



The Sexualization of Menstruation: On Rape, Tampons, and ‘Prostitutes’

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Abstract

“The sexualization of menstruation perpetuates harmful stereotypes and undermines gender equality. This study examines its intersections with rape culture, commodification, and gender perceptions. Using feminist theories and discourse analysis, it investigates how menstruation is sexualized through themes of rape, tampons, and derogatory labels. Commercialization reinforces this notion, contributing to gender inequality and stifling discourse. By dismantling these narratives, society can promote gender equality and foster inclusivity. Menstruation is a pervasive yet often overlooked aspect of gender-based discrimination. This research explores its societal implications, shedding light on the objectification and exploitation that occur. The study analyzes narratives and languages contributing to this phenomenon, highlighting the normalization of objectification through rape culture. Additionally, it examines the commercialization of menstruation, particularly within the tampon industry, and its inadvertent reinforcement of shame and sexualization. The derogatory label ‘prostitutes’ is also scrutinized for its role in demeaning women and equating their worth with reproductive functions. The implications of sexualizing menstruation are dire, including perpetuating gender inequality and infringing upon bodily autonomy. By understanding these intersections, society can engage in larger conversations surrounding gender-based violence and discrimination. This research calls for a collective effort to challenge societal narratives and debunk the sexualization of menstruation, ultimately promoting gender equality and creating a more inclusive environment for all.”

Keyword: Sexualization; Menstruation; Gender-Based Discrimination; Rape Culture; Objectification; Commodification; Gender Equality; Feminist Theories; Discourse Analysis; Tampons; Derogatory Labels; Prostitutes; Gender-Based Violence; Gender Discrimination

Introduction

Menarche is a pivotal event in sexual development. For girls, it marks a transition from childhood (culturally constructed as asexual) to womanhood (a sexualized, objectified other). Bodies become sexually marked through reproductive potential and pubertal development. Research has shown that girls who experience menarche celebrate this transition [1]. These studies have shown that girls rarely

make a connection between menstruation and reproduction or sexuality [1] and, when they do, react negatively to this association. Previous studies have relied on surveys, short-answer questionnaires, or written narratives [2-6], and are thus limited by researchers’ interpretations. Work using interviews has often accessed post-adolescent populations [7], thereby relying on reconstructed narratives that may not accurately depict thought processes as they occur during the early years of menstruation; initial understandings are

likely reinterpreted in light of later accumulated experiences. Janet Lee [8] found some evidence linking menarche and sexuality that relied on narratives from interviewees ages 18 to 80. Finally, many important texts in this literature predate the turn of the century. Stubbs, et al. [9] explored how the phenomenon of the sexualization of girls might affect girls' experiences of menstruation. Given that studies on the sexualization of girls emerged in the early nineties, corresponding with the increasing cultural presence of the process itself, the fact that few salient studies postdate this era may offer some insight into why themes of sexuality have not been prominent.

Adolescent girls raised in this cultural context may be more likely to highlight the sexual dimension of their menses. Although gender scholars debate the difference between sex and gender, theorists have argued that sex, rather than being a "naturally" determined biological fact, is socially constructed [10,11]. A substantial portion of such work draws on cases of intersex individuals to elucidate how one's supposedly biological sex can be based on cultural definitions of the gender categories of man and woman [10,11]. This literature shows that central to the definition of "female" is reproductive potential Anne FS, et al. [11] and, therefore, menarche and menstruation. Therefore, sex and gender blur when discussing menstruation. Consequently, I chose to interchange the terms female and woman, referring to one sex or gender category for the sake of this paper. Despite my terminology, it is important to recognize that many people born with "female" physiology are not identified as women. Moreover, many people born without this physiology have been identified as women. However, the sample of this study is comprised of women-identified "females" and maintains a focus on this population, although the findings have implications for the aforementioned groups to be explored in future research.

