

From Bloodless Respectability to Radical Menstrual Embodiment: Shifting Menstrual Politics from Private to Public

Tensions between the need for public recognition of menstruation and the enforcement of menstruation as a private and often secret experience have grown in recent years, both within the United States and throughout the world. In light of this, we are curious about (and puzzled by) the contradiction that, while menstruation has come out of the closet, there is still a deep investment in concealing it. As menstrual politics evolve, the accompanying menstrual activist movement is realigning its priorities and goals in often problematic ways.¹ For example, while menstrual activism started as a loosely organized series of actions within a variety of communities—including radical environmentalists, DIY punk and anarchist groups, artists, feminist health activists, and consumer rights advocates—its current iterations have prioritized an anemic view of menstruation that is fixated on sanitizing the menstrual experience, avoiding the root causes of stigma, and eschewing radical activist politics in favor of changing the system from within. What was once a movement with a robust history of embodied resistance—from feminist anarchists protesting the shame-based misogyny of the menstrual product industry, to zine makers teaching menstrual literacy and DIY menstrual care, to artists painting with their menstrual blood—has now transitioned into a movement overly concerned with the politics of respectability.² That is, product-focused

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¹ We rely on David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi's conceptualization of social movements as "collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world of which they are a part" (2004, 11), and thus we regard menstrual activism as the work of an emerging social movement that has endured—until recently—largely on the margins.

² Rooted in critical race theory, the politics of respectability was introduced by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham to characterize Progressive-era norms of self-regulation and self-representation directed simultaneously at other black people and whites, who required "justification" that blacks were worthy of their respect (1994, 196). More broadly, it refers to efforts to hold marginalized people to hegemonic standards of so-called propriety.

menstrual activism, though it has some value in inserting menstruation into the public sphere, stops short of addressing the root issues of menstrual stigma and the shaming of menstruating bodies. Product-focused menstrual activism has shifted the movement from one that promotes a body-positive (or even body-neutral) embodied reality to one that prioritizes the efficient *hiding* of menstruation through increasing access to menstrual products. To be an empowered menstruator, it seems, one must keep menstruation private.

In this essay, we argue that the bloodless politics of menstruation manifest in current menstrual activism is dangerously accommodationist, as it strives for social acceptability and incremental change. More specifically, the movement has turned its back on its radical history to reinvent itself as a neoliberal enterprise, one that repeatedly turns to the market to solve the problem of menstrual stigma. Here, we align with Lisa Duggan's critique of neoliberalism in which she asserts: "over about the past 10 years, there's been a slight shift away from [that] set of alliances and towards forwarding a kind of phony, multicultural, egalitarianism that promotes a very narrow form of equality politics that offers a limited kind of inclusion but that doesn't do any kind of redistribution" (Duggan 2003a; see also Duggan 2003b). This neoliberal approach reflects today's iterations of menstrual activism with other accommodationist campaigns, such as Nike's global "Girl Effect," a series of efforts to fortify girls' economic potential but, in reality, what Kathryn Moeller (2018) asserts is thinly veiled corporate public relations, run under the name of economic development and "constituted through reactionary and expansionary tendencies of corporate capitalism" (37).

While rebellion, resistance, and radical cultural change constituted the primary goals of menstrual activists of previous decades, the movement today is mostly concerned about "empowering" menstruators via new and alternative products or by dispersing single-use products more effectively as *the* answer to "solving" menstrual stigma throughout the world. But when a movement values respectability over radicalism, it effaces some of its important complexities and settles on small, incremental changes. In the case of menstrual activism, the fixation with ending the relatively minor "tampon tax" and innovating improved menstrual technologies, such as "smart" tampons, antimicrobial panties, and menstrual product delivery services (Crawford and Spivack 2017), eclipses larger, broader, and more substantive changes like reducing menstrual stigma (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler 2013), teaching menstrual literacy (Bobel 2018), and addressing the needs of trans and nonbinary menstruators (Bobel 2010; Chrisler et al. 2016; Fahs 2016).

We build our concerns about this distressing shift in core values and their attendant actions by drawing upon recent literature that critiques the rise of

respectability politics, particularly as it connects to the increased policing of bodies (Harris 2014). While we recognize that respectability politics works as a strategy to gain political rights within the system, we also want to emphasize the ways that this approach neglects a more radical reading and interpretation of the root causes of stigma and oppression, often using a Band-Aid approach to solving menstrual stigma. At its core, respectability politics disavow the legitimacy of rage and instead push those on the margins to “better” assimilate into what Karen Houppert (2000, 197) calls “the culture of concealment,” the culturally bound contexts of menstrual shame, silence, and secrecy. Our analysis resonates with political theorist Michelle Smith’s (2014). She writes, “On the one hand, like all democratic politics, respectability politics seeks to realize collective aspirations whether grand (justice, equality, full participation) or pedestrian (balanced budget, community policing, bike paths). On the other, respectability politics evince a distinct worldview: marginalized classes will receive their share of political influence and social standing not because democratic values and law require it but because they demonstrate their compatibility with the ‘mainstream’ or non-marginalized class” (1). Building on connections between respectability politics and racialized norms of propriety, we argue that respectability can generate problematic outcomes when it becomes a key framing for a movement, again in large part because respectability politics aim to change the system from within rather than radically reimagining the root causes of a problem. As Paisley J. Harris (2003) argues, we must remain attuned to “the sometimes devastating personal and political impact of the concerns and obsessions which lie at the heart of respectability politics” (212).³

³ At the same time, we remain mindful that respectability politics as related to menstrual activism can operate differently for white, middle-class, cisgender, and able-bodied women than for those who are marked as abject. For those who occupy precarious social locations, the “outing” of menstruation carries potent risks. Therefore, what might be regarded as playing by the rules through a privileged lens may more accurately be described as strategic survival. While a handful of women of color have been menstrual activists, the movement’s public face has been largely white. Noting this demographic reality, we have argued that because menstrual activism, by design, directly violates norms of what is proper to discuss in public, it is potentially more dangerous for women of color whose bodies have been denigrated throughout history (Bobel 2010; see also Roberts 1997; White 2001; Collins 2004). That is, because taking on the menstrual taboo can render the activist “gross,” “nasty,” and “improper,” the work may be less safe for those with less social capital. That said, radical menstrual activism can also open up space for links between, for example, poverty and menstrual stigma. And because radical menstrual activism is intersectional and sensitive to privilege, it operates with a keen awareness of how various kinds of stigma have similar root structures.

