominates popular writings, has arguably touched most of the general population's lives, and has been integrated within the structure of mainstream society (Morgan, 1996). One of the most well-known forms of feminism, liberal feminism strongly overlaps with mainstream feminism. Moreover, as often the case when categorizing objects, the fundamental arguments of liberal feminists overlap with differing feminist ideologies. As noted by Oxley (2011), the basic idea of all feminisms denotes ideas and actions directed toward ending women's disadvantage and oppression, and achieving gender equality. Thus, while feminist ideologies are diverse, the basic theoretical underpinnings of most feminist ideals are best reflected in liberal feminist thought.

Liberalism refers to a set of principles that emphasize the idea of freedom, and that the state upholds these freedoms for individuals (Baehr, 2007; Baehr, 2017). These so-called freedoms include personal, bodily, political, and sexual autonomy, and freedom from coercive

interference. The values of liberalism, including the core belief in the importance of freedom and autonomy for the individual, are embraced by liberal feminists who advocate that the role of the state insist on freedom for women. In addition, liberal feminists also claim that gender differences are not biological but exist in ways of socialization which favors patriarchy and keeps men in positions of privilege and power (refer to Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1989; Oxley, 2011). Since there are not any biological differences in men and women's abilities to participate in social, economic, educational, or political opportunities, then women must be given equal access to those opportunities to uphold these freedoms. Thus, a liberal feminist perspective maintains that these freedoms are best achieved by modifying existing social institutions and political systems, which are public spheres that are historically monopolized by men. The political agenda of the movement aims to liberate and empower women by correcting modern inequalities, such as securing equal civil liberties and sexual and reproductive health freedoms.

The most controversial aspect of liberal feminist thought is the claim that women are socially oppressed, since modern Western women do not outwardly appear to be subject to social marginalization (Oxley, 2011). Yet, a contemporary liberal feminist perspective maintains that society is structured in a way that both subtly and overtly favors men. For example, women's primary source of subjugation is her social role in the family, such as the disproportionate amount of time performing domestic duties, rather than only their biological role in reproduction. Since there is an unequal distribution of unpaid labor in the family, women therefore have less time to take advantage of work opportunities outside the home and thus, do not have equality of opportunity in social and political life. A liberal feminism perspective also contends that these imbalances are reflected in other social arrangements that places burdens on women such as the wage gap between the sexes, men's greater tendency to perpetrate sexual violence against

women, the “pink tax” (i.e., “women’s” items often cost more than identical or very similar “men’s” products), problems with gender roles, social norms, and stereotyping which construct women as weak, vulnerable, too chatty, etc., among several others. In other words, a cycle of power relations and decisions pervade all aspects of women’s lives to which the inequalities of each reinforce each other. However, since liberal feminism is the oldest and most mainstream form of feminism, it is often the target of much criticism, especially by feminists adopting a different perspective (i.e., intersectional feminists) who argue that liberal feminism largely overlooks differences of race, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation relevant to an accurate assessment of women’s situations (see Bryson, 1992; Hill-Collins, 1990; Oxley, 2011; Wendell, 1987). This type of feminism is known as intersectional feminism, which argues that the feminist movement can be much more diverse and inclusive, rather than prioritizing the agenda of white, middle-class women, as often the case with liberal feminism (Brewer & Dundes, 2018).

From these cultural tensions, a form of woman-centric media has emerged in which content creators are incorporating the emancipation of women and liberal feminist ideas into media content. While there is still a multitude of media that exhibit women in stereotypical fashion, there has been an influx of positive messages targeted to women, weaving in themes of female liberation and challenging societal gender norms, arguably reflecting the principles of the liberal feminist movement (Akestam et al., 2017). This trend, although not novel but increasing in frequency within the last decade, uses pro-female talent, messaging, and imagery to empower women and girls, and has recently received significant attention in the news media and advertising industries (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Akestam et al., 2017; Champlin et al., 2017; Drake, 2017). While a seemingly complex idea, feminist liberation is the idea of individual and

collective change (Lykes & Moane, 2009), which is arguably a fundamental element of challenging stereotypical and stigmatizing portrayals in women-centric media (Drake, 2017).

Feminist ideals such as gender equality, body positivity, menstrual-positivity, and women empowerment are also making the shift to marketing and advertising portrayals. This approach attempts to foster a mutual connection with a specific consumer base (i.e., women), through positive portrayals of women and girls, while simultaneously recognizing and correcting past wrongdoings of mirroring gender stereotypes for the purpose of selling a product (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2017; Eisend, 2010). Ads with feminist themes and positive imagery have been shown to be influential to consumers and evoke positive behavioral responses. For example, one industry survey found that nearly all (92%) of the study's participants, who identified as women, were able to recall at least one advertisement that echoed themes from the feminist movement (SheKnows Media, 2016). In addition, over half of the participants (52%) indicated that they purchased a specific product because they appreciated the pro-woman representations in an ad. Moreover, the majority of participants agreed that brands should be accountable for how they use advertising to depict women (SheKnows Media, 2016). The findings from this study echo Klapper's (1960) hypothesis that people prefer media that aligns with their own values, beliefs, and world views.

The new landscape of menstrual-realistic marketing certainly envisions menstrual bleeding as liberating and empowering by co-opting feminist discourses and addressing practices related to menstrual activism (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). As previously mentioned, liberal feminists often assert that the negative cultural attitudes about menstruation and women's reproductive health are at least in part justifications for a male-centered, repressive, patriarchal social structure (Brownmiller, 1984; de Beauvoir, 1989; Moses, 2012). Menstrual-realistic

advertisements resist said negative attitudes about menstruation and benefit from feminist advances by asserting bodily autonomy, which promote a culture of living happy and healthy lives by reframing menstruation as liberating, through the choice of the "correct product." The specific use of the red, blood-like liquid to demonstrate product absorbency pushes the envelope of menstrual-product advertising, dismantling harmful and stigmatizing ideas surrounding menstruation and challenging sexist discourses around body shaming. Keeping in line with previous research arguing that people will gravitate towards advertising that is congruent with and reinforces their beliefs (Green, 1999; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Klapper, 1960; Tucker et al., 2012), it is therefore rational to theorize that attitudes and beliefs relating to the liberal feminist movement would be an important predictor of one's attitude about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Liberal feminist ideologies are likely to influence a partiality for menstrual-realistic ads, as suggested by the previously reviewed literature demonstrating an association between core beliefs and advertising attitudes in outside contexts. Specifically, previous research suggests that women may critically engage with pro-women advertisements and use them as "feminist resources" (Dahlbeck Jalakas, 2016), or use advertising campaigns as a way to engage in conversations about gender equality and often thank companies for their initiatives (Rodrigues, 2016), which is also reflected in the People magazine article cited in the previous chapter. Therefore, menstrual-realistic advertisements are likely to resonate with those who identify with the liberal feminist movement and those who recognize that women are held up to unfair standards and cultural norms about menstruation and other aspects of reproductive health. The following hypothesis was proposed:

> *H_2: The more individuals report liberal feminist attitudes & beliefs, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.*

However, adopting non-sexist attitudes toward women are conceptually different than aligning oneself with the goals and values of the liberal feminist movement. While non-sexist attitudes are certainly one part of feminism, they do not necessarily reflect *all* sociopolitical aspects of liberal feminist ideology. Whereas liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs mirror feminism as a political movement with a particular agenda, non-sexist attitudes refer to the condemnation of male power, traditional gender roles, and men's exploitation of women as sexual objects (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Moreover, the literature suggests that individuals may adopt non-sexist attitudes toward women yet disagree with the goals and agendas of the feminist movement as a whole (Byrne et al., 2011).

While sexism has been traditionally viewed as hostility toward women, Glick and Fisk (1997) identified two kinds of sexist attitudes toward women, which can be adopted by both men and women. The first is called hostile sexism, which justifies patriarchy by degrading women. Hostility toward women is a central component of hostile sexism. The second type of sexism is called benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism occurs when individuals idealize women for their traditional roles and dependency on men. This type of sexism may elicit feelings of affection and protectiveness toward women, but its motives are predicated on perceptions of women as weak, vulnerable, and inferior. Thus, Glick and Fiske (1997) argue that not all sexism is made apparent with hostile motives. For example, the principle that women and children should be saved during a disaster before men is undoubtedly sexist (i.e., benevolent sexism), however, it is difficult to argue that this type of sexism is rooted in hostility (i.e., hostile sexism).

As previously mentioned, the social stigma of menstruation exists to justify patriarchal privileges and is thus rooted in sexism. In one such study by Forbes et al. (2003), the researchers found that both hostile and benevolent sexism were related to negative impressions of the

menstruating women (i.e., rating women on their periods as more irritable, sad, angry, spacey, and annoying than women who were not on their periods). However, this relationship was significantly stronger for participants who scored high on the hostile sexism scale. The authors of this study argued that sexism discounts all aspects of womanhood, and since menstruation is typically conceived of as a "women's problem," those who feel hostility towards women are also more likely to perceive menstruating women unfavorably (i.e., neurotic, incompetent, unintelligent).

Therefore, just as sexist attitudes toward women have been associated with negative attitudes about menstruation and the menstruating woman, it is likely that the opposite will occur; the fewer sexist attitudes one holds toward women, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about anything related to menstruation. As previously mentioned, the limited effects paradigm argues that media serves to reinforce preexisting core attitudes, values, and beliefs (Green, 1999; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Klapper, 1960; Tucker et al., 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to treat attitudes toward women as a separate predictor of menstrual-realistic ads and hypothesize that non-sexist attitudes toward women are related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads, which revision the stigmatization of menstruation as a vital aspect of challenging sexism:

H_3: The less individuals adopt sexist attitudes toward women, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.

The Role of Gender in Attitudes about Menstrual-Realistic Advertisements

Gender identity is a group membership that is an important part of one's self-concept (Bem, 1993; Smith et al., 1999). Gender, therefore, influences the way in which we view ourselves and the world (Bem, 1993). According to extant literature, humans categorize

themselves and others according to gender to interpret various situations in which we find ourselves (Smith et al., 1999). For example, Deaux and Major (1987) argued that when people make sense of their daily social interactions, they turn to what they call their "gender belief systems" which make gender more salient and determine how we should act or think in certain social situations. That is, gender-related attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are not necessarily static, and vary depending on one's social context (Eagly, 1987; Smith et al., 1999).

Regarding menstruation and other feminist, gender-related issues, it may be easy to assume that men approach menstruation with hostility and disgust as menstruation is often labeled as a "woman's issue" (Kissling, 1996), with feminism additionally thought to be a threat to patriarchal order (Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Henderson-King & Zhermer, 2003). For example, the literature attributes the reasons why men are more likely to hold stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation for several reasons; first, young men are less likely to receive adequate, medically accurate sexual and reproductive health education about menstruation (Peranovic & Bentley, 2017). Literature suggests that young boys learn about reproductive health mostly from their peers and media messages (i.e., television, film, or social media), which may or not be medically accurate (Epstein & Ward, 2008). Moreover, menstrual-health education in a formal classroom setting is likely to be plagued with negative and stigmatizing messages, often focusing on biological facts rather than demystifying the secrecy surrounding menstruation (Power, 1995). Menstruation is also often labeled as a symbol of womanhood. Therefore, society's outlooks on menstruation may be related to how society views women and girls in general (Kissling, 1996). For example, there exist many cultural stereotypes about menstruating women, such that they are irrational, crazy, or out of control (Forbes et al., 2003; Johnston-Robledo et al., 2007). The literature also argues that young men's knowledge, especially college-aged men, are more

influenced by cultural stereotypes than are young women (Marván et al., 2005; Walker, 1997). Specifically in Western societies, cultural stereotypes about women tend to be negative, as reflected in the literature arguing that most information available to young people about menstruation are predominantly negative (Erchull et al., 2002; Havens & Swenson, 1988; Merskin, 1999; Power, 1995).

Yet, the issue with societal beliefs about men and/or literature focusing on men and menstruation is that men are often treated as a monolithic group, rather than considering how men living within the U.S. have vastly different experiences with the menstrual process and women in general. Given the complex nature of sexual health topics, it would be easy to assume that men in general meet menstruation with ambivalence or perhaps even hostility. New discourses, however, understand the nuances within men's experiences that impact their beliefs and attitudes about menstruation. For example, a specific context which influences the ways in which men may view menstruation is contact with an intimate partner who menstruates (Allen et al., 2011; Peranovic & Bentley, 2017). Parenting represents another context, where some fathers take an active role in educating their sons and daughters about menstruation (Peranovic & Bentley, 2017). Environmental contexts or childhood circumstances constitute yet another context, such that men who grow up with sisters who experience menstruation or parents who are medical professionals or perhaps even gynecologists may come to view menstruation differently than those men who do not grow up under these circumstances (Peranovic & Bentley, 2017). Moreover, some men menstruate and not all women do, and even looking beyond this fact, men interact with menstruators daily. While it is nearly impossible to identify all factors, characteristics, contexts, and experiences that shape men, it is nonetheless critical to view men

not as a monolith. Rather, their individual identities and corresponding experiences may shape the way that they view issues relating to menstruation and women.

For these reasons, despite men generally having more negative attitudes about menstruation than women, the literature also shows that this much of this population's attitudes are not always stigmatizing and may in fact be informed, open, and comfortable. The non-stigmatizing relationship between men and menstruation may be particularly strong among younger men or boys who grow up with a close social circle of parents and siblings who openly discuss menstruation (Marván et al., 2005). In one such study, Marván et al. (2005) found that in general, despite their age, male participants recognized that menstruation may have some positive aspects, such that it can be a source of pride and well-being for menstruators. In this same study, there were a small percentage of older men who refused to participate when they discovered that they would be asked questions about menstruation. These results suggest that the menstrual cycle is an issue that can generally be openly discussed between genders, especially showing that young men are more likely to be socialized to discuss menstruation at a younger age than their older counterparts (Marván et al., 2005). A separate, yet similar study by Chrisler (1988) yielded similar results; in this study of ideological factors influencing perceptions of menstruation, Chrisler (1988) found no statistically significant differences between men and women's attitudes about menstruation. These results suggest that the process of menstruation could be understood and processed by both genders, despite menstruation being a highly gendered issue. In a separate qualitative study concerning men's attitudes and beliefs toward menstruation, Peranovic and Bentley (2017) found that most participants expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of sexual health education that they received and resultantly took it upon themselves to educate themselves about the topic, which highlighted their openness and

views of menstruation as natural and normal. The results of this study echo Marván et al's (2005) findings, reflecting the improved quality in modern gender relations and an increased openness in talks of reproductive health (Peranovic & Bentley, 2017).

A similar argument can be made for liberal feminist ideals and beliefs. The literature shows that men in general are less likely to distinguish themselves as having goals and views that align with feminism (Silver et al., 2019). While the goal of feminism is to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and gendered oppression, these goals are often assumed to be "women's issues," much like menstruation. Most often, those who adopt feminist values and beliefs are women (Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Henderson-King & Zhermer, 2003). It is important to note, however, that much of this research (similar to my arguments above) did not discuss the various situational or contextual factors that shape men's views on feminism. Thus, research also indicates that many men's feminist identities or pro-feminist views are on the rise, albeit slowly (Tarrant, 2009). The choices for some men to adopt a feminist perspective is associated with the general stigma associated with the word *feminism.* Extant literature shows that men's hesitancy is often related to the unique positioning of the feminist movement itself (Roy et al., 2007; Silver et al., 2019). Specifically, adopting a feminist perspective can be conceptualized as recognizing and opposing men's privileges, highlighting differences between men with varying social identities and different ideologies that emphasize their own masculinities (Messner, 1997; Silver et al., 2019). In this sense, many men who self-identify as feminists carry unique social considerations and stigmatization risks that may make them hesitant to openly disregard traditional masculine norms. For example, in one such study, the researchers found that college students were more likely to rate the term "feminist man" positively than the term "man," but rate them lower in stereotypically masculine characteristics and less heterosexual (Anderson, 2009). The results of

Anderson's (2009) study suggest that men's masculinity may be questioned and stigmatized, which in turn may be a hindrance to them fully adopting feminist beliefs and values.

Much like my arguments about men adopting non-stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, the same holds true for men and feminist-related ideologies. That is, feminist ideas have gained more acceptance by many, but not all, men in recent years. For example, in a review of feminist attitudes and support for gender equality between the years 1974 and 1998, Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) found a general upward trend of men claiming support for the feminist movement, with no significant differences between men and women's support for the movement on all issues in later years except for abortion. Moreover, existing research shows that today's men more or less adopt feminist-supporting attitudes and beliefs, but are far less likely to label themselves as feminists due to the stigma of the word, for the reasons outlined in Anderson's (2009) study above. While there is debate on whether men are truly "feminist" or simply "pro-feminist" (Asche, 2007), notable research nonetheless concludes that it is possible for men to have a place and personal investment in the cause of collective action regardless of whether they self-label as feminists (Conlin & Heesacker, 2018).

Finally, the literature on men and sexist attitudes parallels that of men's attitudes about menstruation and feminism. Unsurprisingly, the literature indicates that women are less likely to adopt a sexist attitude toward women than are men in general. However, studies indicate that many men are generally becoming more progressive about their gender attitudes with every year. For example, some men choose to adopt anti-sexist attitudes or even identify as feminists because they feel that they bear the responsibility for ending the oppression of women. In addition, some men may also recognize that sexism negatively impacts them because it forces them into a hyper-masculine role, which engages high-risk behavior and limits their emotional

expression as full human beings (Klocke, 2008). Therefore, although men are less likely than women to recognize sexism, men allies still nonetheless possess psychological belief systems that allow them to overcome barriers to seeing sexism and thus, recognize the unfair treatment of women.

Given that the literature supports the idea that many men can be pro-menstruation, pro-feminist, and anti-sexist, it is difficult to argue that the relationship between the variables introduced in the previous sections and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will be different for men and women. To reiterate, many men may not be hesitant to be open to discussions about the menstrual cycle and may adopt pro-feminist, anti-sexist attitudes. While studies suggest that consumers are more likely to respond positively to marketing attempts when their core beliefs align with the values presented in the messages, the literature also indicates that ads that are congruent with one's self-concept are also a predictor of advertising effectiveness (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). Therefore, regardless of one's gender identity, if pro-menstruation, pro-feminist, and anti-sexist attitudes are an important part of one's self-concepts, then the relationship between attitudes about menstruation, liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, and anti-sexist attitudes should be similar for both men and women. Specifically, it was predicted that the previously mentioned relationships would be similar for both men and women:

H_4: The relationship between endorsing stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will be statistically significant for both men and women.

H_5: The relationship between liberal feminist attitudes & beliefs and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will be statistically significant for both men and women.

H_6: The relationship between sexist attitudes toward women and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will be statistically significant for both men and women.

Strategies and Motives for Resistance to Persuasion (SMRP) Framework

As previously mentioned, media effectiveness is reliant on whether the consumer perceives the message to be congruent with their own ideologies. However, consumer expectations of information from various forms of communication such as television, film, newspapers, and advertising are entirely different. This is because consumers are generally aware of advertising's persuasive intent and in some situations, will actively resist rather than embrace persuasive attempts. In general, people understand that the source of advertising (i.e., the message sender) uses strategies and tactics for the purpose of selling a product, which in turn may influence the overall effectiveness of the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). When this knowledge is made salient, consumers become suspicious about the source's intentions, the message claims, the quality of the information, and the underlying motives of the sender. Consumers' intuition of having ulterior motives may affect the way that they process information and form an impression about the sender, such that concerns of deception will increase and therefore, ad effectiveness will decrease. For example, research has indicated that individuals who have greater tendencies of understanding persuasion tactics are more likely to elicit unfavorable attitudes about an advertisement (Kachersky, 2011) and negative overall brand evaluations (Jain & Posavac, 2004). Thus, even though consumers show a preference for advertising that corresponds with their core beliefs, they may still be motivated to resist persuasion.

The Strategies and Motives for Resistance to Persuasion (SMRP) Framework offers an approach that people may embrace when resisting persuasion and connects them to which motives they have for resisting a message (Fransen et al., 2015). One motive that explains the reason why people resist persuasion attempts is concerns of deception, as people are more likely to hold defensive attitudes of their belief systems and do not like to be misled by insincere claims. A major factor that increases the likelihood of people scrutinizing and avoiding conflicting information is concerns of the sender's motives. When people are concerned of the sender's intentions, they may become skeptical or disbelieve the truth of the message claims, value of information, and perceive the sender's intentions as insincere or ingenuine, therefore decreasing the effectiveness of the advertisement all together.

Just as some message cues may increase the likelihood of some people interpreting, processing, and positively evaluating the advertising information (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995), those same message characteristics may trigger concerns of deception in some circumstances. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, attention-grabbing cues, delayed sponsor identification, and most relevant to the present study, a borrowed-interest appeal which are attempts to capitalize on popular trending cultural and social topics (Hsu, 2018). Menstrual-realistic advertisements are undoubtedly riding the wave of twenty-first century period-positivity and the current menstrual justice movement after decades of stigmatizing and shame-inducing ad tropes. While showing realistic depictions of period blood may result in positive evaluations by some, the literature also shows that for others, it may increase skepticism in brand intentions and perceptions of insincerity in others (Eyada, 2020, Mirzaei et al., 2022) and affect the way consumers process information (Friestad & Wright, 1994) or result in more negative brand evaluations (Jain & Prosavac, 2004).

Thus, consumers who are apprehensive about a brand's deception or insincerity may try to cope with persuasion attempts by contesting the message, sender, or persuasive strategy of the message (Fransen et al., 2015). Prior research suggests that when contesting strategies are adopted, consumers are more likely to critically process the advertising message and scrutinize the different elements of the message for anything they believe is untrustworthy, insincere untrue, or deceptive (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Main et al., 2007). In addition to disputing the content, skeptical consumers may also challenge the sender of the message by dismissing their credibility or trustworthiness, known as source derogation (Fransen et al., 2015; Zuwerink Jacks & Cameron, 2003). These behaviors undermine the credibility of both the message and sender and are linked to negative perceptions of the advertiser (Sinclair & Kunda, 1999) and decreased message acceptance (Wright, 1975).

Individuals' belief systems tend to override the persuasion attempt when discounting the message or source. In other words, when presented with a persuasive attempt from a source that individuals disbelieve, they easily label it as fabricated or misleading so that there is not any need to process information that is inconsistent with one's worldview (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Fransen et al., 2015). In other cases, people who are concerned about being misguided by a message or a source are more likely to engage in the critical process (i.e., focusing on the inaccuracy of the arguments, the unreliability of the source, or the persuasive strategy being used), therefore decreasing message effectiveness (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Therefore, recognizing these strategies and labeling them as manipulative and untrustworthy serves to resist the message altogether.

