

From Gen X to Gen Alpha: Girls' Perspectives on Periods in Popular Media

Sarah Symonds LeBlanc and Kate White

Abstract: This article explores how representations of menstruation in popular media have evolved across generations, with a focus on how these portrayals shape and reflect girls' experiences of menarche from Generation X to Generation Alpha. Grounding the writing in autoethnography and drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from English and communication studies, the authors analyze period-centered narratives in books and screen adaptations such as *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, *Sweet Valley High* and *The Babysitter's Club* books, and *Anne with an E*. Employing textual analysis and girlhood studies as methodological frameworks, the authors identify three recurring themes: menarche as competition, as a shared intergenerational practice, and as hidden from boys and men. The article also examines how political backlash, cultural taboos, and media resistance continue to shape how menstruation is discussed—or silenced—in public discourse. With personal reflections as mother-scholars, the authors highlight the challenges and urgencies of educating the next generation of girls about menstruation in an increasingly misogynistic sociopolitical environment. Ultimately, the article advocates for more inclusive and normalized representations of menstruation across media platforms and for a broader cultural shift that includes boys and men in conversations about reproductive health.

Keywords: [girlhood studies](#), [generational feminism](#), [pop culture](#) and [puberty](#), [media](#) and [menstruation stigma](#), [interdisciplinary scholarship](#)

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Intradisciplinary Introduction

When we met to explore possible themes for this special edition of *Peitho* focused on girlhood and menstruation, we kept returning to the ways the current political climate is deeply misogynistic and the impact it is having on young people. In Great Britain, one reporter interviewed schoolteachers who stated that 11-year-old students recognized and revered Andrew Tate, who is a self-proclaimed rapist and human trafficker (Folker). Some used Tate's photo as background wallpaper for their phones. *New Yorker* writer Jia Tolentino argues, "Trump won despite and because of the fact that he'd bragged about sexually assaulting women; the fact that his wife was hot, silent, and seemingly miserable." *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022; however, the attacks on reproductive freedom and health continue. The situation is serious, perhaps even dire. Recently, Trump's officials effectively killed research on safer menstruation products (Wiggins).

Sarah Symonds LeBlanc, PhD (Missouri 2012) specializes in family and health communication, in particular menstrual health communication. She has been published in *Health Communication*, *Southern Communication Journal*, and *Atlantic Journal of Communication*.

Kate White is an associate professor of English and the Director of Writing at Purdue University in Fort Wayne. She earned her Ph.D. from the Ohio State University. Her research interests include feminist historiography, banned books, and gendered communication. She has been published in *College English* and *Rhetoric Review*.

Our shock and rage led to conversations about what we, as MotherScholars¹ (“Being Dr. Mom”), could do to educate our daughters about all aspects of reproduction. We both have daughters in elementary school on the verge of menarche, or the first period marking the beginning of one’s menstrual cycle.

In addition to our daughters being the same age, we were both born in the mid-70s in the conservative Midwest and relate to coming-of-age in the ‘90s. Our feminist research interests overlap, although we are from different disciplines, English and Communication. Over the last ten years, we have developed a valuable friendship both at work and outside of it. As we talked, we began to discuss ways we might introduce puberty and menstruation to our daughters, better than our mothers² did with us. We always planned to make sure our daughters had the resources they needed to navigate this transition successfully; however, given the state of the nation, we felt a pressure and sense of urgency that we never expected to feel.

“I watched *Are You There, God? It’s Me Margaret* without the girls,” Sarah admitted. “And I didn’t read the book until after I watched the film. I grew up scared of bringing the book into the house and my mom getting mad. It would have been helpful if I could have read the book and talked to my mom about it. That’s what I want for my girls. I want them to be able to read, or watch, these books and shows, and be able to talk to me about them.” Kate expressed her disappointment over the event of watching the same film with her daughter. “Honestly, I’m not sure what I envisioned, but it was not a pivotal bonding moment [. . .] She seemed to pay attention to the movie, but she didn’t want to linger around after it was over for conversation.”