We outline here the ways that the hypervisibility of menstrual products (often white, clean, and increasingly, environmentally friendly) has ultimately (and ironically) moved menstruation back into hiding and, more importantly, largely failed to examine the bedrock of menstrual stigma. We instead want to consider the value of menstruating in public. By this we mean not only shining a public light on this widely shared but rarely discussed experience but also bringing forward a bloody, messy, embodied version of menstruation so that the roots of menstrual stigma can be visible. Ultimately, we argue for a new vision of menstrual activism that prioritizes what we term “radical menstrual embodiment.” This intervention is an uncompromising feminist approach to combatting menstrual stigma and forging an invigorated connection between menstruation and fertility, sexuality, and gender. The significance of this new view extends beyond the menstruating body. As we have asserted elsewhere: “When we pull back and see menstrual health in context, we can see what is really at stake in menstrual activism. Because a challenge to the menstrual status quo is itself a critique of gender norms about embodiment, it productively leads us to ask some tough questions about what we take for granted. What can we learn about our cultural value systems when we consider enduring menstrual restrictions?” (Bobel and Fahs 2018, 151).

Radical menstrual embodiment also seeks to build bridges with other movements for social justice by making explicit the shared goal of promoting agency and liberation from oppressive social norms. By moving away from the hazardous politics of respectability and its product-focused framework, menstrual activism can and should engage differently with the public sphere through a more explicitly rebellious, embodied, intersectional, and thoroughly feminist agenda. More specifically, radical menstrual politics eschews the more cultural feminist/spiritualist/essentialist approaches to “celebrating” menstrual bodies and recognizing menstruating bodies as “special” and instead addresses the basis of oppression and aligns with other movements that aim to do the same, thereby embracing a confrontational politics that is intersectional and linked to broader feminist goals.

To be clear, we do not aim to create an either/or framework whereby there is One. Right. Way. to do menstrual activism, thus reinscribing a new tyranny of embodiment. Our critique is largely conceptual, aimed at how the problems associated with menstruation are framed. These conceptualizations, we argue, fail to adequately take up the gendered, raced, and classed social construction of embodiment that sets in motion cultural discomfort with the menstruating body. The way forward is necessarily collaborative and practical, merging, for instance, product provision initiatives with educational programs and awareness campaigns. The key to any intervention, we assert, must not lose sight of a radical vision of transformation whereby thinking differently

about menstruation, as not merely a nuisance, a problem, or an impediment, is imperative. Without this conceptual shift, one that makes room for diverse and individualized menstrual subjectivities (including those that are negative or merely neutral), menstrual activism is vulnerable to capitalist exploitation and becomes yet another reinscription of gender norms.

A brief history of menstrual activism

In North America, the menstrual activism movement was founded in the late 1960s by feminist spiritualists such as Tamara Slayton, Jeannine Parvati Baker, Rosemary Gladstar, Jane Bothwell, and Vicki Noble who refused the status quo of menstrual negativity. Drawing on cultural feminist ideologies of the power of womanhood and “natural” difference, they reframed menstruation as a source of embodied knowledge and power unique to the female experience (Bobel 2010). A preoccupation of another form of early menstrual activism was challenging interventions like hormone therapy to “treat” symptoms of menopause as well the pathologization of womanhood expressed through PMS jokes that often trivialized women’s suffering. Feminist activists, including researchers associated with the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research, founded in 1977 (Dan 2004, 45), walked a fine line between taking seriously women’s complaints—such as mood swings and pain (in the case of PMS) and hot flashes, migraines, and vaginal dryness (in the case of peri/menopause)—and defaulting to a disease model of women’s embodiment (Golub 1985).

At the same time, many menstrual activists of the 1970s, continuing through the 2000s, were committed to “outing” menstruation through art such as Judy Chicago’s now iconic 1971 *Red Flag*—a photolithograph of the artist removing a tampon from her body. In the 1990s activists such as Vanessa Tieg used menstrual fluid to paint and otherwise depict the body bleeding to refuse invisibility and normalize menstruation. Earlier, in the 1970s, feminist filmmakers Emily Culpepper and Barbara Hammer took up the menstrual body in their work (Bobel 2010) while others developed and promoted menarche rituals to reframe the first menstrual period as a source of pride and community. Soon thereafter, increasing numbers of feminist health activists began to address menstruation (and reproductive anatomy) as an important dimension of women’s health, particularly the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective’s *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (see Bobel 2008).

A turning point in public discourse about menstruation occurred with the 1980s toxic shock syndrome outbreak, in which 890 cases were reported, 812 (91 percent) of which were associated with menstruation (CDC 1990). Thirty-eight of these were deaths (Meadows 2000; see also Vostral 2018). This egregious breach of consumer trust led Esther Rome, a founder of

the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, to organize efforts to force more Food and Drug Administration (FDA) oversight of menstrual products (Bobel 2008).⁴ Over time, the menstrual activist movement built upon this foundation, expanded its critique of the menstrual care industry, and attracted more constituencies, among them environmentalists who attacked product makers as flagrant polluters and urged menstruators to seek more sustainable alternatives, such as all-cotton unbleached tampons and pads, and reusable material such as cloth pads, sponges, and later, cups (Bobel 2008).

The radical menstruation wing of the movement sprouted in the 1990s, defined by its orientation toward addressing the roots of menstrual stigma (e.g., corporate appropriation of menstrual care, patriarchal framings of women's and girls' bodies as "failing," etc.; Bobel 2010). Aligned with third-wave feminism and an anticapitalist punk youth ethos, radical menstruation activists resisted what they saw as corporate control of menstruation and promoted the use of reusable menstrual products (including free bleeding, or choosing not to use any product—commercial or homemade—to collect or absorb menstrual fluid).⁵ Radical menstruation activists shifted from working with the industry to produce safer products—as earlier activists did—to turning away from industry and deploying art, performance, and self-publishing to raise awareness and challenge the dominant paradigm of menstrual shame, silence, and secrecy. For activists affiliated with this wing, refusing the norms of menstrual concealment was a radical move.