While the literature shows that consumers are partial to advertising messages that align with their previous attitudes, values, and beliefs (Green, 1999; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Hong

& Zinkhan, 1995; Klapper, 1960; Tucker et al., 2012), ad favorability can decrease or even reverse when individuals are skeptical of persuasion attempts (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Fransen et al., 2015; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Main et al., 2007). While menstrual-realistic advertisements certainly tap into individuals' core beliefs about what it means to be a menstruating person by co-opting feminist discourses (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020), consumers may also resist or reject these tactics if they are skeptical of the commodification of feminist ideals for the purposes of selling a product. Therefore, an examination of consumers' levels of brand activism skepticism, a derivative of the theoretical framework of commodity feminism (Goldman et al., 1991), warrants attention.

Commodity Feminism and the "Liberated" Era of Menstrual-Realistic Advertising

Menstrual-realistic advertisements achieve marketing success by making use of feminist ideals and appropriating the spirit of menstrual activism. The growing trend of feminism and femininity representing a large portion of the strategies for capturing the market share does not come without criticism. The motivation to reframe feminist discourses in advertisements targeted to primarily women may not be viewed as authentic, but rather, as market motivated. This is theorized as commodity feminism (Goldman et al., 1991). A play on Marx's (1867) conception of commodity fetishism, which is the perception of social relationships not among people, but as relationships among things as commodities, commodity feminism is the commodification and appropriation of feminist critique and praxis for commercial purposes, usually in advertising (Goldman et al, 1991). According to Goldman and colleagues, since feminism's second wave, advertisers have been trying to connect the value and meaning of women's liberation to the sale of corporate products. In the context of a fragmented consumer market, the basic argument is

that feminist morality has been taken over by the world of marketing and consumerism, driven by the never-ending motive to earn profit.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with empowering women and girls, the argument against commodity feminism is that the rise of a corporate consumer culture has become so pervasive, the implication is that *everything* has a price tag and can be reappropriated into a consumable product. In the process of incorporating feminist ideals such as sexual freedom and agency, commodity feminism is redefining the basic assumptions of feminism through our purchasing behaviors. In this sense, feminism is becoming depoliticized for the purpose of advertising and losing its original meaning, reinventing feminist social goals to an individual lifestyle (Goldman et al., 1991). As argued by many scholars, commodity feminism exploits these ideals and repackages them by insinuating that if a woman wants to be liberated (a core ideal of liberal feminism), she must first make a purchase (Crouse-Dick, 2002; Daily, 2019; Goldman et al., 1991; Lazar, 2006; Meehan, 2012). Within this framework, feminist advertising suggests that that the enlightened can "have it all" with a celebration of all things feminine, only after making the "correct" consumer purchase.

Pro-social messaging in advertising is rarely genuinely progressive, as the incorporation of feminist signifiers of liberation and empowerment imply that feminist struggles have ended (Goldman et al., 1991; Lazar, 2006). Thus, the appropriation of feminism in the advertising world has been labeled as "faux activism" (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020; Sobande, 2019; Varghese & Kumar, 2020). The term "faux activism" (also called "performative activism") refers to the practice of supporting a social or political cause by sending out a particular message to make oneself or an organization appear to be genuine. The problem, however, is that the intended message doesn't actually do much to achieve the goals that are tied to that particular message.

The use of women's empowerment and feminist ideals in advertising hold close ties to "faux activism" because critics view the bottom fundamental motivation not as social change, but rather, as selling merchandise and encouraging consumption, particularly the consumption of gendered products (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020; Sobande, 2019; Varghese & Kumar, 2020).

The reconstruction of gendered issues in advertising is complicated. On the one hand, female empowerment messaging represents a radical departure from the usual portrayals of women (in this case, messages about menstruation) as stigmatized and feminine objects of pleasure (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016). As mentioned previously, the appropriation of feminism for consumer purposes may have a positive impact on product sales because consumers are more likely to know and remember pro-women themes in ad campaigns rather than ads that do not feature women in an empowering way (SheKnows Media, 2016). Contrarily, there is also the argument to be made that companies are engaging in socially responsible marketing, or "faux activism," simply to strengthen their corporate image as well as consumer attitudes about the brand itself (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Now, more than ever, consumers are generally aware of advertising's persuasive intent of inciting needs for unnecessary products and goods, especially through claims of social responsibility (Eyada, 2020; Fransen et al., 2015; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Mirzaei et al., 2022).

Indeed, women's empowerment messages and themes of feminism in advertising have lacked credibility among consumers because they depict staged performances of women's liberation. In reality, very few companies, including menstrual-product advertisers, have a business or a corporate goal that is explicitly related to gender equality (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). Therefore, corporate social efforts that incorporate themes of

feminism into marketing campaigns for the purposes of standing out in a fragmented marketplace have been and continue to be labeled as artificial by the public. In short, academic literature has shown that consumers are aware that many brands are increasingly becoming activists in the sociopolitical sphere. For example, one such survey found that 56% of consumers indicated that too many brands use societal issues primarily as a marketing ploy to incite consumer needs for goods (Edelman, 2019), yet at the same time, consumers often expect brands to enter the social activism domain (Hoppner & Vadakkepatt, 2019). These findings highlight consumers' increasing awareness that brands are becoming comfortable alienating some consumers to address potentially polarizing political issues (i.e., Black Lives Matter, LGBTQIA+ rights, gun control, immigration, or relevant to the current study, menstrual activism).

When brands decide to enter the realm of social activism, particularly when it comes to feminist issues, their underlying motives become scrutinized by the public (Holt, 2002). As previously explained by the theoretical underpinnings of Strategies and Motives for Resistance to Persuasion (SMRP) Framework, people have concerns of being deceived and do not like to be fooled (Fransen et al., 2015). Specifically, consumers are actively concerned about being deceived by the goodwill and trustworthiness of a brand's purpose, values, messaging, and corporate practices (Fransen et al., 2015; Vredenburg et al., 2020). When people cope with persuasive attempts, they will actively resist persuasion because 1) they have preexisting theories about how the source of the persuasion tries to influence them and 2) they do not want to be misled about the true motives of the advertiser (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The literature suggests that in order to cope with concerns of deception, people will contest the source (i.e. the sender) by assigning them two types of motives, which are called firm-serving and public serving

motives. Firm-serving motives are beliefs about how the persuasive attempt will benefit the brand itself. Public-serving motives are preconceived beliefs about how the persuasion will benefit the general public (Barone et al., 2000; Forehand & Grier, 2003). Consumers generally perceive firm-serving motives negatively because they represent an opportunistic perspective on account of the brand itself. Thus, appropriating feminist discourses and engaging in socially responsible feminist marketing or "faux activism" may not be perceived as transparent or a facilitator of true social change, but as an inauthentic strategy for building brand equity and boosting sales.

Thus, keeping in line with the basic idea of commodity feminism or "faux activism," it is necessary to consider brand activism skepticism to explain how people perceive menstrual-realistic advertisements and how these cognitive perceptions subsequently influence their ad attitudes. This concept is suitable to study under the context of brands who engage in socially responsible marketing because consumers express great interest in justifying the reasons why companies may engage in pro-social messaging (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), but will often resist the persuasion attempt due to concerns of deception (Fransen et al., 2015). Moreover, consumers tend to show little trust in advertising attempts to appear as socially responsible citizens. In an era of increased proactive approaches in addressing social issues (in this case, menstrual justice), brand activism risks being labeled as "woke washing" (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, this dissertation refers to the belief that a company or brand is exploiting or appropriating rather than supporting the cause, as brand activism skepticism. When consumers assign individualistic or opportunistic profiteering motives to a company or brand, they may become skeptical of pro-social messaging. Moreover, they may perceive such messaging as a purposeful attempt to mislead consumers into false

conclusions about the company's trustworthiness and goodwill (Fransen et al., 2015; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Beyond deception and manipulation, brand activism skepticism also includes how consumers view external, ingenuine motives as harmful to the social cause because the company is preoccupied with the bottom-line interest of reaping the benefits of capitalism.

People who hold strong liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs may be more likely to exhibit high levels of brand activism skepticism than those who hold weaker liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs. The appropriation of the menstrual movement (or any movement related to gender equality), which encourages the consumption of a gendered product, may also not coexist with the goals of the feminist movement. As previously mentioned, the objective of the liberal feminist movement is to achieve gender equality for everyone. Liberal feminist's main criticism of capitalism as an economic system is that it is inherently exploitative and oppressive, especially about the power asymmetry between those at the top and those at the bottom of the employment hierarchy and supply chain (Gibson-Graham, 1997). Liberal feminists view capitalism as structurally oppressive, and therefore, it further exacerbates sexism, casteism, ableism, etc. Thus, many liberal feminists believe that women's liberation cannot be achieved under a capitalistic society due to disproportionate wages, lack of available jobs for lower and middle-class women, and working laws that favor men (Fraser, 2017). Advertising is nonetheless reflective of a culture of mass consumption and capitalism and is often accused of inciting needs for unnecessary products and goods. Moreover, some critics have interpreted feminist messages in advertising as suggesting that women's liberation derives from brand loyalty and purchasing habits, rather than the large-scale systemic need to guarantee gender equality (McRobbie, 2008). These purchases, often thinly-veiled as "feminist" purchases, may nonetheless be forms of consumer therapy in the current climate of gender discrimination. Therefore, people who hold

strong ties to their liberal feminist ideologies may be more skeptical of brands appropriating activist movements, due to the ways in which women have traditionally been exploited through capitalism.

Departing from liberal feminist views of brand activism, prior studies show that in general, consumers are becoming increasingly skeptical of brand activism, which can subsequently diminish advertising effectiveness. Whether it is conceptualized as advertising mistrust, advertising cynicism, or advertising skepticism, the literature shows that a general disbelief in advertising claims can negatively affect attitudes about an advertisement (e.g., Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Obermiller et al., 2005; Soh et al., 2007; Yang et al., 2021). However, negative effects can be exacerbated by a company's interest in fulfilling social responsibilities. For example, Mukerjee & Althuizen (2020) argue that brand activism can substantially hurt a brand, while the potential benefits are minimal at best. In this study, the authors argued that public backlash against pro-social advertisements could only be mitigated if brands take a public stand on highly divisive social or political issues. In a separate but related study, Chao-Ming and Tzu-Fan (2017) found that consumers who elicited low skepticism of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertisements (i.e., the practice of combining a company's charitable activities with its marketing campaigns) were more likely to exhibit a preference for CSR-related ads, while consumers who were highly skeptical of CSR advertising were less likely to show a preference for CSR-related ads. In congruence with the arguments above, studies relating to feminist messaging in advertising have yielded similar results. For example, in a qualitative study, Abdallah et al. (2019) found that woman empowerment in advertising was received positively among a sample of men. However, the authors also found that brand credibility or brand genuineness was a conditional factor in advertisement

effectiveness. That is, if the advertisement presented to the study's participants was not perceived as genuine, it led to a deterioration of ad attitudes. Collectively, these findings suggest that advertisers should tread lightly when promoting pro-social messaging because these messages could potentially trigger doubt in consumer's minds, leading to an increase in negative ad attitudes.

Menstrual-realistic advertisements hold critical ties to commodity feminism, and therefore, may elicit brand activism skepticism among consumers. As previously mentioned, the history of menstrual-product advertising is tainted. Advertisements for pads, tampons, and other menstrual-related products, up until very recently, have contributed to menstruation's stigmatized status by emphasizing secrecy, avoiding embarrassment, and the importance of staying fresh and feminine (Coutts & Berg, 1993; Merskin, 1999; Erchull, 2013). Menstrual-product advertisers also used blue liquid to demonstrate product absorbency, as opposed to the realistic-looking red liquid, which is the focal point of the present study. The blue liquid trope used to represent period blood was criticized on the grounds that it emphasized the societal expectation that menstruators should keep their menstruation a secret (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). After decades of pushing the narrative that period blood is blue, and therefore should be hidden away from the rest of the world, realistic red liquid is now appearing in mainstream advertising, in conjunction with the current menstrual-activism movement (Bobel & Fahs, 2020). The realistic-looking red liquid, which is meant to be empowering to menstruators, is nonetheless ultimately driven by capitalistic gains (Goldman et al., 1991) and may be perceived as inauthentic or that the brand is exploiting the menstrual-activism movement.

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that adopting liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs may be associated with favorable perceptions of menstrual-realistic advertisements, but *only* under the condition that these individuals do not exhibit high levels of brand activism skepticism because as previously mentioned, the goals of feminism ultimately are not congruent with the goals of capitalism (see Figure 1). In addition, brand activism skepticism is theorized to diminish advertisement effectiveness. That is, consumers may adopt contesting strategies in order to avoid deception from the brand or source itself, therefore backlashing against pro-social advertisements and showing less preference toward them (e.g., Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Obermiller et al., 2005; Soh et al., 2007; Yang et al., 2021). Thus, brand activism skepticism may be a conditional factor between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, and advertising attitudes (see Figure 1). Accordingly, the following was proposed:

> *H_7: Brand activism skepticism will mediate the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, such that the more individuals report liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, the more skeptical they will be of brand activism (i.e., brand activism skepticism) for menstrual-realistic ads, and thus the less likely they will be to have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.*

Brand Credibility and the Appropriation of Menstrual Activism

Similarly, whether or not the consumer perceives the brand's virtue-signaling efforts as genuine may also translate to how the consumer perceives the entire brand itself. As previously argued in the literature, one of the most important characteristics of a brand is their credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Brand credibility is a derivative of source credibility. Several researchers in the field of communication have studied source credibility from the message

sender's (i.e., source) perspective (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Frieden, 1984; Keller, 2000; Ohanian, 1990). According to the source credibility research stream, the sender of a message can be an individual (Frieden, 1984), a fictitious character (Stafford et al., 2002), a large organization (Keller, 2000), or relevant to the current study, a brand (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Wang & Yang, 2010). Source credibility ultimately refers to the message sender's (i.e., individual, character, or brand) positive characteristics such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness/likeableness. Therefore, brand credibility is theorized to embody these three elements; it is the believability of the brand's characteristics on the levels of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness/likeableness.

A consumer's perception of a brand's credibility depends on a company or brand's actions, authenticity, and their level of responsibility for wider societal good. In this context, trustworthiness refers to a consumers' level of trust in the brand. Expertise is defined as the brand's perceived skills or knowledge in a particular field. Attractiveness/likeableness is associated with the brand's perceived image (e.g., having characteristics such as friendliness, charisma, or charm; Wang & Yang, 2010). Companies will often spend a considerable amount of time and resources managing their image and attracting attention from consumers. Hence, brand credibility is achieved when consumers perceive a brand as willing (trustworthiness), having a considerate level of ability (expertise), dedicated to a cause (attractiveness/likeableness), and are consistent in keeping their promises (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness/likeableness can reflect the cumulative effects of prior and current brand activities or can be studied from a relatively succinct period of time (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Wang & Yang, 2010).

Research has established that brand credibility plays an imperative role in a number of consumer outcomes such as purchase intentions (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999), brand awareness and brand image (Wang & Yang, 2010), or consumer loyalty (Sweeny & Swait, 2008), but its antecedents are a relatively underdeveloped area in academic literature. As previously mentioned, a growing trend in advertising are corporations and brands signaling that they are "feminists" by taking a proactive approach to addressing social issues, or relevant to this study, menstrual activism by using realistic red liquid to represent period blood. Taking a stance on divisive gendered/social issues is a deliberate attempt to appear "woke" or public-serving, but may backfire on the grounds that some consumers may perceive the appropriation of feminist discourses as deceptive, ingenuine, or opportunistic (Fransen et al., 2015; Mirzaei et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Therefore, the decisions to be feminist/menstrual activists, which has been argued to induce consumer motivations to accuse the brand of inauthenticity (i.e., brand activism skepticism) may also diminish that brand's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness/likeableness.

Just as brand activism skepticism is theorized to increase negative attitudes about an advertisement with pro-social messaging (see the above section), brand activism skepticism may also hurt a brand's overall image (i.e., brand credibility). As argued by Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020), brand activism provides consumers with the opportunity to assess the brand's moral foundations. If a brand's moral foundations are congruent or perceived as self-similar with the consumer, it could result in more favorable attitudes about that brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). While this notion holds true in most situations, the effect of brand activism skepticism is likely to have the opposite effect in the context of moral judgements, as explained below.

When consumers are skeptical of a brand who signal their responsibility and concern for social issues, they hold the belief that the company is exploiting and appropriating that issue rather than truly supporting the cause. By its very nature, consumers who question the true motives of the company or brand are questioning the brand's moral foundations. When consumers question or disagree with the brand's morality, it implies that the consumer and the brand are not congruent in their beliefs, leading to low self-brand similarity (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Since people tend to consider their own moral beliefs to be superior, it is unlikely that they will perceive the brand to have good intentions. Therefore, when consumers have high levels of brand activism skepticism, they are less likely to perceive the brand in question to be trustworthy, have expertise, or attractive/likeable.

Indeed, a growing body of literature indicates that not only can brand activism decrease favorable attitudes about their advertising (Abdallah et al., 2019; Chao-Ming & Tzu-Fan, 2017; Mukherjee & Althuizen; 2020), but it can also substantially hurt the image of the brand itself. For example, in a series of studies by Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020), the authors consistently found that when a consumer disagreed with a stance taken by a brand, they were significantly more likely to hold a negative attitude about that brand. However, even when the consumer aligned their core beliefs with that of a brand, they were not more likely to have a favorable attitude about that brand. In other words, the overall effects of brand activism were likely to have negative effects on consumer attitudes about a brand, and these effects were exacerbated if the consumers' beliefs were not congruent with the stances of the brand (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). A separate line of research yielded similar results. In a study by Romani et al. (2015), backlash such as hateful feelings against a company was found to have increased when consumers perceived the brand to be morally deviant, prompting them to adopt anti-brand

behaviors. Interestingly, in a qualitative research study focusing on men's perception of women empowerment messages in advertising (Abdallah et al., 2019), most of the interviewees expressed a favorable image of the brand. However, a significant number of participants expressed doubts about the brand's moral intentions, believing instead that their feminist activism was a capitalist marketing tool. Participants who expressed their doubts about the intentions of the advertiser were significantly less likely to perceive that brand as a trustworthy and credible sender.

Thus, the aforesaid studies demonstrate that a company's pro-social activism can hurt the brand substantially, particularly when consumers are skeptical about whether companies truly live up to their professed standards. It is reasonable, therefore, to extend these hypotheses to the realm of menstrual-realistic advertisements. As previously stated, the purpose of using realistic red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements is to empower women and girls and normalize bleeding in tandem with the current menstrual-activism movement (Bobel & Fahs, 2020; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). In doing so, menstrual-product advertisers are taking the risk that their activism may lead to consumer skepticism toward the advertisement, which have the potential to spill over to negative perceptions of the brand themselves. It was therefore predicted that:

H_8: The more skeptical individuals are of brand activism (i.e., brand activism skepticism) for menstrual-realistic ads, the less credible they will perceive those brands.

As mentioned in the previous section, brand activism skepticism is also theorized to be negatively associated with attitudes about an advertisement. That is, when people elicit high amounts of brand activism skepticism, they are less likely to hold positive perceptions of an advertisement engaging in pro-social messaging. Therefore, advertisement attitudes may also be

a conditional factor in how people formulate perceptions of a brand's credibility, depending on their degree of brand activism skepticism.

Previous literature also investigates whether consumers' attitudes about a particular advertisement have a significant and positive association with an attitude about a brand. Studies agree that how positively or negatively an individual feels about an advertisement will directly predict its effectiveness (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Positive reactions to advertisements, regardless of ad familiarity, are likely to have stronger impacts than negative reactions to advertisements. For example, in print advertising, consumers depend very much on the visuals of the product, which will motivate them to continue reading it and help them feel "connected" with it (e.g., the product feeling genuine and credible; Brosius et al., 1996). Positive reactions, or liking of the ad, thus motivates the consumer to possibly change their perception of the product or act upon the advertisement (Jhally, 1995; Moore & Hutchinson, 1983).

Any consumer potentially forms an attitude or belief about an advertisement. When an individual views an advertisement, its effectiveness can be observed through a number of dependent variables such as purchase intention (Curtis et al., 2017), brand trust, or brand loyalty (Nagar, 2013). However, advertising attitudes have been used as an antecedent or independent variable to other outcome variables in past studies. Its usage, however, depends on how it is positioned by researchers.

Many, however, have suggested that advertising attitudes can directly spill over to the way people perceive or favor a brand, with the former hypothesized to have a direct effect on the latter (Nagar, 2013; Sallam & Algammash, 2016). Consumers often rely on their advertisement impressions on which to base their impressions of the brand or advertiser. While consumers who are already familiar with a brand may sometimes draw on their existing brand knowledge,

studies have also shown that there is a significant effect of advertising attitudes on brand perceptions for both familiar and unfamiliar brands (Phelps & Hoy, 1996; Rhee & Jung, 2019). Thus, when the consumer forms a positive evaluation of an advertisement, they are also more likely to form a positive impression of the brand itself. This relationship appears to be intensified especially under the conditions of low involvement (i.e., the consumer does not have a strong connection with the product; Goldsmith et al., 2000). In addition, the relationship between the two variables appear to strengthen depending on the advertisement's appeal. For example, one such study argued that emotional appeals, which play off a consumer's individual feelings rather than their reason, are more effective than information appeals, which use a straightforward presentation of a product's attributes and functions, although both are likely to foster positive brand impressions given that the consumer favors the ad (Rhee & Jung, 2019).

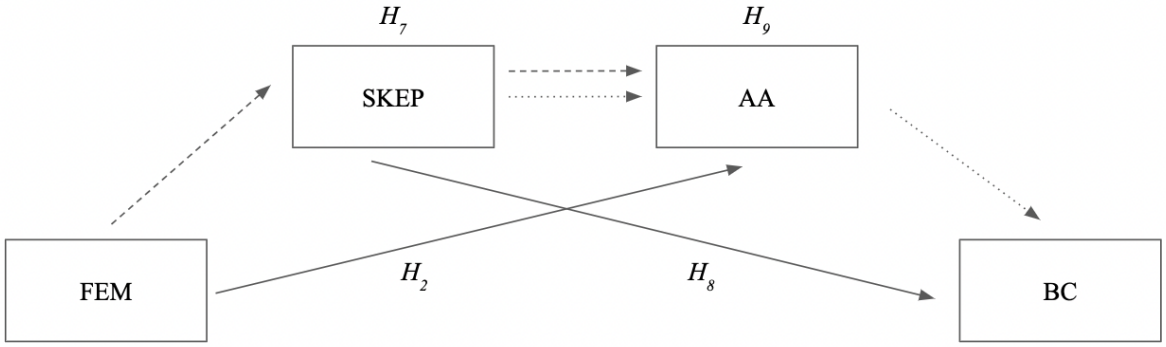
While there are studies that have established that the effects of advertising can directly impact how consumers perceive a brand, none to my knowledge have specifically focused on how advertisements can affect brand credibility. By extension, I theorize that favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements are likely to foster perceptions of brand trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness/likeableness (i.e., brand credibility). As there are a plethora of menstrual-product companies that make and advertise period products, consumers are likely to rely on their split impressions of an advertisement to formulate their attitude about a specific brand. Specifically, value-expressive ads, a key feature of menstrual-realistic ads, achieve the most success as they work to convey a wholesome brand image that jumps on the bandwagon of pro-social messaging, which in turn will likely foster the perception that the brand itself cares about social change (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). Thus, when consumers hold a favorable attitude about an ad, the effects will likely spill over to the brand.

