

# Periods of austerity: The emergence of 'period poverty' in UK news media

*European Journal of Cultural Studies*

1-17

© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:  
sagepub.com/journals-permissions  
DOI: 10.1177/13675494221133131  
journals.sagepub.com/home/ecs

**Sara De Benedictis** 

Brunel University London, UK

## Abstract

This article analyses the emergence of the discourse of period poverty in UK news media across a two-year period. Using thematic analysis and discourse analysis, I analyse three themes: the focus on the schoolgirl, the silencing of the austerity context and the preoccupation with products and public figures to solve the structural issue of period poverty. In doing so, I argue that period poverty has emerged in the cultural sphere due to three key, and intertwined, forces: the continued dismantling of the welfare state and individualising of poverty, an escalation of mainstream feminism and feminist activism around menstruation, as well as high-profile individuals (celebrities, MPs, royals etc) supporting period poverty as philanthropy. This article brings together literature on austerity media culture and mediations of mainstream feminism/s. It expands scholarship on austerity media culture by analysing how the novel discourse of period poverty continues to individualise poverty and justify the ongoing dismantling of the welfare state, and it furthers scholarship on mainstream feminism/s by examining how the discourse of period poverty connects mainstream feminism/s *with* austerity and class.

## Keywords

Austerity culture, mainstream feminism, menstruation, news, period poverty

## Introduction

In 2017, a feature piece in *The Guardian* by Abigail Radnor, who interviewed a number of feminist activists, argued that we had entered a moment of 'menstrual liberation', whereby 'periods got woke' (Radnor, 2017: no pagination). The issue of 'period

---

### Corresponding author:

Sara De Benedictis, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Brunel University London, Uxbridge UB8 3PH, UK.

Email: sara.debenedictis@brunel.ac.uk

poverty'<sup>1</sup> was put forward as one example of this feminist activism. This 2017 article is illustrative, as it underscores that since 2016 there has been increasing attention among activists, charities, politicians and celebrities about a rise in what news media have termed period poverty in the United Kingdom (UK). Emerging within a rise of feminism alongside the chokehold of austerity measures, period poverty has entered the public lexicon in the past decade. The term indicates 'a growing problem among women and girls from low-income households in the UK struggling to afford period products' (Briggs, 2021: 85). Accordingly, increasing sociocultural attention to this issue has emerged under neoliberal austerity in the UK: from various forms of digital activism challenging period poverty like #FreePeriods, to celebrities and brands like Alesha Dixon and Always stepping in to #EndPeriodPoverty, to political parties including the eradication of period poverty into their manifestos. This is despite the issue being intertwined in an historic twofold taboo of menstruation and stigmatisation of poverty (Haneman, 2021: 1), and a relative 'muted response to austerity' from the public (Harrison, 2021: 159).

In such unfriendly waters then, how and why is it that period poverty has galvanised such widespread sociocultural attention since 2016? Period poverty has no doubt long existed as one element of poverty, as the journalist Zoe Williams has pointed out (see Sarkar, 2018; see also Crossley et al., 2019). It is my contention that the 'hot-topic' of period poverty (Hughes, 2020: 84) has emerged in the cultural sphere due to three key, and intertwined, forces: the continued dismantling of the welfare state and individualising of poverty, an escalation of menstruation focused 'popular feminism' (Banet-Weiser, 2018) and feminist activism, as well as high-profile individuals (celebrities, MPs, royals etc.) supporting period poverty as philanthropy. This article analyses the *emergence* of period poverty as a discourse in UK news media across a two-year period by analysing three themes: the focus on the schoolgirl,<sup>2</sup> the silencing of the austerity politics of the issue, as well as the preoccupation with menstrual products and celebrity activists to solve this gendered, classed and structural issue. In doing so, the article brings novel knowledge about the mediation of period poverty and (1) expands scholarship on austerity media culture by analysing how the novel discourse of period poverty continues to individualise poverty and justify the ongoing dismantling of the welfare state, and (2) furthers scholarship on mediations of mainstream feminism/s by examining how the discourse of period poverty connects contemporary feminism *with* austerity and class.

## **Austerity culture, mainstream feminism/s and 'menstrual capitalism'**

### *The cultural politics of austerity*

Following the 2008 global recession and employing a rhetoric of financial stability, many Western nations have imposed restrictive austerity measures, particularly from 2010 onwards. Driven by the Coalition (2010–2015) and Conservative (2015–) governments, in the UK context there have been significant changes to welfare provisions and social security over the past decade, despite the economic logic of such austerity drives being questioned (see Clarke and Newman, 2012). Scholars have documented how austerity extends histories that impact the most marginalised in society and how this is

resisted (e.g. Bassel and Emejulu, 2018). The result of the ‘shredding of the social state’ (Jensen, 2020) is distinctly gendered, and as Jensen (2020) argues, we have seen how austerity directly impacts reproductive healthcare for marginalised groups, particularly migrant women, black women and women of colour. Thus, period poverty must be located within a wider threat to reproductive healthcare that the UK’s austerity context presents.

Some sociological literature has explored period poverty within a broader focus on poverty and foodbanks in the UK (Crossley et al., 2019; Garthwaite, 2016). And, more recently, as period poverty has received mainstream attention,<sup>3</sup> some empirical studies and reports interrogate how class and the structural angles of austerity shape period poverty (Briggs, 2021; Vora, 2020; Williams et al., 2022).<sup>4</sup> While this research offers valuable knowledge about period poverty, the *cultural* context is unaddressed.