While earlier activists attempted to reform the industry and feminist-spiritualists focused on essentialist and individualized transformation, radical menstruation activists promoted a deeper examination of the root structures of menstrual shame and secrecy. In an especially bold departure from the women-centered feminist spiritualists, many radical menstruation activists detached menstruation from gender, refusing to speak of menstruation as a uniquely (cis) women's experience. They reached out to trans men and to

⁴ While the FDA was unwilling to legally mandate safety and performance standards, it did issue a regulation in 1982 requiring tampon boxes to advise consumers to use the lowest absorbency tampons to meet their needs. Activists pointed out that such labeling was meaningless, however, since there was no uniform labeling across the industry—that is, one brand's "super absorbency" may have been another's "regular." In response, Rome, Jill Wolhandler, scientist Nancy Reame, and other activists, including consumer rights advocates, initiated a ten-year campaign to standardize absorbency ratings (Bobel 2008).

⁵ We want to make clear here that our focus is not on the pros and cons of a host of interventions (such as sustainable approaches like menstrual cups or the continued use of cloth where/when appropriate) but rather to step back and assess the assumptions embedded in the *frames* that guide interventions more generally.

gender-nonbinary and intersex people who menstruate when they acknowledged that not all women menstruate and not only women menstruate, and they introduced the gender-neutral term “menstruators” (Bobel 2010). More recently, Cass Bliss (formerly Cass Clemmer), aka “the Period Prince,” developed the character “Toni the Tampon” for a coloring book about menstruation as part of their wider effort to redefine who menstruates (McNamara 2017). As the menstrual activist movement has matured, it has continued to attend to the diverse menstrual experiences, especially among those often neglected.

Building on the early momentum of radical menstrual activism, including efforts to address the menstrual needs of those often ignored, professionals working in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector of economic development gave rise to menstrual hygiene management, a shift in the movement that spread across the globe; intensified activist efforts; and garnered unprecedented media, funder, and policy maker interest. The primary agenda of menstrual hygiene management is to improve access to menstrual care materials; infrastructure (toilets, water, soap, and disposal); and, to a lesser degree, menstrual and puberty health education in the global South. Menstrual hygiene management is promoted through a number of organizational structures, from local NGOs and community-based social businesses to international NGOs such as WaterAid, Plan International, and UN agencies such as UNICEF, which engage menstrual hygiene management as part of their larger agendas.⁶ Menstrual hygiene management has been written into a number of national policies (in India, Kenya, Uganda, Niger, and Senegal, among others). And in 2018, the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women issued its principal annual output document called “the agreed conclusions” (a set of concrete recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies, and other institutions, including NGOs) to “take steps to promote educational and health practices to foster a culture in which menstruation is recognized as healthy and natural and in which girls are not stigmatized on this basis” (UN Women 2018). These words formally put menstrual health on the map as a matter of gender equality on a global scale.

In the mid-2010s, the news media began to take notice of menstrual activism. A number of media outlets marked 2015 as the “year of the period,” including NPR (Gharib 2015), *Cosmopolitan* (Maltby 2015), and the *Huffington Post* (Dasgupta 2015). In April 2016, *Newsweek* devoted its cover

⁶ A social business was first defined by Grameen Bank founder Muhammad Yunus as a “non-loss, non-dividend company with a social objective” (2010, 4; see also related definitions offered in Certo and Miller 2008 and Grieco 2015). Social businesses are alternatively referred to as social ventures, social entrepreneurship, and social enterprises.

story to the global menstrual activist movement (Jones 2016). As an outgrowth of liberal feminism, this newest form of Western menstrual activism is called “menstrual equity” in the United States (Weiss-Wolf 2017) and “period poverty” in the United Kingdom (George 2017). It assumes that women do not have access to menstrual care products because they live in a system that favors men’s bodies and thus refuses to distribute resources equitably to women and men.

The proposed solution to menstrual inequity centers on legislative and policy changes, particularly ones that require small, incremental changes and work within existing systems. A sizable amount of the menstrual activism happening now—especially as it circulates in social media and news media in the United States—focuses on small policy changes like the “tampon tax” (that is, eliminating the sales tax on menstrual care products, often erroneously referred to as a “luxury tax”; Weiss-Wolf 2017) and agitating for free single-use menstrual pads and tampons in schools, prisons, shelters, and so on. These efforts have become the public face of menstrual activism (Gass-Poore 2016; Crawford and Spivack 2017).

Is menstrual activism now anemic?

The current iteration of this rapidly mainstreaming menstrual activism separates menstrual activism from its radical history. Rather than drawing together, as radical activist Ben Morea advocates, the trio of cultural, artistic, and political forms of resistance (Fahs 2012), menstrual activism has shifted toward a politics overly concerned with the values of safety, cleanliness, and bloodlessness (political forms of resistance) at the expense of cultural and artistic modes of resistance. For example, the menstrual equity and period poverty frameworks focus on placing single-use products (commercial tampons and pads) into the hands of unhoused, poor, and incarcerated menstruators without making explicit a structural analysis of why people lack access in the first place (Acoca 1998; Anderson 2017). The popular uptake of this agenda is striking. On January 28, 2019, activists mounted a three-pronged campaign aimed at the US Department of Education. They published a full-page open letter to Education Secretary Betsy DeVos in the *Washington Post*, they delivered a petition with thirty-five thousand signatures to her office, and that evening, they lit up the department’s headquarters with the message “Period Poverty Is Real.” Their demands were state-funded pads and tampons and menstrual health education in American schools (Smith and Strauss 2019).

Incarcerated menstruators have also been a focus of activist attention. A recent Arizona campaign to give free tampons to incarcerated women emphasized the mailing of tampons and pads to legislators; similarly, people post

photos of themselves with pads marked with the (unconsciously ironic) hashtag #letiflow (Vera 2018; White 2018).⁷ While this activism has met with some success (and resulted, for instance, in changing the federal policy around access to menstrual products for incarcerated women), it also presents products as the end goal. What it misses is a more fundamental critique of the prison-industrial complex, differential treatment of prisoners depending on access to commissary monies, and a robust analysis of social class through the power dynamics of guards and prisoners. It also fails to challenge how menstrual stigma is leveraged to exert social control over incarcerated bodies. In this way, the movement has become institutionalized, shifting from a call to change the narrative to one that accommodates existing power structures.