Based on the literature review and my arguments above, this study posited the congruency between brand activism skepticism, advertising attitudes and brand credibility (see Figure 1). Specifically, being skeptical of activist messaging is thought to be associated with unfavorable advertisement attitudes. In addition, unfavorable advertisement attitudes are likely to impact how people perceive a brand and their credibility (see Figure 1). Given this literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

> *H_9: Favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will mediate the relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility, such that the more individuals are skeptical of brand activism (i.e., brand activism skepticism) for menstrual realistic ads, the less likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads, and thus the less credible they will perceive those brands.*

Figure 1

Proposed serial mediation conceptual model of the study's main variables of interest



Note. This figure shows the conceptual relationships between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, brand activism skepticism, attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and brand credibility, where FEM = Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, SKEP = Brand activism skepticism, AA = Attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and BC = Brand credibility. Each path is labeled with its corresponding hypothesis. The solid line represents a direct hypothesized relationship. The dotted line represents the mediation hypothesis between SKEP and BC with AA as the mediator. The dashed line represents the mediation hypothesis between FEM and AA with SKEP as the mediator.

Chapter III: Method

The method used for this study was a cross-sectional survey ($N = 794$), which was distributed in March 2022 via Dynata, an online survey panel company. According to Dillman (2006), an online survey was an appropriate method of data collection for this study because it allowed respondents to read and process each question with an adequate amount of time, compared to an in-person or phone survey. Moreover, Internet surveys reduce the likelihood of participants giving socially desirable answers. This is particularly appropriate for research relating to menstruation, which is a highly stigmatized subject.

Study participants were presented with a survey questionnaire that asked them questions about their liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, and sexist attitudes toward women (i.e., hostile and benevolent sexism). Afterwards, they were shown menstrual-realistic advertisements and asked their opinions about them. For the purposes of this study, menstrual-realistic advertisements are advertisements for menstrual products that use red liquid to represent period blood.

This chapter includes detailed information about the study methods, including the participants and procedures for the survey pretests and main study. It also lists the measures used in the final online survey and the data cleaning and analysis procedures used to test the study hypotheses proposed in Chapter 2. This chapter also provides tables of the means and standard deviations of the most important and interesting measures in this study. Certain measures were showcased over other measures because they provide greater insight into the specific items used in the main study survey, on pages 64, 65, and 67.

Participants

The final dataset included 794 adults who reside across the United States, with the largest percentages of participants from the states that are the most populous (e.g., 8.2% from New York, 7.8% from California, 7.8% from Florida, 6.0% from Texas). A sampling quota was set up to ensure that participants were evenly distributed across a wide range of age categories, such that participants represented ages 18-24 (16.4%), 25-34 (17.0%), 35-44 (17.0%), 45-54 (18.6%), 55-64 (17.8%), and 65 years and older (13.2%). The study's youngest participant was 19 years old and the study's oldest participant was 85 years old ($M = 45.33$, $SD = 16.73$). A sampling quota was also used to ensure that the study had a relatively equal amount of self-identified men (50.3%) and self-identified women (49.7%). Most of the study's participants indicated that they were high school graduates (25.3%), had a 4-year college degree (24.3%), some college (22.9%), a professional or master's degree (12.1%), a 2-year college degree (10.5%), less than high school (2.9%), or a doctorate (2.0%). The most common race or ethnicity in which participants identified was White or Caucasian (83.8%), followed by Black or African American (9.2%), Asian or Asian American (5.3%), Hispanic or Latino(a)(x) (3.7%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1.4%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.4%). A small number of participants ($N = 3$) identified themselves as a race/ethnicity that was not listed.[1] Refer to Table 1 for a summary of the demographic characteristics of study participants.

Related to the study purpose, participants were also asked about their experiences and identification with feminism, menstruation, and menstrual-product advertising. Participants were asked whether they identify or do not identify as a feminist, or do not know. About a quarter self-identified as feminists (24.7%), but most participants (61.2%) did not. An additional 14.1% of participants indicated that they did not know if they considered themselves feminists or not.

[1] The cumulative percentages are greater than 100% because participants were given the option to select all choices that applied to them.

Participants were also asked if they had ever menstruated. About half (47.9%) indicated that they have menstruated. Of these participants, 50% indicated that they menstruate every month, followed by a few indicating that they menstruate once every couple of months ($N = 19$), twice per year ($N = 4$), or once per year ($N = 4$). An additional 39.2% indicated that they have menstruated previously but are now either menopausal or postmenopausal, and a small number of participants ($N = 14$) indicated that they are either taking birth control that suppresses menstruation or no longer menstruate due to having a hysterectomy. It is important to note that a small number ($N = 4$) of self-identified men indicated that they menstruate or have menstruated and thus were included in the dataset as menstruators.

Participants were also asked on a scale from 1 to 5, such that 1= *Never* and 5 = *Very Frequently,* how often they have seen advertisements for menstrual products in general, and advertisements for menstrual products that use red liquid prior to taking the current survey. Among the entire sample, participants indicated that they occasionally see ads for menstrual products in general ($M = 2.94$, $SD = .99$), but had rarely seen advertisements for menstrual products that use red liquid prior to taking the survey ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.20$). Two additional independent samples t-tests were conducted to identify whether there were significant differences in menstruators' and non-menstruators' previous exposure to ads for menstrual products in general and menstrual products that use red liquid prior to taking the survey. Results from the independent samples t-test with previous exposure to ads for menstrual products in general as the dependent variable revealed statistically significant differences between menstruators ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .95$) and non-menstruators ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.01$), $t(792) = -3.11$, $p < .001$. Results from the independent samples t-test with previous exposure to ads for menstrual

product that use red liquid as the dependent variable revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between menstruators and non-menstruators, $t(792) = .71$, $p = .24$.

Table 1

Summary of demographic characteristics of study participants

Variable	N	%
Gender identity		
Man	399	50.3
Woman	395	49.7
Age		
18-24	130	16.4
25-34	135	17.0
35-44	135	17.0
45-54	148	18.6
55-64	141	17.8
65 and older	105	13.2
Race/Ethnicity		
White	665	83.8
Black or African American	73	9.2
Asian or Asian American	42	5.3
Hispanic or Latino(a)(x)	29	3.7
American Indian or Alaska Native	11	1.4
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3	0.4
Other	3	0.4
Education		
Less than high school	23	2.9
High school graduate or equivalent	201	25.3
Some college	182	22.9
Two year degree	83	10.5
Four year degree	193	24.3
Professional or master's degree	96	12.1
Doctorate	16	2.0

Note. $N = 794$. This table displays the relevant demographic characteristics of the study participants. For race/ethnicity, the percentages and numbers do not add up to 100 and 794, respectively, because participants were given the option to check multiple options to describe themselves.

Procedures

Survey Pretesting

Multiple rounds of survey pretesting were conducted prior to the final distribution of the survey to ensure item reliability of the main study measures and to obtain open-ended feedback about the measures before conducting the main study. The first pretest was conducted via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a survey platform company, with a sample of 113 participants in mid-March 2022. Participants were paid $1.00 each for their participation. Participants were first instructed to complete the main measures of the study (i.e., ad attitudes, brand activism skepticism, and brand credibility). After completing the main measures, survey feedback was gathered using the open-ended question *If you would like to share any additional comments or feedback about this survey, please tell the researchers below,* at the end of the questionnaire. Results from the open-ended question indicated that participants needed additional clarification on the brand activism skepticism measures, such that many indicated that they were unfamiliar with the term "social responsibility." Participants also mentioned that some of the scales were difficult to process due to the placement of the reverse-worded items. These concerns were addressed by providing participants with a clear definition of social responsibility, changing the order of the reverse-worded items to decrease item difficulty and ease cognitive load, and presenting fewer questions per page in the final survey. All items tested in this round of pretesting (i.e., ad attitudes, brand activism skepticism, and brand credibility) achieved acceptable levels of reliability.

The second pretest of the survey was also conducted via MTurk with a sample of 40 participants, who self-identified as either man ($N = 24$) or woman ($N = 16$). Participants were paid 50 cents each for their participation. The purpose of this round of pretesting was to ensure

the reliability of the short-form Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology scale (LFAIS), which the original author encouraged the "cautious" use of but advised that it could be further developed in the future to refine a reliable and valid scale (Morgan, 1996). To that end, after testing the original 11-item questionnaire, it was deemed to be unreliable ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .43$, $\alpha = .37$).

The third and final pretest of the survey was therefore conducted to test an edited version of the short-form LFAIS in hopes of achieving reliability. This pretest also conducted via MTurk, again with a sample of 40 participants, who were paid 50 cents each for their participation. Participants self-identified as either man ($N = 25$) or woman ($N = 15$). Following the advice of Woodbrown (2015), three items were removed from the original scale on the basis that they were either too controversial, too unfamiliar with some people, or simply did not apply in the context of 2022. The items that were removed were also the items that were the most unreliable in the pretest described in the previous paragraph. I also reordered the presentation of items to ease participants' cognitive load. Based on the results of the final pretest, the short-form LFAIS achieved an acceptable level of reliability ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .75$, $\alpha = .74$).

Main Study Survey

For the main study survey, participants were recruited and compensated by Dynata, which is the world's largest first-party data platform that conducts industry, professional, and academic studies (Dynata, 2022). A total of 794 participants were recruited to complete the study's online questionnaire over a period of three days in late March 2022. Dynata relies on an opt-in approach, inviting eligible participants via email to complete various study questionnaires. The recruitment email for this study contained information about the study procedures, such as estimated completion time, the principal investigator's contact information, and information explaining that the survey was voluntary. All study procedures and measures were approved by

the Institutional Review Board at Syracuse University in early March 2022, prior to distributing the survey.

After reading the recruitment script sent by Dynata, participants clicked on the link to the survey to learn more about the study. After reading the informed consent form, which explained that participation was completely voluntary and that there were no known risks associated with completing the questionnaire, participants clicked on a button indicating that they were at least 18 years of age and consented to completing the study and viewing content relating to menstruation (see Appendix A). Study data was stored by Qualtrics, the platform in which the survey was built in, which uses Transport Layer Security (TLS), an industry standard, to securely store data (Qualtrics, 2022).

Participants were first directed to consent to viewing content relating to menstruation, and then answer two brief demographic items (i.e., age and gender) which were set up to ensure an equal distribution of participants based on age range and self-identified gender. Participants were then directed to answer questions that assessed their liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, and hostile and benevolent sexism toward women (see Appendix A). Participants were then asked to read a brief description of menstrual-realistic advertisements.

Following the structure of past studies interested in consumers' attitudinal responses toward a particular "type" of advertising (refer to Arbitbol & Sternadori, 2020; Green, 1999), participants were asked to read the following description: *"Advertisers for menstrual products have started to use red liquid in menstrual product ads to represent menstrual blood. These ads are appearing in many spaces, including on television and social media platforms. On the next three pages, you will view three of these ads for menstrual products. The brand names in each of*

the advertisements are intentionally blurred out. Please take the next few moments to look at these ads." After reading the short description, participants were asked to look at three menstrual-realistic ads, one on each page, in randomized order (refer to Appendix A).

The menstrual-realistic ads were selected by the principal investigator of the study based on the criteria that they looked like advertisements and used red liquid to represent menstrual blood. Each page was timed for three seconds (i.e., delayed "next" button) to ensure that participants spent an adequate amount of time viewing each ad. All three ads deidentified brand information to avoid response bias in the subsequent measures. Participants were then directed to answer the main study questions about these types of ads, which are ones that use red liquid (i.e., ad attitudes, brand activism skepticism, and brand credibility). Participants then answered various relevant demographic questions at the conclusion of the questionnaire. The mean survey duration was 13 minutes long.

Data Cleaning Process

To improve the quality of the data and ensure that it was organized appropriately for data analysis, several data cleaning procedures were used. Survey data from 1,075 adults was originally collected. However, 281 participants did not meet inclusion criteria and were removed (i.e., they did not complete the survey, failed one or both validity and attention check questions, or did not identify as man or woman), leaving a final dataset of 794 adults.

143 participants were removed because they did not complete the items that measured the main variables of interest in the survey. An additional 138 participants were removed because they did not answer one or both validity and attention check questions correctly. In terms of demographics, participants who were removed ($N = 281$) from the dataset mostly identified as men (69.5%), followed by women (29.9%). The only participant who identified as genderfluid

($N = 1$) was also removed from the dataset. Participants who were removed from the dataset ($N = 281$) mostly represented ages 55-64 (27.9%), followed by ages 65 and older (23.1%), 25-34 (17.1%), 45-54 (14.2%), 35-44 (11.7%), 18-24 (5.0%), and less than 18 (1.0%). Removed participants identified as mostly White or Caucasian (68.0%), Black or African American (9.6%), Asian or Asian American (3.9%), Hispanic or Latino(a)(x) (3.2%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (2.1%). Two of the removed participants ($N = 2$) identified as a race/ethnicity not listed, but did not specify. It is important to note that the race/ethnicity percentages add up to less than 100% because this question was asked at the end of the questionnaire (rather than the beginning, like gender and age) and some participants discontinued the survey prior to answering this item. These percentages therefore represent data from 246 participants. Moreover, participants who were removed from the data indicated that they had a high school degree or equivalent (23.8%), 4-year degree (20.3%), some college (14.2%), 2-year degree (13.5%), professional or master's degree (8.2%), less than high school (2.8%), or a doctorate (2.5%). Again, these percentages represent data from 246 participants because this question was asked at the end of the questionnaire and some participants terminated the survey prior to responding to this item.

The survey included two validity and attention-check items to identify inattentive participants. Recent studies show that the use of attention checks can also help identify participants who show an elevated use of "straightlining" (i.e., giving nearly identical answers within the same response scale) and inconsistent answers (Gummer et al., 2018). Participants were asked to report the color of the liquid used in the advertisements immediately after viewing them, such that 1 = blue, 2 = purple, 3 = yellow, 4 = red. This attention check question also served to identify participants who may have had the inability to distinguish certain colors (i.e.,

color blindness). Participants were also asked to report the type of products that were being advertised in the ads that they viewed at the end of the survey, such that 1 = gardening products, 2 = menstrual products, 3 = art supplies, and 4 = airline tickets. The drop-off rate and number of those who failed attention checks are consistent with prior studies concerned with the data quality of platforms such as Dynata (Eyal et al., 2021).

Lastly, one participant who identified as genderfluid was unfortunately removed from the data analysis process. This does not imply that this individuals' (or any individual who does not fit into the gender binary) attitudes about feminism, menstruation, and menstrual-realistic advertisements do not matter. Rather, this decision was based on statistical analysis. Since gender identity was part of the main analysis and a one-person group was not enough to be included as a group or draw any meaningful conclusions about this group, this participant's data was not included in the final dataset of this research. After the removal of the above participant, the final dataset comprised of 794 participants.

Measures

This section will discuss each of the main variables of this study, including how they were measured and item samples, in greater detail. The table below (Table 2) demonstrates a summary of the means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and skewness of each of the main variables in this study.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Main Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Skewness
FEM	3.83	.75	-.23
AAM	2.42	.79	.15
HOS	2.72	.97	.14
BEN	3.24	.82	-.28
AA	3.13	1.01	-.28
SKEP	3.01	.88	-.14
BC	3.18	.86	-.17

Note: N = 794*, M* = Mean*, SD* = Standard Deviation. FEM = Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, AAM = Stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, HOS = Hostile sexism, BEN = Benevolent sexism, AA = Attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, SKEP = Brand activism skepticism, BC = Brand credibility. Mean scores are based on a five-point scale.

Main Variables

Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs. The degree to which participants endorsed liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs was measured using the short form of Morgan's (1996) Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (LFAIS). The LFAIS was developed with the intention of measuring the various domains of liberal feminist goals and ideology (i.e., political agendas, global goals, gender roles). The short form of the LFAIS is an eleven-item measure on a five-point scale, such that 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree.* As previously mentioned, however, three items were removed during pretesting due to reliability issues. The short form includes items such as *"Men should respect women more than they currently do"* and *"Women have been treated unfairly on the basis of their gender throughout most of human history."* A higher score indicates a higher level of agreement with that liberal feminist ideology (refer to Table 3). All items were averaged together to measure participants' liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs (M = 3.83, SD = .75, α = .83).

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of the Liberal Feminist Attitudes and Beliefs (LFAIS) Scale

Item	*M*	*SD*
Women should be considered as seriously as men as candidates for the Presidency of the United States.	4.19	1.07
A woman should have the same job opportunities as a man.	4.29	.94
Men should respect women more than they currently do.	4.04	.98
Doctors need to take women's health concerns more seriously.	4.08	.98
Women have been treated unfairly on the basis of their gender throughout most of human history.	3.99	1.05
Although women can be good leaders, men make better leaders (R).	3.32	1.26
Many women in the work force are taking jobs away from men who need the jobs more (R).	3.58	1.22
Women are already given equal opportunities with men in all important sectors of their lives (R).	3.18	1.27

Note. $N = 794$. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard deviation, (R) = Reverse coded. The numbers reported above (R) are already reverse coded. The means are based on a 5-point scale, such that 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation. To measure the extent to which participants endorse the stigma of menstruation, participants were presented with eleven items on a five-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, which were taken from Marván et al.'s (2006) Beliefs About and Attitudes Toward Menstruation (BATM) secrecy subscale. Sample items include *"Women must hide anything that shows that they are having their periods," "Women should avoid talking about their periods when there are men present,"* and *"It is embarrassing when a man finds out that a woman is having her period."* It is important to note that the wording for each item was modified slightly depending on if it was being answered by a self-identified man or self-identified woman (see Appendix A). For the purposes of analyses, all

items for both men and women were combined into a single variable, such that the higher the score, the greater the endorsement of the stigma related to menstruation (M = 2.42, SD = .79, α = .88).

Sexist attitudes toward women. The extent to which participants hold sexist attitudes toward women was assessed using the short form of Glick and Fiske's (1997) Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), which assesses the dimensions of hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick et al., 2000, 2004; Rollero et al., 2014). Participants were asked to respond to six items measuring their hostile attitudes toward women and six items measuring their benevolent attitudes toward women, on a five-point scale, such that 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. Sample items for hostile sexism include *"Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances"* and *"Feminists are making unreasonable demands of men."* Sample items for benevolent sexism include *"Women should be cherished and protected by men"* and *"Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility."* A higher score indicates higher levels of hostile (M = 2.73, SD = .97, α = .90) and benevolent sexism (M = 3.24, SD = .82, α = .83).

Attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads. The extent to which participants have a positive attitude about menstrual-realistic advertisements was assessed using an adapted version of Kaushal and Kumar's three-item (2016) ad attitudes scale. These measures were designed to capture how positively or negatively one feels about an advertisement (or a set of advertisements) with an emphasis on the attributes that would generally be considered desirable. Thus, participants were instructed to respond to the following items on a five-point scale, such that 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree: "I have favorable attitudes toward menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid," "I like menstrual product advertisements that use*

red liquid very much," and *"My attitude towards menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid is positive"* (Refer to Table 4 for the means and standard deviations of each item). A higher score indicates more favorable attitudes about the ads. All items were averaged together to assess the extent to which participants felt positively or negatively about menstrual-realistic advertisements (M = 3.13, SD = 1.01, α = .91).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of the Ad Attitude items

Item	*M*	*SD*
I have favorable attitudes toward menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid.	3.21	1.06
I like menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid very much.	2.98	1.01
My attitude toward menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid is positive.	3.20	1.12

Note. N = 794. M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation. The means are based on a 5-point scale, such that 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Brand activism skepticism. The extent to which consumers are skeptical about the motives of a brand that is socially involved in the menstrual-activism movement was assessed using items adapted from Skarmeas and Leonidou's (2013) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Skepticism scale. Participants were asked to answer four items on a five-point scale, such that 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree.* Sample items include *"It is doubtful that brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are socially responsible retailers"* and *"It is uncertain that brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are concerned to improve the well-being of society."* A higher score indicates a higher level of brand activism skepticism (M = 3.02, SD = .88, α = .88).

Brand credibility. The extent to which consumers perceived menstrual-realistic brands as credible was measured using items adapted from Ohanian's (1990) and Erdem and Swait's (2004) source credibility scales. The scales assess the brand credibility dimensions of attractiveness/likeableness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Participants were asked to respond to a total of ten items on a five-point scale, such that 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree.* Expertise measures consisted of two statements such as *"Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements remind me of someone who's competent and knows what he/she are doing"* and *"Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements have the ability to deliver what they promise."* Trustworthiness measures consisted of five statements, such as *"Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are trustworthy"* and *"Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements deliver what they promise."* Finally, attractiveness/likeableness items consisted of three statements, such as *"Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are attractive to me"* and *"Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are elegant"* (Refer to Table 5). A higher score indicates a higher level of perceived brand credibility. All items were averaged together to create the brand credibility measure ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .86$, $\alpha = .95$).

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of the Brand Credibility items

Item	*M*	*SD*
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements remind me of someone who's competent and knows what he/she are doing (E).	3.25	1.01
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements have the ability to deliver what they promise (E).	3.26	1.01
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements delivers what they promise (T).	3.29	.99
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements product claims are believable (T).	3.36	.98
Over time, my experiences with brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements will lead me to expect them to keep their promises, no more and no less (T).	3.30	.98
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are trustworthy (T).	3.30	.97
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements do not pretend to be something that they are not (T).	3.40	.97
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are attractive to me (A).	2.92	1.16
Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are elegant (A).	2.83	1.12
I think the image of brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are beautiful (A).	2.87	1.15

Note. $N = 794$. M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation. (E) = Brand credibility dimension of expertise, (T) = Brand credibility dimension of trustworthiness, (A) = Brand credibility dimension of attractiveness/likeableness. The means are based on a 5-point scale, such that 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Potential Control Variables

Extant literature on the social meanings of menstruation was used to determine which potential control variables were necessary to include in the main analyses of the current study (i.e., attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements). These variables included age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, education, income, and prior exposure to the media of interest in this study (i.e., menstrual-realistic advertisements).