Within the scholarship on austerity in the UK, a robust body of feminist literature exploring the *cultural* significance of austerity agendas exists (e.g. Allen et al., 2015; Jensen and Tyler, 2012; Mendick et al., 2018). Here, austerity is seen not only as an economic agenda, but, crucially, a cultural formation. Indeed, to ‘engage with the problem of consent’ that the ‘alchemy of austerity’ presents (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 306), we must consider how austerity is ‘a site of discursive struggle between different visions of the future’ (Bramall, 2013: 1). Scholarship focusing on austerity culture notes how it has become a form of neoliberal governance which pushes individualised ideologies around frugality, resilience and nostalgia, while reinstating existing inequalities, particularly related to gender, class, race and disability; this, in turn, intensifies and solidifies the neoliberal project. Tyler (2013) underscores how ‘figures’ emerge across popular culture, public rhetoric and everyday sites, whereby social crises play out through certain individuals and social groups. Relatedly, Jensen (2014) argues that ‘skiver’ and ‘striver’ figures emerge through popular culture and political discourse, reinvigorating historical divisions through moralising distinctions between the ‘deserving’/ ‘undeserving’ poor. Such distinctions uphold a ‘moral and disciplinary project’ that has maintained the “‘crisis lens’ of the welfare state’ since the 1970s, often played out through the family (Jensen, 2018: 144–145). As McRobbie (2020: 97) puts it, ‘Britain’s national imaginary of welfarism has been eroded and chipped away by the visual imaginary of shaming and the mediated distance on which it relies’. Elsewhere, Jensen (2016) examines the child poverty discourse, noting how it paradoxically intensifies as austerity worsens poverty. Resilience emerges as an individualising justification that shifts responsibility away from the state in its failure to improve poverty (Jensen, 2016: 85). Such insights into austerity culture are crucial, but they do not specifically consider how mediations of period poverty help to individualise poverty.

### *The rise of mainstream feminisms and ‘menstrual capitalism’*

Alongside the intensification of the austerity discourse, there has been a cultural emergence of feminism/s in the 2010s. Feminist media scholars (e.g. Banet-Weiser, 2018; Kanai, 2020; Rottenberg, 2018) examine the significance of mainstream feminism/s, underlining that some dominant forms of feminism intertwine with neoliberal mentalities. Rottenberg

(2018) illuminates how 'neoliberal feminism' interpellates a white, middle-class subject through discourses around balance and happiness, which sees feminism framed by capitalist logics. Simultaneously, she argues neoliberal feminism overshadows other feminisms and draws on 'others', such as working-class or migrant women, to maintain its normative requirements. Banet-Weiser (2018: 1) relatedly investigates the rise in popular feminism in the United States and the UK. She argues feminism is 'popular' because (1) 'feminism manifests in discourses and practices that are circulated in popular and commercial media'; (2) popular feminism 'signifies the condition of being liked or admired by like-minded people and groups, as popularity'; and (3) drawing on Stuart Hall, she asserts that popular feminism is 'a terrain of struggle, a space where competing demands for power battle it out'. She further investigates how popular feminism and misogyny relationally exist in an 'economy of visibility', whereby visibility becomes the political stance in an increasingly digitally connected world. Such analyses, I argue, are crucial to underscore the context in which period poverty, and its related feminist activism, has emerged.

This popularity of feminism has also seen, since 2015, a focus on menstruation (Tomlinson, 2021). While scholarship has investigated menstruation, representation and activism since the 1970s prior to the rise of mainstream feminism/s (Hughes, 2020: 84; see Røstvik, 2022, for an overview), there is a growing body of feminist scholarship that explores the recent upsurge of menstrual representations (and 'critical menstruation studies', see Bobel et al., 2020), particularly analysing advertising with some touching on period poverty. Campbell et al. (2021: 231) note that menstrual advertising changed post-2010 as menstruation became an 'invisible presence', rather than an 'overt threat' as in the 1980s/1990s, or through 'uncontrollability' as in the 2000s. They and others (Haneman, 2021; Koskenniemi, 2021; Røstvik, 2022) link this shift to brands taking on feminist values under 'woke washing' and 'femvertising' (see Sobande, 2019a). Exploring the US context, Haneman (2021: 9) analyses the emergence of 'menstrual capitalism', whereby 'corporate virtue signalling' around period poverty and capitalism combine to form a 'menstruation industrial complex'. Similarly, in *Cash Flow*, using archives, interviews and visual analysis, Røstvik (2022: 2) analyses the 'booming menstrual economy' from 1945 to 2020. Drawing on Bridget Crawford, Røstvik (2022: 17) notes that analyses of 'menstrual capitalism' interrogate the exploitation of menstruation by 'corporations, advertisers and other for-profit entities', forming the basis for later policy conversations on period poverty. Røstvik (2022: 191) considers how period poverty is one of many social justice issues that contemporary menstrual brands may speak to (see also Koskenniemi, 2021), but also notes that some feminists exploring 'free bleeding' (where no period products are used) may show 'radical empathy and understanding' towards those experiencing period poverty. Such analyses provide vital context about the changing nature of menstrual representations, capitalism and the cultural turn to feminism. Yet, the austerity context that marks the UK context is not analysed in depth, and advertising is often the main site of analysis, with other sites, such as news media, unattended.

Period poverty is, however, discussed in some analyses of social media. When analysing period memes, Tomlinson (2021) briefly discusses period poverty, noting that it is framed through the representation of the schoolgirl to raise awareness and normalise menstruation, although she does not analyse news. McKay (2022) does usefully analyse the emergence of period poverty in social media and news media to see how

contemporary activism shapes media and political agendas in the Scottish public sphere. While McKay touches on austerity and menstrual activism in the case study analysis, how the discourse of period poverty is theoretically interconnected with the cultural politics of austerity, mainstream feminism/s and menstrual capitalism, and may (re)invigorate social inequalities, is largely unsaid.

### *Mainstream feminism/s under austerity culture*

Some valuable literature combines the context of mainstream feminism *and* austerity culture to interrogate new formations of femininities. Gill and Orgad (2018: 483) argue that a discourse of resilience has emerged recently, seeing '[a]usterity discourses stress women's responsibility and need for adaptation and positive thinking'. As mentioned earlier, McRobbie (2020: 61–62) analyses gender and feminism under austerity, arguing that gendered and classed notions of resilience become crucial to mainstream feminism, and shapes how austerity is politically presented.<sup>5</sup> Relatedly, Budgeon (2019) explores 2010–2015 news coverage of austerity and gender, arguing that liberal feminist discourses around 'equality', 'integration and inclusion' and 'essentialism' were used, 'which rendered austerity *intelligible*' (p. 1147, my emphasis). This scholarship teaches us that dominant feminist and austerity discourses are culturally intertwined, yet this framework has not been applied to interrogate period poverty. The following section outlines my methodological approach to achieve this aim.