Finding the Books

We tried to find the best way to reach our daughters. After all, the topic of menstruation isn’t necessarily one they have been excited to discuss. Kate took her daughter to Barnes and Noble, set on buying books about puberty. *Maybe this would be the way.* While her daughter looked at the books, she seemed more interested in the potential for new graphic novels and promised queso dip from the Mexican restaurant after the outing. Nevertheless, the stack of books got Kate thinking. Surely, two academics could find the answers they sought through reading.

Sarah began buying and evaluating period and puberty books for her research and community engagement. Her daughters would enter her room, examine the pile, and eventually start pulling books, asking questions about the pictures on the pages. Because Sarah was forthcoming with answers, their comfort level in discussing menstruation and the possibility of menstruation increased.

As we began reading what our daughters were reading, we realized that some of the books were also from our childhoods. We observed the resurgence of several young adult series, including two of our favorites,

1 MotherScholars focus on the maternal subject in the private and public spheres integrating their maternal identity into the scholarly world through their research agendas and/or their pedagogies (Lapayese, 2012).

2 We are aware that society places an unfair burden on mothers or other women to provide reproductive health information for daughters and families.

The Babysitter's Club and Sweet Valley High, along with an updated version of *Are You There, God?* and *Anne with an E*, a modern-day version of *Anne of Green Gables*. Today, some of these texts are being introduced to our daughters in different formats, including graphic novels, fan fiction, movies, and television shows. We began wondering how pop culture was dealing with menstruation now.

In the following sections, we explore how changing representations of girls experiencing menstruation in written or graphic novels invite us to think about girls' menstruation experiences from a new or different perspective. We focus on three popular texts: Sweet Valley High's *Jessica's Secret*, *Get Real* and Judy Blume's *Are You There, God?* We examine these texts alongside newer versions, when appropriate, and modern-day popular graphic and young adult novels. Next, we examine television series or movies that feature menstruation, such as *The Babysitter's Club* (Netflix), *Anne with an E* (Netflix), and *Are You There, God?* (Lions Gate).

For this discussion, we have chosen to focus on books and screen representations over other types of social media. Pop culture has always shaped the way humans understand the world. Children are not raised in a vacuum, and they quickly internalize negative messages, especially regarding menstruation (Rosewarne 57). We chose to highlight girl-centered cross-media adaptations (i.e. novel to film, film to TV, etc.). Such texts have been circulating in popular culture for almost 35 years now.

Textual analysis provides a qualitative methodology that applies to both English and communication, and we aimed to illustrate a methodology that embraces an interdisciplinary approach. Textual analysis serves as a foundation of qualitative research and provides insights into human communication and behavior. This approach involves dissecting written or spoken language to reveal patterns, themes, and underlying meanings. Researchers from various disciplines utilize textual analysis to interpret everything from historical documents to social media posts, resulting in a deeper understanding of cultural contexts and societal trends (McKee). We read/watched/listened to the texts multiple times, took notes, coded emerging themes, and met to discuss our interpretations and analyses. We employ Girlhood Studies as a lens to guide our research questions and inform the textual analysis. We examine how menstruation is discussed within popular texts from our youth. In re-reading the books, we paid particular attention to the menstruation scenes and referred to menstruation research to explain the meaning and representation of a young girl's menstruation. As a result, three themes emerged: menarche as a competition, menarche as a shared practice between girls and women, and menarche as hidden from boys and men.

Girlhood

Currently, girlhood is trending: girl boss, girl math, just a girl, girl dinner, girl glaze, happy girl era, girl code, pretty girl summer, pretty girl walk, and girly pops. There is the vanilla girl, messy girl, clean girl, and the girl's girl, too. There are TikTok songs, hashtags, videos, comments, and even products branding themselves as being for and about "girlhood." The concept of girlhood carries currency in our cultural landscape. Girlhood is more than a brand, but does not have a singular definition. What is girlhood then?