Age. A few studies have found significant age differences in attitudes about menstruation (Chandra & Chaturvedi, 1992; Chrisler, 1988; Kissling, 1996; Marván et al., 2005; Stubbs, 1989). Most literature has found that older adults are far less likely to perceive menstruation as debilitating or bothersome than do college students or young adults (Chandra & Chaturvedi, 1992, Chrisler, 1988; Kissling, 1996; Stubbs, 1989). This may be because personal experience with menstruation, as well as access to varied sources of information increases with age. However, a more recent study found that younger women were *less* likely to exhibit negative attitudes about menstruation, thus indicating a shift in cultural ideas of menstruation over time (Marván et al., 2005). Although previous studies yield inconsistent results, a participants' age was thus considered as a potential control variable for the study's main analyses.

As previously mentioned, a sampling quota was set up to ensure that participants' ages were evenly distributed. A second item assessed participants' exact age in years, and thus age was measured using two different questions. First, participants were asked to indicate their age range with a single question, *"What is your age?"* such that 0 = Less than 18 years, 1 = 18-24 years old, 2 = 25-34 years old, 3 = 35-44 years old, 4 = 45-54 years old, 5 = 55-64 years old, and 6 = 65 years and older (M = 3.51, SD = 1.65). Participants who were 18 years of age were rerouted to the end of the study. This question was used to satisfy the survey quota. Second,

participants were asked to indicate the year that they were born with the single question, *"In what year were you born?"* and were provided options in a drop-down menu. Participants' birth years were recoded in SPSS by subtracting the year they were born from the current year, 2022 (M = 45.33, SD = 16.73).

All analyses were conducted twice, including the analyses for the main hypotheses, once using the categorical variable as a potential control variable, and the second time using the continuous measure as another potential control variable. It was determined that there were not any differences in statistical outcomes whether the categorical or continuous variables were used to measure age. Therefore, the categorical variable was chosen to be the potential control variable. The continuous measure was only used in the current dissertation for descriptive purposes only (to report the exact mean age of participants).

Gender identity. As discussed in Chapter 2, gender identity is also likely to impact the way that people view menstruation. The most consistent argument among scholars is that men are significantly more likely than women to hold negative attitudes about menstruation (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1986; Chrisler, 1988; Erchull, 2020; Marván et al., 2005). Negative attitudes among men may be due to a lack of comprehensive sexual health education (Kissling, 1996; Peranovic & Bentley, 2017), a general disconnection with menstruation (i.e., as a "women's-only" problem; Stubbs & Costos, 2004), or a general lack of experience with it (Chrisler, 1988). Due to gender differences in the way that people perceive menstruation, this may subsequently impact attitudinal responses to menstrual-realistic advertisements and was thus considered as another potential control variable for the study's main analyses.

Participants were asked to indicate their gender identity by choosing one of three options, such that Woman = 0, Man = 1, Not Listed = 2. Participants were given the option to indicate

their gender identity if they did not identify as either man or woman. It should be noted, as previously mentioned, that the study's only participant who identified as genderfluid was removed from the dataset for statistical purposes. Therefore, only response options for woman (0) and man (1) were used in the data analysis.

Race/Ethnicity. Some ethnic and racial differences in attitudes about menstruation have also emerged in literature, as norms and taboos surrounding menstruation differ depending on one's cultural context. For example, discrepancies in attitudes about menstruation have been found between Asian and White women, likely due to deeply internalized stigmas and period shame which can be exacerbated in Asian contexts (Sommer et al., 1999). Similar disparities have also been found among Black individuals, compared to White individuals (Scott et al., 1989). Although this study included only participants who are from the U.S., it is possible that their cultural backgrounds may influence the way that they perceive menstruation or menstrual-realistic advertisements, and thus it was considered a potential control variable for the study's main analysis.

Participants were asked to report their race/ethnicity with the following question: "*Please select all of the following that represent your race and/or ethnicity. Check all that apply."* Participants were provided the response options of White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino(a)(x), Asian or Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and were also given the option to type their race/ethnicity if it was not listed. Participants mostly identified was White or Caucasian (83.8%), followed by Black or African American (9.2%), Asian or Asian American (5.3%), Hispanic or Latino(a)(x) (3.7%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1.4%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.4%). A small number of participants ($N = 3$) identified themselves as a race/ethnicity that was not listed. It is

important to note that participants were given the option to check multiple categories, and thus, the total adds up to greater than 100%. Race/ethnicity was then dichotomously recoded in SPSS, such that 0 = White and 1 = Non-White, thus resulting in a total of 81% White and 19% non-white participants. Participants who checked a combination of White or Caucasian and another race (i.e., more than one race/ethnicity category) were coded as non-White.

Race/ethnicity was dichotomously coded to understand the differences between different groups of participants. Previous literature indicates that non-dominant groups are more likely to perceive menstruation negatively than dominant groups due to cultural differences and different taboos surrounding menstruation (Scott et al., 1989; Sommer et al., 1999). Dominant groups are defined as groups that control the major elements of a society's norms and values (Kauffman, 2004). Thus, it is also possible that dominant groups might perceive menstrual-realistic ads differently than non-dominant groups. From this perspective, participants' race/ethnicity was divided into two different groups (i.e., White and Non-White). Moreover, for the purposes of statistical analysis, race/ethnicity was dichotomously coded because the sample was not representative in terms of race/ethnicity. Many of the race/ethnicity categories contained very few participants (i.e., Hispanic or Latino(a)(x), American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander). These small group sizes would not have drawn any meaningful conclusions about those respective groups, and thus, it was necessary to combine participants from non-dominant groups into one group for statistical purposes.

Educational status. Educational status is also considered an important indicator of how individuals react to menstruation. Scholars have devoted much time and effort to understand how a lack of education (or misinformation) can contribute to individuals' misinformed beliefs, which can increase the stigmatization of various health conditions (e.g., Krishna & Thompson, 2021).

For example, Marván et al. (2006) suggested that individuals with limited educational backgrounds may have different sets of attitudes and beliefs toward events in women's lives (i.e., menstruation), and thus be less likely to seek out oppositional points of view and preserve their traditional beliefs. The same logic can also apply to attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and therefore, it was also theorized as a potential control variable for the main analyses in this dissertation.

Participants were asked to indicate their highest level of education with the question, *"Which best represents your highest level of education?"* and were given the following response options: 1 = Less than high school, 2 = High school graduate or equivalent, 3 = Some college, 4 = Two year degree, 5 = Four year degree, 6 = Professional or master's degree, 7 = Doctorate (M = 3.72, SD = 1.53).

Previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertisements. Given that attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements are the main variable of interest in this study, participants' previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertisements (prior to taking the study) was considered as another potential control variable. Prior menstruation research indicates that seeing menstrual blood, especially for the first time, can be a stressful, surprising, or anxiety-inducing experience (Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1982; Scott et al., 1989). Since menstruation is rarely depicted in media, particularly accurate depictions of menstrual blood (Kissling, 2002; Rosewarne, 2012), the same logic can be applied to menstrual-realistic advertisements. For example, a participant who has never seen menstrual-realistic advertisements may view them as surprising or disgusting, which may lead them to have a negative attitude about them. In opposition, a participant who has seen them often may be more comfortable with those depictions and rate them as more positive. In light of this possibility, it is also necessary to

consider participants' previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertisements as a covariate in this dissertation.

The degree to which participants have been previously exposed to menstrual-realistic advertisements was assessed using a singular question on a 5-point scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very frequently*, "*How frequently or infrequently have you seen red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements prior to taking this survey?"* (M = 2.09, SD = 1.20).

Household income. Household income is lastly theorized to impact how people perceive advertising itself. According to an industry survey (Clutch, 2017), higher household income earners are more likely to be influenced by advertisements, likely because they don't have to be as careful about their spending habits. Moreover, consumers with a household income of under $49,999 are *less* likely to believe the messaging within advertisements are trustworthy and reliable than households who earn more than $100,000 per year (Clutch, 2017). Annual household income was therefore considered as the final possible control variable for the main analyses.

Participants were asked to indicate their annual household income: *"Information about income is very important to understand. Would you please give your best guess? Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income before taxes"* such that 0 = Prefer not to say, 1 = Less than $10,000, 2 = $10,000 - $19,999, 3 = $20,000 - $29,999, 4 = $30,000 - $39,999, 5 = $40,000 - $49,000, 6 = $50,000 - $59,999, 7 = $60,000 - $69,999, 8 = $70,000 - $79,999, 9 = $80,000 - $89,999, 10 = $90,000 - $99,999, 11 = $100,000 - $149,999, and 12 = $150,000 or more ($M$ = 6.33, SD = 3.79).

Data Analysis

Preliminary Analysis

Prior to testing H_1-H_9, descriptive statistics, such as the means, standard deviations, and ranges, were collected for the relevant variables via IBM SPSS Statistics, which is a software that runs statistical procedures. A reliability analysis for all variables were conducted to ensure internal consistency. All variables were checked for the means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis to ensure that they fell within acceptable ranges (See Table 2 for the descriptive statistics for the study's main variables of interest). Bivariate correlations were also run between the relevant variables to determine the strength, direction, and significance levels for each of the variables and to determine the appropriate control variables to include in the main analysis prior to testing the main hypotheses (See Table 6 for bivariate correlation matrix).

Table 6

Bivariate Correlations Between Main Study and Other Relevant Variables including Potential Control Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. AA	-												
2. BC	.85***	-											
3. SKEP	.02	.09**	-										
4. FEM	.08*	.05	-.18***	-									
5. AAM	-.015	-.10**	.38***	-.50***	-								
6. HOS	.03	.11**	.37***	-.56***	.56***	-							
7. BEN	.31***	.37***	.31***	-.10**	.33***	.34***	-						
8. GEN	-.07	-.02	.03	-.29***	.12***	.30***	.09*	-					
9. AGE	-.23***	-.24***	-.07*	-.09*	-.04	-.12**	-.05	-.01	-				
10. R/E	.07	.04	.03	-.05	.04	.09*	-.06	-.06	-.17***	-			
11. EDU	.04	.07*	.04	.01	.08*	.03	-.02	.20***	.14***	-.08*	-		
12. EXR	.37***	.38***	.22***	-.12**	.20***	.18**	.31***	-.02	-.37***	.03	.01	-	
13. INC	-.01	.03	-.01	-.02	.07*	.01	-.02	.14***	.11**	-.10**	.51***	.04	-

Note. N = 794. AA = Attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, BC = Brand credibility, SKEP = Brand activism skepticism, FEM = Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, AAM = Stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, HOS = Hostile sexism, BEN = Benevolent sexism, GEN = Gender identity, AGE = Age of participants in years, R/E = Race/ethnicity, EDU = Educational status, EXR = Previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising, INC = Income, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to identify whether there were significant differences in participants' attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements based on their gender identity and race/ethnicity. Results from the independent samples t-test with gender identity indicated that there were not any statistically significant differences, $t(792) = 1.91$, $p = .056$, between participants who identified as a woman ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.04$) or man ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .98$). Results from the independent samples t-test with race/ethnicity also indicated that there were not any statistically significant differences, $t(792) = -1.91$, $p = .06$ between participants who identified as white ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.01$) and non-white ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.01$).

Three separate one-way ANOVAs were performed to determine any difference in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements by a) age categories, b) income levels, and c) education levels. As previously mentioned, the age variable was measured with a categorical variable, such that 1 = 18-24 years old, 2 = 25-34 years old, 3 = 35-44 years old, 4 = 45-54 years old, 5 = 55-64 years old, and 6 = 65 years and older. Age was also measured using a continuous variable, such that participants reported the exact year in which they were born. All analyses were initially conducted, including the analyses for the main hypotheses, using both age variables. It was determined that there were no differences between the continuous and categorical variables. In other words, the data would have yielded similar results and interpretation of the data would have been the same regardless of whether the continuous or categorical variable was used in the study analyses. Since there were no observable differences, the categorical variable was chosen to be used as a potential control variable in the main analyses. Therefore, the first one-way ANOVA with the categorical variable age as the factor (IV) and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements as the dependent variable revealed that there were statistically significant differences between group means, $F(5, 788) = 12.41$, $p <$

.001. A Tukey post hoc test showed that the mean value of ad attitudes was significantly different between participants 65 and older and participants ages 35-44 years old ($p < .001$, 95% CI = [-1.058, -.354]), participants ages 25-34 years old ($p < .001$, 95% CI = [-1.066, -.361]), and participants ages 18-24 ($p < .001$, 95% CI = [-.925, -.199]), such that participants ages 65 and older had less favorable ad attitudes than the aforementioned groups. The post hoc analysis also revealed that the mean value of ad attitudes was significantly different between participants ages 55-64 years old and participants ages 35-44 years old ($p < .001$, 95% CI = [-.916, -.246]), ages 25-34 ($p < .001$, 95% CI = [-.923, -.253]), and ages 18-24 ($p = .005$, 95% CI = [-.783, -.090]), such that participants ages 55-64 years old were less likely to have favorable attitudes than the aforementioned groups. Moreover, the mean value of ad attitudes was significantly different between participants ages 45-54 years old and participants ages 35-44 years old ($p = .016$, 95% CI = [-.707, -.044]), and participants ages 25-34 years old ($p = .013$, 95% CI = [-.714, -.052]), such that participants ages 35-44 years old had a lower mean ad attitude score than the aforementioned groups. Taken together, the analysis revealed that in general, the younger age categories had more favorable attitudes than the higher age categories.

In addition to the one-way ANOVA conducted on ad attitudes based upon participants' ages, two separate one-way ANOVAs were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences based upon participants income and education levels. Results from the one-way ANOVA on participants' income levels revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between group means ($F(12, 781) = .56$, $p = .87$). Finally, results from a separate one-way ANOVA on participants' educational levels revealed that there were also no statistically significant differences between group means ($F(6, 787) = 1.89$, $p = .08$).

Finally, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between the frequency of previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertisements and ad attitudes. Results showed that there was a significant and positive relationship between the two variables ($r = .356$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the more participants had previously seen menstrual-realistic advertisements, the more positive their attitudes about them were.

Final Control Variables

Of the six proposed control variables, it was determined that participants' age, gender identity, and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising would be included as control variables (covariates) in the final analyses. These three variables were selected because of their statistical significance against the ad attitudes variable, and they had the greatest potential to influence the relationship between the independent (i.e., liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, hostile and benevolent sexism) and dependent variables (ad attitudes and brand credibility). For example, participants who previously have had frequent exposure to menstrual product advertising that uses red liquid may feel less stressed or surprised about such depictions than participants who have had no prior exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising (Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1982; Scott et al., 1989), and thus, may view them more favorably, which in turn may influence other main variables of interest in the present study. It is also possible that participants' advertisement attitudes may also be influenced by their ages and gender identities and thus, it was deemed necessary to control for both age and gender as well.

Although there were no statistically significant differences between men and women's ad attitudes, the literature nonetheless consistently argues that gender identity dictates our behavior, socialization patterns, and ways in which we view the world (refer to Butler, 1990; Cameron,

1998; Carter, 2014; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016). Gender role socialization begins at birth, and thus impacts how we behave and perceive the world based off society's created norms. This logic was applied to the current study. It was therefore theorized that, although gender was not correlated with attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, participants' gender would nonetheless dictate the way that individuals perceive the advertisements and other variables in the model, such as brand activism skepticism and brand credibility, due to this dissertation's focus on a highly gendered issue (i.e., menstruation). Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 6, gender was highly correlated with many of the study's variables, indicating the need to include it as a covariate in the study's main analyses. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to hold gender constant throughout the study.

Testing the Main Hypotheses

H_1-H_9 were analyzed using one hierarchical regression model, one serial mediation model, and one moderation model. The control variables in the following analyses remained constant and included *previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertisements, age,* and *gender identity* (see the *measures* section above). All three models included the same control variables, except for the moderation model, which included gender as a moderating variable to address the corresponding hypotheses about gender identity.

H_1, *H_2*, and *H_3* were analyzed separately using hierarchical regression in SPSS. As previously mentioned, these hypotheses predicted the relationship between stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, and attitudes toward women (IVs) and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (DV). Gender, age, and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising (control variables) were entered into the first block. Stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and hostile and benevolent sexism (i.e., negative attitudes) were

entered in the second block. Although tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was only of little to moderate concern (stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, tolerance = .59, VIF = 1.69; hostile sexism, tolerance = .60, VIF = 1.67; benevolent sexism, tolerance = .78, 1.29; liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, tolerance = .52, VIF = 1.92), the liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs variable was highly correlated with most other variables of interest in the regression (refer to Table 6), and thus was placed separately in the third block (i.e., positive attitudes). Moreover, the liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs variable was placed separately in the last block because it was the focal variable of the present dissertation, and it was thus essential to understand the role it played in adding additional variance to the dependent variable of interest (i.e., attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements). Attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements were entered as the dependent variable.

Both the moderation analysis (H_4, H_5, and H_6) and mediation analysis (H_7, H_8, and H_9) were conducted using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS. PROCESS is a statistical tool that assesses the strength of association between variables and uses a bootstrapping procedure in which 95% confidence intervals are used to approximate the sampling distributions each direct and indirect relationship (Hayes, 2013).

For the moderation analysis, H_4, H_5, and H_6 were separately analyzed using PROCESS. Model 1 in PROCESS was used to determine whether the relationship between the independent variables and stigmatizing attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements were statistically significant for both men and women. For all hypotheses (H_4, H_5, H_6), age and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising were entered as control variables, gender identity was entered as the moderator variable, which was dichotomously coded as: 0 = Woman, 1 = Man, and

attitudes about the advertisements was entered as the dependent variable (Y). For H_4, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation were entered as the independent variable (X). For H_5, liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs were entered as the independent variable (X). For H_6, hostile sexism was entered as the independent variable (X). In addition, for H_6, benevolent sexism was entered as the independent variable (X) in a separate model.

A serial mediation analysis (H_7, H_8, and H_9) separately tested the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, brand activism skepticism, attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and brand credibility (see Figure 1 for conceptual model) using model 6 in PROCESS. Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs was entered as the independent variable (X). Brand activism skepticism (M_1) and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (M_2) were entered respectively as the two serial mediators. Brand credibility was entered as the dependent variable (Y). Gender, age, and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising were entered as covariates.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand individual's attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements based on their liberal feminist beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, and sexist attitudes toward women, as well as how brand activism skepticism might relate to these views. This chapter restates the study hypotheses and provides results for each hypothesis proposed in Chapter 2. Results for each hypothesis will be presented in the order in which they were introduced in Chapter 2. Table 7 displays the results of the hierarchical regression analysis (H_1, H_2, H_3). Table 8 displays the results of the four moderation analyses (H_4, H_5, H_6). Table 9 displays the results of the serial mediation analysis (H_7, H_8, H_9). Each table shows the path coefficients and their respective direction (+/-). For a visual reference of H_7, H_8, and H_9, refer to Figure 2 on page 93 which shows results from the serial mediation analysis. Figure 2 also shows the path coefficients, and their respective signs (+/-). Statistical significance for all hypotheses was examined at $\alpha < .05$.

H_1 proposed that the less individuals endorsed the stigma of menstruation, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. It was found that stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, sexist attitudes toward women (i.e., hostile and benevolent sexism), and relevant control variables (model 2) explained a significant amount of variance in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements ($R^2 = .21$, $F(6, 787) = 34.89$, $p < .001$). Put differently, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism explained 21% of the variance in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, compared to the relevant control variables explaining 14% of the variance in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Results from the hierarchical regression analysis indicated that the relationship between stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and attitudes about the

advertisements were statistically significant, and in the predicted direction, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = -.10, p = .012, 95% CI = [-.225, -.028]). Therefore, the less that individuals held stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, the more they had favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (refer to Table 7). H_1 was thus supported.

H_2 proposed that the more individuals reported liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, the more likely they would have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. It was found that liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, sexist attitudes toward women, and relevant control variables (model 3) explained a significant amount of variance in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (R^2 = .22, F(7, 786) = 30.81, p < .001). Put differently, liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs explained 22% of the variance in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, compared to stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, hostile, and benevolent sexism, and relevant control variables explaining 21% of the variance in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Results from the hierarchical regression analysis indicated that the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements was statistically significant, in the predicted direction, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = .09, t = 2.28, p = .02, 95% CI = [.018, .235]). Thus, the more individuals endorsed liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, the more they also reported favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (refer to Table 7). H_2 was therefore supported.

H_3 proposed that the less individuals adopted sexist attitudes toward women, the more likely they would have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. As stated above for H_1, it was found that stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, sexist attitudes toward women, and relevant control variables (model 2) explained a significant amount of variance in

attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (R^2 = .21, F(6, 787) = 34.89, p < .001). Results from the hierarchical regression analysis indicated that the relationship between *hostile* sexism and attitudes about the advertisements were not statistically significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = -.05, p = .23, 95% CI = [-.135, .033]). However, results from the hierarchical regression analysis also indicated that the relationship between *benevolent* sexism and attitudes about the advertisements was statistically significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = .29, p < .001, 95% CI = [.265, .436]), but not in the predicted direction, such that the higher individuals scored on the benevolent sexism scale, the more favorable were their attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (refer to Table 7). Therefore, H_3 was not supported.

As demonstrated in the regression table (Table 7) for H_1, H_2, and H_3, the stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation variable was no longer significant after the liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs variable was added to model 3. Interestingly, benevolent sexism remained highly significant (along with the control variables age and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising), indicating that benevolent sexism explained the most variance in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements compared to the other independent variables.

It is also important to note that the control variables age and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising were significant in all three regression models (H_1-H_3). However, gender was not significant in any of the models. Refer to Table 7 below.

Table 7

Hierarchical regression table for H1-H3

Predictor	B	SE B	b	R^2
Model 1				.14***
GEN	-.13	.07	-.06	
AGE	-.08	.02	-.12**	
EXR	.26	.03	.31***	
Model 2				.21***
GEN	-.13	.07	-.06	
AGE	-.09	.02	-.14***	
EXR	.21	.03	.25***	
AAM	-.13	.05	-.10*	
HOS	-.05	.04	-.05	
BEN	.35	.04	.29***	
Model 3				.22***
GEN	-.01	.07	-.05	
AGE	-.09	.02	-.14***	
EXR	.21	.03	.25***	
AAM	-.09	.05	-.07	
HOS	-.01	.05	-.01	
BEN	.33	.04	.27***	
FEM	.13	.06	.09*	

Note. $N = 794$. This table demonstrates the relationships between the relevant independent variables and ad attitudes, with gender, age, and past exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising entered as control variables. AAM = Stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, HOS = Hostile sexism, BEN = Benevolent sexism, FEM = Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, GEN = Gender identity, AGE = Age of participants in years, EXR = Previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

H4 proposed that the relationship between endorsing stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads would be statistically significant for both men and women (refer to Table 8). Results from the first moderator analysis indicated that the relationship between stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation (X) and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads (Y) was statistically significant, net of gender and controls (b = -.13, t = -2.26, p = .02, 95% CI = [-.2456, -.0178]). The relationship between gender identity and ad attitudes was also significant, net of controls (b = -.48, t = -2.23, p = .03, 95% CI = [-.9109, -.0590]). The interaction between attitudes about menstruation and gender, however, was not statistically significant, net of controls (b = .15, t = 1.78, p = .079, 95% CI = [-.0154, .3184]). The inclusion of gender into the model did not influence the relationship between stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads. Moreover, gender was not significant in the regression model above. Thus, *H4* was supported.

