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'Responsible Body': Menstrual Education Films and Sex Education in the United States and Scotland, 1970s–1980s

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The provision of menstrual products for free has become one part of the larger push by menstrual activists to make menstrual equity a global priority. Menstrual equity includes addressing and solving concerns that connect menstruation to public health issues, gender equality, and access to complete and comprehensive health and menstrual education. This last point is the focus of this paper. The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill in Scotland did not emerge out of nowhere; neither did legislation across the US that addresses period poverty. Rather, these legal advances are the latest in a complicated and complex fight for menstrual education and healthcare. The Period Products Act's emphasis on 'access'—access to education and to menstrual products—is rooted in Scottish sex and menstrual education. This seemingly subtle difference from American menstrual education reveals how access has historically been integrated into Scottish menstrual education, a comparison particularly visible in the American and Scottish films studied here, *Naturally … a Girl* (1973) and *Having a Period: Menstruation* (1980), respectively.

Introduction

Towards the end of the 1980 Scottish educational film *Having a Period: Menstruation*, a woman, Margaret, speaks with her younger sister about where she can purchase menstrual products. By this point in the film, the audience has learned that Margaret is a trusted source of information about the menstrual cycle, as she has educated her sister (and the viewers) about the female reproductive system and the different menstrual products on the market. Yet there is one more piece of information that Margaret needs to impart: where does one actually buy menstrual products? Margaret informs her sister that not only can she purchase pads or tampons at the pharmacy, but they are sold at supermarkets, as well. The price? 'They're not very expensive', Margaret concludes. This interaction takes less than a minute of screen time, but communicates volumes about who has access to menstrual products, where to find them, and the financial means necessary to obtain them. *Having a Period: Menstruation* frames accessing menstrual products as a crucial part of understanding the menstrual cycle.

Nearly 40 years after *Having a Period: Menstruation*, Monica Lennon, a Member of the Scottish Parliament, introduced the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill (hereafter referred to as the Period Products Act, or the Act) in an attempt to combat period poverty. Becoming law in 2021, the Period Products Act aims to offer free menstrual products, particularly pads and tampons, in easily accessible places, thus lessening the burden for those who need menstrual products and may not be able to afford them. Scotland had already been providing period products free to schools and universities across the country; this act expanded that access to include places like community centers, pharmacies, public toilets, and youth clubs. It also placed a legal obligation on local authorities to provide menstrual products. While Scotland may be the first to pass sweeping national legislation, it is not the only country implementing laws designed to mitigate hardships that make obtaining menstrual products difficult, including the 'tampon tax'.[1] For example, even though the United States has yet to pass any federal legislation to provide menstrual products free of charge or to eliminate the 'tampon tax', the country is home to robust activism addressing numerous avenues of menstrual poverty.[2]

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[1] 'Tampon tax' is the popular term that identifies the sales tax added to purchases of menstrual products. While other basic necessity items, like food, are often exempt from a sales tax, many cities and countries continue to tax menstrual products. In 2004, Kenya removed the tax on pads and tampons, and seven years later the country began distributing free pads in schools in low-income communities (Hallett, 2016). In the summer of 2021, New Zealand began offering period products in all its schools, starting with primary institutions (Ministry of Education, 2021). Removing the 'tampon tax' and providing free menstrual products are only two ways to combat period poverty.

[2] Several major states and cities have passed local legislation, including New York City, which has been providing free menstrual products in public schools, prisons, and homeless shelters since 2016 (NYC Press Office, 2016). That same year, Chicago, and then the entire state of Illinois, removed the tampon tax on menstrual products (Geiger and Garcia, 2016).

The provision of menstrual products for free has become one part of the larger push by menstrual activists to make menstrual equity a global priority. Menstrual equity includes addressing and solving concerns that connect menstruation to public health issues, gender equality, and access to complete and comprehensive health and menstrual education (Hennegan et al., 2021). This last point is the focus of this paper. The Period Products Act did not emerge out of nowhere, nor did the legislation across the US and in other parts of the globe. Rather, these legal advances are the latest in a complicated and complex fight for menstrual education and healthcare.

There are important national differences in this global trend, however. While US menstrual activism to address period poverty has largely focused on issues of cost and funding (such as the 'tampon tax'), the Period Products Act frames menstrual justice around the question of 'access'. The Act's emphasis on 'access'—access to education, access to menstrual products—is rooted in Scottish sex and menstrual education, as the trusted narrator, Margaret, illustrates in *Having a Period: Menstruation*. This seemingly subtle difference from American menstrual education reveals how access and responsibility is and has been historically integrated into Scottish menstrual culture, particularly in the Scottish educational film studied here.[3] The language around menstruation found in the Period Products Act, then, is not a large departure from familiar narratives.