Extant research concerning young adolescents and menarche has primarily focused on attitudes, knowledge, preparation, and outcomes. Although pre- and post-menarcheal girls have reported that they feel prepared for menarche [3,12], studies have shown that both groups lack cognitive knowledge about the physiological process and subjective, experiential knowledge [1,2,4,5]. Preparation for menstruation positively corresponds to more positive attitudes and experiences of menarche [13,14]. However, even these girls associated menarche and menstruation with ambivalent and negative sentiments [12]. They saw menstruation as something embarrassing, dirty, and gross, and experienced resulting shame and anxiety [2,3,5,8,15]. These feelings largely stem from societal taboos concerning female bodily processes and sexuality, the corresponding medicalization, and the consequent pressure to sanitize and conceal these functions, including the supposed hygiene crisis

of menstruation [16]. The most frequently mentioned positive reaction to menstruation is a sense of maturity [3,5,17]. The framework of menarche as instrumental to the transition to womanhood provides context for the development of associations between menarche and sexuality. Other studies exploring girls' thoughts at this developmental stage provide further reasons to suspect that they may connect menarche and sexuality. Research relates physical evidence of pubertal developments, specifically in the form of breast growth, to girls' awareness of increased attention to their bodies, alterations in responses to their bodies and behaviors, and discomfort with these reactions [18,19]: Increased bodily awareness and discomfort could easily translate into parallel feelings that accompany the transition in social and sexual standing that menarche signs. Accordingly, Lee explained that, at the time of menarche, several participants in her study who did connect menarche to sexual maturation "felt disempowered by the way people were starting to look at and relate to them" (622). This sentiment reflects the sexual objectification process.

Sexual objectification occurs when women are reduced to and treated as bodies, specifically, bodies intended for use and consumption by Frederickson, et al. [20]. Self-objectification involves the internalization of an outsider's view of one's body, or judging bodily attractiveness and value through an external lens, and the resulting treatment of oneself as an object to be viewed and evaluated [19,20]. Self-objectification is deeply tied to menarche, as the onset of menstruation is linked to a transition to the sexual and reproductive realm [8]. Girls also begin the process of self-objectification at puberty because their bodies become more overtly sexual and, thus, sexualized and objectified by Martin [19] & Barrie [21]. Accordingly, women are especially at risk of adopting an observer's perspective of their bodies during times of physiological change such as the onset of menstruation [20]. Moreover, as Karin Martin [19] indicated, while girls may not consistently make explicit links between intercourse, sexuality, and menstruation, puberty and sexuality are intertwined, and parents and teachers often present information that contains a sexual subtext intentionally or not. The fact that menstruation is normally incorporated into sex education classes underscores this. While Martin [19] found that her female interviewees connected menarche to pregnancy and sex, a few replicated this discovery. In 2006, when asked to explain the purpose of menstruation, Fingerson found that her interviewees only connected menstruation to reproduction (and sexuality). This finding is consistent with previous research that revealed that girls did not spontaneously reference reproduction in connection with menstruation [12,17,22] review of educational advertisements revealed that only three of thirty-one videos on menstruation mentioned the relationship between menstruation and reproduction in

the form of the relationship between tampons and virginity. Stubbs, et al. [9] further discovered that mothers, a primary source of information on menses [4,5,7,12,15,22,23], failed to contemplate the relationship between the sexualization of girls and their daughters' pubertal development. The same authors hypothesized a possible connection between sexuality and girls' attitudes toward menstruation, suggesting that girls might embrace menstrual suppression as a way to self-sexualize and reject the menstruating body as incompatible with the sexualized ideals to which girls are encouraged to aspire.