## Methodology

This article analyses news media representations of period poverty. It is important to consider how news shapes contemporary issues due to how it represents itself as objective, factual, often neutral and, most importantly, 'truth', despite its constructed and ideological nature (Burton, 2010). As pointed out by Orgad, Rottenberg and myself elsewhere De Benedictis et al. (2019: 719), 'traditional' news still validates and shapes topical issues (such as #MeToo) and continues to be an important source of information that frames social issues and national agendas.

In September 2018, I used the term period poverty to search LexisNexis. I kept the parameters of the search open and discovered that the term was first used in news media in 2016, as I detail below in the analysis. The time frame of news media that I analysed was two years (2016–2018). Once duplicate and irrelevant articles were removed, there were 154 articles remaining to analyse. Interestingly, a search conducted of local news media indicated that there were many more articles, potentially due to the galvanising effect of local activism related to the issue. However, I retained the focus on national newspapers due to the bigger reach, readership and cultural clout of these types of newspapers in shaping public discourse. LexisNexis does not hold all newspapers, and the analysis comprises online and news articles from the following publications: *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Express*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Mail on Sunday*, *The Observer*, *The People*, *The Sun*, *The Sunday Express*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Times*. LexisNexis does not include accompanying imagery; therefore, I did not analyse images.

I used discourse analysis and thematic analysis to analyse this two-year period of coverage. A qualitative and discursive approach was used as '[d]iscursive methods lend insight into the gendered nature of social conditions' (Budgeon, 2019: 1142). Following Budgeon (2019: 1142–1143) who draws on Reiner Keller, my aim was 'to generate data that demonstrated what could be said about the relationship between gender and austerity and the structure of this expression'. Due to the flexibility needed to analyse news media, I drew upon a thematic analysis to examine the data, themes and strands and considered how discourse was circulating through news media. As Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) note, '[t]hematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail'. Guided by key literature around the cultural politics of mainstream feminism/s and austerity and inspired by other news analyses (see De Benedictis et al., 2019: 722–723), I coded the data set by asking questions (see Braun and Clarke, 2006: 89) around: how the issue of period poverty was being represented, who was represented as the dominant subject of it, who or what validated the issue and what was offered as the source and solution to period poverty. Following Gill's (2018) approach to discourse analysis in media and communications, and in consultation with the literature and through looking for repetitive discursive patterns, these codes were then used to form three main themes. In what follows, then, I begin by tracking the emergence of period poverty in the news coverage and subsequently outline the themes that arose from the analysis of the coverage: namely, the dominance of the schoolgirl, the silencing of the austerity context and the preoccupation with menstrual products and individuals to solve the gendered, classed and structural issue of period poverty.

## Analysis

### *The surfacing of period poverty in UK news media*

The search of newspaper coverage of period poverty indicated that the term first featured in UK national newspapers on 27 September 2016 in an article by Libby Brooks (2016) in *The Guardian*. The article was entitled, 'MSPs debate giving free sanitary products to women on benefits; Topic discussed for first time in Holyrood, as Trussell Trust Scotland calls on SNP to address period poverty'. The article reported on Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) in Holyrood debating whether period products should be free for women receiving working age benefits in Scotland, as The Trussell Trust and other organisations brought the issue to light and urged MSPs to act. It ends by reporting on how Monica Lennon discussed 'the growing menstrual equity movement across the globe', situating period poverty within mainstream feminist movements. While period poverty has no doubt been discussed prior to this article, and the article itself referenced Lennon's period poverty campaigning since May 2015, it was this moment in September 2016 when the phrase first emerged in news media (see also Crossley et al., 2019; McKay, 2022). The surfacing of period poverty in news directly maps onto the rise of feminism in public discussion and the shift in menstruation discourse more generally (Haneman, 2021; McKay, 2022), as detailed above. It is therefore perhaps not that surprising that period poverty gained prominence then. Yet, while the discussion

of menstruation was present through period poverty, the newspaper coverage offered a sanitised view of menstruation. Indeed, like historical representations of menstruation in advertising<sup>6</sup> (see Campbell et al., 2021; Koskeniemi, 2021; Røstvik, 2022) and memes (Tomlinson, 2021), the coverage rendered actual blood absent.

After the emergence of period poverty in September 2016, the volume of news articles increased slightly, and the coverage slowly gained traction within national newspapers. In the beginning of the coverage, a couple of articles discussed *I, Daniel Blake* director Ken Loach and writer Paul Laverty speaking out about period poverty in December 2016, corroborating McKay's (2022) findings. *I, Daniel Blake* was released in October 2016 and drew on welfare claimant testimonies and anonymous state workers to narrate the lack of welfare support available to the main character Daniel Blake who had suffered a heart attack (Jensen et al., 2020). As Jensen et al. (2020: 80) note, the surrounding mediated discussion after its broadcast on the BBC in 2019 prised open complicated debates that underscored 'pro and anti-welfare discourses', which 'play out over media, policy and popular debate'.

Importantly, *I, Daniel Blake* had two scenes that represented period poverty. In the first scene, one of the main characters, Katie, is depicted as having to resort to shoplifting pads and the shop owners questioning her about this shoplifting. In the second scene, the same character is shown to ask whether her foodbank stocked pads, which it did not.<sup>7</sup> Jensen and Tyler (2015) argue that to understand how consent is procured for anti-welfare commonsense in the current austerity moment, it is crucial to consider how the political and cultural interlace. Period poverty becomes an important issue in the news as there is a critical nexus between popular culture (*I, Daniel Blake* and commentary from the film's creators) and political commentary (the MSP debate) to get the societal issue onto the public agenda (see also McKay, 2022). McKay (2022) argues the alliteration of period poverty made it palatable for news and social media too. News commentary about period poverty, however, swiftly underscored a certain type of subject, the schoolgirl, which, I suggest, worked to amalgamate ideological tensions under mainstream feminism and austerity, as the next section will explore.