H5 proposed that the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads would be statistically significant for both men and women (refer to Table 8). Results from the second moderator analysis indicated that the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs (X) and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (Y) was statistically significant, net of gender and controls (b = .14, t = 2.27, p = .02, 95% CI = [.0195, .2682]). The relationship between gender identity and ad attitudes was not statistically significant, net of controls (b = -.24, t = -.67, p = .50, 95% CI = [-.9537, .4673]). The interaction between liberal feminist attitudes and gender was also not significant, net of controls (b = .05, t = .52, p = .60, 95% CI = [-.1340, .2313]). The inclusion of gender into the model did not influence the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads, indicating that this relationship is the same for

both men and women. Moreover, gender was not significant in the regression model above. H_5 was therefore supported.

H_6 proposed that the relationship between sexist attitudes toward women and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads would be statistically significant for both men and women (refer to Table 8). Two moderation analyses were conducted for each sexism scale, one for hostile sexism and one for benevolent sexism.

Results from the moderator analysis with hostile sexism, gender, and ad attitudes indicated that the relationship between hostile sexism (X) and attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads (Y) was not statistically significant, net of gender and controls, which was also consistent with the regression model above (b = -.10, t = -1.92, p = .06, 95% CI = [-.2017, .0024]. The relationship between gender and ad attitudes was statistically significant, net of controls (b = -.53, t = -2.56, p = .01, 95% CI = [-.9373, -.1239]). The interaction between hostile sexism and gender was statistically significant, net of controls (b = .15, t = 2.12, p = .034, 95% CI = [.0114, .2934]). The inclusion of gender into the model influenced the relationship between hostile sexism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements; however, once the relationships were examined by each gender identity category, this relationship was not significant for women (b = -.09, t = -1.92, p = .055, 95% CI = [-.2017, .0024]) or for men (b = .05, t = 1.04, p = .29, 95% CI = [-.0468, .1522]).

Results from the moderator analysis with benevolent sexism, gender, and ad attitudes indicated that the relationship between benevolent sexism (X) and ad attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads (Y) was statistically significant, net of gender and controls (b = .21, t = 3.47, p < .001, 95% CI = [.0924, .3337]). The relationship between gender and ad attitudes was also statistically significant, net of controls (b = -.67, t = -2.50, p = .01, 95% CI = [-1.1898, -.1435]).

The interaction between benevolent sexism and gender was not statistically significant, net of controls (b = .15, t = 1.91, p = .057, 95% CI = [-.0046, .3092]). The inclusion of gender into the model did not influence the relationship between benevolent sexism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, such that benevolent sexism was significantly related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements for both men and women. Therefore, H_6 was partially supported, such that benevolent sexism was related to favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads for both men and women, but hostile sexism was *not* related to favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads for either men or women.

For H_4, H_5, and H_6, the covariates age and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising were significant in all four models. Refer to Table 8 below.

Table 8

Moderation of gender in attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements

	Coefficient	SE	*t*	LLCI	ULCI
	Model 1				
AGE	-.08**	.02	-3.15	-.1245	-.0290
EXP	.27***	.03	8.84	.2087	.3278
AAM	-.13*	.06	-2.27	-.2456	-.0178
GEN	-.48*	.22	-2.23	-.9109	-.0590
AAM × GEN	.15	.09	1.78	-.0154	.3184
	Model 2				
AGE	-.08**	.02	-3.47	-.1320	-.0367
EXP	.27***	.03	9.19	.2147	.3313
FEM	.14*	.06	2.27	.0195	.2682
GEN	-.24	.36	-.67	-.9537	.4673
FEM × GEN	.05	.09	.52	-.1340	.2313
	Model 3				
AGE	-.08**	.02	-3.26	-.1271	-.0315
EXP	.27***	.03	8.84	.2069	.3250
HOS	-.10	.05	-1.92	-.2017	.0024
GEN	-.53	.07	2.12	-.9373	-.1239
HOS × GEN	.15*	.02	2.12	.0114	.2934
	Model 4				
AGE	-.09**	.02	-4.01	-.1414	-.0484
EXP	.19***	.03	6.28	.1308	.2498
BEN	.21**	.06	3.35	.0924	.3337
GEN	-.67*	.27	-2.50	-1.1898	-.1435
BEN × GEN	.15	.08	1.91	-.0046	.3092

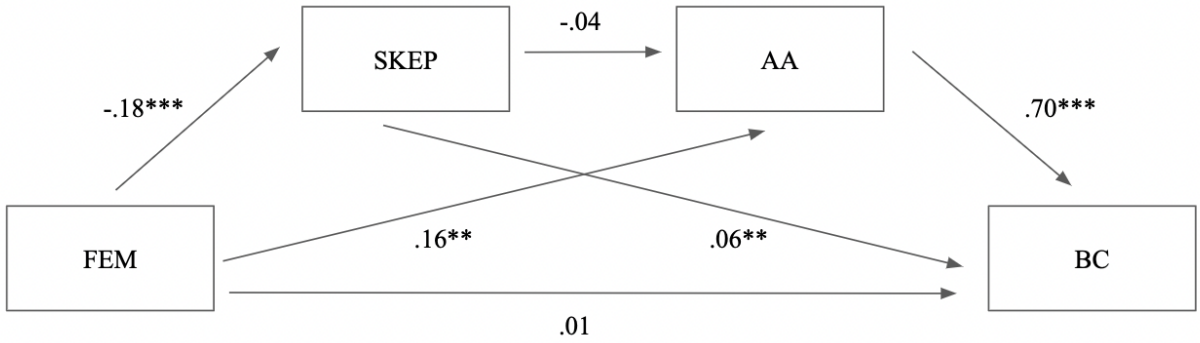
Note. N = 794. The dependent variable for each model is attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Models 1, 2, 4, and 4 correspond with H_4, H_5, and H_6, respectively. FEM = Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, AAM = Stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, HOS = Hostile sexism, BEN = Benevolent sexism, GEN = Gender identity, AGE = Age of participants in years, EXP = Previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising. Age and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertisements were entered as covariates. Gender did not moderate the relationship in models 1, 2, and 4, indicating that the relationship between the IVs and DV was the same for men and women. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

H_7 proposed that brand activism skepticism will mediate the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements,

such that the more individuals endorsed liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, the more skeptical they will be of brand activism for menstrual-realistic ads, and thus the less likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements (refer to Figure 2 and Table 9). Results from the serial mediation analysis indicated that the path between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads was statistically significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = .16, t = 3.36, p = .001, 95% CI = [.0660, .2514]). The path between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs on brand activism skepticism was also significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = -.18, t = -4.23, p < .001, 95% CI = [-.2640, -.0966]), but not in the predicted direction. The path between brand activism skepticism on ad attitudes was not significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = -.04, t = -1.07, p = .28, 95% CI = [-.1184, .0346]). Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs are therefore associated with lower levels of brand activism skepticism, but brand activism skepticism does not have a significant relationship with favorable ad attitudes. Since the path between brand activism skepticism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements was not significant, brand activism skepticism did not mediate the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and ad attitudes. Therefore, H_7 was not supported.

Figure 2

Serial mediation statistical model of the study's main variables of interest



Note. This figure shows the statistical relationships between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, brand activism skepticism, attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and brand credibility, where FEM = Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, SKEP = Brand activism skepticism, AA = Attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and BC = Brand credibility. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

H_8 proposed that the more skeptical individuals are of brand activism for menstrual-realistic ads, the less credible they will perceive those brands (refer to Figure 2 and Table 9). Results from the serial mediation analysis indicated that the relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility was statistically significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = .06, $t = 3.02$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.0198, .0930]), but not in the predicted direction. In other words, the more than individuals are skeptical of brand activism for menstrual products, the more likely they are to perceive those brands as credible. Since the relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility was not in the predicted direction, H_8 was not supported.

H_9 proposed that favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will mediate the relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility, such that the more individuals are skeptical of brand activism for menstrual-realistic advertisements, the less likely they will have favorable attitudes about them, and thus, the less credible they will perceive those

brands (refer to Figure 2 and Table 9). Results from the serial mediation analysis indicated that the path between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility was statistically significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = .06, t = 3.02, p = .003, 95% CI = [.0198, .0930]). However, the path between brand activism skepticism and ad attitudes was not significant, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = -.04, t = -1.07, p = .28, 95% CI = [-.1184, .0346]). The path between ad attitudes and brand credibility was statistically significant, and in the predicted direction, net of controls and other variables in the model (b = .70, t = 40.98, p < .001, 95% CI = [.6642, .7311]). Ad attitudes thus did not mediate the relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility, since the relationship between brand activism skepticism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements was not significant. Therefore, H_9 was not supported.

Table 9

Serial mediation of study's main variables with direct effects

Outcome	Predictor	Coefficient	SE	LLCI	ULCI
SKEP					
	FEM	-.1803***	.0426	-.2640	-.0966
	GEN	-.0127	.0630	-.1363	.1110
	AGE	.0089	.0221	-.0345	.0523
	EXR	.1481***	.0271	.0949	.2013
AA					
	FEM	.1587**	.0472	.0660	.2514
	SKEP	-.0419	.0390	-.1184	.0346
	GEN	-.0578	.0690	-.1932	.0776
	AGE	-.0831**	.0242	-.1306	-.0356
	EXR	.2793***	.0302	.2200	.3386
BC					
	FEM	.0134	.0227	-.0312	.0580
	SKEP	.0564**	.0186	.0198	.0930
	AA	.6977***	.0170	.6642	.7311
	GEN	.0722*	.0330	.0075	.1370
	AGE	-.0124	.0116	-.0353	.0104
	EXR	.0513**	.0152	.0214	.0812

Direct effect	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
FEM → BC	.0134	.0227	-.0312	.0580

Indirect effects	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
FEM → SKEP → BC	-.0102	.0046	-.0198	-.0021
FEM → AA → BC	.1107	.0357	.0429	.1840
FEM → SKEP → AA → BC	.0053	.0073	-.0073	.0212

Note. N = 794. This table demonstrates the hypothesized relationships using serial mediation with gender, age, and previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertisements entered as covariates. LLCI = Lower level of confidence interval, ULCI = Upper level of confidence interval. SKEP = Brand activism skepticism, FEM = Liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, AA = Ad attitudes, BC = Brand credibility, GEN = Gender identity, AGE = Age of participants in years, EXR = Previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the in greater detail and provide insights about their implications. This chapter also compares the results to previous literature relating to menstruation, advertising, and attitudes about brand activism. Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed. The chapter concludes by discussing the study limitations and provide directions for future research.

The purpose of this study was to understand how individuals' liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, and sexist attitudes toward women are related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and how brand activism skepticism might play a role. As predicted, this study found that the more individuals endorsed liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and the less they endorsed stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, the more likely they had favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. These relationships were significant and positive for both men and women. However, this study also discovered a significant and positive relationship between benevolent sexism and ad attitudes, which was the same for both men and women, but there was not a relationship between hostile sexism and ad attitudes for either men or women. The study also revealed that the greater the liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs of participants, the less likely they were to have brand activism skepticism. Finally, the study found a significant and positive relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility, and a significant and positive relationship between ad attitudes and brand credibility. While these direct relationships were found, however, the proposed mediating relationships, with brand activism skepticism and ad attitudes as mediators, were not significant as predicted. Refer to Table 10 for a summary of the study hypotheses and results.

Table 10

Summary of hypotheses with results

N	Hypothesis	Results
H_1	*The less individuals endorse stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.*	S
H_2	*The more individuals report liberal feminist attitudes & beliefs, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.*	S
H_3	*The less individuals adopt sexist attitudes toward women, the more likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.*	NS^{+}
H_4	*The relationship between endorsing stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will be statistically significant for both men and women.*	S
H_5	*The relationship between liberal feminist attitudes & beliefs and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will be statistically significant for both men and women.*	S
H_6	*The relationship between sexist attitudes toward women and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will be statistically significant for both men and women.*	PS*
H_7	*Brand activism skepticism will mediate the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, such that the more individuals report liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, the more skeptical they will be of brand activism (i.e., brand activism skepticism) for menstrual-realistic ads, and thus the less likely they will be to have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.*	NS
H_8	*The more skeptical individuals are of brand activism (i.e., brand activism skepticism) for menstrual-realistic ads, the less credible they will perceive those brands.*	NS
H_9	*Favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements will mediate the relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility, such that the more individuals are skeptical of brand activism (i.e., brand activism skepticism) for menstrual realistic ads, the less likely they will have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads, and thus the less credible they will perceive those brands.*	NS

Note. This table provides the results of all hypotheses in the current study. N = Hypotheses number, S = Supported, NS = Not supported, PS = Partially supported.
$^{+}$Significant for benevolent sexism, but in the opposite direction than hypothesized
*Supported for benevolent sexism but not hostile sexism

Less Endorsement of Menstruation Stigma, More Favorable Ad Attitudes

As expected, participants who did not endorse the social stigma of menstruation were more likely to have favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Participants who were *less* likely to believe that menstruation should be kept a secret or hidden away from the rest of the world were more likely to be partial to menstrual-realistic advertisements. This finding is consistent with extant menstruation research. For example, consequences for holding stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation include perceiving anything related to menstruation as unfavorable (refer to Grose & Grabe, 2014; Johnston-Robledo et al., 2003; Kowalski & Chapple, 2000; Roberts et al., 2002). Contrastingly, individuals who view menstruation openly and positively are more likely to have desirable outcomes and perceptions relating to menstruation, such as having medically accurate knowledge about reproductive health (Eswi et al., 2012; Rabiepoor et al., 2017; Sparado et al., 2018) or viewing oneself while menstruating favorably (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000). Thus, the present study extends these findings into the realm of advertising, such that those who reject the idea that one's menstrual status should be concealed or perhaps even view it as pleasant are also more likely to show positive perceptions of advertising that provides more realistic portrayals of menstruation. Such a finding also provides further support for the idea that individuals tend to show a preference for information within their environments that is congruent with and confirms their attitudes and beliefs.

Also as predicted, the relationship between stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements was consistent among men and women in the sample. Both men and women who scored lower on the menstrual secrecy scale tended to have more positive attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and consequently, both men and women who scored higher on the menstrual secrecy scale tended to have more negative attitudes

about menstrual-realistic advertisements. This finding is unsurprising, given that there is a growing body of recent literature that sheds light on how men, particularly young men or single fathers, have a desire to be supportive of women's reproductive health and engage in open communication about menstruation (Marván et al., 2005; Peranovic & Bently, 2017).

The fact that that younger age categories throughout the sample, regardless of gender, were more likely to view menstrual-realistic advertisements favorably than older age categories in the sample further supports this literature. Recent studies have argued that, contrary to previous generations, menstruation can be viewed in a non-stigmatizing or open way among younger generations (Marván et al., 2005). This study was further validated by the data from the current study. This result is somewhat encouraging, indicating that attitudes about menstruation are slowly experiencing a societal shift in the United States. While at least one other study has made this claim (Marván et al., 2005), it may be helpful to follow up with a study focusing on the role of both age and gender in stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements using longitudinal data.

Yet, on a separate yet related note, despite the relationship between stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation and advertisement attitudes being similar for both men and women, the findings also demonstrated that men were more likely to hold stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation than women in general, regardless of age. This finding is also consistent with previous studies, arguing that many men's cultural views of menstruation suggest a source of shame for women, disempowering girls and rendering them as the "other" (Allen et al., 2011; Erchull, 2020; Marván et al., 2005). An underlying theme in much extant research, including the finding from the present study, suggests that menstruation is a domain for some men with which they are not comfortable that may not necessarily disappear with age if they are encompassed by

such messages within their developing years. At the heart of this finding is the problematic cycle with which menstruation is equated with "womanhood," because it is something that most men are not expected to deal with. This lack of experience with menstruation, as demonstrated by the current study sample, can ultimately contribute to the cycle of stigma if this cycle is not interrupted.

Greater Liberal Feminist Attitudes and Beliefs, More Favorable Ad Attitudes

The hypothesis that liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs was positively associated with favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements was supported. That is, the more participants endorsed a liberal feminist ideology, the more likely they were receptive to menstrual-realistic advertising. This finding follows extant research that indicates that individuals prefer attitude-consistent messaging, particularly in the advertising realm, over counterattitudinal messages (Green, 1999; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Klapper, 1960; Tucker et al., 2012). Menstrual-realistic ads co-opt feminist discourses, such as reproductive health rights and bodily autonomy, and challenge sexist discourses that censor the biological realities of half the world's population. Advertisements for menstrual products that confront harmful narratives about women's bodies through the form of accurate visual depictions therefore resonated with participants who supported a liberal view of women's rights and gender equality (i.e., their world views).

This significant and noteworthy finding also supports the view that there is a proven relationship between consumers' self-concepts and advertising preferences (Feiereisen et al., 2009; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016; Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Advertisements that tap into feminist discourses may have a self-activating effect which can affect the way that consumers evaluate the ads themselves. For example, congruity between self-

schemas or beliefs about gender have a direct connection with the theme of the ad, or in this case, menstrual-realistic advertisements. This, in turn, leads to a higher disposition toward the advertisement and corresponding product. The relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements is therefore unsurprising, particularly because menstrual-product advertisers have a long history of perpetuating harmful narratives about menstrual health and placing menstruators in narrowly-defined roles (Coutts & Berg, 1993; Erchull, 2013; Liu et al., 2021; Merskin, 1999; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). Participants who endorsed liberal feminist beliefs (such as agreeing that women should have the same job opportunities as men or that men should have greater respect for women) in the current study thus may have been able to recognize the women empowerment tropes in menstrual-realistic advertisements, which in turn, influenced their positive evaluations about them.

The positive relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and favorable ad attitudes was consistent among men and women in the study. In other words, both self-identified men and self-identified women yielded a significant and positive relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and advertisement attitudes. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the frequency of men engaging in feminisms are on the rise, such that men's willingness to adopt feminist values are becoming increasingly common despite the stigma attached to the word "feminist" today (Anastosopoulos & Desmarais, 2015; Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Conlin & Heesacker, 2018). Pro-feminist attitudes are likely an important part of participants' self-concepts, regardless of their own gender identities, and thus, it is likely that the self-congruency between participants' own beliefs about women's rights and menstrual-realistic ads activated their self-schemas, thus influencing the way that they viewed and processed the ads. The

relationship between liberal feminist ideology and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements was therefore similar for both men and women among the study sample.

The lack of gender differences in the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and advertisement attitudes should be interpreted with caution, however, as there is a conceptual difference between endorsing and agreeing with feminist ideology and feminist self-identification. Much like menstruation, the word "feminism" bears the mark of social stigma (Anderson, 2009; Dye, 2005; Messner, 1997; Roy et al., 2007; Silver et al., 2019). In recent years, it has been suggested that feminism carries a negative label. Men who self-identify as feminists in particular run the risk of ostracization, as it is a common misconception that feminists oppose men's privileges which threatens their dominant social positions (Anderson, 2009; Anastosopoulos & Desmarais, 2015). Therefore, while it is more common for today's men to adopt liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, they are much less likely to label themselves as such (McCabe, 2005). To that end, the current dissertation conceptualized liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, rather than labeling oneself as a feminist, as a core predictor of attitudes about menstrual-realistic attitudes, with no differences in the strength or direction of this relationship among men and women. Had this study hypothesized that feminist *identification* predicted ad attitudes, gender differences may have been found.

The Relationship Between Sexist Attitudes Toward Women and Ad Attitudes

When examining the relationship between sexist attitudes and favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads, it was unexpected that sexist attitudes (hostile and benevolent sexism) were not related to less favorable attitudinal responses to these advertisements. To restate, hostile sexism was not significantly related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. Interestingly, though, benevolent sexism was *positively* associated with favorable attitudes about

menstrual-realistic ads and was more strongly associated with these attitudes than the other proposed predictive variables in the regression model.

The strong relationship between benevolent sexism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements among both men and women was unexpected, but upon further reflection, unsurprising. As previously mentioned, benevolent sexism denotes paternalistic attitudes toward women that appear to be favorable or even chivalrous on the surface (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Yet, these attitudes are the foundation for subtle forms of discrimination against women. Consider, for instance, the social norms that encourages men to carry women's bags, pay for her meals on a date, open the car door for her, or complement her maternal abilities. These views of women are harmful in nature because they seriously suggest women's inferiority and fragility; yet, it is common for one to believe that these attitudes promote positive interpretations of women (Glick and Fiske; 1997; 2001). Individuals who endorse benevolent sexist attitudes thus may believe that some women "deserve" benevolent sexist treatment as a reward for being delicate and in needing of protection. It is important to mention, as previously stated in Chapter 2, that both men and women can have benevolent sexist attitudes, which for women may be a result of internalized sexism (Becker, 2010).

The finding that benevolent sexism significantly relates to favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements within the current study therefore reflects the internal thought processes of those who endorse benevolent sexism. As previously mentioned, the stereotypes of menstruating women (and women in general) include the idea that they are weak or vulnerable, rendering them inferior to men and perhaps other women who are not currently menstruating (Crawford, 1981; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016; Marván et al., 2014; Tuana, 1988). Menstrual blood receives similar treatment because it is usually interpreted as a symbol of weakness and

malignancy and is often used to justify women's so-called inferior positions in society (refer to Bramwell, 2001). Yet, it is also a common idea that women, menstruating or not, are beings in need of admiration and protection. It is therefore probable that participants who endorsed benevolent sexism attitudes (both men and women) interpreted the imagery of menstrual blood in menstrual-realistic ads in a way that reflects their own views on women; as a symbol of women's weakness and vulnerability. This, in turn, may have led participants to believe that menstruating women, or women in general, are deserving of protection (i.e., a core component of the dimension of benevolent sexism), and thus interpreted menstrual-realistic advertisements more favorably because they viewed them using their own stereotyped ideas about menstruation and women (i.e., that women are deserving of protection). This relationship (benevolent sexism and ad attitudes) may have been particularly stronger than the other variables in the regression (i.e., hostile sexism, liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation) because participants may have viewed the depiction of menstrual blood as nearly congenial to their own world views.