In this paper, I analyze two menstrual education films—one from the US and one from Scotland—and demonstrate how each outlines different meanings of menstruation and bodily responsibility via education, access, and gender roles. The two films here, *Naturally ... a Girl* (1973, US) and *Having a Period: Menstruation* (1980, Scotland), are rich primary sources to dissect what messages appeared in menstrual education films during the 1970s and early 1980s. Scholars have largely neglected these two films, in particular, and the menstrual education of the era, instead concentrating more on the 1940s–1960s (Freeman, 2008; Kennard, 1989; Vostral, 2008, 2011). These films, however, offer ample opportunities for comparison: they were both aimed, generally, at the same age and gender demographics, they communicated much of the same information and messages, and they came from relatively the

Most recently, the US Congress passed legislation, as part of a Covid-19 relief bill, that allowed people to use health savings and flexible spending accounts on menstrual products, thus classifying them as medical expenses (Congress.gov, 2020). Starting in 2022, California, the most populous state in the US, began providing menstrual products for free in public schools, community colleges, and the California State University System, potentially reaching millions of students (Williams, 2021). In January 2022, Ann Arbor, Michigan required all public restrooms to provide free menstrual products, becoming the first city in the US to provide them in all public bathrooms (Harring and Alsharif, 2021).

[3] Scottish menstrual education has its own extended history related to the United Kingdom and England in particular. I am not, in this article, examining the bigger history of UK menstrual or sex education.

same time period.[4] At 13 minutes in length, *Naturally … a Girl* emerged as the decade's go-to menstrual education film in the US. *Having a Period: Menstruation* is a Scottish-made film and represents several divergent aspects of menstrual education in the country.[5] While a few years younger than *Naturally … a Girl*, it contains many similar characteristics in terms of length (16 minutes) and general menstrual knowledge. Both films were aimed at students or young people aged 10–15. A close reading of these films illustrates how Scotland's more holistic take towards menstrual education led to the Period Products Act of 2021. While the specifics of the Act are further outlined in the introduction of this collection, I show how the prominence of 'access' that occurs in the Act had a larger history in Scottish menstrual education, as expressed in *Having a Period: Menstruation*.

Perhaps one of the most crucial and complex concept that appears in menstrual education surrounds who is responsible for managing aspects of the menstrual cycle—most prominently menstrual fluid but also cramps and menstrual products—in public. Who is supposed to ensure that a menstruator is never caught without the proper products? Who is to ensure that a menstruator knows exactly what to do when they get their first period? The menstruator? Parents? Schools? The government? While the answers to these questions may vary, there continues to be a social expectation that someone will be responsible for managing the menstrual cycle, especially in public. Historically, menstrual education films more often communicated that the responsibility lies with the person menstruating. Menstrual activists and laws like the Period Products Act, however, complicate that message and remove some of that individual responsibility by placing it with the state.

The final version of the Period Products Act contained the term 'responsible' no fewer than 18 times, with the phrase 'responsible body' used most often. While the Act used the expression with specific intention and identified a 'responsible body' as either a local authority, education provider, or specific public service body (Scottish Parliament, 2021), I contend that there is a larger historical definition of 'responsible body' linked to menstruation and menstrual education. As I will show in these two films, the menstruators themselves become the responsible persons tasked with

[4] Neither film provides education about transgender or non-binary individuals. Both films use binary language to address the menstrual cycle without any mention of differing gender expressions or gender identities.

[5] Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis have documented several Scottish sex education films screened in schools or public places throughout the 20th century (Davidson and Davis, 2005, 2012). *Having a Period: Menstruation* is one of the few films that centers mainly on menstruation. Additionally, the archives for menstrual education films can be sporadic and difficult to find. The National Library of Scotland has digitized *Having a Period: Menstruation*, and the film is available for public viewing. Its wide accessibility and the fact that the film concentrates on menstruation make it a rich resource for analysis and inclusion in this study.

knowing not only their physical bodies, but also how to respond to the period and how to adjust (or choose not to adjust) their behavior in public. The films convey how menstruators are the ones in charge of their bodies, thus as 'responsible persons' they must manage their 'responsible bodies'. Lastly, the responsible body also means one's responsibility towards the socially constructed and changing understandings of morals about menstruation and sex.

Menstrual Education Immersed in Sex Education

The history of menstrual education is not a standalone topic but one that must be understood as part of the broader genre of sex education. The films in this paper emerged not solely out of the topic of menstrual education, but from the more comprehensive approach of sex instruction. From the mid-20th century, educators often tied menstrual education to sex education for several reasons: both topics dealt with the body, both concerned the act of sex and procreation, and both were steeped in social controversy around issues of morals and modesty. Yet there was another prominent reason that menstrual education became inextricably linked to sex education: menstrual education was one way of teaching about sex, or integrating the topic into a curriculum, without having to explicitly teach about sexual activity and conception. As Sharra L. Vostral has found, menstrual education is one narrative component of what she has called 'menstrual passing' (2008). By linking menstrual education with sex education, and in some cases submersing it in sex education, educators could pass menstrual education off as different forms or kinds of sex education, depending on the situation. Educators and health professionals sometimes presented menstrual education as a substitute for larger (and usually necessary) sex education. While many people may assume that American sex education was exclusively the responsibility of schools, in the early decades of the 20th century sex education received a great deal of attention in public cinemas, lectures, church groups, civic communities, health clinics, and promotion by the government.

Several scholars of sex education have focused on issues of morality in connection to how sex education was formed, the messages in it, and how people responded to the subject (Irvine, 2004; Lord, 2010). Sex education organizations and the US government often grafted sex instruction to general understandings of sexual morality. Even if some parents may have objected to menstrual education in public or school settings, the topic was one form of sex education that many found suitable for women and girls.