### *The focus on the schoolgirl*

In my analysis of the two-year news period, I was interested in examining who is positioned as the subject of period poverty. In approximately a fifth of the news coverage, the subject of period poverty was undefined, and it was discussed as a general issue or topic, as I expand upon below. When a subject was defined, while women, particularly those who could not afford products, were often discussed and while there was also some mention of asylum seekers and refugees, trans men, non-binary people, patients, detainees or women and girls outside of the UK, the issue of period poverty was most often framed as one experienced by girls, and largely, schoolgirls in the UK. This framing is echoed in diverse media sites, meaning that others who experience period poverty may be overlooked (see Tomlinson, 2021). Mention was made of a type of schoolgirl: one on free school meals, deprived or underprivileged. Period poverty was, therefore, positioned as a gendered and classed issue that needed intervention, aligning with the way in which 'popular feminism' represents working-class

girls, black girls and girls of colour through a risk discourse compared with their white middle-class counterparts who are positioned as overcoming self-esteem issues and gaining confidence (Banet-Weiser, 2018: 82–83). By and large, the repercussions of period poverty were left unsaid in roughly half the coverage; when mention was made of its impact there was a focus on missing school, the health risks of using alternatives (e.g. socks or newspapers), embarrassment, shame, stigma, and a repetition of an impact on ‘health, hygiene and well-being’.

So why is it that the schoolgirl managed to galvanise so much attention in the coverage of period poverty? As mentioned, the coverage stressed working-class girls were missing out on school and their education. For example, drawing on an Always OnePoll survey, one article noted that those who had experienced period poverty were ‘less likely’ to gain qualifications and were then less likely to gain employment (with a caveat that those who experience period poverty also finished school and gained degrees) (Elsworthy, 2018). I suggest that one discursive strand of period poverty is the connection it makes to wider discourses about social mobility under austerity. Biressi and Nunn (2016: 69) argue that social mobility and aspiration have long been proposed as achievable for the working-classes through education. Within ‘austere meritocracy’ discourses (Mendick et al., 2018) and the mainstream feminist and austerity context (McRobbie, 2020), education and career are offered as key to individual young people’s success, especially girls.<sup>8</sup> Through the logic of school equalling career and social mobility, period poverty therefore directly threatens these sometimes unachievable and difficult goals. Cultural attention then mobilises around the subject of period poverty as an absent schoolgirl to counteract the threat that her absence poses to ‘austere meritocracy’, as she is positioned as the ‘deserving’ poor that society must aid. Røstvik (2022: 195) similarly notes that anxiety around period poverty and school attendance is related to ‘loss of productivity and the resulting economic impacts’. This cultural attention also implicitly frames the working-class schoolgirl through whiteness as she is seen as excluded yet redeemable in the news coverage, rather than ‘as a racialised irredeemable “other”’ (Haylett, 2001: 351), aligning with broader historical representations that position social exclusion and welfare reform in Britain as about ‘the reconstruction of nation through the reconstruction of white working-class identities’ (Haylett, 2001: 351). Furthermore, in the coverage, the figure of the schoolgirl becomes divorced from the family, and while occasional links to parents were made (see below), overall we see the longer child poverty discourse repeated, that ‘uncouples the poverty of children from the poverty of their parents’ (Jensen, 2016: 78). Therefore, in the period poverty discourse the schoolgirl works to uphold neoliberal values under austerity and individualises poverty by wrenching the ‘deserving’, implicitly white schoolgirl from the family, obscuring the structural components of poverty and the racialisation of these social mobility discourses.

Additionally, in this two-year period of news referencing period poverty, it was very rare firsthand narratives or firsthand experiences of those facing the issue were present; indeed, quotes were very rarely used. Out of the 154 articles analysed, there were three articles that quoted a girl, a student and a group of mothers’ experiences of period poverty, and three where Celia Hodson (Hey Girls owner, a ‘femcare’ social enterprise) discussed her experiences of poverty, and implicitly period poverty. Thus, in the



coverage, period poverty was largely an issue framed and legitimised by others, such as politicians, activists, charity workers, celebrities and companies, and not by those experiencing it. When this is coupled with a general lack of specificity about the material and social effects of period poverty in the news coverage, poverty experiences are ‘flattened’, as is also the case in some televisual representations of poverty (De Benedictis et al., 2017: 349). In this sense, this coverage repeats a longer history of marginalising working-class experience of menstruation in the public sphere (De Benedictis and Mendes, 2021; Lander, 1988), and indeed of working-class experiences under austerity (see e.g. Mew and Herrington, 2018). Therefore, the discourse of period poverty is not about working-class experience or narratives of poverty, rather the figure of the schoolgirl largely upholds middle-class and neoliberal values about social mobility under austerity as noted above, like other classed figures (Tyler, 2013). Furthermore, within the discourse of period poverty the cause of it was ambiguously portrayed, as I discuss next.

### *Period poverty without poverty*

Intriguingly, at the beginning of the two-year period of news coverage, period poverty was often framed through political critique. In some articles, period poverty was situated within broader changes and shifts, such as cuts to school nurses (Roberts, 2017), the increased tightening of benefits and cuts (Brewer, 2017) or Theresa May’s classed and gendered assault on women through welfare reforms (Cosslett, 2016). As one article states, ‘The implementation of welfare reform has taken a terrible toll on families who are already up against it and on terribly low incomes. [ . . . ] Struggling to afford sanitary products is just another burden for low-income women’ (Simmers cited in Brewer, 2017, no pagination). In this sense, period poverty was framed in some outlets through discussions of poverty, political reform, the ‘shredding’ of the welfare state (Jensen, 2020) and linked to broader power structures. From approximately September 2017, a shift occurred in the news coverage. The cause of period poverty began to be increasingly unspoken or vaguely positioned; detailed discussions about it became increasingly infrequent. While there was critique of the government around how period poverty was handled and fleeting references to poverty, the cause of period poverty became unmoored from the context of austerity or cuts within the coverage. Intermittently, this process was noted by some journalists: in *The Guardian*, Zoe Williams (2018) argued that there is ‘no world in which “period poverty” – not being able to afford tampons – can be separated from “actual poverty” (not being able to afford beans)’. Crossley et al. (2019) note that, in recent years, issues pertaining to poverty have become disjointed in public discourse (e.g. period poverty, fuel poverty etc.) (see also McKay, 2022). They argue that this is problematic as ‘the notion of poverty becomes increasingly fragmented, wider determinants of the distribution of resources remain unproblematised and the scope to challenge them is therefore diminished’ (Crossley et al., 2019: 1). Similarly, the poverty part of period poverty, situated within the austerity context, by and large, became decontextualised in the coverage.