While this finding was unanticipated, a second thorough investigation of the literature reveals that it nonetheless mirrors the findings of previous studies. For example, in a survey study conducted by Marván and colleagues (2014), participants who displayed the highest benevolent sexist attitudes were more likely were more likely to reflect the belief that women should feel emotions such as well-being and pride while menstruating (i.e., positive and pleasant attitudes toward menstruation), yet also tended to believe that menstruation keeps women from performing their regular daily activities (menstruating women should avoid carrying heavy things, take hot showers, etc.). That is, participants who held the most positive *and* most restrictive beliefs about menstruation were more likely to hold the most positive and restrictive

beliefs about women. In this same study, it was also revealed that high benevolent sexism attitudes were strongly correlated with positive attitudes toward women with PMS (premenstrual syndrome) and pregnant women, indicating that participants perhaps viewed these women as weak or needing protection. Similar to my reasoning above, the authors argued that benevolent sexism suggests that women should be held on a pedestal; yet, at the same time, it does not advance the position of women in society because it also suggests conformity to traditional gender roles (Marván et al., 2014). These views are especially consistent in traditionally-oriented men and women, who view menstruation as a vital part of a woman's reproductive life (Marván & Lama, 2009). If we put these ideas together, coupled with the findings from the present study, it is very reasonable to suggest that men and women who agree with benevolent sexism statements, which are seemingly positive in tone, might also view menstrual-realistic advertisements more favorably than someone who does not agree with benevolent sexism statements because they also have traditional views of menstruation, as well as traditional views of women. Unfortunately, no such measure was included in the present dissertation, so this presumption requires additional validation in future studies.

Contrastingly, the finding of insignificance for hostile sexism departs from prior research (Forbes et al., 2003; Marván et al., 2014). Studies have shown that hostile sexism significantly predicts negative consequences relating to menstruation, particularly negative attitudes toward women who are menstruating, consequently because hostile sexism disparages and discounts all aspects of femininity, which in most cases, is a part of being a menstruating woman (Glick & Fiske, 1999). In this dissertation, however, no such relationship was found. It could be that hostile sexism is more closely related to how people perceive *women* than it is to how people perceive *advertisements* that are gendered in nature. After a thorough review of the literature, no

such study focusing on hostile sexism and its relationship with advertising perceptions exists. Therefore, the absence of research in this area indicates a need for more work to be done in this domain.

It could also be that hostile sexism is more closely related to some aspects of negative/stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation in general, but not others. In one such study, Yagnik (2014) identified three dimensions of menstrual taboos, which are a) the concealment taboo, which renders all aspects of menstruation within society as invisible, b) the activity taboo, which deals with the beliefs of people on restriction from physical activity during menstruation, and c) the communication taboo, which deals with the notion that menstruation should not be discussed through interpersonal communication. Studies relating hostile sexism to different beliefs or taboos about menstruation have thus yielded mixed results. For example, Aker et al. (2021) found no relationship between hostile sexism and many aspects of the activity taboo such as the belief that menstruation is a debilitating or bothersome event among a sample of nursing students. Another study by Marván et al. (2014) found that higher levels of hostile sexism were only significantly related to the belief that menstruation is annoying and general negative affect toward menstruation, but not related to the belief that menstruation is debilitating (i.e., the concealment taboo) or other aspects relating to the concealment and communication taboos. As previously mentioned, these studies indicate that there is a possible relationship between hostile sexism and some aspects of negative attitudes about menstruation or menstruating women, but these attitudes may not translate to how people perceive advertisements for menstrual products, or perhaps even other advertisements that are gendered in nature. This argument deserves future attention in literature.

Yet, the most logical explanation for the insignificance of hostile sexism on ad attitudes for both men and women is the idea of social desirability bias. Social desirability in survey research can be best understood as the tendency of survey respondents answering items in a manner that will allow them to be more favorably viewed by others (Krumpal, 2013). Although studies are inconclusive as to which gender is more affected by this phenomenon, extant literature has shown that both men and women may be prone to social desirability (Bernardi, 2006; Bernardi & Guptill, 2008). The degree of social desirability bias may be heightened when responding to sensitive topics, such as controversial issues like race or gender. Sexism measures may be particularly vulnerable to social desirability effects, as people are hesitant to express hostility to a historically discriminated-against group. It is thus possible that participants in the current dissertation felt the need to give socially desirable responses when answering the hostile sexism items because they wanted to avoid appearing sexist nor express their true feelings about women, which could explain the insignificant relationship between hostile sexism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads. Yet, this was not a problem for the benevolent sexism measures because as previously mentioned, benevolent sexism is a subtle form of discrimination against women which on the surface appears positive and thus, participants did not feel the need to adjust their responses, which mitigated social desirability effects.

Feminist vs. Paternalistic Views of Menstrual-Realistic Advertising

A few observations can be made from the hierarchical regression analysis examining the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, hostile and benevolent sexism, and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. First, while liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, and benevolent sexism were all related to how consumers formulate attitudes

about menstrual-realistic ads, stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation does not play as significant a role as liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and benevolent sexism. This is evidenced by its relatively low correlation coefficient as well as the idea that the variable was insignificant once the liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs variable was added to the model. Second, and more importantly, the benevolent sexism variable remained significant throughout the regression, and the liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs variable remained significant in both the regression and serial mediation model. This suggests that liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and benevolent sexism play a much larger role in how consumers process and interpret advertisements that use menstrual-realism.

Based off the data yielded from the present dissertation, consumers may thus view, interpret, and form attitudes about menstrual-realistic ads using one of two paths. The first path suggests that individuals may view these ads through a liberal feminist lens. That is, consumers who endorse liberal feminist ideals may be better able to recognize the themes of gender equality in menstrual-realistic ads and interpret them according to their own beliefs. This, in turn, led to their favorable evaluations of the ads. The second path indicates that consumers may also view these ads through a "protective" lens (i.e., the inclination to glorify women and perceive them as needing protection, which is expressed through benevolent sexism; Glick & Fiske, 1997; 2000; 2001; 2004). This means that consumers who endorse benevolent sexism viewed menstrual-realistic ads according to their version of what they believe women are supposed to be like; as needing to be set on a pedestal and cherished by others. This, much like liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, resulted in more favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. While this idea certainly explains why there was a significant and positive relationship between benevolent sexism and ad attitudes (even though it was unexpected), it also reflects the

fragmented nature of today's feminist movement/differing ideas about women's place in the world, which speaks to the idea that there are many philosophical variants of feminism, all of which contain ideas that perhaps even directly contradict each other (refer to Tong, 2007). The idea that consumers may view menstrual-realistic ads in one of two ways (a feminist or a protective lens) is further supported by the fact that liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs was negatively correlated with benevolent sexism in the current study (refer to Table 6). Implications of this finding are extensively discussed below.

Greater Liberal Feminist Attitudes and Beliefs, but Less Brand Activism Skepticism

What complicates the findings, however, is the relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, brand activism skepticism, attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and brand credibility. First, to restate, liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs were associated with less brand activism skepticism about menstrual-realistic ads. This finding is inconsistent with recent research which argues that feminist endorsement in advertisements is subject to much criticism on the grounds that these practices are appropriating feminist discourses for profit gains (Dahlbeck Jalakas, 2016; Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Research has found that many of today's liberal feminists are skeptical of a capitalist society because the goals of feminism cannot be reached under an oppressive economic structure (Cudd & Holmstrom, 2011; Fraser, 2013). Academic discourses usually position advertising as a tool of a capitalist structure by presenting consumption as an answer to all material and social needs (refer to Jhally, 2014; Taylor, 2012; Williams, 2000). It was thus hypothesized that individuals who endorsed liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs would be more likely to exhibit higher levels of brand activism skepticism. Nonetheless, endorsing a liberal feminist ideology was associated with lower levels of brand activism skepticism in the present study.

This unforeseen result may be interpreted in several ways. First, as extensively considered in Chapter 2, the significant and negative relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and brand activism skepticism provides further support for the limited effects paradigm, despite incorrectly hypothesizing the direction of the relationship. It is therefore possible that the feminist narrative in menstrual-realistic advertisements elicited positive evaluations of the message and the brand itself among individuals who support women's rights and gender equality in a way that eliminated their need to think critically and make rational judgements about the advertisement and the brand's marketing strategy. That is, the supporters of feminism in the current study had positive reactions to menstrual-realistic ads because the messaging itself produced harmony with their preexisting beliefs, thus overriding any skepticism or backlash about the brand itself.

Research has found that individuals who are exposed to attitude-consistent messaging are less likely to critically think and process a message, and are more likely to accept that messaging, than individuals who are exposed to messages that do not conform to their beliefs (Sawicki et al., 2013). One of the most common motives for people to engage in information processing is when they experience cognitive dissonance, which is the preference for information consistency over inconsistency (Festinger, 1957). When people are faced with dissonant information, they are aware of this inconsistency and are thus driven to reduce their state of tension by justifying thoughts that preserve and maintain their beliefs and attitudes (i.e., effort justification). When people are faced with information that is congenial to their beliefs, however, no such justification or information processing is needed. It is therefore plausible that participants who reported strong liberal feminist beliefs in the current study felt little need to avoid dissonance because they felt very little cognitive tension when asked to evaluate menstrual-realistic advertisements,

thus resulting in less deliberate processing of the ads and lower levels of brand activism skepticism. These results suggest that, consistent with prior research, cognitive responses in persuasive contexts (i.e., menstruation and advertising) are highly subjective rather than objective and rational (refer to Cacioppo et al., 1982).

Yet another potential interpretation of the unexpected relationship between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and brand activism skepticism could be that different forms of feminism are more strongly related to brand activism skepticism than other forms of feminism. This dissertation conceptualized and measured liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, which can be loosely classified as the general belief that women are treated differently from men, which holds women and girls back from achieving social, political, and economic autonomy (Baehr, 2007; 2017; Wendell, 1987). These ideas, however, have been circulating in mainstream United States since the late 18th century and are one of the oldest schools of feminist thought (Kotef, 2009; Marilley, 2013; Maynard, 1995). Since the first wave of feminism, many nuances of modern-day feminism have emerged, reflecting the shifting and often fragmented state of feminism in America today.

One philosophical variant of feminism is Marxist feminism. An extension of Marxist theory, Marxist feminism analyzes the ways in which women have been exploited through a capitalist system. According to feminists who endorse Marxist ideology, women's liberation cannot be achieved unless the current state of capitalism is dismantled (Barrett, 2014). Scholars have argued that, although some mainstream liberal feminists may believe that capitalism and feminism cannot coexist, Marxist feminism may be more closely associated with denouncing an exploitative economic system (Barrett, 2014; Gimenez & Vogel, 2005; Luxton, 2014; Scott, 2006). Many critics of advertising have argued that nature of advertising serves capitalism (refer

to Benhabib & Bisin, 2002). Marketing tactics including advertising thus encourages mass consumption and promotes a culture of consumerism, which is needed to keep the cycle of capitalism stable and profitable.

While there exists a plethora of schools of feminist thought that are worthy of discussion, Marxist feminism may be more strongly related to brand activism skepticism. If Goldman et al.'s (1991) commodity feminism, which provides the foundation for the conceptualization of brand activism skepticism, is often framed within both the lenses of Marxist and feminist theories, it is therefore probable that individuals who hold Marxist-feminist beliefs are more likely to be skeptical of brand activism for menstrual products. Consequentially, this relationship was the opposite for liberal feminist thought, which was the focal point of this dissertation, because liberal feminism is the most lenient approach to feminism among all philosophies and places less emphasis on capitalism as the root of economic inequality (Beasley, 1999; Cruz, 2018; Kensinger, 1997). Since the data cannot provide full support for these interpretations, it is thus critical for future studies about feminist thought and menstruation to consider a measure or measures of Marxist ideology as a potential indicator of ways in which consumers might perceive brand activism in menstrual product advertising.

Brand Activism Skepticism, Ad Attitudes, and Brand Credibility

In light of previous research concerning the effects of advertising skepticism on advertising attitudes, which has argued that the consequences of disbelief diminish positive perceptions of ads (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Fransen et al., 2015; Main et al., 2007), these findings raise the possibility that advertising skepticism is increasingly complex in the context of brand activism, as no significant relationship between brand activism skepticism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements was found. Studies examining various determinants of

favorable and unfavorable advertisement responses, in general, have found that broad skepticism or low trust in marketing efforts is a key mediator in consumer reactions to persuasive attempts (refer to Joireman et al., 2018; Obermiller et al., 2005; Raziq et al., 2018; Yang & Hsu, 2017). These negative attitudes are particularly exacerbated in today's highly competitive marketing economy, where consumers are bombarded with product claims and thus may dispute the believability or genuineness of the ad or product. While these findings are generally consistent across research, no such relationship was detected in the present dissertation.

This result does not lend support to the Strategies and Motives for Resistance to Persuasion (SMRP) Framework (Fransen et al., 2015). The framework suggests that consumers do not like to be deceived because they are keen on their belief systems, and will try to resist the sender's motives. Resultantly, their attitudes about the persuasive attempt will be negative in nature. Grounded in the idea that feminist ideals are often appropriated for commercial purposes (i.e., commodity feminism), much research has argued that using feminism as a marketing ploy is contradictive and inappropriate (Daily, 2019; Goldman et al., 1991; Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Thus, if consumers resent the commodification of feminist discourses and are actively concerned that the advertiser is not genuine in their claims (i.e., brand activism skepticism), following the SMRP Framework, consumers' attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertising should have been unfavorable. Yet, to restate, no such relationship was found, which suggests that SMRP may not be a useful framework to understand how consumers perceive brand activism (rather, only general persuasive attempts). Since brand activism differs from general persuasive attempts because it is driven by *both* justice and profit gains (two goals that are very much contradictory and perhaps even problematic; Moorman, 2020), this finding suggests the

need to develop a persuasion-based framework that is specific to brand activism in marketing contexts.

The need to clarify our understanding of brand activism in persuasive contexts is reinforced by the idea that skepticism is not an independent factor in how consumers receive and process information. Advertising skepticism connects with multiple variables. For example, one such study argued that advertising skepticism can vary between individuals, such that some individuals may naturally have lower levels of skepticism than others who may be highly skeptical of advertising (Hardesty et al., 2002). Skepticism is also related to a concept called advertising literacy, which is the consumer's ability to interpret, analyze, and process an advertisement (O'donohoe & Tynan, 1998). Recent research has shown that when consumers exhibit high levels of advertising literacy, they are also high in advertising skepticism, and thus their attitudes about advertising in general are negative (Shen et al., 2016). Moreover, advertising skepticism can also be exacerbated by deceptive advertisements, or at the very least, advertisements that are perceived as such (Xie, 2016). Unfortunately, the previous variables were outside the scope of the present study, so these assessments require substantiation in future studies.

It is important to note, however, that previous studies have focused on how *general skepticism toward advertising* play a role in ad perceptions. The present dissertation studied *brand activism* skepticism, an increasingly complex phenomenon theorized to impact consumers' preferences about menstrual-product advertising that incorporates themes of menstrual activism and feminism. It could be equally meaningful to also study the potential relationship between general ad skepticism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements because it is possible that advertising skepticism is more closely related to general ad attitudes

than brand skepticism. Moreover, while numerous studies to date have focused on advertising skepticism, there is scant literature looking at skepticism in the context of brand activism, indicating the need to clarify the nature of these relationships in future studies.

Although this dissertation did not propose a positive relationship brand activism skepticism and brand credibility, results indicated that men and women who were highly skeptical of brand activism were also more likely to perceive brands who use menstrual-realism as more trustworthy, attractive, and likeable (i.e., the dimensions of brand credibility). This result was unexpected. As previously stated, when consumers experience concerns of being deceived about the motives of the brand, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that undermine the effectiveness of the persuasive attempt or perhaps even label the source of the message (i.e., the brand) as less trustworthy (Fransen et al., 2015; Pollay, 1986). Yet, the results of this dissertation indicated the opposite to what Fransen et al. (2015) proposed. It is possible that participants who experienced high brand activism skepticism in the present study also experienced greater motivation to process information about the brand, or think critically about the brand's motives, than did participants who experienced lower levels of brand activism skepticism. Previous work in the vast and growing literature has used the term "involvement" to understand how consumers perceive and process information in the attitude formation process, which is defined as the desire or motivation to evaluate a brand (refer to MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). When consumer involvement is high, basic brand categorization is formed, such as evaluative responses about the brand that are emotionally positive, which could be more heightened if the consumer is involved in the cause itself (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). For example, in an experimental study of 89 participants, Muehling and Laczniak (1988) found that individuals who were more involved in processing an advertising message were more likely to formulate positive attitudes about that

brand, whereas no significant relationship was found between less-involved participants and brand attitudes. These relationships remained stable, even after a one-week delay. It is therefore probable that participants in the present dissertation, especially those who elicited high levels of brand activism skepticism, were also more involved and driven to scrutinize the elements within the menstrual-realistic advertisements they were asked to evaluate. Following the examples that I provide above, this in turn, could have resulted in favorable cognitive responses toward the advertised brand.

While this explanation is certainly plausible, there is also conflicting empirical support for the role that brand skepticism plays in brand attitudes. Contrary to the literature mentioned above, Patel et al.'s (2017) study concluded that skepticism toward a brand's CrM ("cause related marketing") did not have an effect on brand attitudes, in addition to having no effect on advertisement attitudes and purchase intention. One possible explanation offered by the authors is that participants may already feel a strong emotional attachment to a brand or product, or already have a high degree of trust in a company and their principles. This argument is certainly relevant to the participants in the present study, who may have been experienced in using the kind of menstrual product depicted within the advertisements, or could have already supported the overall mission to portray a realistic representation of periods in mainstream advertising. The present study differs from Patel et al's (2017) study because this dissertation deidentified all brand information to avoid priming participants and their subsequent responses. Yet, it is particularly compelling that the previous exposure to menstrual-realistic advertising variable was highly significant throughout the entire analysis. That is, the more participants reported that they were familiar with blood depictions in menstrual-product advertising, the more favorable their attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements were. This finding raises the possibility that

participants may have had prior exposure to the ads presented to them in this study, or perhaps were able to recognize the brands in ways that were not detected in the current study. Since brand awareness is a necessary precursor to brand attitudes, this finding suggests that both brand and ad familiarity play a larger role in brand and ad attitudes than brand activism skepticism because brand and ad familiarity may foster consumer trust and override the need to scrutinize the ad/brand. However, the contradictory empirical support for these claims suggests the need for clarifying our understanding of the relationship between brand skepticism and brand attitudes in future advertising research.

Yet, these explanations do little to explain why brand activism skepticism had a different relationship for brand credibility than attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements. These inconsistencies lend support for the need to develop a questionnaire that more accurately reflects the conceptual domain of brand activism skepticism. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the present dissertation used an adapted version of Skarmeas and Leonidou's (2013) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Skepticism Scale. CSR, in general, is the idea that corporations are socially responsive to social problems and are obligated to self-regulate their actions to be socially accountable to their customers and the world at large (e.g., Baxi & Ray, 2012; Mintzberg, 1983). CSR skepticism is therefore the suspicion that corporate social involvement is not conducive to real social change. While CSR skepticism and brand activism skepticism are thus very much closely related, their definitions slightly differ, where CSR is a broader concept which focuses on being a *good corporate citizen*, and brand activism focuses on *justice* (Vredenburg et al., 2020). It is conceivable that the CSR skepticism scale used in the present dissertation either did not fully assess the breadth and depth of the brand activism concept, tap into the justice aspect of it, or perhaps did not cover all other theoretical aspects of it (i.e., construct validity).

While brand activism skepticism was conceptualized and defined based off Goldman et al.'s (1991) ideas on commodity feminism, a thorough review of the literature revealed scant literature on the concept. The lack of literature in this area, or at the very least, on this specific concept, reflects the need to further develop our understanding of brand activism skepticism by defining and explicating it. Only when the conceptual domain is further refined can brand activism skepticism be operationalized effectively. It would therefore be beneficial for future endeavors to pursue creating a well-established brand activism skepticism measure for use in later studies.

Alternative Explanations for the Findings

This dissertation revealed that the relationships between liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, brand activism skepticism, and brand credibility were either not significant, or significant but not in the predicted direction. An alternative explanation to the statements offered above may be attributed to the menstrual-activism movement not yet circulating in mainstream society (Jones, 2016). As previously mentioned, engagement with identity and social movement participation exists within the realms of labor activism (e.g., "The Fight for $15"), racial justice (e.g., Black Lives Matter), U.S. gun control (e.g., "The March for Our Lives"), sexual abuse and rape culture (e.g., Women's March and the #MeToo movement), among many other worthy causes (Dreier, 2020). Yet, what is consistently absent from most public discussions of broader social justice affairs is the issue of menstruation (Koskenniemi, 2021; Okamoto, 2018). It is thus very possible that participants simply were unable to associate menstrual-realistic advertisements to brand activism because they were unaware of the menstrual-activist movement. While this is possibly a methodological issue in this case, given that the questionnaire made no reference to menstrual activism to avoid

priming participants from giving socially desirable responses to subsequent questions, this speaks to the larger issue of periods nonetheless being shrouded in secrecy and shame. As such, the need to collectively reduce the stigma and shame around menstruation on a national and international level at a much more rapid pace that focuses on long-term, sustainable change is more urgent than ever, as suggested by menstrual activist leaders and scholars throughout the globe (refer to Bobel, 2010; Fahs, 2016; Sommer et al., 2015).

Despite menstruation being virtually hidden from most public discussions, it is also very likely that the theoretical assumptions in this dissertation remain valid in other types of pro-social messaging that are habitually visible in the public eye. Recently, there has been growing public skepticism of ethically problematic companies who use social movements, which are often considered more "mainstream" and outside the scope of menstrual-activism, to market to the public without addressing how their business is complicit. These conversations around "woke-washing" and holding brands accountable for matching their corporate-facing values to their public-facing values have become integrated in recent public dialogue. For example, in 2019, the American multinational footwear and apparel corporation Nike was criticized by the public after creating an advertisement championing gender equality. Yet, it was revealed that the Nike corporation refused to offer paid maternity leave to their female athletes shortly after the ad's release (Jones, 2019). Then, in the year 2020, the American multinational technology and e-commerce company Amazon frequently aired ads championing front-line laborers and their work during the coronavirus pandemic. Yet, the company faced intense backlash, which the public criticized Amazon's poor treatment of employees, including claims that they underpay their staff and force them to work in dangerous working conditions (Crowley, 2021). What is more, at the time of this writing, Walmart's attempt to commemorate Juneteenth by selling a new ice cream

marketed as “Celebration Edition: Juneteenth Ice Cream” sparked backlash by many on social media. The company, which comprises an all-white executive committee, apologized for their mistake and removed all Juneteenth items from the shelves shortly after (Valinsky, 2022). While it is important to emphasize that these cases are not completely parallel with the type of advertising in the current study, as menstrual-realistic advertisements are a more subtle method of championing social justice causes, it certainly demonstrates that consumer skepticism of appropriating activist ideals are on the rise and perhaps suggests that “politically correct” marketing messages can easily backfire, even beyond the scope of menstruation and gender issues. These examples thus imply that consumer skepticism of activism marketing tactics, and how this relates to their ad attitudes, could be studied outside the scope of menstruation.