Within this framework built on the intertwined foundations of neoliberalism, capitalism, and the blunting of feminism's radical edge, periods are merely material. Much like Nancy Fraser's (2013) critique of workplace reforms as an insufficient (and even counterproductive) means to achieve gender equality, we see the commodification of menstruation as yet another neoliberal turn away from radical transformation. Because the language of menstruation is bounded by the vocabulary of sexism and the grammar of capitalism, people are socialized to think about menstruation *through* products like tampons, pads, cups, and even birth control (Kissling 2013), a view that distracts from a more robustly complex analysis of the sociocultural and political realities that shape menstrual subjectivities. It is true that some of the organizations in the menstrual activist space are pairing product provision with educational initiatives, but in most cases, the educational efforts are a lesser priority (Bobel 2018). To be sure, NGOs and social businesses doing this work often regard product provision as a foot in the door, but due to constraints such as funder pressures and state agency priorities, they tend to produce material interventions that are easily scalable and measurable in ways that long-term attitudinal and behavioral change through education are not.

We assert a radical critique of the framing of menstruation as product focused, as stripping menstrual activism of its more profound critical capacity, sanding down the rough edges of the movement, and producing a solution that hides menstruation from public view. Imagine the outcomes if other movements adopted this accommodationist stance. The Health at Every Size movement might begin promoting Jenny Craig diet programs, and Black Lives Matter activists might hold workshops to train people of color to politely interact with the police.

⁷ Indian celebrities also adapted the strategy of posing with products, in this case in conjunction with the release of *Padman*, a film based on the true story of an Indian man who invented a low-cost menstrual pad-making machine (*Times of India* 2018).

The blunting of the radical edge has a long history in social movements and feminist projects. Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) and Gayle Sulik (2011) have aptly critiqued the breast cancer fund-raising infrastructure as “pink-washing” women’s experiences, fetishizing survivor status, minimizing the fact that women die from breast cancer, and using breast cancer to sell products and engage in corporate partnerships. Similarly, the battered women’s movement was founded by survivors who led efforts to establish shelters and services and who insisted on public visibility and legal justice. Over time, these activists were displaced by social workers who shifted the focus to the efficient running of shelters (even as their numbers declined) rather than challenging the power dynamics that give rise to abuse (Goodman and Epstein 2008; Schneider 2008). Similarly, Suzanne Staggenborg (1988) argues that while the pro-choice movement became more formalized and institutional so that it could move more easily across coalitions, this shift undermined the development of new tactics and introduced struggles attached to its more formal status (e.g., lavish Planned Parenthood fund-raisers and glossy brochures instead of angry, scrappy, grassroots activism). And so we join Fraser (2013), who calls for a redirection of social movements toward larger-scale, radical thinking that reckons (again) with transformation as an alternative to the “fortunes of feminism” that reveal a tamer form of feminism in the late capitalist era. Of course, activists are seldom, if ever, clearly either radical or accommodationist in their actions. Compromises are made, uneasy strategic partnerships are forged, and tactics that seem safe or palatable to the largest possible audience are engaged. These are the messy realities of doing social change work. We recognize that activism is always shaped and indeed constrained by resources and the sociopolitical climate of the time and place and that the vision of pure action is a fantasy. Still, we continue to worry about the ways that some actors in the menstrual activist movement link arms with and implicitly endorse (or even advertise for) multinational menstrual product makers in spite of long and distressing corporate histories of disregarding women’s health and deploying shame as a selling tool. We want to nurture a more radical vision for change both in and outside of the movement.

In summary, an interest in respectability leads to a shift toward safety and institutionalization, which then facilitates co-optation. With this turn, the movement becomes vulnerable to capitalist exploitation. The new priorities—organizing product drives; setting up social businesses and NGOs to provide products to girls and women in the global South; developing policy and legal interventions to mandate that governments provide products in schools, prisons, and public spaces—all reduce menstrual activism to a movement to fortify what historian Sharra Vostral (2008, 2) terms “technologies of passing”: the methods (commercial or homemade) that enable

menstruators to pass as nonmenstruators, to conceal the stigmatized biological process loaded with ideologies about femininity.

Troubling frameworks of menstrual activism

Given this history of menstrual activism and its changing priorities, we now examine three key frames that conceptualize the current movement's issues and priorities: public health, human rights in the context of global development, and gender equity. Our aim is to expose the problematic conceptualizations set in motion by the tamer forms of menstrual activism that reign supreme today. The vision guiding the three frames, we assert, remains mired in the menstrual mandate of shame, silence, and secrecy because it does not fundamentally question the norms of embodiment rooted in the denial of (many) female bodily realities. Each frame begins with the largely unexamined premise that the body must be managed and controlled. We are pushing back against this to pry open more innovative and body-positive messaging and interventions, including educational programs that teach body literacy and promote the body as a source of power, pleasure, and potential instead of a problem to be solved through engagement with consumerism.

One: Public health

Today, many organizations regard “menstrual hygiene as a public health issue” (VanLeeuwen and Torondel 2018, 169), hitching it to the firmly established public good of advocating for the health of the people (see, e.g., Parrillo and Feller 2017). In this frame, underserved populations, especially people who are poor, homeless (or, in the more recent parlance, unhoused), or incarcerated as well as poor girls in schools who lack access to menstrual care materials, are targets of intervention. Some of the most prominent menstrual health activists hail from public health programs that seek to redress a historical inattention to menstrual health in their field. For example, Marni Sommer and colleagues (2016) argue that “a lack of adequate guidance, facilities, and materials for girls to manage their menstruation in school is a neglected public health, social, and educational issue that requires prioritization, coordination, and investment” (1). In another article, Sommer and colleagues (2015) attribute the blind spot to “the siloed nature of donor funding, with health and education supported through different funding streams” (1304).

The discourse of menstrual activism as a matter of public health is ubiquitous and not without merit. That said, it often stands in for a deeper analysis of the problems. For instance, a lack of access to products figures prominently in a short documentary called *See Here Now* featuring Chelsea Von

Chaz, founder of #HappyPeriod, a Los Angeles–based nonprofit organization that distributes donated menstrual products to people experiencing homelessness (Huntington 2017). While the emphasis on the unmet needs of unhoused menstruators is a worthy intervention, the neoliberal product focus obscures the root causes of desperate income inequality and the social marginalization of the poor and the unhoused.