As the cause of period poverty was often left unsaid or unclear, political discussion of period poverty was replaced with it becoming a shorthand to speak about other things, like news coverage of other phenomena such as trafficking (King, forthcoming). For example,

period poverty was dismissed as not as serious as Brexit negotiations (Littlejohn, 2017) and as the 2017 general election loomed, eradicating period poverty appeared as a party promise from the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party. Krisel et al. (2021) note a similar dynamic in news about the ‘tampon tax’; discussions about the ‘tampon tax’ are co-opted to speak about broader political aims in the UK and US contexts, rather than used to speak about menstruation, poverty or social inequalities. Some politicians placed the onus of period poverty on parents too as the coverage discussed Justine Greening (the then Secretary of State for Education) suggesting that parents (and schools) must take responsibility for period poverty and children missing school, reiterating, in a different way, the aforementioned individualising of poverty (e.g. Buchan, 2017; see Jensen, 2018). Period poverty also became shorthand to highlight Meghan Markle’s charity work to address period poverty in India (e.g. Long, 2018; see Clancy, 2021, for an analysis of how Markle’s ‘Firm’ visits relate to ‘diversity capitalism’). One article even cited political debate on menstruation and period poverty as evidence of feminism having ‘gone too far’: ‘It’s not enough that we’ve had MPs sobbing over Universal Credit benefits, their abortions and alcoholic dads – now we have to listen to a woman telling the world it’s that time of the month’ (Platell, 2018). Here, the intermingling of feminist discourse and negative reactions to it, a hallmark of ‘popular feminism’ (Banet-Weiser, 2018), emerged, as the discourse of period poverty is mobilised to speak about things other than period poverty.

The latter journalist’s critique of period poverty discussion highlights a further strand that emerged within the coverage. The menstruation taboo was often presented as the *cause*, and breaking this taboo was offered as the *solution* to period poverty, among other things as I detail below. In essence, the dual consideration of how period poverty is a gendered *and* classed issue (see Briggs, 2021), and indeed can be complicated by other social inequalities related to, for example, race, disability or gender identity (see Bobel et al., 2020, for an overview on menstruation), became lost in the coverage overall. While the gendered taboo around menstruation undoubtedly shapes period poverty, it is also related to specific and complex inequalities that emerge in the current austerity moment (McKay, 2022). However, considering mainstream feminism’s tendency, and some alternative menstrual brands (Koskenniemi, 2021), to offer diversity to ‘homogenize and flatten out difference around a white feminine ideal’ (Kanai, 2020: 29) while promoting diversity as the “‘happy point’ of intersectionality’ (Ahmed cited in Kanai, 2020:29), it is perhaps unsurprising that the gendered components of period poverty became a strong thread. So, while the coverage initially showed some promise of diverging from the discursive elements of neoliberal austerity, over time familiar repetitive tropes of dislodging systemic inequalities from the structures that cause them became dominant. The decontextualisation of period poverty occurred alongside the individualisation of it, which I consider next.

### *Shifting the focus to products and individuals*

The two-year news coverage showed a strong emphasis on activists, celebrities, charitable organisations, companies and the government intervening to provide products for those experiencing period poverty. Scotland was often celebrated as the first country to provide free menstrual products to 1,000 women in ‘low-income homes’ in Aberdeen (e.g. MacDonell, 2017),<sup>9</sup> and other nations were asked to follow suit. Feminist activists,

such as Amika George, celebrities, such as Adwoa Aboah, Alesha Dixon and Daisy Lowe, royals, such as Meghan Markle, and MPs, such as Monica Lennon, Angela Rayner and Paula Sherriff, became central to the coverage on period poverty. As mentioned above, the issue of period poverty was legitimised by others. Spotlighting public figures instead of those experiencing period poverty supports neoliberal tropes and aligns with how we might expect feminist issues to be represented under popular feminism's 'economy of visibility' (Banet-Weiser, 2018: 2). In the coverage, the focus on public figures occurred alongside charities, such as GirlGuides, In Kind Direct and WaterAid, and companies, like Boots, Always and the social enterprise Hey Girls, rallying around the eradication of period poverty and donating products, either in bulk or for each product sold. This individualising discourse in the coverage accentuated the notion that products are the answer to period poverty; the more you consume or donate, the more period poverty will be solved. This is similar to how websites and blogs of alternative period products market themselves under popular feminism (Koskenniemi, 2021). This mentality underscores that while menstruation has long been hidden, products are increasingly central to menstruation, and using them is now positioned as empowering and 'promising freedom through "feminist capitalism"' (Røstvik, 2022: 164; see also Koskenniemi, 2021).

Relying on consumerism to solve social issues aligns with ideas about philanthrocapitalism. Richey and Ponte (2011) interrogate the emergence of 'brand aid' that 'brings consumers and branded corporations into international development through celebrity mediation' (p. 17). Brand aid has three components – the 'brand', 'aid celebrities' and 'cause' – and ensures that 'consumption becomes the mechanism for compassion and creates new forms of value' (Richey and Ponte, 2011: 12). As they (Richey and Ponte, 2011: 152) elaborate, 'causumerism' ('shopping for a better world') becomes a form of citizenship and action, which is pushed forward by celebrity mediation. While Richey and Ponte discuss international development, their analysis still speaks to the discourse of period poverty in news media, as we see a similar dynamic emerge. 'Brand aid' shapes the discourse of period poverty and the focus on products in the coverage could be seen as a wider shift whereby menstrual brands intervene into social justice issues (Haneman, 2021; Koskenniemi, 2021; see Røstvik, 2022). The consideration of how it is a broader aspect of poverty, situated within austerity, is, again, lost in this discursive logic. This dovetails with the celebration of foodbanks in recent times. Garthwaite (2016) argues that as foodbanks have emerged under austerity, they themselves have been celebrated; this is instead of questioning why foodbanks have emerged in the first place, or why their usage has risen dramatically.