At the turn of the 20th century, as scholar Robin Jensen found, 'social' was a known euphemism for sex. 'Hygiene' was a more capacious term that included nutrition, medicine, and cleanliness in addition to sexual activity (Jensen, 2010: 1). Society

understood the popular term ‘social hygiene’ to reference sexual health, including topics such as abortion, birth control, and venereal diseases. By the late 1910s, the term ‘sex’ replaced ‘social’, bringing ‘sex hygiene’ into more common use. The term sex hygiene maintained popularity through the 1920s, when ‘sex education’ and ‘sex instruction’ entered the mainstream vocabulary. In the 1930s and throughout the 1940s, educators would use the three terms—hygiene, education, and instruction—interchangeably, although other reformers balked at the use of ‘hygiene’ during this period. After World War II, in the US, ‘family life education’ became the nomenclature for sex education in school settings. The word ‘family’ disguised mention of sex and family life education became an easily marketable and digestible term. Oftentimes, schools couched family life education in other courses, such as physical education, biology, or health classes. It was within these family life education classes that school menstrual education emerged. The term ‘hygiene’ persisted throughout the 1950s as educators and product companies used it to identify ‘menstrual hygiene’ as one aspect that students should learn.

In both the US and Scotland, educators often included menstrual education in larger sex education curricula. Although throughout the 20th century many physicians, educators, and filmmakers actively created and disseminated sex education material, anti-sex education advocates remained skeptical and antagonistic. Pro-sex education supporters had varying reasons for wanting to teach sex and diverse approaches on how to do that. Likewise, those against sex education argued that the messages embodied ideas of promiscuity, obscenity, pornography, or socialism. (Freeman, 2008: 97–99; Irvine, 2002: 35–62; Moran, 2000: 156–193; Schaefer, 1999: 165–216; Vostral, 2011). To this day, American sex education is uneven and sporadic, with no federal requirement that schools must teach the subject. As such, the degree to which children and young adults are exposed to menstrual education in schools varies widely. The subject still remains a point of contention.

Scottish sex education, historically, has also not been without controversy. The integration of the topic into schools prompted debate and discussion about how sex education should be taught and by whom. Before the 1950s, sex instruction in schools received a fair amount of disagreement between activists in the social hygiene and social purity movements. Because of this contention, little sex education appeared in Scottish schools, save for some sporadic and makeshift lessons. In Aberdeen, for example, schoolgirls received instruction from a nurse that included ‘cleanliness at menstrual times’ (Davidson and Davis, 2012: 187). The theme of menstruation as a concern of cleanliness remained prevalent throughout the 1950s (Davidson and Davis, 2012: 193). In the 1960s, some Scottish schools shifted their sex education programs to include

more diverse topics, discussing menstruation alongside puberty, sexual intercourse, and nocturnal emissions. Notably, during this time a few schools incorporated television shows into the curriculum, such as *Living and Growing*, a show aimed at 10-to-13-year-olds. Just as in the US, teachers, parents, and students praised the use of film and television, claiming that they created 'a more relaxed discussion of sexual issues within both the school and the home' (Davidson and Davis, 2012: 201; Anon, 1947: 215).

By the 1970s, the ad hoc nature of Scottish school sex education was in many ways lacking, despite numerous initiatives over the previous two decades to bring more attention to the subject. One survey of the era found that only 10% of primary schools included some type of sex education, with only 7% including menstrual education for girls. Even fewer schools, only 5%, reported the occasional use of media like film, with several educational authorities refusing to allow the screening of sex education films in schools (Davidson and Davis, 2012: 201).[6] Yet during this time, the local Perth and Kinross Education Committee approved the use of sex instruction films for primary school children. This allowed individual school principals to decide whether or not to show sex education films, as long as they consulted with parents throughout the process. This relationship permitted parents to withdraw their children from the screenings if they objected (Anon, 1970).

While menstrual education had appeared in public spaces since the 19th century, including in books, lectures, and pamphlets, the topic emerged in sex education films during the late-1920s and 1930s, opening another avenue for instruction. American corporations led the way in menstrual education during this time, recognizing the ability to capture the attention (and consumer practices) of young girls (Kennard, 1989). Many product companies in the US and Scotland created complimentary pamphlets and booklets for distribution to young girls. This practice was not unusual. The companies often framed the literature as educational, and many of the pamphlets outlined the basic components of the female reproductive system (Freidenfelds, 2009). But these materials were also forms of advertising for the companies and a way of securing brand loyalty early: a tactic that brand companies used throughout the 20th century (Vostral, 2011: 51). In many cases, companies provided their written material alongside a menstrual education film that they had co-produced or co-created.

[6] Not every film received a warm welcome. One sex education film called *Growing Up* apparently featured nudity, close-up shots of sex organs, and images of sexual intercourse and masturbation. Despite not having any power to stop the screening of the film, the then Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher warned schools not to show the film to their pupils (Deans, 1971). While sex instruction films across the US and Europe had showcased nudity before, usually those films were screened only for male soldiers in military units. *Growing Up* joined a list of sex instruction films that featured explicit nudity or sexual acts that filmmakers made for educational purposes.

More often, teachers and critics praised these menstrual education materials, including the films, for their ability to teach a somewhat controversial subject (Ghanoui, 2020).