Public health, as a field, is invested in promoting healthy behaviors that prevent illness and disease. Thus, this particular framework rationalizes certain foci such as improving access to products for the poor who, it is feared, will develop illness if they do not use hygienic means to absorb their flow (though to date, little data supports a clear causal link between the type of menstrual method used and negative health outcomes; see Sumpter and Torondel 2013 and Das et al. 2015). Of course, poor and unhoused menstruators *should* be afforded unrestricted access to the materials they need to manage their periods, but the public health frame must also engage why agencies such as homeless shelters and other programs designed to meet the needs of those facing dire poverty until recently did not typically provide menstrual materials to the people they serve.

Furthermore, the menstrual cycle as a meaningful marker of health and well-being receives scant attention in this framework. Most menstrual discourse (and thus action) decontextualizes menstruation, excising it from the continuous menstrual cycle that impacts multiple body systems. Such a limited view is a missed opportunity. There are some members of the medical community, however, who have registered the importance of the menstrual *cycle*, widening the frame to take stock of more than the monthly shedding of the uterine lining (AAP and ACOG 2006; ACOG 2006).⁸ Because the menstrual and ovulatory system is so important to overall health, a number of health researchers and advocates refer to it as the “fifth vital sign” (the other four signs are heartbeat, breathing rate, temperature, and blood pressure). In 2004, a scientific forum, “The Menstrual Cycle Is a Vital Sign,” was convened at the New York Academy of Sciences to boost awareness that “the menstrual cycle is a window into the general health and well-being of women, and not just a reproductive event . . . (that) can indicate the status of bone health, heart disease, and ovarian failure, as well as long-term fertility” (AAAS 2004). And, in 2006 the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists filed a “Committee Opinion” advising practitioners to use menstruation in girls and adolescents as a vital sign (ACOG 2006).

⁸ This information is also taken from email communication between Chris Bobel and Jerilyn Prior, January 2, 2018.

Still, like all moves to make the private more public, there are hazards to this too. For example, Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (2014), in her examination of campaigns targeting menstruators in South Asia, finds fault with the rendering of menstruation as a medicalized problem that, in her words, reduces it to “a universal feminine experience and . . . strictly a biological condition” (1162). She resists placing menstruation “squarely within the medical domain” whereby it is “an ailment of the body in need of ‘sanitising’ and remedying” (1159). Similarly, Deepa Joshi, Gerlinde Buit, and Diana González-Botero (2015) demonstrate how a medicalized framing of menstruation obscures the way institutions (religious, educational, cultural, corporate) shape agendas for change. For example, in the slums of Jaipur in the Indian state of Rajasthan, Shobhita Rajagopal and Kanchan Mathur (2017) evaluated menstrual health curricula and found that although “the textbooks focus on the biological and technical aspects of human reproduction, no effort is made to discuss the social and emotional aspects which the adolescents need to understand” (314).

Such medicalized renderings delink menstruation from sexuality in spite of the common association between menstruation and fertility, one that often positions the menstruating girl as sexually available and/or marriageable. And yet, contemporary menstrual activist discourse severs this cultural connection, thrusting girls into an ambivalent state, marked but muted as (potentially) sexual. Thus, we sound an alarm about the problematic delinking of menstruation and sexuality in menstrual health education. We advocate instead for menstrual health as part of comprehensive sexual health and rights education whereby menstruators understand the relationship between fertility and the menstrual cycle and are allowed to understand menstruation as part of their sexual lives (and sex as part of their menstrual lives). But this material must be taught through a feminist lens that refuses to instrumentalize the menstruating body as *merely* reproductive (and marriageable). It is crucial that the menstrual cycle be understood in social and physiological context while centering—always—agency and choice.

In short, current conceptualizations of menstruation as a public health concern are too narrow. They tend to reduce menstruation to a matter of hygiene to prevent infection (despite a dearth of evidence establishing a link between reused menstrual materials, such as cloth, and illness), and they privilege improved access to menstrual products over more substantive concerns. The public health frame also narrowly constructs menstruation as a medical condition that detaches the biological process from the social and emotional meanings that profoundly shape the menstrual experience, including a fuller reckoning with the entire menstrual cycle as not only a signal of fertility but also a robust health marker.

Two: Human rights

The second menstrual activist framework we offer for reconsideration is one that deploys discourses of human rights to mobilize improvement of access to menstrual care materials; infrastructure (toilets, water, and disposal); and, to a lesser degree, menstrual and puberty health education. This frame is especially prominent in the menstrual hygiene management movement flourishing in low- and middle-income countries where advocates explain how menstrual hygiene management is key to the achievement of several rights, including the rights to good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, decent work, and economic growth. Tying menstrual hygiene management to human rights has been a productive move. It has forced a dialogue around a deeply taboo topic, but simultaneously, the framing of menstruation as a human rights issue (specifically through discourses of dignity) enables advocates to talk about menstruation without talking about blood. This passage from Human Rights Watch demonstrates the link: “Taboos and stigma around menstruation are rooted in perceptions that menstruation is something dirty, to be ashamed of, and to be hidden. This can create or reinforce discriminatory practices against women and girls, hampering gender equality and impacting women’s and girls’ dignity” (2017, 14).

Using the language of dignity to discuss menstrual health is at once clever and deeply problematic. After all, who can argue with the human right to dignity? But the uses of dignity in menstrual activist discourse present a curious paradox. While advocates of menstrual hygiene management challenge the stigma of menstruation through sloganeering such as “break the silence” and “smash the shame,” they advance concrete interventions focused on keeping menstruation hidden through “upgraded” menstrual care materials such as replacing cloth—accessible, sustainable, and affordable—with Western-style single-use pads or cups designed expressly for menstruation. This move to “upgrade” rationalizes the superiority of “new and improved,” but it rests on the yet-unfounded assertion that current means of menstrual management are unsafe and unhygienic and keep girls out of school. Indeed, while the link between improving access to menstrual products and quality of life might seem intuitive, the evidence base is only beginning to build. To date, there are only a handful of studies that show a causal relationship between product provision and school attendance in particular contexts (such as Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, and India). A systematic review of the extant research concluded that there is insufficient evidence to establish the effectiveness of menstruation management interventions such as product provision (Hennegan and Montgomery 2016), although a few rigorous trials are underway. Another review of research in the Indian context showed a relationship between school

attendance and access to menstrual pads, but when the analysis was adjusted for region, the relationship was not significant (van Eijk et al. 2016).