In 2008, scholars Claudia Mitchell, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, and Jackie Kirk created a new journal, *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, which is widely viewed as the advent of the field. Scholar Mary Celeste Kearney offers this three-pronged definition for girlhood studies: “1) the subjective experiences of those who identify as ‘girls’; 2) as the period in life one identifies as ‘girl’; and 3) as the discursive construct used by social institutions and individuals to categorize those deemed young and female/feminine, which is commonly performed and reconstructed by those who identify as ‘girl.’” Other scholars have defined girlhood as the stage after infancy and before adulthood. The interest in girlhood studies comes with an imperative to include a previously marginalized population; female adolescents are doubly marginalized because of their age and their gender. Girlhood studies scholars, such as Mary Celeste Kearney acknowledge there has been generational progress made as “girls today have more agency than those of previous generations;” however, as “minors, they are barred from many of the activities and social institutions that might expand their power and improve their lives” (21). Because of the complicated status, there is a dearth of research that involves girls’ participation and their perspectives.

In addition, discussions of girlhood involve female adolescence and the onset of female puberty as typical markers. Menstruation is often viewed as a critical part of identity formation (Cohen). There is a tendency to universalize the category of girlhood as the developmental stage of all young women. We have attempted to navigate this by revealing some of ourselves throughout the essay. We examine the pop culture artifacts from our lived perspectives and through our terministic screens³: we are middle-aged white women with children who live in the Midwest and who teach college; we didn’t experience girlhood subjectivity the same. However, as we’ve noted earlier, menstruation is one of the most common experiences of women⁴, surpassing class, race, sexual preference, politics, religion, and personal choice, so we’ve focused our discussion of girlhood on pop culture and periods.

Menarche as a competition

Despite menarche, the onset of one’s first period, not occurring for the main character until the end of the book, *Are You There, God?* exemplifies some of the actions and thoughts girls experience during the menarche years. This novel moves away from previous menstrual narratives, arguing that women should remain mothers, caregivers, and homemakers (Egan). Rather than characterizing menstruation as a disability, an illness, or even a threat to emotional stability (Egan), Blume, author of *Are You There, God?* paints menarche as a competition, an event young adolescents can prepare for, and an event to share with mom.

Readers become aware of the competition between Margaret and her friends Janie, Gretchen, and Nancy in Chapter 15. Margaret shares the following exchange with her mother when she arrives home:

3 In his book *Language as Symbolic Action*, Kenneth Burke develops the concept, “Even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality” (45). Sarah and I view the world through our own terministic screens or filters.

4 Contemporary scholars and organizations like the ACLU have noted that trans men and nonbinary individuals also menstruate, and importantly, not all women menstruate.

“Gretchen Potter got her period.”

“Did she really?” my mother asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“I guess you’ll begin soon.” (114-115)

A few days later when Nancy’s family is away for the long President’s Day weekend, Margaret receives a postcard from Nancy with three words “I GOT IT!!!” (116). Margaret’s reaction was to rip the cards into tiny pieces, throw them away, and go to bed thinking something was wrong with her. Readers of the novel will soon discover that Nancy’s proclamation was a lie. In Chapter 17, Margaret learns of Nancy’s deceit when she begins crying in a steak restaurant restroom asking Margaret to get her mother. After giving Margaret some coins to get a product from the dispenser, Margaret asks Nancy’s mom “Does she always act like that?” “It’s her first time,” Mrs. Wheeler explained (123). Nancy’s deception demonstrates how puberty, in this case, menarche, is characterized as a competition. Because she wasn’t the first of her friend group, Nancy decided just to say she got it. After all, she was the first to wear a bra, she claimed to have bigger breasts than Margaret so why not also be first, or in this case second, in experiencing menarche?

Menarche as a competition is also evident in *Jessica’s Secret* by Francine Pascal. Jessica is jealous when her twin Elizabeth experiences menarche. Rather than be truthful that Jessica hadn’t started, she acts as if she too has gotten her period but in a much more sullen way than her sister. A second example is when Elizabeth explains to Jessica what Elizabeth’s friend Amy said after Elizabeth shared that she got her period. Elizabeth confides, “[Amy] said she was kind of jealous. She understands that everybody’s different and lots of girls don’t start until they’re older, but still, she felt left out (Pascal 15).