In particular, questions around menstrual education often mirrored ones involved with sex education. Two common questions presented both to and by teachers, parents, product companies, and filmmakers was who had the right to teach children about their bodies and how that should be done. Many sex and menstrual education films addressed these questions by creating the idea of an 'authority figure' who delivered information about sex, menstruation, and the body. This authority figure served as both an educational center for students, but was also used to create a sense of trust among the school, product companies, and parental figures. Throughout the 20th century, many conservative American critics argued that implementing school sex and menstrual education programs would usurp parental authority by stripping parents of their moral responsibilities, leaving school children defenseless against a supposed sex-filled society creeping towards the door of immorality. Conversely, while most sex education advocates wanted the topic in schools, they were not uniform in their methods, with some noting that menstrual and sex instruction needed to start in the home first. Thus, even some educators and physicians placed the family as the primary instigator of this conversation, identifying the school as the secondary source of information.

Naturally … a Girl (US) and *Having a Period: Menstruation* (Scotland)

In the 1970s, menstrual education films continued to screen in schools and in community centers across the globe. In the US, the repertoire of films included the Disney/Kotex-produced *The Story of Menstruation* (1946) and *Molly Grows Up* (1953), backed by the Personal Products Corporation of Johnson & Johnson. These aging films, while still popular, did not represent the wide demographic that product companies wanted to reach; nor did they reflect many new informational and documentary films released in the 1960s and 1970s. *Naturally … a Girl* was a replacement for these out-of-date films.

Naturally … a Girl uses interviews to connect with the viewers and a documentary-style form of storytelling to impart information—a relatively new method for menstrual instruction films of the time. The filmmakers, Cinemakers, Inc., and producers, Johnson & Johnson (aiming to promote Modess, a brand of menstrual pads), open the film by asking different people about their changing bodies. The film then shows an animation of a developing female body, and bounces back-and-forth between the interviews and animation as viewers learn about menstruation, how often it occurs, and the organs of the reproductive system. Also mixed in with the animation are close-up shots of a person's hands as they show different ways to wear menstrual pads: the belt, elastic loops on underwear, or the 'new' kind of pad that features adhesive on the underside.

The last third of the film centers on actions menstruators can do during their periods, such as showers, exercise, and social events. Information on how to use and dispose of products is threaded throughout the entire film.

The Scottish film, *Having a Period: Menstruation*, contains much of the same information as *Naturally ... a Girl* and both films attempt to create a warm connection to their audiences, but the Scottish film's delivery and framing varies radically. Unlike the documentary approach of its American sibling, *Having a Period: Menstruation* has a story with a plot, albeit a slim one. A woman, Margaret, and her sister go to the supermarket and pharmacy; while on the trip, the younger sister asks about their purchases, which includes menstrual pads. Margaret explains the menstrual cycle, sex, and reproduction as they make their way back home, unpack the groceries, and make tea. Unlike many US menstrual education films, including *Naturally ... a Girl*, *Having a Period: Menstruation* does not contain any obvious name-brand product placement: the Scottish Health Education Unit sponsored, Markcrown Limited produced, and Boulton-Hawker Films distributed the film.

Voice of Authority

To create a trustworthy connection between audience and film and to circumvent controversy over who could teach sex and menstruation, menstrual education films often utilized an authority figure. The 'authority figure' characters embody a responsible and truthful figure, oftentimes a parent, teacher, nurse, or sibling. Early menstrual education films used different versions of the authority figure.[7] The authority figure served as the bridge between the audience and their parents or teachers, thus functioning as a vehicle to normalize conversations around the period, sex, and the changing pubescent body. As Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis found, even as late as the 1970s the Scottish Education Department concluded that sex education needed to be included in schools while it also stressed that the subject 'was a joint responsibility' between educational institutions and parents (Davidson and Davis, 2012: 202). The authority figure attended to that purpose.

Both *Naturally ... a Girl* and *Having a Period: Menstruation* used authority figures in different ways, but the authority figures in each film also embodied another idea of a 'responsible body'—one who had the expertise and the gravitas in society to teach younger students or children about menstruation. In this case, the authority figure had

[7] *The Story of Menstruation* does this through a narrator, for more see Mariah Mendes Schaefer (2018). *Molly Grows Up* has several authority figures: the school nurse functions as the primary authority figure, while the mother and sister are secondary authority figures.

the responsibility of preparing the menstruator to become their own 'responsible body', able to manage their menstrual cycle and fluid. The responsibility here is twofold: first is the part of the authority figure to prime the young or future menstruator and second is on the menstruator to handle their cycles according to socially accepted ideas.

Naturally … a Girl had a female narrator who functioned as the main authority figure, but the film also used other menstruators in the role to create a sense of trustworthiness through the collective. Employing montages, *Naturally … a Girl* narrativizes the notion that all menstruators are different yet experience the same problems and concerns growing up. This forms a team-like bond between the audience and the authority figure. The playful and colorful film uses interviews as a way of connecting with the audience and features menstruators from different ages and racial backgrounds. The film promotes the message that 'girls', in particular, may be different in numerous distinctions, but they can find commonality through the menstrual cycle. The global menstrual equity campaigns of today, including the Period Poverty Act, often highlight diversity or disadvantaged groups. The emphasis on diversity in *Naturally … a Girl* served as a predictor of how menstrual equity notions continue to complicate the idea of unity through difference. At the opening of the film, the audience sees a title card while the narrator exclaims, 'find two girls who are exactly ALIKE!'. Numerous images of different menstruators flash on the screen, most of them smiling towards the camera. The sequence ends on a set of identical twins playing with their hair. One of them wears her hair long and straight while the other pulls hers back in a ponytail, away from her face. This suggests that the notion of 'alikeness', then, does not exist even in identical twins. 'Girls are as different as people can be … naturally', the narrator deduces before the film's title card appears on the screen.