Our complaint is not with the general deployment of the human rights frame *per se*. Rather, we grow uneasy with how the discourses of menstrual hygiene management use human rights to inadvertently accommodate stigma. Menstrual hygiene management's focus on managing the menstrual body so that no evidence of menstruation is detected (thereby "preserving dignity") reifies the mandate of shame, silence, and secrecy. An apt example of using human rights discourse to accommodate stigma comes from a video produced by the Ghana Education Service in collaboration with UNICEF and the High Commission of Canada. Reflecting on his memories of being in school, broadcaster Israel Laryea shares: "Sometimes my female classmates ended up soiling themselves when we're in school. [pause] See you're amazing. You're strong. You're so resilient. You're made in such a special way. Be Yourself. If . . . of course I'd advise that you learn how to manage your menstruation a lot better. But it's a natural phenomenon. You have to do it . . . that indeed makes you special" (UNICEF Ghana 2017). This message—notably issued from the mouth of a middle-aged man and public figure—suspends girls in an impossible spot. How do they reconcile the dueling messages of "you're amazing" and "manage your menstruation"? To our ears, the takeaway is this: Being amazing depends on one's capacity to manage one's body, and managing one's body means hiding menstruation as effectively as possible.

As these examples illustrate, the discourse of menstrual hygiene management constructs dignity as dependent on menstrual invisibility. Failure to pass is typically expressed as an urgent matter or a "hygienic crisis," a term coined by historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg (1997, 31) to conceptualize the historic shift in American cultural views of menstruation at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Brumberg, around this time, menstruation transformed from primarily a maturational event to an urgent matter of menstrual concealment. Relatedly, Lara Freidenfelds (2009) finds that, in the United States, the embrace of the body-in-control served as a requirement for membership in the middle class—those whose bodies are free of odors, their clothes free of tears and stains. This means, of course, that any evidence of menstruation is strictly forbidden (Goldenberg and Roberts 2004). This "modern" view is now exported throughout the global South, shaping a judgment of the racialized poor and their "backward" practices.

Given the deeply racialized histories of colonialism, the precursor to development work in the global South, the development subsector of menstrual hygiene management reflects a standard of embodiment tied to white Western privilege and the promotion of a particular kind of embodiment. With this

history in mind, we must ask how development initiatives to provide girls and women of the global South with Western-style products represent yet another colonial project, casting the bodies of South Asians and Africans as deficient and in need of rescue.

In summary, the deployment of human rights discourse in the emerging menstrual activist movement in the global South produces a complicated picture. It effectively arrests attention and situates menstrual health as a legitimate issue of development. But it simultaneously constructs the brown and black body as a problem in need of a solution. When the trope of dignity is leveraged to argue for menstrual product access, the underlying assumption is that the body that discloses its menstrual status is necessarily *undignified*. Thus, this discourse fails to trouble the pervasively negative view of menstruation, especially for racialized bodies. Rather, it quietly accommodates it. In this way, the public discourse of menstruation in the global South works to reinforce stigma rather than resist it.

Three: Gender equity

As an outgrowth of liberal feminism, the third framework in question is the menstrual equity/period poverty model of menstrual activism, which employs a liberal feminist assessment of the gendered distribution of resources. The value of this approach lies in its attention to refusing men's bodies as the standard of normality. A key fixation in this frame is the eradication of the so-called tampon tax, an agenda that places a central emphasis on menstrual products at the expense of more substantive social critiques of social class, menstrual visibility, and intersections with gender and sexuality, even while the theoretical underpinning of the menstrual equity frame explicitly acknowledges sexism. The obsession with the tampon tax targets a relatively easily achievable goal that makes a negligible, although arguably symbolic, difference in women's financial lives as a stand-in for the far more complicated and multifaceted goals of radical menstrual activism (e.g., critiquing systems in which women's health and women's bodies—not to mention trans and nonbinary bodies—are ignored). As Zoyander Street (2016) asserts, "Even if sales taxes on sanitary products were lifted, it would only make a small dent in the impact that menstruation has on the lives of people in severe poverty."

In addition to fighting for menstrual product access, a related set of efforts are focused on the design of better and more user-friendly menstrual products. For example, innovations in "femtech" (Tin 2016) such as absorbent underwear (some with built-in menstrual pads), reusable menstrual cups that cost around US\$30 and come in several different sizes, and even "smart tampons" (a design where a monitor alerts menstruators when their tampons fill up) have emerged as solutions to the socially constructed "problem" of

menstruation. Similarly, subscription services for menstrual products have sprung up, allowing menstruators to avoid the supposedly embarrassing experience of purchasing products in a typical brick-and-mortar store (Parker 2017). Using this frame, the “need” for better, more sophisticated, more cutting-edge, more convenient, and more “lifestyle friendly” menstrual care products is socially constructed. Yet again, the menstruating body is situated as a problem that is best solved through consumption or, borrowing from political philosopher Michael Sandel (2012, 203), menstrual activism is another case of “the marketization of everything.”

Concern about access to menstrual products for trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer people has also constituted an emergent goal of menstrual activism. Some menstrual activists have lobbied for more awareness about the hazards of inserting tampons and menstrual cups for trans men, who may not always welcome insertive products (Green Vagina 2017). Similarly, the lack of menstrual products in men’s restrooms has raised concerns about bathroom equity, as trans men cannot easily or safely buy an emergency supply of tampons and pads in public spaces if they start their periods unexpectedly. Further, without privacy in the restroom to change pads, tampons, or cups, trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer people may regard menstruation as more challenging to contain (Armitage 2017).

We argue that the problem with this approach, embodied most clearly in the relentless emphasis on products as the solution, is that it cedes the menstrual activist movement to the product makers by advancing technologies of passing while failing to advance a truly trans-positive and gender-nonbinary body politics. That is, menstruation becomes material, whereby the solution to gender inequity is to supply *more* material to *more* women and others who menstruate, and to make those products more fun, less expensive, and more user friendly. We dispute this approach because it relies too heavily on consumer culture; it authorizes capitalism to swallow menstrual activism whole. And, of course, the products themselves, designed to mask and hide menstruation, become the thing, the silver bullet to champion and celebrate. In this way, the complicated needs of menstruators are reduced to simply needing something to bleed on. For example, Thinx, a start-up that sells “period-proof underwear” engaged in an ad campaign that trivialized the trans menstrual experience, framing it as a matter of “wanting to be included” rather than as a matter of having, for example, different menstrual needs and different consequences for being outed as menstruating. While the menstrual equity frame is ostensibly intersectional through its emphasis on poor and otherwise marginalized menstruators, it is an impoverished reckoning with the complexity of menstruators’ lives, one that is too tightly cleaved to menstruators as consumers, a monodimensional and indeed commodified rendering of the embodied experience.