What is interesting to note within the novels is how open the girls are about menarche, even when lying about getting it. Menstruation scholarship (Jackson et al.; LeBlanc “Breaking the Cycle”; Roscoe and LeBlanc) found that many young menstruators experience shame and stigma and often keep menarche hidden, but our analysis suggests that in young adult literature, this doesn’t seem to be the case.

Menarche as being shared with friends and with mom but not in school

Before Margaret, or any of her friends, experience menarche, readers note how despite the girls having the rule that “the first one to get her period had to tell the others all about it. Especially how it feels,” (Blume 33) they find that menstruation is not talked about openly at school, as menstruation “is a certain very private subject just for girls” (Blume 49). Menarche and menstruation are constructed as shameful, embarrassing, and something to be hidden, especially within schools (Conner-Burrows et al.). Most schools in the United States are not required to provide menstrual products (Bhoda et al.) nor teach menstrual education (LeBlanc “School Nurses”).

First, we noted the secretive way characters in Blume's and Pascal's novels learn about menstruation. In chapter 15 of *Are You There, God?* the school separates the sixth-grade boys from the sixth-grade girls. Margaret recalls, "The film told us about the ovaries and explained why girls menstroo-ate. But it didn't tell how it feels, except to say that it is not painful, which we knew anyway" (Blume 96). Pascal's book 1 of the Sweet Valley Twins Junior High series, *Get Real*, shows a lack of conversation about menstruation. One would think physical education class would be ideal, but instead, it became a class where one could be embarrassed, as Jessica learned during gym class. The following exchange is a scene from gym class in Pascal's text:

Miss Scarlet lined the class up on the bench again.

"Now, girls," she said, "I don't allow anyone who is having her period to go swimming. It's extremely unsanitary. Are any of you menstruating?"

I gasped. Did Miss Scarlett actually mean that if you have your period, you have to announce it in front of the whole class? I was mortified enough just by her question – but I couldn't even imagine having to answer it. (Pascal 65)

Jessica's experience highlights two common problems. First, the scene demonstrates how menstruation is framed as an embarrassing, shameful event for young girls. Conner-Burrows et al. determined with their focus group respondents that many teenage girls find menstruation to be constructed as embarrassing, shameful, and often something not to be discussed in public. Hence, it is not surprising that none of the girls in Jessica's physical education class raise their hands to admit having their period. The shame and stigma surrounding menstruation goes beyond just the act of menstruating but also fear of others finding out that one is menstruating. After Miss Scarlett's request, Jessica thinks the boys in her class "were just dying for some poor girl to raise her hand so they could make her life miserable for the rest of her life" (Pascal 66). Today's youth readers see such a prediction play out in Williams and Schneeman's (2020), *Go with the Flow*, a graphic novel centering on four girls and their menstruation journey. Sasha experiences her menarche in school and her new friends help her out in the restroom. However, Sasha lives with the aftermath of the incident throughout the school year with "Bloody Mary" graffiti and tampons hung on her locker door. The nickname Bloody Mary stays with her.

Next, the scene brings to light how society views menstruation as dirty. By Miss Scarlet labeling menstruation as unsanitary, she plays into society's discourse of stigmatizing beliefs. van Lonkhuijen et al. (2023) determined that the attitude regarding dirty is associated with the act of menstruating as well as menstrual products. This scene is rooted in a real-world concern for many swimmers, according to scholars Zipp and Hyde who have actually studied menstruation and swimming specifically in 2024. Swimmers are paranoid, scared, and self-conscious already over the fear of leaking poolside (Zipp and Hyde); hence, the feelings could escalate if one's teacher or coach believes menstruation is dirty. The fear of leaking could also impact training. One coach told Zipp and Hyde that the swimmer's "focus might not be actually on what they were supposed to be trying to achieve because they may be too concerned about leaking or showing" (250).

Despite the lack of menstruation communication within schools, Margaret experiences open conversation with her mom when realizing she started menarche.

I really hollered, “Mom – hey mom – come quickly!”

When my mother go the bathroom she said “What is it? What’s the matter?”

“I got it,” I told her.

“Got what?”