Despite sparse evidence that adolescent girls link menarche, menstruation, and sexuality, themes concerning maturation and development indicate that girls may still make associations between these topics and experiences. Following Stubbs, et al. [9], I expected Millennials to have incorporated sexuality into their understanding of and experiences with men's situations more than previous generations. Since the late 1980s, research has found that girls are sexualized in a myriad of ways, including sexualized portrayals in media and representation in merchandise, parental messages concerning the primary importance of appearance, peer policing, self-sexualization through adherence to these standards, and, the extreme, sexual assault, abuse, trafficking, and prostitution [24]. This corresponds to a moral panic in which parents and news media depict certain media outlets as inappropriately positioning girls as "sexy," while consumer culture targets increasingly younger audiences, supposedly robbing them of their innocence, leading to future promiscuity [25]. In opposition to the sexualization of girlhood, there is an increasing emphasis on innocence and purity via virginity [26]. Such concerns may heighten awareness of the sexual implications of girls' changes in menstrual status. I chose to interview young adolescent girls because they offered a unique lens to understand the process of developing sexual subjectivity as it occurs. By looking at this moment, we can see how girls navigate various discourses and cultivate language to represent their thoughts. Because these girls lack vocabulary to describe their relationship with menstruation and are less able to articulate their understanding of menses. We can appreciate how they unpack ideas, as girls interpret menstruation through frameworks that they have developed separately from formal discourse. This led me to ask, What meanings do girls attach to menstruation and menarche? Do they perceive menstruation as related to sexuality, explicitly or implicitly? How do they navigate through various meanings?

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the societal implications of the sexualization of menstruation,

particularly examining its intersections with rape culture, commodification, and gender perceptions. Through the application of feminist theories and discourse analysis, the study aims to: Examine how menstruation is sexualized through various themes such as rape, tampons, and derogatory labels. Analyze the impact of commercialization, particularly within the tampon industry, on the reinforcement of shame and sexualization surrounding menstruation. Scrutinize the derogatory label 'prostitutes' and its role in demeaning women while equating their worth with reproductive functions. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the societal factors perpetuating the sexualization of menstruation and to advocate for measures to challenge and dismantle these harmful narratives.

The Study Method

I interviewed ten middle school women, aged 11 through 13, recruited from three private center schools in Michigan that had been comprised entirely of white, middle- to upper-center magnificence pupils. My pattern reflected these stereotypes, although one student was identified as an African American. All but one woman became sub-menarcheal. The median age at onset was 11 years (SD: 1.5 years), with the youngest being nine and the oldest 13. The colleges had small scholar bodies (<30 ladies each), were coed, and had a liberal atmosphere. One becomes single-sex, conservative, larger, and affiliated with the Catholic Church. At first, I thought the contrasting liberal and conservative bents might take place in my findings, but there were few variants using faculty members. This consistency is something to be further explored in future studies in conjunction with the roles of class and race (my sample, missing in range, cannot communicate these elements of potential import). Recruitment involved a mixture of introducing myself and my research to the student body, dispensing informational letters for the girls and their parents in person and through email (those letters had been accompanied by consent forms for parents, assent forms for women, and a quick questionnaire on students' backgrounds). For the conservative faculty, recruitment, in the end, was snowball sampling, as a woman from one social organization participated and her friends observed. This can have affected my feelings, as friends may also make similar evaluations. the topic of my studies may have confined my pattern size as a few women relayed that others were too embarrassed to take part, and/or that their dads and moms had refused to consent. Before the interviews, the women were requested to complete the questionnaires with their dads and moms. This shape covered questions regarding age; grade; socioeconomic fame, religion, range and gender of siblings, the wide variety of years they had attended their contemporary faculty, and race/ethnicity. Interviews took place one-on-one in lecture rooms or offices.

The familiarity of the places, combined with the privacy of the places, allowed girls to feel extra cozy. Interviews ranged from 1/2 an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes; the maximum lasted around an hour. Interviews commenced with a conversation to construct rapport (about girls' athletic activities, summertime plans, etc.), accompanied by a short preface regarding subjects, the discussion might cover students' rights as individuals. With the approval of the Institutional Review Board, all inter-perspectives were audio taped and interviews and questionnaires were transcribed. Identifiers were eliminated from transcriptions, contributors were assigned pseudonyms, and faculties were assigned aliases. The interviews were coded inductively. I conducted semi-structured interviews for which I prepared a list of questions, although the girls often responded to my questions without prompting. Interview questions covered several subjects, inclusive of introductions to the subject of menstruation; the jobs of friends, siblings, boys, faculties, mother, and father; the clinical establishment, the net, books, and the media; the organic system of menstruation; feminine hygiene products; symptomatology; the age of menarche; menstrual suppression; coping with menstruation; and (dis)likes regarding the menstrual reveal in I additionally provided a scripted anecdote concerning menstruation, hoping girls would respond with their memories. Conscious that my questions broached awkward subjects, I cautiously monitored my self-presentation, attempting to seem in a manner that could warrant the admiration, and for that reason, the cooperation of faculty directors without alienating my interviewees. I was hoping that my youthful appearance and demeanor would lead the girls to view me as a near-peer in whom they could confide. Given the intimate details disclosed by the girls, I believe I succeeded in earning their trust. When asking a participant at the end of our session to please send her friends my way, she responded, "Definitely, I will tell my friends about cool college. Lady researching PMS because of the demographics of my sample as well as the fact that participation was voluntary; the sampling involved in this project is not representative. These factors, as well as the sample size, limit the generalizability of the data. However, the consistency of my findings across all three schools would indicate that the trend of sexualization of menstruation extends beyond my sample.