We also see this kind of product-focused, neoliberal framing as dangerous because it situates menstrual activism as very, very small in focus, a move that makes it more difficult to link menstrual activism to other social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, labor rights, environmental rights, antifascism, and so on. This is a point we will return to shortly. For example, even if unhoused or trans menstruators gain access to products, they still lack many other basic needs, and class inequality and violence against trans people continues to worsen in the United States and throughout the world. Fanta Sylla's writings about white privilege animating menstrual activism resonate: "So you can put period blood war paint on your face, and YES, in your context, it will probably be *subversive* and *revolutionary*. For the rest of us just going outside, walking in the streets, exposing our vulnerable, repulsive bodies is *subversive* and *radical*."⁹ The lack of broader critique represented through product-based activism—of the prison industrial complex, of class warfare, of police brutality and institutionalized racism, of fat phobia, of transphobia, of body shaming/policing—trivializes menstrual activism and lessens its potential political impact.

Social movements have the greatest impact when they imagine themselves as intertwined and interconnected, rooted in the same structures of inequality and oppression that allow for injustices to occur. After all, as trans activist Leslie Feinberg (1996) writes, "I believe that this is the only nobility to which we should aspire—that is, to be the best fighters against each other's oppression, and in doing so, build links of solidarity and trust that will forge an invincible movement against all forms of injustice and inequality" (92). Menstrual activism, by definition and through its intersectional history, is connected to other movements aligned with the struggles of others fighting for social justice. We call for a return to and development of these linkages without which the movement will languish on the margins.

For menstrual activism to truly connect with neighboring social movements, it needs to address the deeper sources of menstrual inequality, a move that will produce efforts to destigmatize and normalize menstrual experiences while acknowledging the unique needs of marginalized menstruators. We argue that products may not encapsulate the primary needs of these underserved populations, just as eliminating the tampon tax (a very small, albeit symbolic, amount of money per package) does not represent menstruators' larger concerns about stigma and body surveillance. For instance, this critique extends even to academic feminists and menstrual activists who imply that the primary need of trans menstruators is a shift in *language* to allow for more

⁹ See Fanta Sylla's 2017 Tumblr post, "white women x period blood," at <https://www.tumblr.com/dashboard/blog/fansylla/114528043755>.

trans-inclusive word choices (e.g., from “women” to “menstruators”).¹⁰ And while language matters and signals inclusion, such a linguistic shift is hardly an adequate solution to oppression.

Furthermore, the needs of trans people may differ wildly and extend far beyond the matter of language. As a therapist who works with trans men and nonbinary clients, Breanne Fahs has found that trans men are most concerned about how to avoid body dysmorphia during their menstrual cycles, how to reconcile the mandate to have frequent pap smears while they take testosterone (and manage the shame and embarrassment of medical intrusions like these), and, for trans men, how to avoid leaking/staining and therefore unwittingly outing themselves as trans. This disconnect between academic framings and nonacademic descriptions of trans men’s menstrual needs highlights the importance of moving beyond a gender equity model into a model of menstrual embodiment that is far more complex and multifaceted.

A new vision for menstrual activism: Radical menstrual embodiment

The realization of radical menstrual embodiment insists on taking seriously what it means to be radical. We push beyond the colloquial meaning of radical as extreme to reclaim radical as “relating to the root.” Thus, a politics of radical embodiment is one that aims to remove the source of body negativity that grows in the soil of white supremacist, heteronormative misogyny. To wit, menstrual activism must necessarily remain focused on shame-based perceptions of menstruation that run contrary to seeing the body as a site of power and pleasure. This attention must be focused not only on the shedding of the uterine lining but, more broadly, on the entire menstrual cycle across the life span, from menarche through menopause, for diverse bodies. This expanded view makes room for a broader range of experiences related to the many phases of the menstrual cycle as well as associated disorders such as endometriosis and polycystic ovarian syndrome. Resistance, then, requires challenging assumptions about the body; it demands that we rip out the (diseased) root of menstrual stigma.

¹⁰ It might make sense, as we have argued elsewhere, to move back and forth between “women” and “menstruator” so that we do not lose the historical roots of misogynistic oppression (Przybylo and Fahs 2018). This move also carries the benefit of being more legible to many activists in the global South, who are less supported in writing gender fluidity into policy. As Bobel’s fieldwork exploring menstrual activist interventions in East Africa has demonstrated, the word “menstruator” is often met with resistance. As one policy advisor quipped: “I’d love to see the looks on the people in the Kenyan delegation if we suggested using the word ‘menstruator’” (Bobel 2018, 111).

Our notion of radical menstrual embodiment is informed by the scholarship of critical body studies that explores the tensions inherent in situating the body as at once a source of power and oppression (see Martin 2001; Kline 2010; Grosz 2011). Michel Foucault (1995) has most famously theorized how social relations of power produce bodies that are both disciplined and resistant, and Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) elaborates this tension through a gender lens. A politics of menstruation, then, must carefully reckon with how menstruation has been a source of discrimination without sliding into an overdetermined counternarrative that prescribes a uniformly positive view. While cultural feminists in particular argue that celebrating features of female embodiment—such as menstruation, pregnancy, and breastfeeding—contributes to the ongoing project to assert women’s value (see, e.g., Rich 1995), liberal feminists often take the position that fixating on the uniqueness of female embodiment keeps women “stuck” as the subjugated other (see Bobel 2010). Radical menstrual embodiment straddles these two views by recognizing the history of body-based oppression without reversing the narrative to claim power dependent on embodied experience. Because this radical view champions self-determination, it refuses to exchange one tyranny (hate your period) for another (love your period). Instead, it promotes the capacity of menstruators to develop menstrual literacy, body sovereignty, and diverse menstrual subjectivities.

The radical vision we advocate is a conceptualization of the end goal of activism, that is, the construction of a progressive narrative and plan for action in which menstruators are freed from body-based stigma and its mandate to conceal and contain the menstrual body. This radical reconceptualization does not prescribe a “proper” way to menstruate, including any explicit expectation, for example, that menstruators free-bleed. To repeat, we are advocating for the erosion of a mandate of any kind—the world we want is one where menstruators are supported to care for their bodies in the ways that are right for them.