I started to laugh and cry at the same time. “My period. I’ve got my period!” My nose started running and I searched for a tissue (Blume 170).

Mom verifies that Margaret did start her period and left the room to get the products she would pack in Margaret’s camp gear. Then she asks Margaret if she needs help. Critically looking at the exchange supports menstrual communication research. The conversation initially focuses more on menstrual product instructions (Costos et al.) than on what is happening and what this means to Margaret’s body. Next, this scene juxtaposes LeBlanc’s (“Breaking the Cycle”) findings, where the lack of silence around menarche impacts how one experiences it. Margaret’s menarche is positive; she calls her mother to the room. A similarity, though, between LeBlanc’s participants’ experiences and Margaret’s is how the mother is more focused on the use of the product and not on what is happening to the girl’s body.

Elizabeth and Jessica Wakefield’s experience in telling their mom resulted in Mrs. Wakefield exclaiming, “That’s wonderful!” as she jumped up from her seated position and embraced her daughters. “Oh, I can’t believe it! You’re growing up so fast!” she explained (Pascal 7). Mrs. Wakefield then asked her daughters to sit with her and encouraged them to ask questions. The mother-daughter menstrual communication evident in Blume’s and Pascal’s novels deviates from menstruation scholarship. Costos et al., contend that society does not promote constructive menstruation communication between mothers and daughters. Mothers find the menstrual topic uncomfortable, resulting in many mother-daughter dyads not talking about menstruation (McKeever).

Menstruation as secret from men and boys

Youths interviewed in Tomlinson’s work indicate that young boys lack information about menstruation (Tomlinson 188). Why aren’t boys involved in the discussions? If they are excluded from discussions, they have no way of understanding how menstruation impacts everyday life. The pop culture texts we examined revealed this stark reality: girls don’t talk to boys or men about menstruation. Menstrual privacy is often presented in movies and books in the “don’t tell Dad secret-keeping manner” (Rosewarne 9).

The theme of secrecy is paramount in both Blume and Pascal’s texts. In *Are You There, God?* Nancy immediately invites Margaret to an initiation of sorts. Nancy tells her: “I want you to join my secret club”

(Blume 15). Their new club also conducts a “secret vote” and the girls are given “secret names” (Blume 38). Margaret also keeps the cotton balls stuffed in her blouse a secret, too (Blume 94). This secrecy seems heightened when it comes to keeping things from males as scholars have noted that men and boys are both sidelined on screen and in books regarding “girls’ issues.”

One of the books in Francine Pascal’s Sweet Valley High YA series tackles menstruation as a primary theme. In the most obvious way, Jessica’s story announces a “secret” in the title—the secret represents her lie, but it also represents menstruation itself. Media scholars have observed, “While menstruation might only be physically experienced by women, men who share their lives—as fathers and husbands and brothers and colleagues—exist on the periphery” (Rosewarne 25). There is no parallel experience for men. In *Jessica’s Secret*, the sisters actively work to keep their brother, Steven, from finding out that Elizabeth got her period. The sisters are careful not to discuss menstruation in front of him. Jessica asks her mother how old she was when she started her period when “Steven came barreling through the kitchen door” (Pascal 10). Steven enquires about the special meal being prepared:

“‘What’s the occasion?’ Steven demanded, giving Jessica a doubtful look. Jessica exchanged smiles with Elizabeth. ‘Nothing *you’d* understand,’ Jessica told him. The twins dissolved into giggles, and Steven gave Mrs. Wakefield a helpless shrug. ‘Girls!’ he groaned.” (Pascal 11)

The twins are also afraid of boys finding out. Jessica and Elizabeth go to the drugstore to buy pads for the first time. As they approach the two checkout lines, Jessica chooses one and Elizabeth responds, “‘But the right one is so much shorter...*Oh*.’ Elizabeth’s gaze landed on the boy. ‘Good choice, Jess,’ she agreed. Somehow she did not want to have to be waited on by a boy” (Pascal 18). As the sisters are waiting in line, they notice two boys, Bruce and Todd, from school. Panic and fear ensue as Jessica attempts to hide behind a magazine and both girls turn red from embarrassment at the thought of boys witnessing their purchase. While we have discussed the shame and stigma surrounding menstruation, this scene shows the importance of keeping it from boys and men. The result is men are often left to occupy “caricatures such as menstrual dolts, as menstrually emasculated, and as menstrually creepy” (Rosewarne 7). She explains the underlying reason: “While there exists a general cultural imperative to keep menstruation hidden, there is an even more specific demand to keep it hidden *from men*” (Rosewarne 8). We observed this with boys as well.