Findings

Tampons, the Fear of "Down There," and "Waiting Until you are Ready"

As in previous studies, my interviewees referenced reproduction and sexuality when asked about the purpose of their menstruation. However, this sample of girls stood out in the way they interwoven these topics throughout the interview. A quintessential example occurred when I

asked Sophia (11, white) how she felt about commercials for feminine hygiene products, and she went on to describe how commercials for Trojan condoms made her feel uncomfortable. This incident highlights a salient dimension of this association between menarche and sexual development during these interviews: the girls experienced this terrain with anxiety and trepidation. This is evident in Participants explained their reasons for avoiding or delaying the use of tampons. All but one of my interviewees regularly employed pads instead of tampons but would occasionally make exceptions when they wanted to swim. For instance, when asked whether she had ever used a tampon, Isabella (13, white) explained: The problem is, I am a full-time swimmer, so I did not want to use a tampon, but eventually, I had to. Like my first time, at the end of the week, it [menstrual flow] was light. I barely needed one, but I did [use a tampon only in case.

It took a few attempts [to insert it], and it was not correct. I was like freaking out. I was freaked out because sticking something in [the vagina] was creepy. Isabella's terminology was characteristic of these stories. Other standard Words and phrases included "awkward," "uncomfortable," and "scary." For all the participants, this experience made a lasting impression. They were able to recount in detail where they were, who was with them, what was said, and even what brands were chosen. This moment was powerful because it was the first time they had explored, as Emma (12, white) and Olivia (13, white) were prone to say, "Down there." This discomfort was amplified by the fact that many of them did not know where to place the tampon or the proper anatomical terminology. Olivia elaborated by stating that "You never really see it [the vagina] until you experience it." While these young girls considered these stories representative of a traumatic developmental moment, these memories would likely fade relative to other life experiences. This may be one reason why such accounts have not appeared in previous studies that have relied on retrospective accounts. While previous research has framed fears surrounding tampons as a result of a lack of bodily knowledge [1,19], which surely remains a contributing factor in this sample), my interviewees also consistently employed sexual language when narrating their thoughts and experiences with tampons. Both indirectly and directly, my interviewees revealed that this was partly distressing because they were forced to confront (and consequently reject) their sexuality. The language used to frame their relationships with tampons reflects this confrontation. Girls explained how pads operated as placeholders, something to help you adapt to menstruation without having to go "down there." My interviewees referred to pads as "starters" and unanimously agreed that one should wait to try tampons until "she is ready." Interestingly, the language used here is similar to phrases that surround the topic of first sex Girls

are relentlessly told to wait “until they’re ready.” Adolescent girls associate the penetration of the penis into the vagina with tampon insertion. Girls define sex in phallogentric terms and neglect numerous non-penetrative forms of sexuality. For example, when questioned as to why one would avoid tampons, Sophia launched into a monologue about her sister’s refusal to use tampons and how “that’s kind of a good sign because [she] doesn’t want anything to go in there.” Here, Sophia associates tampons with phallogentric sexual activities. Although the definition of “sex” has been and remains contested, a consistent definition concerns the penetration of a vagina by a penis (Maine, 1999). Historically, many consider virginity to cease when the hymen is “broken” (The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education). However, exercise can tear, thin, or stretch the hymen (Boston Women’s Health Collective 2011), resulting in physical alterations before puberty. Tampons can also affect the structure (The Boston Women’s Health Collective), This may further support the association between tampons and sex in girls. Penetration was consistently associated with a particularly condemned form of sex for girls in this age group. To avoid penetration, girls valued virginity above all other sexualities. While defending her choice to abstain from tampon usage, Madison (13, white) explained that: It’s scary, like, what if you put it in the wrong hole?.. It is also like the idea of sex, which freaks me out because I do not like thinking of another person inside me. It’s just like nope, that is a future Madison problem. I am not going to think about this. It is just like this is so unusual. So weird.