So, what’s a (menstrual) activist to do?

Menstrual activists, we assert, must reexamine their strategic priorities to fundamentally challenge rather than reify stigma. With encouragement, we note a small number who are doing exactly this. For example, the Kenya-based social business and foundation hybrid ZanaAfrica is publishing a feminist reproductive health magazine with content geared toward girls and featuring positive boy role models.¹¹ The magazine is distributed for free in Nairobi-area

¹¹ See ZanaAfrica, <http://www.zanaafrica.org/faq/>.

schools. Kelsey Knight and Emily Varnam, a nurse and a doula respectively, established an education and awareness project dubbed the Fifth Vital Sign. They travel around the United States teaching people how to chart their cycles, make informed choices about birth control and menstrual care, and generally develop agency as reproductive health care consumers (Kim 2017). And UNICEF Indonesia has developed a menstrual health comic book aimed at boys with the core message that menstruation is normal. The content is informed by research conducted with schoolchildren (Kritz 2017).

But such approaches remain the exceptions that prove the rule. So, what will it take to capture more attention and drive more resources toward a more radical politics of embodiment? First, we refer activists to the origins of menstrual activism, a movement inspired by feminist critiques of the medicalization and commodification of the body. Remembering this history, and the alternative views that animated it, can redirect today's menstrual activism, returning it to its agenda of challenging stigma.

Second, activists must turn to the available research to ground their efforts. Despite an immature evidentiary basis linking product access to outcomes like improved school attendance and the avoidance of infection, most initiatives targeting menstruators in the global South include product provision (Bobel 2018). And in the West, the clarion call for menstrual equity similarly works to ensure that everyone gets access to menstrual products to “work and study, to be healthy, and to participate in daily life with dignity” (Weiss-Wolf 2017, xvi). It is troubling that activists assert the power of products to impact lives when the research base for these interventions, thus far, is thin.

That said, the research on menstrual stigma is far more robust and should factor more prominently in activist rationalizations for interventions. In Western culture, girls report a range of emotional reactions to menstruation, but they are mostly negative; they see it as a sign of growing up but are also embarrassed about it (Stubbs 2008). In a representative study in Kenya, girls expressed fear, shame, distraction, and confusion associated with menstruation because they were embarrassed, concerned about being stigmatized by fellow students, and, as one teacher explained, they were worried that the onset of menstruation signals the advent of a girl's sexual availability (McMahon et al. 2011). Menstrual negativity ignites a vicious cycle: poverty of knowledge fuels stigma, and stigma prevents the acquisition of new knowledge. Stigma, as it relates to the public deployment of menstrual knowledge, is especially dangerous in these ways. So why not channel resources toward menstrual health education that challenges the narrative of stigma?

After all, promoting health literacy is protective across the life course. In particular, research shows, early puberty education that includes important information about the body impacts children's health outcomes throughout

their lives (Nutbeam 2000; Graf and Patrick 2015). Menstrual activists need models of body-positive menstrual health messaging that could guide efforts to develop, for instance, nonbranded menstrual education in schools. But if the focus is narrowly trained on product access, the root issue of menstrual stigma remains obscured.

Advancing a stronger movement by building bridges

And yet, these recommendations are meaningless if menstrual activists do not make a commitment to link arms with neighboring movements. Over time, menstrual activism has increasingly stood on its own, pulling away from its environmental, consumer rights, and feminist health roots and later its anti-capitalist, punk, and anarchist connections. This is a mistake. While we reject framing menstrual activism as a fight for dignity, a claim that relies on the social construction of the menstruating body as abject, menstrual activism can draw on the broader movement for embodied autonomy by connecting to reproductive justice movements and providing a differently articulated bridge to the human rights movement. As we've stated elsewhere, menstrual activism, after all, is part of the complex and enduring project of loosening the social control of women's bodies, of working to move embodiment from object to subject status. While menstrual activism *is* about bleeding—unapologetically so—it is also not *only* about bleeding. The work of reframing menstruation is foundational to taking on a host of other urgent issues—from human trafficking to eating disorders to sexual assault.¹² This means that menstrual activism can link up to the broader feminist movement in robust and meaningful ways, particularly the *radical* feminist movement that seeks to look at the deeper root structures of inequalities that are based in patriarchy, racism, classism, cisgenderism, and homophobia.

As such, reproductive justice serves as a more suitable frame for the kind of public radical menstrual activism we envision. Referencing the racist history of denying women of color their rights to have and care for their own children, twelve US women of color founded this new frame of reproductive justice in 1994, situating abortion rights as part of “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”¹³ As Loretta Ross (2015), a cofounder of SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, once opined, “[reproductive justice] brings human rights home by looking at the totality of women's lives.” Conceptualizing menstrual

¹² See The Society Pages, <https://thesocietypages.org/girlwpen/tag/new-blood>.

¹³ See SisterSong, <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>.

activism in this way enables us to pay attention to the complicated contexts that shape embodied decision making that begins—at least—with the menstrual cycle.

When we regard the menstrual cycle as a normal biological process and a vital sign, we reject the idea that menstruation is merely a nuisance, a foil to femininity, and a business opportunity. Again, this does not mean that period-hate is necessarily replaced with period-love. For some, including those who experience painful periods and those who were assigned female at birth but do not identify as women or girls, menstruation can be traumatic, troublesome, even dangerous. A progressive and radical menstrual activism does not replace one dogma with another. Rather, it looks to the root causes of menstrual stigma in order to detach the menstrual cycle from commodification and medicalization. If menstrual activism hopes to grow into a durable, polyvocal, and resonant movement for social change, it must join other movements that rewrite the rules of embodiment through an intersectional feminist lens. No quest to sanitize menstruation or make it respectable will ever meet the fundamental needs of menstruators. Instead, let us reimagine menstruation as fiercely and defiantly in public, with menstrual product access as only one of many different facets of a bold new movement. Done right, menstrual activism is public feminism par excellence, moving embodiment, especially reproductive embodiment, out of the shadows. Radical menstrual embodiment can model a grassroots, transnational, anticapitalist, antineoliberal, antiracist, and anticlassist politics of thought into action.

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