Menstruation on Screens

Some of the books our daughters have been reading have also been turned into television series or movies. While we know the books have menstruation in them, we also know it is rare for menstruation to be seen as a plot device in British or American films (Kasenko). This made us wonder, then, whether updated made-for-television remakes of classic books we read as young adults embraced menstruation. This section examines how the books we read as young adults, such as *The Babysitter Club* series and *Anne of Green Gables*, showed menarche differently than the newer screen versions.

Modern-day American television addressing menstruation is unsurprising as it fits within today's culture. However, many American and English young adult novels, published before 2020, lack representation of menstruation (Walton). This didn't stop television shows based on English and American books from addressing menstruation; as Sarah points out, *The Babysitter Club* series is not the only series of books that changed from the original books to screen (LeBlanc "Women's Health and Popular Culture").

One such example is *Kristy's Big Day* by Ann M. Martin, which was first published in 1987 but aired on Netflix in 2020. The television adaptation of this young adult novel is described as featuring a character getting their first period. Blogger Pip Harry writes, "Kristy's mom is getting re-married, she's the bridesmaid and her first period arrives on the big day." What is significant is that menarche does not occur in the book but was a plot device in the episode with the same title (*Kristy's Big Day*). The absence of menstruation from the original plot, but then making it a pivotal moment in the television show, left Sarah bewildered.

"Why would they do that?" Sarah wondered. "Perhaps it is a sign of the times."

Kristy's Big Day begins by mentioning feminine hygiene products on the camp supply list. Kristy, not understanding what the term means, asks if the boy list includes "masculine hygiene products" before Claudia explains, "I think they mean pads and tampons" (Shukert). The lack of education Kristy has about menstrual products foreshadows a bigger scene near the end of the episode, but also supports research that found that most first-time menstruators seek advice on what products to use ("Women's Health and Popular Culture"). Near the end of the wedding reception, Kristy experiences menarche, telling her friends, "I guess it is my big day, too" (Shukert). Unlike Margaret and her friends in Blume's text, Kristy's friends are supportive of Kristy's milestone. Marianne explains how to put on the pad. Claudia points out that Kristy can now commiserate with them. And Stacy reminds her that she can bring her stash of feminine products to camp. The *Babysitter Club* members break the silence and the shamefulness of menarche (Roscoe and LeBlanc) and instead celebrate and assist Kristy.

As Kate sat and watched the episode of "Kristy's Big Day," memories of reading the *Babysitter Club* series as a young girl sharing a room with her younger sister came flooding back. Her memories inspired her to buy the original series for her Gen Alpha daughters, hoping that the books might help her discuss adolescence and puberty with them.

Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* experienced her first menarche at night. Then she discussed it with her school friends the next day, at least as shown in the Netflix series *Anne with an E*. Sarah didn't read the series until she was 14 and could not recall the menarche scene. She recalled Anne Shirley as a feisty, creative, and devoted friend, but she could not remember her getting her period in the books. *Anne with an E* creator Moira Walley Beckett explained that "the period episode was essential for the coming-of-age story she wanted to tell. Suddenly changing from a young girl to a young woman is a pivotal life moment" (Yuko). The episode (Episode 5, Season 1) inadvertently addressed the menstruation absence in the book

by having one of Anne Shirley's classmates say "No one is supposed to know. A woman's cycle is shameful" (Beckett and Montgomery).

The girls' conversation in the coat room during recess reiterates periods as negative, scary, and gross, and producing irrational women. We provide the dialogue taking place during lunchtime among four friends: Diana, Anne, Josie, and Tillie.

RUBY: I'm not a woman! Why don't I have it?!