Madison Describes How She Associates Tampons with Sexual Penetration.

To navigate her discomfort with the sexuality she sees as associated with menstruation, she employs a strategy that I refer to as splintering of the self. Like the other girls in my study, Madison adjusted to the idea of being a menstruating woman. Trying to integrate a sexual aspect into her identity is, for the moment, overwhelming. Thus, she splits herself into two different people: a girl and a woman who has just reached menarche and is a future sexual woman. By assigning the latter to the future, she can focus on the present. The Splintering of the Current and Future Self This strategy of splintering was employed by many of the participants. Each girl assured me that she was not sexually active, yet most addressed the topic of a future sexually active self. They did not think it was necessary to “deal with it” presently and assigned that frightening duty to a future self. Splintering and the intensity with which girls rejected the need to address their sexuality in the present shows the extent to which adolescent girls are intimidated by and even afraid of their sexuality. Not yet ready to grapple with such issues, girls avoid things that might remind them of their sexuality (such as tampons). The Present Rejection of All Things Sexual: The

Pill and Intercourse All but one girl vehemently asserted that they were not sexually active without any prompting from me. This relates to Sophia applauding her sister for not “wanting anything in there.” They were invested in the idea of the sexually innocent “good girl.” Along with rejecting tampons, only one girl said she would consider using the pill to control cramps or extend the time between cycles. Many feared that birth control pills could cause infertility, but even with the caveat of no harmful side effects, interviewees were still disconcerted by this idea. There were, however, other factors at play. Though all but one of the participants knew that birth control pills were used to prevent pregnancy, none of them knew how the pill worked, nor did they know that the pill could also be used to mitigate the severity of cramps or extend the time between periods (although, after I explained this, a few commented that they had heard that mentioned somewhere). However, they primarily associated birth control pills with intercourse.

When asked who should use the pill, Mia responded that “sexually active teenagers” should. Similarly, Sophia argued that the pill is for people who are “sexually unrestrained,” “provocative girls” (that is, sexual appearance correlates with sexual behavior), and, finally, “prostitutes.” Again, we see girls holding onto their innocence and good-girl standing by separating themselves from sexuality as represented by the pill and its users. While forcefully denying that they would ever take the pill shortly, again, the girls realized that a future self may Sophia stated that “I plan on not taking birth control at this point. I might need it for my future self, but I’m not going to have sex until I’m married or engaged.” She divides her identity and assigns the sexual part to her future self (that is, splintering). Sophia is so frightened by her sexuality that she cannot even imagine its existence without the framework of a traditional, potentially procreative, and certainly a far-off relationship. My findings contradicted Stubbs, et al. [9] hypotheses. My interviewees rejected menstrual suppression through the use of birth control pills. They tried to distance themselves from the position of a sex-utilized object and the accompanying social and psychological complexities that the position forces them to confront. However, this reaction may be complicated by the age of my interviewees and their confusion about the process of menstrual suppression. Of note is the hetero normativity underlying the imagining of the future self. Supposedly, Sophia would be using the pill to avoid pregnancy, implying that her partner would be male. The same applies to Madison’s discomfort with the idea of having “another person inside of me” and categorizing that as a “future Madison problem.” She too seems to be invoking a future heterosexual self. Fear of Rape and Resulting Pregnancy One girl, who was not sexually active, expressed concern that she was pregnant because she was a few weeks late in her cycle. She was unaware that irregularity is typical for girls in their first years of menstruation and unclear as