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study extend and enhance previous literature on how people formulate advertising attitudes, specifically in the context of menstrual products. In doing so, the findings support the idea that menstrual-realism in advertising can could be a valuable strategy for marketers. Although the study produced a convenience sample, which cannot be generalized to the U.S. population, the findings may be generalized to the theories used in the present dissertation, as the analysis identified specific demographic and attitudinal attributes of participants that make them either receptive or non-receptive to menstrual-realistic advertising. Specifically, the findings suggest that, in general, consumers do not see menstrual-realistic advertisements as conflicting with their own beliefs about feminism, sexism, and menstruation. This is particularly the case for individuals who endorsed liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, regardless of whether they chose to label themselves as feminists or not, as participants who reported stronger beliefs in liberal feminist ideology showed favorable attitudes about realistic

depictions of periods in advertising. Clearly, based off the results of this dissertation, the men and women who endorsed liberal feminist ideals perhaps viewed the advertisements as a source of information about menstruation or gender equality, regardless of whether they were highly skeptical about the motives and intentions of the brand itself. As previously mentioned, one possible explanation may be that the current state of feminism is fragmented and complex, as suggested by the plethora of studies which have found that feminist ideology has a complex role in how individuals evaluate media content (e.g., Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Myers, 2022).

The findings of this dissertation also mirror previous studies, which suggest that consumers specifically prefer ads that are self-congruent (e.g., Green, 1999; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Tucker et al., 2012). In doing so, this study adds to scholarly consensus that consumer values and beliefs influence their preferences for certain advertisements (i.e., limited effects paradigm; Klapper, 1960). The purpose of these studies, however, was to establish the connection between environmental attitudes and "green" advertising (e.g., Tucker et al., 2012), consumer self-concept such as introvertedness and extrovertedness and brand attitudes (e.g., Hong & Zinkhan, 1995), or ethnic identification and ethnically targeted media (e.g., Green, 1999). The current study sought to examine the potential factors that were associated with consumers' positive or negative evaluations toward a relatively novel advertising approach, which is menstrual-realism in menstrual product advertising. In doing so, this study was the first of its kind in a relatively understudied area in the literature: menstruation and media.

Perhaps the most important theoretical contribution of this study is that it adds to the somewhat minimal and complicated literature on pro-social advertising. Hypotheses about liberal feminist beliefs and stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation were generally supported, even

among men and women, and were formulated based off prior literature about green and ethnic advertising (refer to Green, 1999; Tucker et al., 2012), and Fransen and colleagues' (2015) Strategies and Motives for Resistance to Persuasion (SMRP) framework. However, the findings also indicated that although ads based on activism within the social realm, specifically menstrual activism, share a focus on making significant strides toward gender equality, they may not necessarily be interpreted or analyzed in the same way. This was illustrated by the non-significant relationship between brand activism skepticism and ad attitudes. This finding thus conflicts with prior research.

The non-significant relationship between brand activism skepticism and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertising, and the unexpected relationship between brand activism skepticism and brand credibility generally indicate that consumers are not applying the same standard to menstrual-realistic advertisements as other types of advertising in the social activism realm. Put differently, if the participants in the present study reacted similarly to the advertising messaging in this study as say, the examples of brand activism in advertising above, the results could have been dissimilar or perhaps even contrasting. The menstrual product advertising industry does not have a reputable history contributing to the de-stigmatization and demystification of women's reproductive health. This is evidenced in the menstrual product industry's tarnished history of shaming women for their body's natural smells or hyper-fixation on discreetly bleeding as if the menstrual cycle is something to be ashamed of (Coutts & Berg, 1993; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016; Merskin, 1999; Pascoe, 2014; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). Moreover, the menstrual product industry itself has also been known for lack of transparency and pushing back on laws which would require them to be specific about the ingredients that they put into their pads, tampons, and liners (Valenti, 2019). Multiple period product companies, such as

Thinx, have recently been criticized for promising a feminist utopia to all menstruating people except their employees, having been cited as refusing adequate maternity leave, paying wages below the poverty line, and frequent complaints of hostile and unsafe working environments (Gray & Peck, 2017). Yet, despite the menstrual-product industry's less-than-sparkling reputation, participants' skepticism interestingly had no bearing on the ways in which they perceived the advertisements. While there may have been measurement issues with the brand activism skepticism items, this also indicates an urgent need to further develop a theoretical framework specific to feminism and advertising.

The unexpected relationship between brand activism skepticism, attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, and brand credibility further suggest the need for a comprehensive theory relating to pro-social messaging and consumer skepticism. While Fransen et al.'s (2015) Strategies and Motives for Resistance to Persuasion (SMRP) framework certainly provided a starting point for how consumers use resistance strategies to cope with persuasive attempts, the framework is not specific to how people perceive pro-social messaging. Given the results of this study, which indicates that the ways in which consumers perceive pro-social messaging and other cause-related marketing is complex and not yet completely understood, it would thus be beneficial to build a theoretical framework which focuses solely on the ways in which consumers evaluate and interact with activism messages because as demonstrated by the examples offered above, it is clear that positioning a brand within the activism realm appeals to people who endorse congruent values. Yet, because activism in advertising also intersects with capitalism and the commodification of the issue itself, persuasion in this context may be different than in other marketing contexts, potentially isolating consumers who resent the appropriation of social issues for the purpose of selling a product. A recent industry survey found that over half

(53%) of survey respondents believed that brands who engage with societal activism are doing so for PR or marketing purposes (Marketing Charts, 2019). It is thus imperative to develop a framework, which potentially includes variables such as attitudes about brand activism or level of agreement with the brand's stance, into the study.

Practical Implications

Menstrual-product advertisers can greatly benefit from adopting a more conscious awareness of the portrayals of women's reproductive health they use in their ads. Although most menstruation and media research show that menstrual-product advertisers have been working reactively with stigmatizing images of periods and stereotypical images of menstruating women (refer to Coutts & Berg, 1993; Erchull, 2013; Liu et al., 2021; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016; Merskin, 1999), this dissertation showed that there are benefits to actively challenging societal norms about menstruation. Specifically, the findings showed that menstrual-realistic advertisements effectively appeal to a diverse audience with a variety of different views related to feminism and menstruation, given that liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and non-stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation predicted favorable attitudes about the ads, regardless of gender.

Based on a high mean score for the ad attitudes variable, the finding that many participants, both men and women, had favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertising can be viewed as affirmation that this these kinds of depictions in advertising can and should be explored. This produces a mutually beneficial situation for both target audiences, whose attitudes and beliefs are validated, and brands, who are able to garner attention from potential consumers who agree with their stance. Specifically, in terms of the limited effects paradigm, which propounds that individuals prefer media messages that reinforce their own beliefs (Klapper,

1960), these findings illuminate how menstrual-realistic depictions in menstrual product advertising can be an worthwhile marketing tool, particularly for people who are familiar with and support women's issues. This was particularly the case for individuals who endorsed liberal feminist ideology, as those consumers who scored the highest on the liberal feminist measures also showed favorable attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertising. Clearly, menstrual-realistic advertisements are not completely incongruent with consumers' own world views.

The noticeable lack of brand activism skepticism among the study sample provides further support for these claims. As mentioned in Chapter 3, participants overall exhibited relatively neutral brand activism skepticism attitudes. Moreover, no significant relationship was detected between brand activism skepticism and ad attitudes, implying that unlike other real-world pro-social messaging examples, brand activism skepticism had little bearing on how they perceived the ads. While this could have been a methodological issue, as previously mentioned, based on the findings of the present study, it is still very much possible that the consumers in this study in general were simply less likely to question the message's authenticity, by relating the portrayals in the advertisements it to their own lives or views on women (refer to Escalas, 2006). In the current dissertation, it is possible that participants were able to associate the tropes they saw in the ads back to their own beliefs (their attitudes about menstruation, benevolent sexist attitudes, and liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, in particular). These appeals potentially overrode any suspicion of altruistic motives, thus eliciting favorable perceptions of menstrual-realistic ads in the present dissertation.

The findings of this study also indicate that many consumers have not yet been exposed to this type of advertising. As mentioned in Chapter 3, most participants indicated that they have never or rarely seen menstrual-realistic advertisements, regardless of their gender identity. This

observation was also corroborated by the finding that participants' previous exposure to menstrual realism in advertising did not differ between menstruators and non-menstruators, despite the prevalence of personalized marketing attempts (i.e., algorithmic profiling) that seeks to advertise to consumers based off their gender, age, consumption preferences, etc. (Choi & Kim, 2020; Kant, 2020). Taken together, these findings imply that many consumers are not yet seeing honest advertising representations of women's reproductive health on a widespread scale, even in 2022. Yet, a recent industry survey of 10,017 men and women by Bodyform, a UK-based menstrual-product company, found that 74% of survey respondents indicated their desire to see even more realistic representations of periods in advertisements (Bodyform, 2017). This statistic, coupled with idea that previous menstrual-realistic ad exposure played a major role in participants' favorable ad attitudes, indicate the need to paint a more realistic picture of periods for consumers on a greater scope. This need is especially important for young girls who have not yet reached menarche, or young boys and even men, who are rarely exposed to accurate information about reproductive health outside of traditional media messages.

Yet, while the idea of menstrual-realistic advertising is certainly an upgrade from traditional menstrual-product advertisements which in general were stigmatizing and degrading in nature, menstrual-product advertisers looking to depict realistic visualizations of menstrual blood should also be aware that they need to tread lightly. This is because, based off the findings of the current study, consumers do not necessarily formulate their attitudes about these advertisements through their liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs, or "empowering" ideas about women. Rather, consumers make sense of these ads through their beliefs about women, regardless of whether they are "good" (i.e., liberal feminist lens) or "bad" (i.e., benevolent sexism lens). While consumers might like the idea of menstrual-realistic ads or indicate that they

like the depictions that they see in them, consumers will still nonetheless read the ads in ways that reflect their own views about women or how they believe that women are supposed to be. Given this, advertisers should thus proceed with using menstrual-realistic advertisements with caution, because consumers do not interpret feminist issues in a uniform way, reflecting the current state of feminism today. Moreover, since many participants in the current study may have viewed the ads as reinforcing their own ideas that women are deserving of protection (i.e., benevolent sexism), it is reasonable to suggest that menstrual-realistic advertisements may not be as "feminist" as many originally praised them to be. Menstrual product advertisers therefore must be mindful about the potential ways in which their target audiences may interpret these advertisements, rather than simply creating these messages from only their points of view.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with all research, limitations should be noted. These limitations nonetheless provide the opportunity for future studies to address the constraints and seek to replicate the findings of this study as there remain many gaps and unanswered questions. The first and primary area of concern is the study's sample, which was mostly white and sampled from only one survey platform (i.e., Dynata). The data was thus not representative in terms of race/ethnicity. Much like how visibility in media is important to advance reproductive health equity, racial and ethnic diversity in social science research facilitates the growth of inclusion and can help bring clarifying data to a complex topic. Studies should therefore follow up with a more racially and ethnically diverse sample. Moreover, participants were primarily recruited from the survey platform Dynata. While Dynata has established a reputation as an innovative and opportunistic data platform (Dynata, 2022), some research suggests that participants from panel research (such as Dynata or Qualtrics) can be less racially diverse, less honest, and less likely to pass attention

check questions than participants on survey panels (such as Amazon Mechanical Turk or Prolific; Eyal et al., 2021). Additional studies are therefore needed to include a wider range of voices in this line of inquiry and therefore should consider using different survey platforms and panel tools, such as Qualtrics or Prolific.

On a similar note, this study removed data from 281 participants who failed one or both attention check questions or failed to complete the questionnaire. Although the removed participants were similar based on their race/ethnicity, age, and education levels to the final dataset, it is important to recognize that the removal of these participants may have influenced the results of this study by eliminating certain voices, which could have contributed to the richness of this dissertation. That is, the removal/data cleaning process may have influenced the interpretation of the data in ways that may not be detectable. Results should thus be interpreted with caution.

Given that the online recruitment process produced a convenience sample of participants, results should be interpreted with caution, as they are not representative of the U.S. population. Specifically, the online recruitment process within this study produced many respondents from the most populous states (i.e., New York, California, Florida, and Texas), and greatly outnumbered those from the less populous U.S. states. Therefore, the convenience sample cannot be generalized to the entire U.S. population. Future studies can thus seek a representative sample by including participants who live in less populous U.S. states, or perhaps seek representativeness by including additional demographic characteristics of U.S. inhabitants such as gender identity, sexual orientation, or parental status.

The data collected from this dissertation was also cross-sectional and collected within a single point in time. Therefore, this study can only claim association between the study's main

variables of interest. Establishing causation in additional studies is a meaningful and worthwhile pursuit in future research, which can be achieved by conducting an experiment on U.S. men and women to examine the effects, however defined, of menstrual-realistic advertising on consumers. Moreover, the presumption that menstrual-realistic advertising could persuade consumers to adopt liberal feminist attitudes could also be considered, or at the very least, persuade them to like, share, or comment on these ads via social media. Scholars could also consider using qualitative approaches such as one on one in-depth interviews or focus groups, which could potentially examine the reasons why consumers have a particular feeling toward menstrual-realistic depictions or how they interact with and interpret the ads.

Additional limitations concerning the choice of menstrual-realistic advertisements within the present study should also be considered. First, this study relied on participants' reactions to advertising which uses static imagery and text, and not necessarily video-based advertising, which is becoming an increasingly popular advertising strategy for menstrual-product advertisements that portray realistic blood-like depictions, particularly on social media platforms (Lipsman et al., 2012). The choice to include only static advertising images certainly provides a starting point for research in this area, but could have affected participants' interpretations of the advertisements since static ads only represent a small fraction of growing instances of blood depictions being shown on social media, television, and magazines alike. Moreover, although the advertisements were chosen on the basis that they were typical of most menstrual-realistic advertisements (i.e., portraying different menstrual products such as pads and menstrual cups), it is possible that this study would have yielded different results had it chosen to focus on a specific type of menstrual product, as recent studies suggest that consumers perceive non-traditional menstrual products such as cups or discs differently than traditional menstrual products such as

pads or tampons (Grose & Grabe, 2014; Ndichu & Rittenburg, 2021; Owen, 2021). Future studies should thus consider replicating this study by using different static ads, or perhaps consider advertisements in video form which depict different products such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups and discs, and period underwear as examples for participants. And, although it is unlikely, it is also possible that participants have seen the ads prior to taking the study. Thus, their evaluations may have reflected their previous interactions with the ads. Although the brands were de-identified as much as possible (i.e., blurring the brand logo), including a question asking participants if they had seen each of the advertisements prior to their participation in the study would have been meaningful to the study. This may have provided insight into the relationship between brand activism skepticism, advertising attitudes, and brand credibility. On a separate yet related note, it is also possible that specific companies and their past behavior regarding the treatment of women (menstruating or not) may impact a consumers' level of brand activism skepticism, and thus, future research could also consider identifying brand information, unlike the current study.

It is also possible that this study would have yielded different results had it focused on a different type of feminism. As previously mentioned, the feminist movement is somewhat fragmented and feminists today are coming to understand that their definition of "feminism" vastly differs from previous generations (Kantola & Outshoorn, 2007). Resultantly, many philosophical variants of feminism have emerged today, including, but not limited to radical, Marxist, cultural, and intersectional feminism, many of which are theorized to be more closely related to brand activism skepticism than liberal feminism (Beasley, 1999; Fraser, 2017). While this study certainly provided a starting point for how feminism is related to how people perceive menstrual-realistic advertisements, future studies should consider replicating this study, but

conceptualizing and measuring different types of feminism. What is more, future studies could also consider including *only* participants who self-identify as feminists.

As discussed extensively throughout this chapter, future studies should consider rethinking the conceptual model proposed in this study. This perhaps is the most urgent issue that emerged from the current dissertation. In addition to considering separate, discrete classes of feminism (i.e., Marxist feminism, radical feminism) and including only participants whose core identities include the label "feminist," general advertising skepticism (rather than brand activism skepticism) is theorized to play a bigger role in how consumers receive and process persuasive information. Yet, advertising skepticism is not an independent factor in how consumers receive and process information, and thus, scholars should consider adding additional variables to the conceptual model. For example, studies have shown that individuals may naturally elicit either high or low advertising skepticism (Hardesty et al., 2002), and thus, additional studies interested in how people perceive menstrual-realistic advertisements could consider including participants who *only* exhibit greater or lesser skepticism (rather than consumers who "neither agree nor disagree" to skepticism measures). Because extant research has argued consumers who have high levels of advertising skepticism also have high levels of advertising literacy high levels of advertising literacy which therefore depletes their general advertising attitudes (Shen et al., 2016), scholars should also consider including a measure of advertising literacy into future conceptual models. These variables could easily be considered in future studies using similar quantitative methods as the current dissertation, such as a survey design.

A separate fundamental concern regarding the conceptual model of the present study is the issue with the brand activism skepticism measures. That is, the brand activism skepticism measures raised construct validity concerns. If future studies wish to pursue brand activism

skepticism rather than general advertising skepticism in future inquiries, it is also necessary to operationalize the construct into concrete and measurable characteristics based off the various dimensions of brand activism skepticism. Although time consuming, a validated scale is worthy of pursuit in future research.

Finally, the conceptual model and theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation can also be extended to other types of social advertising. Since the menstrual activism movement isn't widely circulated in mainstream society (Jones, 2016), it is very possible that participants were unable to associate menstrual-realism in advertising with the menstrual activism movement, thus resulting in neutral or lower levels of brand activism skepticism. Yet, a number of brands outside of the feminism and menstrual-activism movements have been observed appropriating social issues for monetary benefits and have received extensive backlash from consumers (i.e., Amazon, Nike, WalMart; Crowley, 2021; Jones, 2019; Valinsky, 2022). It would thus be beneficial for future studies to replicate the current study by focusing on a separate aspect of pro-social messaging (i.e., Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, LGBTQIA+), which is likely to yield similar if not more compelling results.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Menstruation is a source of social stigma in women's lives (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013; Johnston-Robledo & Stubbs, 2013; Kowalski & Chapple, 2000; Patterson, 2014). As a departure from traditional menstrual-product marketing, advertisers have begun to debut a new ad trope that bears resemblance to actual period blood in an effort to normalize periods and demystify women's reproductive health (Patel, 2020; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). The public has generated a wide range of attitudinal responses to these blood-like depictions, which for the purposes of this study are called menstrual-realistic advertisements, including praise and claim, disgust and hostility, and accusations of ingenuity and faux activism (Pasquini, 2020; Patel, 2020). Literature concerning how people formulate attitudes about various types of advertising has found that consumers prefer advertising messages that align with their own preexisting beliefs (Green, 1999; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Klapper, 1960; Tucker et al., 2012), and therefore expect brands to enter the brand activism realm (Hoppner & Vadakkepatt, 2019). Yet, there is also growing evidence that consumers are becoming increasingly skeptical of brands who do so (Edelman, 2019). The purpose of this study was thus to understand the conditions that lead individuals to either positively or negatively evaluate menstrual-realistic ads, and whether or not brand activism skepticism about this type of advertising may play a role.

This study identified several interesting and noteworthy findings. Namely, individuals' liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs and benevolent sexism, regardless of gender, were positively related to favorable evaluations of menstrual-realistic advertisements. Moreover, the more individuals held stigmatizing attitudes about menstruation, regardless of gender, the more they negatively evaluated menstrual-realistic advertisements. Yet, since benevolent sexism and liberal

feminist attitudes and beliefs were more strongly related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements, this finding indicates that consumers mainly interpret these ads through either their preexisting beliefs about feminism, or preexisting beliefs about how women are deserving of protection. These findings contribute to extant literature which establishes a connection between consumer attitudes and beliefs and their partialities toward media messages which align with those attitudes (Green, 1999; Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Klapper, 1960; Tucker et al., 2012). Interestingly, the results of this research also showed that endorsement of liberal feminist attitudes and beliefs were associated with less brand activism skepticism about menstrual advertising, but that brand activism skepticism was not related to attitudes about the ads. This finding raises the possibility that differing ideologies from liberal feminism, such as Marxist feminism, may be more strongly related to brand activism skepticism, which thus may impact how individuals perceive menstrual-realistic advertisements. It would therefore be beneficial for future researchers to replicate this study by focusing on different variants of feminism because it would provide greater insight into how differing positions about women may be more or less closely related to attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements.

Given that many conversations around menstruation are suppressed and that periods are rarely featured in mainstream media (aside from simply being used as a plot device or the occasional offensive period joke), scholarly research focusing on menstruation and media are rare. Thus, the trend of menstrual-realistic depictions in advertising provided the unique opportunity to conduct this research. Moreover, previous quantitative studies focusing on menstruation and media have only done so through descriptive means such as content analyses, rather than a survey. In addition to identifying important contextual factors that lead individuals

to positively or negatively evaluate realistic depictions of period blood in advertising, this dissertation thus made a unique contribution to the field of mass communication research.

This study provided empirical support for how beliefs about women and menstruation may influence how people formulate attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertising, which arguably depict period blood more realistically than traditional menstrual product advertisements. Results indicated that those who embrace and align themselves with the liberal feminist movement are highly receptive to the new landscape of menstrual-product advertising. This is undoubtedly good news for advertisers, as these ad tropes represent sizeable improvement over the traditional, stereotype-laden menstrual-product ads. Yet, because of the contradictory findings that individuals who endorse liberal feminist beliefs *and* individuals who have benevolently sexist attitudes about women are highly receptive of menstrual-realistic ads, I close this writing with some words of caution: consumers may not interpret these ads in the same way nor in the way that advertisers may intend them to, depending on their own beliefs about women. Advertisers considering appropriating menstrual activism, or any social justice causes for that matter, are likely to be taking a sizeable risk. Moreover, advertising messages alone are unlikely to end period stigma on a broader scale, as they embody just a fraction of messages around menstruation that we receive daily. Considering that young people are likely to learn about the social stigma of menstruation very early in life, actively challenging the stigma of periods, including outside of advertising messages, and learning to appreciate (or at least not loathe) menstruation is likely to contribute to women's positive health outcomes as well as their social status.

Appendix A

Informed Consent

We are inviting you to participate in a research study. This study is conducted by Adriana Mucedola, a doctoral candidate at Syracuse University, under the supervision of Dr. Rebecca Ortiz, a professor at Syracuse University. The purpose of this study is to understand attitudes toward advertisements for menstrual products.

The survey should take about 15 minutes of your time. All information collected will remain anonymous. This means that your name will not appear anywhere, and your answers will not be linked to your name. Involvement in this survey is voluntary. This means that you can choose whether to participate and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You will receive $5.00 for your participation in this study.