Consumerism is, therefore, paradoxically offered to solve the very issues and inequalities that a capitalist system creates and maintains in the first place. Always featured heavily in the news coverage due to their #EndPeriodPoverty campaign and donations of pads. This is perhaps unsurprising considering that Always has long targeted young girls through advertising (Røstvik, 2022: 115) and period poverty is framed through the school-girl. Yet, the role Always reportedly plays in the (re)producing of inequalities through menstruation is masked in the coverage. Corporations that sell period products are involved in policy initiatives to cease period poverty, thus highlighting they play a part in creating the issue by setting prices (Røstvik, 2022: 194). Other issues about Always are masked in the coverage too. Kenyan customers have long detailed their negative

experiences with their products causing burns, irritation, rashes and so on (Haneman, 2021; Røstvik, 2022). Røstvik (2022: 124–125) notes that under the #MyAlwaysExperience, Scheaffer Okore and others detailed their Always experiences in the 2010s. A resulting investigation by Ciku Kimeria uncovered that Proctor and Gamble (parent company of Always) were selling African consumers pads that used technologies that were defunct for Western consumers due to the health issues the technologies caused (Røstvik, 2022: 124–125). This masking of ‘Western exceptionalism and corporate colonialism’ (Røstvik, 2022: 125) in the coverage under an implicit auspice of care<sup>10</sup> aligns with Chatzidakis and Littler’s (2022: 269; original emphasis) definition of ‘care-washing’, whereby ‘contemporary practices in which companies try to cleanse themselves from the connotations of corporate exploitation, and instead connect their brand to a mood, an affect, an ethos, an idea of *care*’. In this vein, Sobande (2019b: 2740) stresses brands must go further than use social justice causes for marketing; rather they must reflect and change ‘the principles underpinning their in-house labour practices, production methods and sources and uses of profit’ that cause inequalities. Overall, in these contexts, the onus of solving social inequalities shifts towards individuals and brands, and crucially the state withdraw as ‘NGOs and corporations are left to hammer out the social contract(s)’ (Richey and Ponte, 2011: 159). Like Go Fund Me pages, as Ouellette (2018) argues, ‘happiness agents’ take on the responsibility of solving the issues that result from the flailing state, creating a new form of welfare.

Importantly, however, the news coverage showed some pockets of resistance to the dominant narrative. In a *Guardian* piece, Carolyn Harris reportedly asked, ‘Why is the UK government failing to provide support to tackle this growing problem, and leaving it to charities and individual groups like Beauty Bank[s], a cosmetic equivalent of food banks, to fill the gap?’ (Harris in Marsh, 2018). However, the questioning of this discourse was rare. Such coverage of period products and public figures ultimately masked alternative narratives or knowledge about contemporary period poverty despite the issue occupying increasing public and media attention.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have analysed the discursive rise of period poverty in mainstream UK news media. I have shown that period poverty became an issue that needed public attention as a result of the continued dismantling of the welfare state and individualising of poverty, an escalation of ‘popular feminism’ (Banet-Weiser, 2018) and feminist activism around menstruation, as well as high-profile individuals (celebrities, MPs, royals etc) supporting period poverty through philanthropy. The analysis highlighted the subject of period poverty was often a schoolgirl, following other media representations (Koskenniemi, 2021; Tomlinson, 2021). While it is important to address whether schoolgirls are experiencing period poverty, this rendering of period poverty ultimately created ‘deserving’ subjects and continues to individualise poverty. Representing the issue in this way also encourages it to be positioned through ‘causumerism’ with one simple solution (distributing products), rather than considering the structural issues at play and how these may affect different people and social groups in varying and complex ways. The critique of austerity and funding cuts and how these are related to period poverty was often lost in

the news coverage. Yet, if period poverty is to be solved, then it must be continually situated as one aspect of poverty under austerity, which structural solutions must address (see also Briggs, 2021; Crossley et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2022). Overall, this article contributes to our understanding of how crucial mediations of period poverty are to individualising poverty, reinstating social divisions and reaffirming capitalistic mentalities under mainstream feminism. This is important because such discourses shape how societal issues are experienced and solved; news can shape which issues are seen as newsworthy and thus can take off in public debate, but they also can and do shape the consideration of solutions to issues in the public sphere (De Benedictis et al., 2019; see also McKay, 2022).

The analysis presented here raises issues that need further consideration. First, while this article has focused on news media, it is important to explore different sites that create the meaning of period poverty; dominant forms of media may be masking alternative meanings about period poverty. A multitude of media shape our ideas about welfare and the ‘public narrative of austerity’ (Jensen and Tyler, 2012). Second, and related to the first, the dearth of narratives and opinions expressed by those experiencing period poverty must be redressed to ensure they shape discussions about it in mainstream news (see Mew and Herrington, 2018, in relation to poverty more generally). Third, we need to understand how period poverty is mediated in mainstream news since 2018. Recent research suggest it has reportedly worsened in the COVID-19 pandemic (Williams et al., 2022) and the cost of living crisis (Thomas, 2022). More research is thus urgently needed to assess whether alternative solutions to period poverty – that do not individualise and decontextualise this contemporary social inequality – are being articulated in the cultural realm.


## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Laura Clancy, Rachel O’Neill, Catherine Rottenberg and the anonymous peer reviewers for their thoughtful and generous comments and suggestions to improve this article. I would also like to thank those at the Welfare Imaginaries (Present) seminar who engaged with an early version of this paper, asked some great questions and helped to shape its direction.

## Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by the Brunel Research Initiative and Enterprise Fund (Award Number: 1064).