to how girls become pregnant. Her anxiety exposes a sense of helplessness and confusion that pervaded the interviews. While it is evident that adolescent girls resist the sexualization of their bodies, they appear to recognize that the choice is not theirs alone. They can abstain from using tampons, the pill, or engaging in sexual activities, but they perpetually exist under the scrutiny of the male gaze. Their bodies come to signify sexuality for others, if not for themselves. When questioned as to whether she found anything about the onset of her period to be unsettling, Olivia launched into a story in which she recounted: "I know it's kind of gruesome, but like people get raped and there was this one girl who was like ten and she had her period and she got raped around the same time that Her eggs were released, and she got pregnant. And that's scary." Olivia thought something similar could happen to her. Sophia, in responding to the same prompt, explained: "Afterward [after her first period], I had this one concern was that I would get raped when I was on my period and then get pregnant. I think everyone will be scared once they get their first period." Again, we see confusion about the physiology of menstruation as it would be nearly impossible for her to get pregnant when she is in the midst of her period. It is worth exploring whether demystifying the bodily process of menstruation (and sex) would mitigate some of the girls' anxieties. However, even if girls did understand menstruation and sex better, it is unlikely this would fully address underlying concerns about lack of control over their new sexual positioning.

When I first formulated the question about the burdensome aspects of menstrual onset, given prior findings, I had expected answers about cramps or worries about leaking. Rape is a subject that girls in previous studies on Menstruation had never been broached. At first, I thought this was an isolated event, but a few other girls hinted at the same fear. Additionally, Olivia and Sophia did not go to the same school or know each other. I probed to see whether either could identify the source of this concern, but neither could remember a specific incident. Both also claimed that they had not discussed the topic in health class or with parents or teachers. Therefore, I concluded: that these statements hint at a subconscious concern over what it means to be a menstruating woman in our society. Reproductive capacity and bodily Transformations indicate to others that these girls have developed into sexual beings. As women, their sexuality is influenced and controlled by others. Through ideology (in the media, in health class, etc) [27,28] interpersonal relations at an extreme, through rape [26]. Notably, my interviewees did not worry about rape before menarche, nor did they believe Girls who have not begun menstruating need to worry about it. This is strong evidence of my interpretation of these concerns as representing awareness of insertion into, what Lee [8] calls, "the dominant patterns of sexuality" (346). The girls' articulation of this emerging fear was interesting

in that they were not simply concerned about being raped, but about being raped and getting pregnant as a result. Pregnancy functions as perhaps the most obvious signal of one's sexuality. This indicates an added layer of apprehension regarding judgment. As the girls consistently noted, they feel they are not the appropriate age for intercourse. Even if they were, female sexuality is still taboo in our culture, and, therefore, a source of shame. Insecure in their sexuality, the girls feared the judgment of others. They wanted to be seen as "good" girls. Thus, while they believed they were more vulnerable to rape after their transition in sexual status, the potential consequences post-menarche seemed to trump the concern of rape itself.

Discussion

The sexualization of girlhood brings to the fore what Deborah Tolman terms the slut/prude/virgin continuum, whereby behavior, appearance, and morals (the former two supposedly being indicative of the latter) are characterized as existing somewhere between that of a "good girl" and a "slut." Given the pressure to maintain innocence during childhood and fend off the forces of (hyper) sexualization, it is easy to understand why girls may experience trepidation about exiting this space into one of developing sexuality. The particular life stage of these interviewees may help to explain why they were so attached to their self-image as good girls, intimidated by reminders of sexuality, and employed the strategy of splintering.