Whenever one works with email or the internet, there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact the researcher, Adriana Mucedola by email at asmucedo@syr.edu.

I am 18 years of age or older, and by continuing I agree to participate in this research study OR by clicking here I agree to participate in this research study.

Survey Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this survey is to learn abiut reactions to menstrual-product advertisements. You will be asked to look at a few advertisements for menstrual products. Please indicate whether or not you consent to continue.

1 – I consent

0 = I do NOT consent

First, we'd like to know a little bit about you. Please answer the following questions.

What is your gender identity?

0 = Woman

1 = Man

2 = Not listed (please indicate):

What is your age?

0 = Less than 18 years

1 = 18-24 years old

2 = 25-34 years old

3 = 35-44 years old

4 = 45-54 years old

5 = 55-64 years old

6 = 65 years and older

On the next few pages, you will be asked your perceptions about various topics. Remember there are no right or wrong answers. Please give us your honest opinions.

Liberal Feminism Attitude and Beliefs

[1=Strongly Disagree] [5=Strongly Agree]

1. Women should be considered as seriously as men as candidates for the Presidency of the United States.

2. Although women can be good leaders, men make better leaders (R).

3. A woman should have the same job opportunities as a man.

4. Men should respect women more than they currently do.

5. Many women in the work force are taking jobs away from men who need the jobs more (R).

6. Doctors need to take women's health concerns more seriously.

7. Women have been treated unfairly on the basis of their gender throughout most of human history.

8. Women are already given equal opportunities with men in all important sectors of their lives (R).

Stigmatizing Attitudes About Menstruation

[1=Strongly Disagree] [5=Strongly Agree]

(FOR MEN)

1. It is important that women talk about menstrual periods with men (R).

2. It is important to discuss the topic of periods at school with boys and girls together (R).

3. Women must hide anything that shows that they are having their periods.

4. It is important that women buy sanitary pads without being seen.

5. It is uncomfortable for men to talk about periods.

6. It is important that nobody knows when a woman is having her period.

7. It is embarrassing when a man finds out that a woman is having her period.

8. Men blush when we see an advertisement about sanitary pads when we are with a woman.

9. It is important to keep periods a secret.

10. Women should avoid talking about their periods when there are men present.

11. It is important to discuss the topic of periods at home openly (R).

12. Women must stay away from men while they are having their periods.

(FOR PARTICIPANTS WHO NEITHER IDENTIFY AS MAN NOR WOMAN)

1. It is important that women talk about menstrual periods with men (R).

2. It is important to discuss the topic of periods at school with boys and girls together (R).

3. Women must hide anything that shows that they are having their periods.

4. It is important that women buy sanitary pads without being seen.

5. It is uncomfortable for men to talk about periods.

6. It is important that nobody knows when a woman is having her period.

7. It is embarrassing when a man finds out that a woman is having her period.

8. Men blush when they see an advertisement about sanitary pads when they are with a woman.

9. It is important to keep periods a secret.

10. Women should avoid talking about their periods when there are men present.

11. It is important to discuss the topic of periods at home openly (R).

12. Women must stay away from men while they are having their periods.

(FOR WOMEN)

1. It is important to talk about menstrual periods with men (R).

2. It is important to discuss the topic of periods at school with boys and girls together (R).

3. Women must hide anything that shows that we are having their periods.

4. It is important to buy sanitary pads without being seen.

5. It is uncomfortable for us women to talk about periods.

6. It is important that nobody knows when a woman is having her period.

7. It is embarrassing when a man finds out that a woman is having her period.

8. Women blush when we see an advertisement about sanitary pads when we are with a man.

9. It is important to keep periods a secret.

10. Women should avoid talking about their periods when there are men present.

11. It is important to discuss the topic of periods at home openly (R).

12. Women must stay away from men while we are having their periods.

Sexist Attitudes Toward Women

[1=Disagree Strongly] [5=Agree Strongly]

Hostile Sexism

1. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.

2. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.

3. Feminists are making unreasonable demands of men.

4. Women seek power by getting control over men.

5. Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.

6. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.

Benevolent Sexism

1. Women should be cherished and protected by men.

2. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.

3. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.

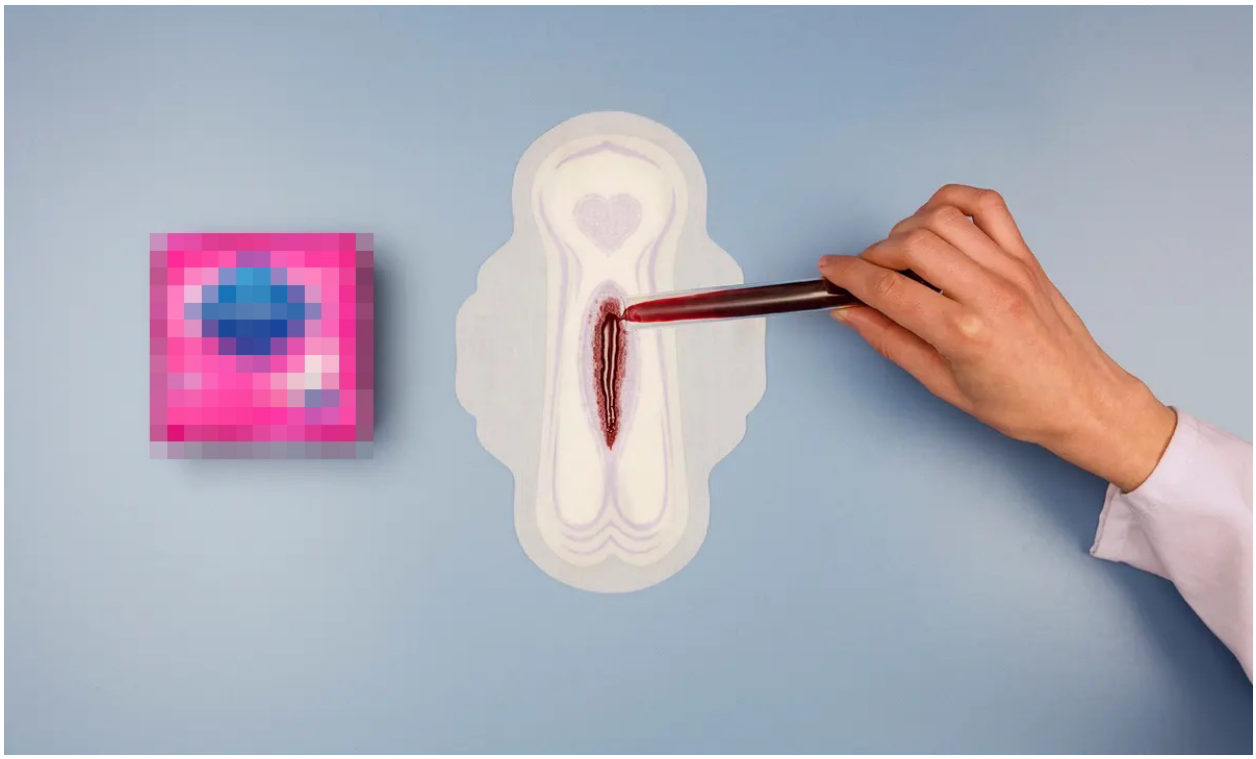
4. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.

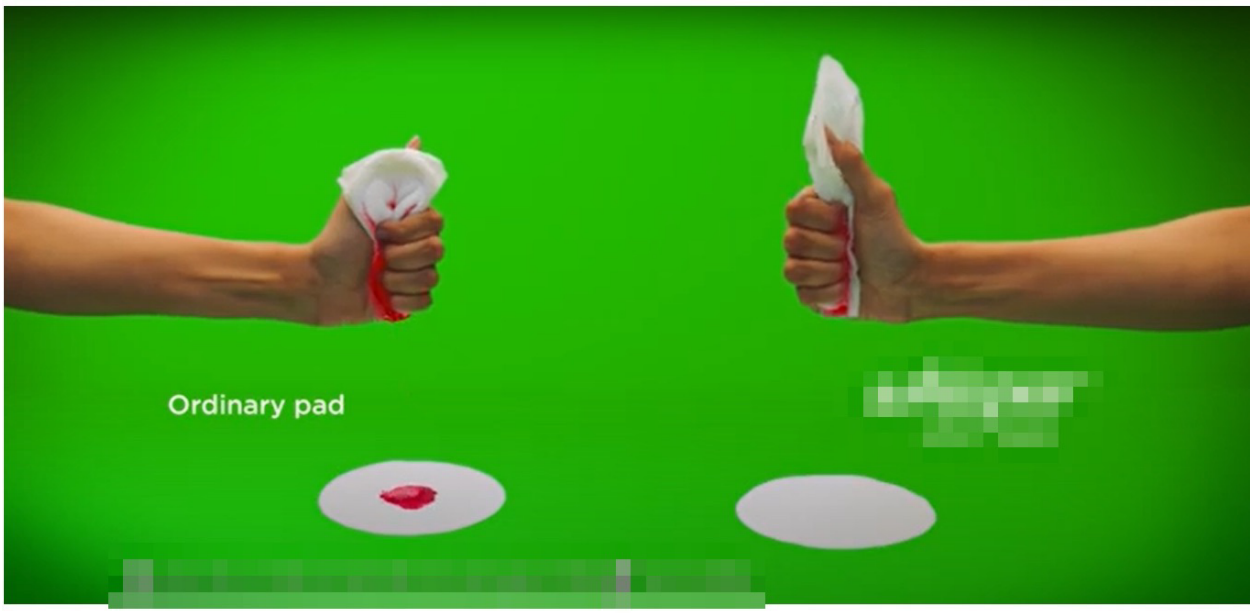
5. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.

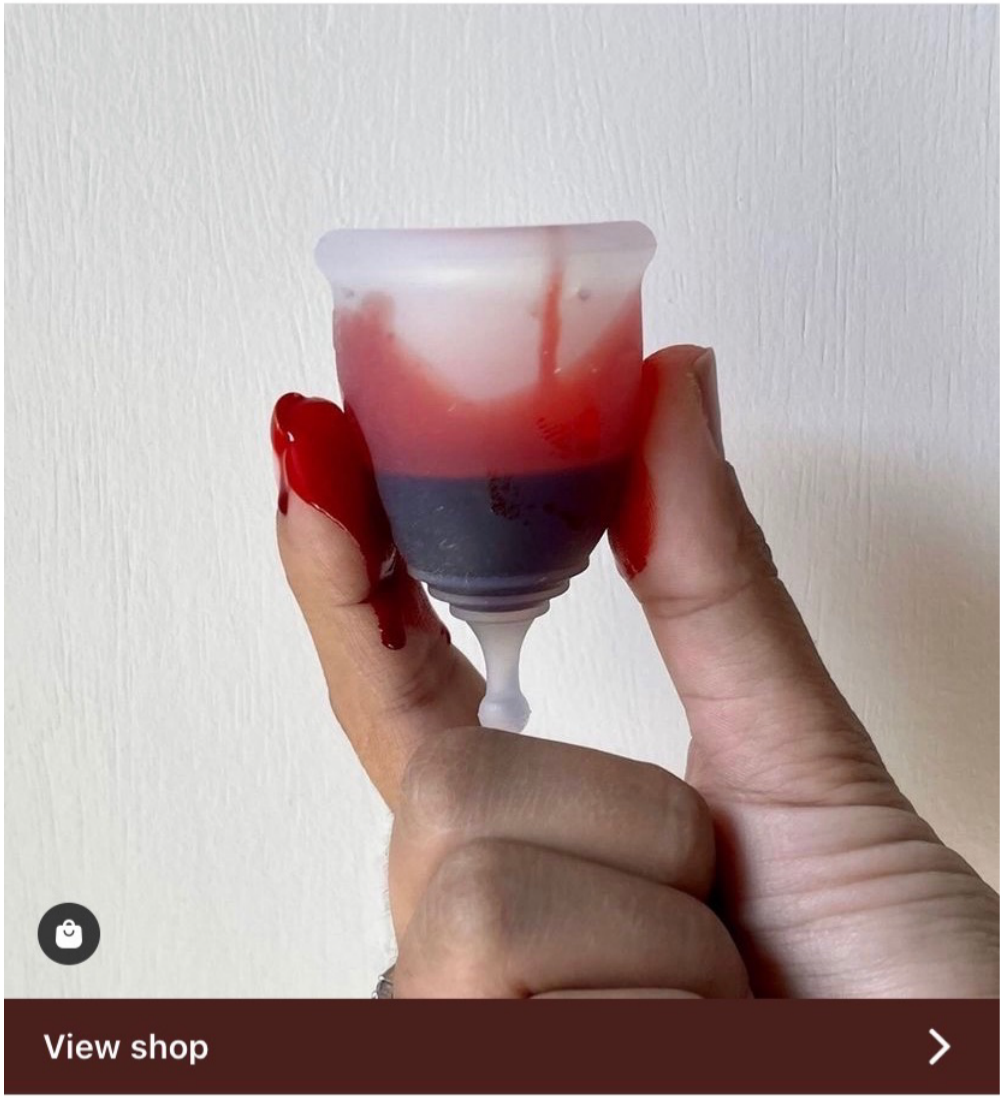
6. Men are incomplete without women.

On the next page, you will read a brief description about advertisements for menstrual products. Please click the arrow to continue.

Advertisers for menstrual products have started to use red liquid in menstrual product ads to represent menstrual blood. These ads are appearing in many spaces, including on television and social media platforms. On the next three pages, you will view three of these ads for menstrual products. The brand names in each of the advertisements are intentionally blurred out. Please take the next few moments to look at each of these ads. The "next" arrow will appear after a few seconds on each page.




Ordinary pad



245 likes

[redacted] Ever wondered if you'll be able to feel blood moving inside your cup?

We can confidentially say: Nope!

You can sit, lean, squat, jump, lay, swim, or even cartwheel in your [redacted] and never feel any movement of the blood it has captured.

What color liquid was depicted in the ads you just viewed?

1 = Blue

2 = Purple

3 = Yellow

4 = Red

On the next few pages, you will be asked your opinions about ads that use red liquid to represent menstrual blood, just like the ones you just viewed. The ads will remain on each page as a reference to you. Please proceed when you are ready.

Attitudes About Menstrual-Realistic Advertisements

[1=Strongly Disagree] [5=Strongly Agree]

1. I have favorable attitudes toward menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid.

2. I like menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid very much.

3. My attitude toward menstrual-product advertisements that use red liquid is positive.

Brand Credibility

[1=Strongly Disagree] [5=Strongly Agree]

Expertise

1. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements remind me of someone who's competent and knows what he/she are doing.

2. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements have the ability to deliver what they promise.

Trustworthiness

1. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements delivers what they promise.

2. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements product claims are believable.

3. Over time, my experiences with brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements will lead me to expect them to keep their promises, no more and no less.

4. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are trustworthy.

5. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements do not pretend to be something that they are not.

Attractiveness/Likeableness

1. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are very attractive to me.

2. Brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are very elegant.

3. I think the image of brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are beautiful.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements in terms of their relevance with social responsibility. Social responsibility means that individuals and companies act in the best interests of society as a whole.

Brand Activism Skepticism

[1=Strongly Disagree] [5=Strongly Agree]

1. It is doubtful that brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are socially responsible retailers.

2. It is uncertain that brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements are concerned to improve the well-being of society.

3. It is unsure that brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements follow high ethical standards.

4. It is questionable that brands who use red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements act in a socially responsible way.

What type of products were being advertised in the ads you viewed earlier?

1. Menstrual products

2. Menstrual products

3. Art supplies

4. Airline tickets

Just a few more questions and you are done.

How frequently or infrequently have you seen red liquid in menstrual-product advertisements prior to taking this survey?

1 = Never

2 = Rarely

3 = Occasionally

4 = Frequently

5 = Very frequently

How frequently or infrequently have you seen advertisements for menstrual products in general?

1 = Never

2 = Rarely

3 = Occasionally

4 = Frequently

5 = Very frequently

Do you consider yourself a feminist?

0 = No

1 = Yes

2 = Don’t know

In what year were you born?

In which U.S. state do you currently reside?

Which best represents your highest level of education?

1 = Less than high school

2 = High school graduate or equivalent

3 = Some college

4 = 2 year degree

4 = 4 year degree

5 = Professional or master’s degree

6 = Doctorate

Please select all of the following that represent your race and/or ethnicity.

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Hispanic or Latino(a)(x)

Asian or Asian American

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other (please indicate):

Information about income is very important to understand. Would you please give us your best guess? Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income (in previous year) before taxes.

1 = Less than $10,000

2 = $10,000 to $19,000

3 = $20,000 to $29,999

4 = $30,000 to $39,999

5 = $40,000 to $49,999

6 = $50,000 to $59,999

7 = $60,000 to $69,999

8 = $70,000 to $79,999

9 = $80,000 to $89,999

10 = $90,000 to $99,999

11 = $100,000 to $149,999

12 = $150,000 or more

13 = Prefer not to say

What is your biological sex (the sex, sometimes known as gender, you were assigned at birth)?

1 = Male

2 = Female

Have you ever menstruated (had a period)?

0 = No

1 = Yes

Approximately how often do you get your period?

1 = Once every month

2 = Every couple of months

3 = Twice per year

4 = Once per year

5 = Not applicable, menopausal or post-menopausal

6 = Other (please indicate):

Which of the following are you most likely to use when you are on your period? Please select all that apply.

Pad

Tampon

Period panties or period underwear

Menstrual cup

Pantyliner

Other (please indicate):

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, August 2022
Mass Communications
Dissertation: *Bleeding red: The relationship between feminism, brand activism skepticism, and attitudes about menstrual-realistic advertisements*
Advisor: Rebecca Ortiz, Ph.D.

M.A., Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, June 2019
Media Studies
Thesis: *Making health social: Effects of health PSA videos on social media*
Advisor: Rebecca Ortiz, Ph.D.

B.A., SUNY Oswego, May 2017
Broadcasting and Mass Communications major
Music minor

A.A.S., Cayuga Community College, May 2015
Telecommunications/Music Recording

CERTIFICATE

Certificate in University Teaching (CUT), Syracuse University, May 2022

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Finger Lakes Community College
Instructor of Communications
COM 100: Human Communication
COM 110: Public Speaking
COM 223: Media Writing
August 2022-Present

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University
Instructor
COM 107: Communications and Society
Spring 2021-Fall 2021

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University
Teaching Assistant
COM 107: Communications and Society

COM 408: Advertising and Public Relations Law
Fall 217-Fall 2020

SUNY Oswego
Teaching Assistant
BRC 319: Mass Media and the Law
Spring 2017

PUBLICATIONS

Mucedola, A., & Smith, A. (in press). "But I think there's always been that stigma": Adult women's perceptions of menstrual-product advertising. *Health Care for Women International*.

Shi, J., **Mucedola, A.**, Lin, T., & Green, K. (in press). Sexual misconduct in politics: How intergroup biases affect judgements of a scandalized politician and partisan ambivalence. *Communication Quarterly*.

Shi, J., **Mucedola, A.**, & Yao, S. (2022). Changing channels or changing minds: Likeminded media perceptions, emotions, and civic engagement. Article submitted to *International Journal of Communication* currently under review.

CONFERENCES

Mucedola, A., & Smith, A. (2022). *Did you ask your TikTok OBGYN? How TikTok videos are demystifying women's reproductive health.* Paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association (NCA), New Orleans, LA.

Shi, J., **Mucedola, A**., & Yao, S. (2022). *Changing channels or changing minds: Perceived degree of media likemindedness, emotions, and civic engagement*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), Detroit, Michigan.

Mucedola, A., & Smith, A. (2022). *"But I think there's always been that stigma": Adult women's perceptions of menstrual-product advertising.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association (ICA), Paris, France.

Wagner, K., Ortiz, R., & **Mucedola, A.** (2022). *Sex positivity in the COVID era?: Analyzing the messages and priorities of government-sponsored safer sex and COVID-19 messages released by U.S. public health departments.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association (ICA), Paris, France.

Shi, J., **Mucedola, A.**, Lin, T., & Green, K. (2021). *The Politics of Behaving Badly: How ingroup-outgroup conditions affect individuals' perceived credibility and partisan ambivalence.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), New Orleans, Louisiana. Top student paper award.*

Mucedola, A. (2021). *Royal baby boom: How British tabloids covered Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle's pregnancies.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), New Orleans, Louisiana.*

Smith, A., **Mucedola, A.**, & Shi, J. (2021). *Partisan pride: How cross-exposure to partisan news and emotions toward Trump leads to civic engagement.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), New Orleans, Louisiana.*

Smith, A., & **Mucedola, A.** (2020). *From geek to chic: Understanding how gender, social status, and relationship status influence portrayals of sexual health messages in teen-based TV shows.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association (NCA), Indianapolis, Indiana.*

Smith, A., **Mucedola, A.**, Holland, S., & Webster, K. (2020). *A content analysis of casual sex, social status, and substance use in teen-based Netflix shows.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), San Francisco, California.*

Mucedola, A. (2020). *Making health social: Effects of health PSA videos on social media.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), San Francisco, California. Top student paper award.*

Mucedola, A., & Yao, S. (2020). *Trump fatigue: Exploring the relationship between perceived media bias and news exhaustion.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), San Francisco, California. Top student paper award.*

Smith, A., Holland, S., Webster, K., & **Mucedola, A.** (2020). *Sexual consent is 'Not' sexy: A content analysis of teenage-based Netflix original shows.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association (ICA), Gold Coast, Australia.*

Mucedola, A., & Smith, A. (2018). *Breaking the cycle: Responses to age representation in menstruation advertising.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Association for Media and Communication (IAMCR), Madrid, Spain.

Mucedola, A. (2018). *An apple a day? Responses to contradictory nutrition information on Facebook*. Paper accepted for presentation at the annual midwinter conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), Norman, OK.

Mucedola, A., Drayton, N., Haynes, A., & Sun, L. (2017). *#RelationshipGoals: The*

influence of parasocial relationships on body satisfaction and consumer habits. Paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association (ICA), Washington, D.C.

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RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

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Summer 2018

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Social Media Supervisor Intern at Outings & Adventures Travel Company
Spring 2016-Spring 2017; Virtual Internship

Radio Production Intern at Galaxy Communications
Spring 2015; Syracuse, New York

AWARDS

2022 Summer Dissertation Fellowship Award, $4,000
2019 Newhouse at Syracuse University Graduate School Master Prize
2017 Vernon E. Rank Outstanding Senior Award in Communication Studies
2017 Lambda Pi Eta, National Communications Honor Society
2016 Tau Sigma, National Transfer Honor Society
2016 Omicron Delta Kappa, National Leadership Honor Society
2015 Mark E. Castiglione Commencement Scholarship

MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

International Communication Association (ICA)
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC)
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STUDY ABROAD

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