## ORCID iD

Sara De Benedictis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1998-1078>

## Notes

1. I use scare quotes to indicate the discursive emergence of period poverty in mainstream cultural sites, but henceforth use period poverty.
2. ‘School person’ would be more accurate as period poverty is faced by non-binary people and trans men too, a focus that period poverty activism has marginalised (De Benedictis and Mendes, 2021; Weckesser et al., 2020). However, the newspaper coverage analysed did not

- make this distinction and seven out of 154 articles focused on trans and non-binary people. Therefore, I use ‘schoolgirl’ to reflect how the phenomenon was discursively framed.
3. Research on menstruation and poverty has long existed in various nations. Briggs (2021: 3) notes that research exploring ‘menstrual poverty’ exists in Global South contexts like Kenya since 2012. Likewise, Vora (2020: 32) underscores that menstruation research has been ‘polarized’, ‘either addressing the privileged middle classes in the Global North or the socioeconomically marginalized in the Global South’.
  4. While ‘proving’ a causal link between period poverty and austerity measures is difficult – particularly since the issue has not historically been measured (e.g. via regional surveys), Briggs (2021) argues that the phenomenon must be contextualised through austerity, noting how the need for menstrual products has increased as fiscal measures bite. Similarly, Williams et al. (2022) argue that under COVID-19 and austerity, period poverty has worsened in the UK, and their study shows new social groups are affected.
  5. See Dabrowski (2021: 102) for an empirical analysis of how neoliberal feminist discourses intensify austerity discourses through ‘narratives of morality, culture, distance, distinction and blame’.
  6. Although a representational shift recently occurred, as exemplified by Bodyform using red liquid in their advert, rather than blue, marking a change in menstrual advertising (Koskenniemi, 2021; Røstvik, 2022). This change was also discussed in the news coverage in October 2017.
  7. Reportedly, after *I, Daniel Blake*’s release, donations of period products to foodbanks rose by 500 percent in some UK areas (see Collins, 2017).
  8. Ensuring that menstruation does not inhibit workforce participation has marked other menstrual representations. In World War II advertising ‘messages of fitting in, being free from embarrassment and smelling fresh’ were used to encourage workforce participation (Campbell et al., 2021: 220).
  9. In August 2022, Scotland passed the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill, becoming the first country in the world to instil a legal duty on local authorities to give free products to those that need them (see Diamond, 2022).
  10. Indeed, Røstvik (2022: 169) argues that ‘femcaring’ marks newer menstrual brands’ marketing strategies within a more recent focus of care in advertising.

## References

- Allen K, Mendick H, Harvey L, et al. (2015) Welfare Queens, Thrifty Housewives, and Do-It-All Mums: Celebrity motherhood and the cultural politics of austerity. *Feminist Media Studies* 15(6): 907–925.
- Banet-Weiser S (2018) *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Croydon: Duke University Press.
- Bassel L and Emejulu A (2018) *Minority Women and Austerity: Survival and Resistance in France and Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Biressi A and Nunn H (2016) *Class and Contemporary British Culture*. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bobel C, Winkler IT, Fahs B, et al. (2020) *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bramall R (2013) *The Cultural Politics of Austerity: Past and Present in Austere Times*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101.
- Brewer K (2017) How Scotland is putting a stop to period poverty. *The Guardian*, 9 August.

- Briggs A (2021) 'Period poverty' in Stoke-on-Trent, UK: New insights into gendered poverty and the lived experiences of austerity. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 29(1): 85–102.
- Brooks L (2016) MSPs debate giving free sanitary products to women on benefits. *The Guardian*, 27 September.
- Buchan L (2017) Government urged to end 'period poverty' in schools amid concern girls forced to use socks as sanitary products. *The Independent*, 13 October.
- Budgeon S (2019) The resonance of moderate feminism and the gendered relations of austerity. *Gender, Work and Organization* 26(8): 1138–1155.
- Burton G (2010) News. In: Burton G (ed.) *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives* (2nd edn). Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp.228–268.
- Campbell R, Freeman O and Gannon V (2021) From overt threat to invisible presence: Discursive shifts in representations of gender in menstrual product advertising. *Journal of Marketing Management* 37(3–4): 216–237.
- Chatzidakis A and Littler J (2022) An anatomy of carewashing: Corporate branding and the commodification of care during Covid-19. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 25(3–4): 268–286.
- Clancy L (2021) *Running the Family Firm: How the Monarchy Manages Its Image and Our Money*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Clarke J and Newman J (2012) The alchemy of austerity. *Critical Social Policy* 32(3): 299–319.
- Collins J (2017) Donations of sanitary products 'sky rocket' by up to 500% after I, Daniel Blake. Available at: <https://eachother.org.uk/donations-sanitary-products-sky-rocket-500-i-daniel-blake/> (accessed 5 July 2021).
- Cosslett RL (2016) Theresa May says she's a feminist. Let's ask her to eradicate period poverty: Is the prime minister ready to be a bloody difficult woman about making sure we can all afford to buy tampons? *The Guardian*, 13 December.
- Crossley S, Garthwaite K and Patrick R (2019) The fragmentation of poverty in the UK: What's the problem? A working paper: 1–23. Available at: <https://www.whatstheproblem.org.uk/a-working-paper>
- Dabrowski V (2021) 'Neoliberal feminism': Legitimising the gendered moral project of austerity. *Sociological Review* 69(1): 90–106.
- De Benedictis S, Allen K, Jensen T, et al. (2017) Portraying poverty: The economics and ethics of factual welfare television. *Cultural Sociology* 11(3): 337–358.
- De Benedictis S and Mendes K (2021) Mediating menstruation. Unpublished manuscript.
- De Benedictis S, Orgad S and Rottenberg C (2019) #MeToo, popular feminism and the news: A content analysis of UK newspaper coverage. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 22(5–6): 718–738.
- Diamond C (2022) Period poverty: Scotland first in world to make period products free. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-51629880> (accessed 22 August 2022).
- Elsworthy E (2018) Women who suffer from period poverty more likely to have anxiety or depression. *Mirror.co.uk*, 18 July.
- Garthwaite K (2016) *Hunger Pains: Life Inside Food Bank Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Gill R (2018) Discourse analysis in media and communications research. In: Kearney MC and Kackman M (eds) *The Craft of Criticism: Critical Media Studies in Practice*. London: Routledge, pp.23–34.
- Gill R and Orgad S (2018) The amazing bounce-backable woman: Resilience and the psychological turn in neoliberalism. *Sociological Research Online* 23(2): 477–495.
- Haneman VJ (2021) Menstrual capitalism, period poverty, and the role of the B Corporation. *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*. Epub ahead of print 1 February. DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.3778969.