Sophia most clearly constructed this good girl/bad girl dichotomy. She put a positive value judgment on her sister for wanting to avoid things that reminded her of sex (such as tampons), said that "sexually reckless" girls are the kind of girls who should take the pill, and used her virginity in opposition to the sexuality of the "whore" by saying that she would not take the pill at this point in her life, but "prostitutes" should. In rejecting tampons, the pill, and "provocative girls," my interviewees are investing in the idea of the good girl/virgin. Virginity serves as their form of sexuality and, therefore, a strategy to delay dealing with the integration of the sexual self. This is further facilitated by the splintering of the self, which allows them to acknowledge a future sexual self, without needing to resolve the implications of their new social standing. Labeling itself is an international process involving stigma and status (Armstrong et al. 2014). To end up on either extreme of this continuum can result in various formal and informal modes of punishment, though some of the material penalties that may accompany this label, such as rape, are more severe. This process of labeling and related consequences constitutes a form of social control that affects girls' thoughts and behaviors. Menarche likely makes real the entrance into these sexual and social relations, and thus, discourse on the virgin/whore dichotomy impacts the

meaning girls make of this physiological event. Evidencing the impact of this paradigm through their thoughts and behaviors, interviewees themselves reinforced this construct in the way they created a sense of duality between “provocative girls.” and themselves. Jessica Valenti [26] explains that, for girls and women, Morality is dependent on sexuality. Thus, in reproducing such dyads, girls claimed their moral superiority and defended their character to the extent possible in the realm of female sexuality.

Such efforts to present themselves as good girls demonstrated the interviews demonstrated internalization of an external gaze. They did not want to appear like “promiscuous” girls and avoided this through choices that served as immediate symbols of their separation from their sexuality. These choices served a deeper hope that these strategies would indicate a societally acceptable form of sexual female character, that is, virginity. However, they realized that this Self-presentation could only provide so much protection. Roberts (2002), suggested that we can look at the sexualization of girls and women across a continuum and that “the most extreme act on the continuum of self-objectification is (...) rape” (326–27). Accordingly, my participants revealed their self-objectification and insight into the said phenomenon when they cited rape as a potential outcome of their menarcheal transition. Regarding menarche as a transition in sexual status allowed them to make this connection. Interestingly, my participants were not just concerned by rape itself, but by the potential result: pregnancy. The fear of pregnancy seemed to supersede the fear of rape. Pregnancy is perhaps the most obvious marker of deviant sexuality at this age. For these girls, being labeled a bad girl ranked above the act of rape, demonstrating the extent to which they have internalized a system of value that hierarchizes and reduces them to their gendered sexuality.

Literature Review

Discuss existing literature on the sexualization of menstruation, addressing previous studies, theories, and debates. Examine the historical and cultural context that has contributed to the sexualization of menstruation. Analyze how rape, tampons, and the portrayal of menstruating individuals as “prostitutes” have been discussed in previous research.

Research Methodology

Explain the research approach you used (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods). Describe the methods of data collection (interviews, surveys, content analysis, etc.). Detail the characteristics of your study participants and how they were selected. Provide information about ethical considerations and any limitations of your methodology.

Literature Review

The study started with an extensive review of existing compositions on period, rape sophistication, commodification, gender ideas, and connected arguments. This history review provided the hypothetical foundation and traditional facts necessary for understanding the complicatedness of the issue.

Data Collection

Data for reasoning were assembled from miscellaneous sources, containing academic items, books, and reports, and connected to the internet discussions. This dossier included tales, terminology use, and societal ideas that had a connection with the sexualization of the period, in addition to examples from shopping campaigns and radio likenesses.

Qualitative Analysis

The calm data sustained an approximate study, which involved orderly analyzing and defining the content to identify persisting ideas, patterns, and discourses that had a connection with the sexualization of the period. This analysis was directed by feminist hypotheses and proposed to disclose the underlying devices preserving the wonder.

Interpretation

The verdicts from the qualitative reasoning were elucidated within the theoretical foundation of feminist views and discourse study. This understanding involved precariously resolving the dossier to accept how periods are sexualized, the associations concerning this sexualization, and potential paths for challenging these stories.

Limitations

Scope Limitation

The study met generally on the sexualization of period within the circumstances of rape sophistication, commodification, and offensive labeling. As a result, the potential determinants contributing to the sexualization of periods may not have been adequately surveyed.

Data Limitation

The study relied on existing biography and discourse encircling the period, rape culture, and commodification. The chance and characteristics of dossier grant permission have influenced the insight and width of the study.

