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Aliya Linder
aliyalinder@uri.edu

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ALIYA LINDER (Nursing)

The Bloody Reality: An Analysis of Menstruation Representation and Perception in the United States from the 1940s-2010s

Sponsor: Kathleen McIntyre (Gender and Women's Studies, Honors Program)

Menstruation has long been a taboo topic. Despite half the world experiencing this natural biological process, the shame that comes with menstruation continues to be an issue for many women. By analyzing a variety of primary sources, including newspaper articles, magazine advertisements, and educational short films, this paper looks into the stigmas that women in the United States face every day. These sources include, among others, the advertisements used to sell menstrual products and the everyday dialogue that is used to subliminally imply that women are inferior to men, simply because they don't have menstrual cycles. In chronological order, a few of the points touched upon are: 1) a 1946 Walt Disney Production short film entitled "The Story of Menstruation", 2) what drove many women of the 1970s to undergo the risky procedure of menstrual extraction and, 3) how social media and advertisements have both empowered and silenced women in the 2010s. The roots of this form of gender stigmatization have always been present, even as it has grown and adapted to fit the mold of the times. Through the analysis conducted within this paper, it can be concluded that the paradigm of menstrual stigma still exists today and has permeated various outlets as it evolved throughout history.