- Harrison K (2021) Can't, won't and what's the point? A theory of the UK public's muted response to austerity. *Representation* 57(2): 159–174.
- Haylett C (2001) Illegitimate subjects?: Abject whites, neoliberal modernisation and middle-class multiculturalism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19: 351–370.
- Hughes B (2020) *Performing periods: Challenging menstrual normativity through art practice*. PhD Thesis, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool.
- Jensen T (2014) Welfare commonsense, poverty porn and doxosophy. *Sociological Research Online* 19(3): 277–283.
- Jensen T (2016) Against resilience. In: Garrett R, Jensen T and Voela A (eds) *We Need to Talk about Family: Essays on Neoliberalism, the Family and Popular Culture*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.76–94.
- Jensen T (2018) *Parenting the Crisis: The Cultural Politics of Parent Blame*. Bristol: Polity.
- Jensen T (2020) Shredding the social state: Maternal studies, ten years on. *Studies in the Maternal* 13(1): 1–11.
- Jensen T, Allen K, De Benedictis S, et al. (2020) Welfare imaginaries at the interregnum. *Soundings* 72(72): 79–89.
- Jensen T and Tyler I (2012) Austerity parenting: New economies of parent-citizenship. *Studies in the Maternal* 4(2): 1.
- Jensen T and Tyler I (2015) 'Benefits broods': The cultural and political crafting of anti-welfare commonsense. *Critical Social Policy* 35(4): 470–491.
- Kanai A (2020) Between the perfect and the problematic: Everyday femininities, popular feminism, and the negotiation of intersectionality. *Cultural Studies* 34(1): 25–48.
- King J (forthcoming) A deconstruction of the human trafficking phenomenon: A critique of United States mainstream newspapers, tales of exploitation and electioneering. *Thesis to be submitted to Brunel University London*.
- Koskenniemi A (2021) Menstrual activism in the market for alternative period products. *Feminist Media Studies*. Epub ahead of print 21 September. DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2021.1948885.
- Krisel R, De Benedictis S and Mendes K (2021) Tracking the 'Tampon Tax'. In: *Menstruation and the Media*, Online/Sheffield, 2021. Available at: <https://stayhappening.com/e/menstruation-in-the-media-conference-digital-day-E3LUSL1SR1AI>
- Lander L (1988) *Images of Bleeding: Menstruation as Ideology*. New York: Orlando Press.
- Littlejohn R (2017) Wobble or not, Theresa is the only show in town even if I don't believe she will deliver the tungsten-tipped Brexit I want, writes Richard Littlejohn. *MailOnline*, 30 May.
- Long C (2018) Pity the star of that new royal horror show: The Silence of the Markle. *The Sunday Times*, 27 May.
- MacDonell H (2017) Low-income women will be given free sanitary products. *The Times*, 12 July.
- McKay F (2022) Scotland and period poverty: A case study of activists' media and political agenda-setting. In: Morrison J, Birks J and Berry M (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Critical Journalism*. New York: Routledge, pp.396–406.
- McRobbie A (2020) *Feminism and the Politics of Resilience*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Marsh S (2018) MP breaks House of Commons taboo by discussing her period. *The Guardian*, 28 June.
- Mendick H, Allen K, Harvey L, et al. (2018) *Celebrity, Aspiration and Contemporary Youth: Education and Inequality in an Era of Austerity*. London: Bloomsbury Press.
- Mew H and Herrington T (2018) Resistance to austerity. In: *Welfare imaginaries*, Liverpool. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/user-693174855/welfare-imaginaries-seminar-6>
- Ouellette L (2018) Packaging and performing need: The cultural economy of go fund me. In: *International communication association*, Prague, 2018. Available at: [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.icahdq.org/resource/resmgr/conference/2018/2018\\_printedprogram.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.icahdq.org/resource/resmgr/conference/2018/2018_printedprogram.pdf)



- Platell A (2018) Platell's people: Jamie and Jools know the real value of money. *Mail Online*, 30 June.
- Røstvik CM (2022) *Cash Flow: The Businesses of Menstruation*. London: UCL Press.
- Radnor A (2017) 'We're having a menstrual liberation': How periods got woke. *The Guardian*, 11 November.
- Richey LA and Ponte S (2011) *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Roberts R (2017) NUS to offer free tampons to all female students across the UK. *The Independent*, 2 May.
- Rottenberg C (2018) *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sarkar A (2018) Let's put the politics back into International Women's Day. *The Guardian*, 8 March.
- Sobande F (2019a) Femvertising and fast fashion: Feminist advertising or fauxminist marketing messages? *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 6(1): 104–113.
- Sobande F (2019b) Woke-washing: 'intersectional' femvertising and branding 'woke' bravery. *European Journal of Marketing* 54(11): 2723–2745.
- Thomas T (2022) Cost of living crisis has exacerbated period poverty, charities say. *The Guardian*, 10 April. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/10/cost-of-living-crisis-has-exacerbated-period-poverty-charities-say#:~:text=Period%20poverty%20in%20the%20UK,distributed%20by%20charities%20has%20increased>
- Tomlinson MK (2021) Moody and monstrous menstruators: The Semiotics of the menstrual meme on social media. *Social Semiotics* 31(3): 421–439.
- Tyler I (2013) *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London: Zed Books.
- Vora S (2020) The realities of period poverty: How homelessness shapes women's lived experiences of menstruation. In: Bobel C, Winkler IT, Fahs B, et al. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.31–47.
- Weckesser A, Williams G, Hewett A, et al. (2020) *Inclusivity and Diversity – UK Expert Views*. Available at: [https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-ltp-learning-briefing-3pdf/download?token=BIB\\_vIps](https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-ltp-learning-briefing-3pdf/download?token=BIB_vIps)
- Williams G, Craddock E and Weckesser A (2022) *Periods in a Pandemic*. Available at: <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/periods-in-a-pandemic-final-report-jan2022-132871415463701935.pdf>
- Williams Z (2018) Tory feminists do exist – but they offer only cheap wins and bad faith. *The Guardian*, 8 March.

## Biographical note

Sara De Benedictis is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Communications at Brunel University London. Sara's research explores the cultural politics of gender, class, birth, menstruation, reproduction and feminist activism.