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**Athletic Flow: Sporting Women and Tampon  
Advertising, 1936-1960**

Cultural understandings of menstruation have frequently been linked to cultural understandings of women's physical activity. For example, Patricia Vertinsky argues medical discourse that constructed menstruation as a sign of illness in the late-nineteenth century was a powerful means for controlling women's physicality. Similar discourse persists throughout the twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries. Advertising constitutes another important ideological tool in connecting menstruation and women's physical activity. A combination of advertising, medical discourse, menstruation, and women's physical activity is certainly evident in the commercialization of the tampon. When tampons were first advertised in 1936, the use of medical and scientific rationales to sell these new "internal" devices was prevalent. At the same time, advertising promulgated the idea that women could be physically active any day of the month, thus offering freedom through this modern technology. The image of the menstruating woman, however, was complicated, as she was also framed within rhetoric of discretion and shame. Therefore, advertising of the tampon and the tampon itself brought both menstruation and the menstruating woman out into public while simultaneously promoting a culture of concealment. This paper examines the cultural significance of the tampon and the role it played in reconceptualizing women's physical activity. I conduct this examination through a critical analysis of tampon advertisements in popular women's magazines from 1936 to 1960. I contextualize these advertisements within the cultural and historical settings of the mid-twentieth century to argue that images of sporting females in tampon advertisements helped perpetuate an ideology that made women's physical activity more acceptable, or at the very least more visible in mid-twentieth century U.S. society.

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