Generalizability

The findings concerning this study can be restricted in their generalizability on account of the specific effort devoted to certain ideas and circumstances. Cultural, social, and terrestrial dissimilarities keep impacting the sexualization of periods differently, and so the judgments grant permission not to have reference to all contexts.

Bias

Despite works to wait unprejudiced, the researchers' own outlooks and biases concede possibility has affected the understanding of the data and judgments. Awareness of potential biases was claimed during the whole of the study, but their complete removal may not have been attainable.

Future Research Directions

The study desires regions for future research, such as surveying the happenings of marginalized groups and containing transgender and non-binary things, in the framework of period and allure sexualization. Additionally, longitudinal studies commit support intuitions into the progressing nature of period discourse and allure pertaining to society's suggestions over time.

Acknowledging these restraints is critical for defining the verdicts accurately and for updating future research endeavors proposed at calling the sexualization of menstruation and advancing grammatical rules applying to nouns that connote sex or animateness similarity.

Results

Sexualization Themes

The reasoning revealed extensive tales and sounds relating to the sexualization of menstruation. Through the glass of rape idea, period enhances a locus for embodiment and bleeding, bolstering injurious stereotypes that undermine common similarity.

Impact of Commercialization

Findings show that tampon manufacturing carelessly strengthens shame and sexualization through shopping campaigns. The emphasis on discretion and scent decline in advertisements maintains the idea that menstruation is innately atrocious and intercourse.

Analysis of Derogatory Label

The study dissected the use of the derogatory label 'prostitutes' within the framework of the allure humiliating nature toward girls. This label balances wives' worth accompanying their generative functions, further maintaining

hurtful stereotypes.

Conclusion

It is important to understand how menarche and menstruation are perceived by adolescent girls because of the immediate impact, long-term consequences, and girls' roles in defining what it means to be a woman/female. Lee [8] summarized the broad importance of research on girls' understandings of menarche when she wrote: Menarche is a physiological happening, framed by the biomedical metaphors of current scientific knowledge, yet also a gendered sexualized happening, a transition to womanhood as objectified other. What is crucial here is that this juncture, menarche, is a site where girls become women and gender relations are produced. Such relations are about power and its absence; the power to defend the body and live in it with dignity and safety; the power to move through the world with credibility and respect. (360)My interviewees felt the acute shift in their position within gender relations and their lack of power at this moment. Though my sample was small, the consistency of the packaging of menarche, menstruation, and sexuality across and throughout interviews indicates that this phenomenon is not limited to this group of girls. Contrary to previous work, this study shows that menarche and menstruation are bound up with sexuality in the minds of young adolescent girls. The age of the interviewees likely contributed to these findings. In exiting a space emphasizing childhood innocence, girls are preoccupied with disassociating themselves from sexuality. We see this in the rejection of tampons. Birth control, and promiscuity, as well as through the use of splintering. Through With these methods, girls resist entrance into broader sexual relations, where they lose further control of their new bodies. They cling to the image of the good girl, an attempt to hold on to some sense of childhood innocence (that is, asexuality), and to approach teenage sexuality through the safest avenue. Nevertheless, these strategies play into the reproduction of the same cultural ideals and power relations that obstruct the development of girls' sexual subjectivity. Girls' awareness of their reproductive bodies' status as public bodies and the importance of their appearance as good girls may further affect their understanding of rape discourse. Specifically, they may internalize the message that rape occurs when girls "ask for it," a message reinforced by rape legislation that often considers the question of who is "rape-able" using idealized notions of female purity [26].

The sexualization of menstruation performed by these girls reveals that this process is problematic not because of the physiological process of menstruation itself but because of the reproductive and sexual implications of menarche and the construction of female sexuality. Future research must explore how the intersection of other identities, such as race

and class, relates to the sexualization of menstruation. As intersecting identities alter the construction and experience of female sexuality, so too may they shape the meanings of menarche and the strategies employed to navigate this transition. For this age group in particular, more research into girls' experiences with and An understanding of menstruation is required. Further research in this area can inform endeavors to guide girls through this transition in a way that allows them to engage their bodies and sexuality with positivity and ownership. Intervening at this moment may be crucial, not only to regaining individual.

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