ANNE: Trust me, if I could give you mine, I would. This is so inconvenient!

DIANA: Hush, Anne!

JOSIE: Keep your voice down.

TILLIE: No one's supposed to know. A woman's cycle is a shameful thing.

ANNE: Why?

The first six lines of the conversation demonstrate how menstruation is a shameful thing. Today, many young menstruators disclose their status to avoid shame during school hours (LeBlanc "School Nurses"). The shame associated with menstruating can produce anxiety and low self-esteem (Stubbs) or even negative self-talk (LeBlanc "Breaking the Cycle").

DIANA: It's unmentionable, that's why.

ANNE: That's not a reason.

JOSIE: Why don't you ever understand anything?

ANNE: Marilla said it's God's plan, so doesn't that make it good? I mean, we can make a whole person. Where's the shame in that?

JOSIE: Am I the only one who thinks she's out of her mind?

DIANA: It's a secret, Anne. That's just the way it is.

The second set of the dialogue highlights two of the myths associated with menstruation: it is unmentionable, and it is a secret. Society perpetuates the notion that menstruation should not be talked about (Delaney et al.). Delaney and the authors explained that during agrarian times, farmers would have their wives stay home during their flow. They were not allowed to interact with others. Many cultures practice similar acts today, such as many Muslim women not entering places of worship during their cycle (Reed).

ANNE: Do boys have to contend with anything like this?

DIANA: Boys have their own problems.

RUBY: Why are they doing that?

JOSIE: There's a question for the ages.

TILLIE: When I get mine, I stay home from school, because I don't want to have an accident.

ANNE: Accident?

RUBY: There was a girl a few years ago who bled right through the back of her dress.

TILLIE: Oh, I would die of mortification.

RUBY: The teacher called her up to the blackboard and everybody saw.

TILLIE: I would just die

Finally, the dialogue concludes with references to how menstruation impacts girls' education. In the United States, girls may leave school early, arrive late, or skip school altogether (Kuhlmann et al.). Viewers also hear the story of a girl who bled through her dress and then had to go to the blackboard, sharing her accident with everyone. As we pointed out above, incidents like this stay with the young girl for a while, resulting in bullying from classmates or dropping out of school.

Across Generations

As we noted in the introduction, women's rights are being actively restricted across the United States. Historically, the advancement of women's rights in the United States has been accompanied by different levels of backlash from reactionary and conservative forces who see these changes as a threat to traditional, Christian, Caucasian, and heterosexual values. Our girls represent the next generation, Generation Alpha, that will face the impact of the current backlash. The repercussions could reinforce taboos around menstruation, making it harder to discuss or to normalize. Progress is eradicated when efforts to promote menstrual health education are met with resistance by opponents who frame the argument as inappropriate or "woke" content. The recent online feedback about Disney's *"Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur"* episode about menstruation bears out the argument regarding the current backlash (Willets). While some comments praise the show for the educational aim of providing information to young girls, many others suggest the content is "hellish" and is a "woke" message orchestrated by liberals.

We realize that so much has changed, and yet, so much has stayed the same. In the 1990s, Judy Blume's book served as a primary source of information about puberty and menstruation for young girls. While the advent of social media like TikTok, and the ever-changing Wikipedia, allows girls to have so much more information about menarche, it's interesting to note that feelings of shame are still present. We might think



that girls in the United States, because of our country's wealth and access to information, would be free from shame, and of course, that just isn't true.

In Gloria Steinem's watershed essay, "If Men Could Menstruate," she answers her own question about ways we might think differently about menstruation if it were not marked as a female-only event: "The answer is clear—menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event" (Steinem). While Steinem was making a joke, we believe that perhaps the root of the joke is the answer. Until books like the ones we looked at, and television shows, are marketed for boys and men as well, menstruation continues to be a woman's issue. We want reproductive rights for women, and we want public conversations, literature, and media that support these rights as well. While it's not new to suggest that women shouldn't have to live in shame, we stand by this sentiment. In the meantime, we'll be with our daughters as they navigate their transitions—hoping to instill a sense of confidence and the value of female friendship in them as they become women.

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