Through learning with each other (and alongside the menstruators in the film), the audience becomes its own authority figure and accepts some of the responsibility for understanding and dealing with the menstrual cycle. *Naturally … a Girl* better encapsulates menstruators as multifaceted beings than its predecessors. By the end of the film, the narrator is introduced as a woman who, as she says, used to dream of acting and is now an actress. She reassures the audience that the reality is better than dreaming and what follows is a montage of working women: a nurse, teacher, police officer, flight attendant, secretary, tennis player, lineworker, and mother. The last line of the film sums up its overall 'girl power' message with a young girl (still missing baby teeth) who concludes that being a woman 'is better than being a boy'. In *Naturally … a Girl*, the narrator serves as the main authority figure while the other menstruators in the film function as trusted peers. Yet these are nameless people with no specific relationship to the audience or, save the case of sisters, each other.

Having a Period: Menstruation uses the voice of authority differently, by leaning into a trusted familial connection. *Having a Period: Menstruation* opens on a residential street, with different menstruators narrating their experiences of learning about menstruation or having their first period. One voice-over mentions reading the word 'menstruation' in a magazine and being confused about its meaning. Having learned that it is a synonym for 'period', she concludes her thoughts with 'menstruation, it just means having a period'. Another woman narrates that her teacher told her that she should carry on with her life as normal while she is on her period. As her voice-over tells this story, the audience enters her bedroom where she explains that bleeding can be normal when it comes from periods. This is Margaret, the film's main narrator. Margaret and her younger sister, Janet, go to the supermarket and the chemist (pharmacy) to buy menstrual products. The younger sister spends a few moments inspecting the wall of period products and watches intently as Margaret makes her purchase. When she describes the use of 'sanitary towels' to Janet, Margaret explains that their use is to stop the blood from staining clothing. The film frames staining as the primary reason for using menstrual pads, thus connecting the period to notions of dirtiness or uncleanliness.

In the case of *Having a Period: Menstruation*, Margaret, as the older sister, functions as the expert. Her experience comes from not only having a period but presumably from learning about it from her own authority figure, whether that was a mother, teacher, or medical professional. While the children mention both a mother and father, neither parent appears in the film. Margaret assumes the parental role of educating her younger siblings about the female body and the changes that happen when one goes through puberty.

Sex and the Changing Body

Both films educate about pubescent bodies but *Having a Period: Menstruation* uses plain English and images of a nude body, which contrasts with the euphemistic nature of *Naturally ... a Girl*. The American film ignores a discussion of conception and does not show any nude images of a developing menstruator's body. Instead, the film uses animation to show a vagina, uterus, Fallopian tubes, and ovaries, and the process of ovulation and menstruation.

While *Naturally ... a Girl* mentions growing bodies, it features them through the use of dance, a process that sexualizes the young menstruators and stresses stereotypical constructions of white femininity. In the film's first use of dance, a young woman with dark hair, dressed in a full-body, tight leotard performs basic ballet moves. Her body is then silhouetted and the film transitions into animation of the reproductive

organs. Later in the film, a group of six young people, who the narrator identifies as girls, are seen dancing together. They are of numerous races and wear different colored leotards and tights, but the narrator notes that all the girls are 12 years old. This scene accentuates the dichotomy of sameness-difference: all the girls may be 12 years old but they exhibit unique traits and are at varying stages of physical development. Some still possess the prepubescent physique of young children while others have fuller breasts and wider hips. The dancing creates a sense of performance: the camera is above the girls and pans down as they lie on a black background, thus giving the viewer a shot of the girls' entire bodies. The allure of this shot is created through a sense of voyeurism, as the audience gazes at the girls moving their bodies in a tight space, close to each other. The choreographed routine the girls participate in is a simple dance that symbolizes how they all are going or will go through puberty, but will still have varying menstrual cycles. The girls perform the same routine but at different speeds and skill levels, so the movements are never in sync and always slightly off-kilter. Furthermore, sporadic moments of fragmentation occur as the camera pans to show close-ups of each girl's face. Later in the film, when discussing cramps, a pubescent girl in a bright red leotard is featured in a slow tilt up so her body is presented in quarters: feet and lower legs, buttocks with hands to the side, chest and shoulders, and then neck and head. Even though *Naturally ... a Girl* does not mention conception, the film contains many elements of sex that strengthen social ideas of female sexuality, heteronormativity, and the male gaze.

Having a Period: Menstruation takes a more comprehensive approach to education by including sex—albeit briefly—and a nude female body as part of the educational process. The film recognizes that access to menstrual education must integrate knowledge of the changing body, conception, and how to manage the menstrual cycle; particularly menstrual fluid and how to acquire menstrual products. As found in the Period Products Act, these ideas of access in the film foreshadow important components of the Act, such as pricing, acquiring products, and general understandings of how to responsibly manage a menstruating body.

Having a Period: Menstruation casually references sex in a matter-of-fact way that attempts to normalize both sex and menstruation. While the film does not dwell on it, when explaining to her siblings how conception occurs, Margaret outlines that an egg can become a baby if the woman has 'made love' to a man and fertilization has occurred. While a few menstrual education films mention fertilization, rarely do they address sex. Even though Margaret uses the euphemism 'made love' to describe sex, the message is not lost. It does, however, connect both sexual acts and conception to the concept of love, which alludes to steady relationships or, potentially, marriage.

In addition to acknowledging sex, *Having a Period: Menstruation* has an image of a fully nude woman, thus making body knowledge more realistic and accessible. The film features the woman from the front before an animation shows where her reproductive organs are. The mature woman has breasts and pubic hair; audiences learn about the physical development of the female body through this one image alone. The film presents somewhat contradictory messages of varying levels of education. The older sister explains basic terminology to Janet, saying that blood comes from a hole between her legs called her vagina. Yet, the film shows the image of the nude woman without an explicit explanation of her body changing from pre-pubescent to pubescent. Thus, at this point in the film, the audience must make an assumption about how female bodies evolve from childhood to maturity. Only later does Margaret explain that one sign that a girl may start menstruating soon is her own changing body. In addition to larger breasts, Margaret elucidates, hair starts to grow around a woman's vagina and in her underarm areas. *Having a Period: Menstruation*, however, does not sexualize its characters or the female body; rather, it puts a woman's body up front, but desexualizes it to normalize and accept changing bodies.

The Idea of Normality

While the Western social understanding of periods may be that menstruators often hide the existence of periods and the accompanying products, both Scottish and American menstrual education films of the 1970s and 1980s actively worked to destigmatize the cycle and menstruators' relationship to it. The notion of normality was key in numerous menstrual education films and *Naturally … a Girl* and *Having a Period: Menstruation* follow this rule. Yet, both films place the responsibility of normality directly with the menstruators. It is their responsibility to know when their periods are coming, how to use and dispose of menstrual products, and what activities (such as exercise) they can participate in.

Product companies often dispersed pamphlets alongside their films that not only recounted information on the menstrual cycle but also included calendars where young menstruators could document their periods. *Naturally … a Girl* also features an animated calendar [**Figure 1**]. The calendars serve two distinct purposes: first, they transmit the notion that young menstruators should never be unprepared for their periods, and thus never be caught in a situation without menstrual products or where they would bleed on their clothes. With terms like 'regular' and 'scheduled', the calendar in *Naturally … a Girl* emphasizes the normality of menstruation: it comes every month and can be monitored. By tracking their monthly cycles, menstruators should know exactly when their next period will come, and thus not inconvenience society by accidentally exposing their menses. Tracking and calculating the next menstrual cycle is a task that contributes to menstruators being responsible persons with responsible bodies.

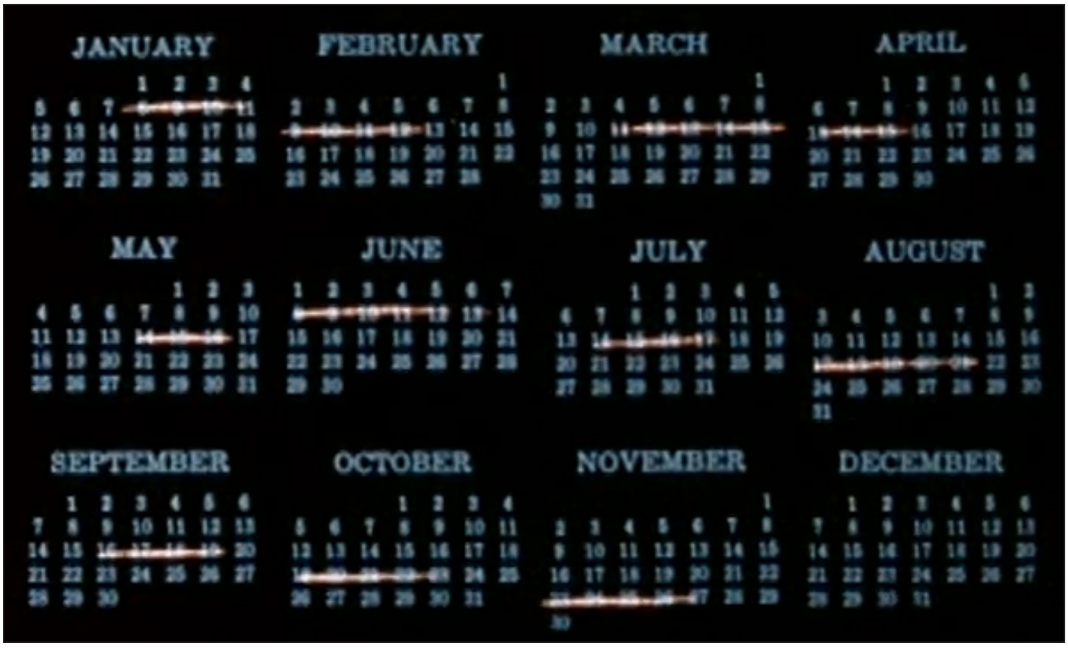

Figure 1: Still image from *Naturally … a Girl* shows a calendar featuring all 12 months. Five days of each month are crossed off, symbolizing a menstruator marking their cycle. Image: Prelinger Archives for the Internet Archive, Creative Commons in Public Domain.

Second, the calendars teach about sex. Even though the film does not mention sex, the emphasis on monitoring one's cycle is a way for the filmmakers to promote abstinence, patrol a missed period, and serves as a warning about unwed pregnancies. As mentioned, few American menstrual education films openly addressed sex, instead leaving the topic couched in euphemistic language or forgoing it completely. In addition to the calendars, *Naturally … a Girl* highlights the actions that menstruators could do on their period and that nobody would know about their cycle. Thus, the hidden nature of the period is another way the film homes in on normalcy: menstruators can participate in all their regular activities and no one will suspect that they are bleeding. The calendars, then, are for private purposes, to be used only by the menstruators.

Having a Period: Menstruation also crafts normality through its use of plain language and terminology to explain that menstruation is 'nothing to be frightened or embarrassed about. It's all a very normal part of growing up'. 'Normal' was often used to address the continued expectation that menstruators maintain their participation in everyday society. While it communicates that menstruators need not be worried or embarrassed about their period, that message does not allow much room for abnormal or painful menstruation, particularly when 'normality' is unachievable. One aspect of the Period Products Act is to ensure that menstruators have access to products so they may continue their participation in daily life in Scotland, particularly in schools

or other educational institutions. The construction of normality in the Act, then, is that one's period should not negatively interfere with their 'normal life'. By providing menstrual products, the state is transferring some responsibility from individuals to the government to help facilitate menstruators' 'normality'.

Having a Period: Menstruation supports the gender binary that menstruation is something that 'happens to all girls', and this claim is repeated several times throughout the film. Yet, it also links female knowledge to male knowledge. The two sisters have a little brother: as he helps unpack the groceries, he pulls out a package of menstrual pads and inquires as to what they are. Using a pamphlet she got from school, Margaret explains to her sister and brother about the female reproductive system. The brother asks questions along with his sister, probing about the size of an egg and the process of ovulation. The film draws humor from the little brother, however, by having him seem perplexed by the menstrual cycle and asking questions like 'don't tell me there's something else?' after his oldest sister explains the average 28-day cycle. The brother's presence showcases how understanding the menstrual cycle is imperative for everyone, despite one's gender. At one point, the brother claims 'this is all girl's stuff, it's got nothing to do with me'. Margaret, the oldest sister, immediately counters her brother's statement by equating menstruation with 'human stuff', and part of a larger understanding of the physical and social construction of menstruation. Margaret's attempt to break the binary by equating menstruation with 'human stuff' provides some groundwork for the language of the Period Products Act. Instead of using terms like 'women', 'girls', or 'menstruators', the Act uses 'persons who need to use [period products]' or 'pupils'. By making access to menstrual products about 'human stuff'—to use Margaret's label—the Act deletes nearly all references to gender or the gender binary. Furthermore, the word 'pupil' connotes similar accessibility questions that pop up in the Period Products Act. Margaret explains the differences between press-on menstrual pads, the menstrual belt, and tampons. Margaret's comment that disposable products are best reveals several social perceptions of menstrual products: first, discretion functions as a large part, as Margaret says that one can flush the used products down the toilet or dispose of them in a trash bin; second, she mentions that women can find directions on their use in the pamphlets that accompany the products, giving a subtle nod to the product companies as a perceived reliable source of information and education on the topic; and third, Margaret says that the products are not very expensive and can be found in both supermarkets and pharmacies. Acknowledging the price is another way of reinforcing the normality of menstrual periods. The technology used during one's period does not cost much, according to the film, and is thus not an inconvenience.

Audience

Naturally … a Girl screened in both public venues and in school settings, potentially reaching audiences of school-aged children, teenagers, and those even older. The film played across the US with showings, for example, in Oregon, New Jersey, and Florida.[8] The showing in Florida occurred two decades after the film's initial release and played for fourth grade girls (with parental permission) (Badie, 1993). Furthermore, Detroit local television aired two showings of a program called 'Naturally a Girl'. One appeared in a television guide for airing on Tuesday, November 10, 1981 at 2.45 pm. Another issue of the same newspaper advertised an additional scheduled airing for Tuesday, December 29, 1981, also at 2.45 pm (Anon, 1981a; Anon, 1981b). While documentation of showings may be sporadic, they do indicate that *Naturally … a Girl* played across the US and reached a relatively wide age demographic. *Naturally … a Girl*, like its predecessors, was viewed for decades after its production and the makers of the film continued to reproduce its handy booklet, *Growing Up and Liking It* (Anon, 1972), into the 1990s.

The diverse showings of *Naturally … a Girl* in schools, civic communities, and on public television, exposed how educators and leaders played the film for audiences of numerous demographics, across age, class, race, and economic lines. Given that Johnson & Johnson sponsored the film, the company had a strong stake in making the film as accessible and easy-to-understand as possible, one of its intentions was to build brand loyalty. *Naturally … a Girl* does not include an explanation of price or where to buy products, thus that form of accessibility is missing from the lesson. This information may have been attainable elsewhere, however, such as in an accompanying pamphlet.

Having a Period: Menstruation emphasizes accessibility in several ways: accessibility of products (and a variety of products), accessibility of education, and accessibility of bonding or social connections around menstruation. While the film frames accessibility as important, it does so through the lens of commercialization and capitalism. The film explains the price differences of products, and where and how to purchase them. Yet, it does so without showcasing specific brands or products. Only the most eagle-eyed of audience members may be able to distinguish specific brands in the supermarket scene. Thus, the ideas of audience and accessibility in *Naturally … a Girl* and *Having a Period: Menstruation* have similarity—the idea of consumerism—but the films impart this knowledge in different ways.

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[8] An article in the *Herald-News* noted that the Girls' Club of Clifton, New Jersey was holding a program on health care and growing up (Anon, 1980). The program was called 'Naturally a Girl' and featured a film. It is plausible that the film screened at this showing was a different one than the 1973 film discussed here. 'Naturally a Girl' was not an unheard of title for public education programs aimed at young girls about their bodies. There was also a menstrual education program in California called 'Naturally a Girl' (Anon, 1987b.: 5; Anon 1988: B4).

Conclusion

In 1981, Tampax sponsored a study documenting Americans' general attitudes towards menstruation, concluding that many in the country still were not comfortable with the topic. Through interviews with men and women, the survey found that most Americans did not believe menstruation 'should be discussed openly', although the report did not outline what 'openly' actually meant (Tampax Inc., 1981). Presumably, Tampax identified 'openly' as conversations that occurred in public places, in mixed-gender company, or among different age groups. Younger people were more likely to have learned about menstruation in school than those over the age of 21, and they were more likely to cite health clinics as a source of information.

While Tampax outlined stereotypical understandings of the menstrual cycle, the report buried one interesting statistic three quarters into the write-up. Ninety-one percent of respondents approved of schools teaching menstruation, while over four-fifths wanted to see sex education in schools. This study was another example of product companies, educators, and even society as a whole struggling to fully distinguish between menstrual and sex education. These statistics may seem like there was a clear demarcation between the two subjects, but many educators taught menstrual education as a part of sex education (Freeman, 2008: 6). This raised problems because both subjects incurred controversy connected to larger understandings of morality, medical science, and questions of 'appropriateness'.

Only several years later, in 1987 Aberdeen, Scotland's *Evening Express* featured a short article that was, essentially, an advertisement for Tambrands Inc. The write-up blames mothers for their children's lack of menstrual education: a theme that had been commonplace for decades. The story does not tout the quality of the product, its price, or even many of the stereotypes associated with menstrual product companies, such as discretion and secrecy. Instead, the article addresses how surprising it is to see 'articulate and confident mothers … chicken out' when trying to speak with their daughters about menstruation. If they attempted the subject at all, the article contends, Scottish mothers often only 'le[ft] a book on [their daughters'] bed' (Anon, 1987a). This was such a problem that less than two-thirds of menstruators had learned about the menstrual cycles from their parents. The product company, however, had a solution: mothers could write to the company to receive two booklets (one for the mother and one for the daughter), a kit for the child, and a packet of ten tampons with a holder. These complimentary items, the article subtly communicates, would not only aid the mother but also serve as an educational tool for her (and thus her daughter) given that they lack the resources elsewhere.

A report from a US menstrual product company and a newspaper advertisement from a Scottish one may seem like different types of text for comparison, but they both indicate that menstrual education was lacking in numerous ways, either in schools or from parents. Access, then, was and remains an important understanding of the menstrual cycle: access to education and access to products. The responsible bodies also existed in two distinct forms: the individuals responsible for managing their menstrual cycle and the corporations who wanted to be responsible for providing products and educational material. Films like *Naturally … a Girl* and *Having a Period: Menstruation* support the notion of responsible bodies, placing the onus on the individual menstruators.

The two films discussed here only represent a small portion of menstrual and sex education in the US and Scotland. On the surface, the films may seem surprisingly similar, but a closer examination shows how delicate messages about the changing body, language around menstruation, and the discussion of menstrual products illustrate the societal importance of menstrual health. The American film, *Naturally … a Girl*, emphasizes connections between education and the growing (and sexualized) teenage body, while the Scottish film, *Having a Period: Menstruation*, leans into the links between education and access. Done subtly, these constructions, however, address larger cultural differences between how young and teenage menstruators should be educated about the period and what that means for who should control and be responsible for menstruation. More so, these messages nod to larger societal emphases about the value of menstrual health and contemporary discussion about product access and knowledge. The authority figure(s) in both films offer a trustworthy connection between viewer and film, hoping to persuade the audience to believe the messages they are receiving. The films are not without fault, but as the Tampax Report and Aberdeen's *Evening Express* illustrate in a small way, young people were not learning about the menstrual cycle and something had to fill that gap. Menstrual education films (and product companies) often served that purpose.

Today, the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 attempts to combat menstrual stigma by providing products and opening up ways to menstrual education. While offering products alone is not enough to battle negative social constructions of menstruation, the Act shifts some aspects of the 'responsible body' from the individual directly to the state. Unlike in the US, where cities or states are focusing predominately on the 'tampon tax' as the main avenue of tackling period poverty, the Act highlights access as a critical point of menstrual management. Scotland's approach in becoming the 'responsible body' is rooted in a deeper history of menstrual education that includes a more holistic valuing of the menstruating body and menstrual management.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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