

# WWD

Fashion. Beauty. Business.

## No Longer Taboo

Feminine personal-care products are firmly in the spotlight.

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Becca and Too Faced help push the Estée Lauder Cos. Inc.'s results up in the quarter.

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Street-style star Fil Xiaobai talks about being an influencer in China – and her disdain for KOLs.

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# Greece Is the Word

"I'm expressing through fashion a fascination I've had since childhood," Karl Lagerfeld said of his latest cruise collection for Chanel, a freewheeling interpretation of Greece paraded in Paris against a backdrop of crumbling columns and olive trees. Here, one of his draped toga gowns and gladiator heels.

*For more on the show, see pages 6 and 7.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY STÉPHANE FEUGÈRE

**BEAUTY**

# The Vagina Diaries: Beauty World Embraces Feminine Care

● And new entrants are flooding into the market.

BY ALLISON COLLINS, RACHEL STRUGATZ  
AND ELLEN THOMAS

The wellness trend has made its way to the feminine hygiene aisle.

Feminine personal care is the latest craze in a fast-growing beauty industry, with dozens of brands from established to new rushing to create products with names (and functions) that could make even the most unfiltered consumers blush. Once considered “taboo” to discuss anything relating to women’s “personal issues” – whether menstruation or otherwise – the sector of the market is in the midst of a radical shift.

The conversation around feminine care had an about-face when a handful of period-centric products hit the scene a few years ago – deploying unorthodox marketing tactics and more direct ways of communicating with customers than ever before. These included Thinx, the antimicrobial “period underwear” trying to supplant pads and tampons, followed by better-for-you tampon brand Lola, a start-up built on providing complete ingredient transparency.

Arguably, Thinx started a personal-care movement when a series of ads were released in New York subways in late 2015 that contained images of grapefruits; raw, drippy eggs and explicit messaging stating that the product was “Underwear for Women With Periods.” This opened the floodgates – not only stirring a heated dialogue about whether the ads were appropriate (an ad proclaiming that Thinx were “p--y-grabbing-proof underwear” was banned in San Francisco in the fall) – but gave way to a fresh movement.

“It’s a shift where the vagina becomes an area women should feel empowered to look after, not fetishized as a taboo, or something shameful. It’s another key part that all women share and keep healthy. We’ve seen vaginal skin care and health...wrapped into the language of well-being,” said Lucie Greene, worldwide director of The Innovation Group at J. Walter Thompson.

“Call it women power, Millennial power – that’s what this is,” said Wendy Liebmann, chief executive officer of WSL Strategic Research. New brands have a contemporary Millennial voice to them, she said, and they’re reaching out to women who view vaginal health and beauty as part of a larger wellness and personal-care regimen. “This whole wave we’re seeing that relates to the wellness movement is really powerful and it’s not just limited to things like probiotics and vitamins and sun care – it’s very holistic.”

“A lot of it comes back to these brands really addressing the taboo of feminine care. We’re seeing advertisements that are more real...and more about addressing the health issues and making [vaginal care] part of a daily routine.”

– MARISSA GILBERT, MINTEL



“A lot of it comes back to these brands really addressing the taboo of feminine care,” said Marissa Gilbert, senior health and wellness analyst at Mintel. “We’re seeing advertisements that are more real – it’s less about women wearing white jeans... and more about addressing the health issues and making [vaginal care] part of a daily routine.”

Lola was among the first to address menstruation in a modern way. The company hit the scene in 2015 with a mission to deliver 100 percent cotton (and now 100 percent organic) tampons – and transparency in ingredients – directly to women’s doorsteps. The start-up, cofounded by Jordana Kier and Alexandra Friedman, gives women the choice to decide exactly when they want to receive product, as well as how many and how absorbent (light, regular or super) their tampons are. Last month the brand introduced Lola’s First Period Kit, a \$34 box that contains varying absorbencies of pads, liners, tampons with

corresponding instruction cards for each product, a canvas pouch, a sheet of stickers for period tracking and a credit toward a future subscription.

Cora, another tampon company with a subscription service that costs \$6 to \$18 a month, came along a year later. The brand, also sold at Target Corp., includes a handful of individually packaged tampons that each contain a unique code with monthly deliveries to facilitate organic, word-of-mouth sharing with friends and family. The code, when entered on cora.life, gets both the subscriber and their friend a free month of product.

Now, almost two years after the launch of Thinx and Lola, a slew of feminine-focused products are coming to market. These span a number of wipes and cleansers with updated, pH-balanced formulations to more niche products like Fur Oil for pubic hair or VMagic’s Feminine Lips Stick that’s billed as a kind of Chapstick for the “lips below your hips.” The boom is in large part driven by

the normalization of conversation around tending to feminine parts – Gwyneth Paltrow famously proclaimed “V-steaming,” or vagina steaming, as a must for cleansing in 2015, and Emma Watson said in an interview that she uses Fur Oil on her pubic hair – but societal factors are also coming into play.

Greene called out Amy Schumer, Jenny Slate and Lena Dunham (also an investor in Lola) as social media and cultural influencers who are bringing a “new frank lens” to the realities of female bodies and bringing to light issues that, historically, weren’t discussed in the open.

According to Mintel’s Gilbert, feminine product sales are on the rise. In part it’s because younger generations are buying. According to a report released by Allied Market Research earlier this week, the global feminine hygiene market is poised to do \$42.7 billion in revenue between 2016 and 2022. In 2015, consumers in the Asia-Pacific region accounted for the highest percentage, or 48.9 percent, of market share, followed by Europe and the U.S.

“It has a lot to do with demographics purchasing these – younger women, really having a focus on health,” Gilbert said. Wipes in particular, she said, are having a higher acceptance among younger women.

Goodwipes founders Charlie Siciak and Sam Nebel weren’t thinking about vaginal health when they developed the idea for their three-year-old line of body-cleansing wipes as fraternity brothers at Florida State University, but it’s now the largest part of their business.

“Living in the frat house freshman year, Sam and I quickly bonded over our hygiene routines – we were both wiping our butts with baby wipes,” said Siciak, who said he and Nebel quickly extolled the virtues of baby wipes to the rest of the organization. “The response was phenomenal – we had all 50 guys using baby wipes.”

But Siciak and Nebel learned there was a white space in the wipe market – their peers were embarrassed to buy a product meant for babies, and they also discovered that women had similar issues with the feminine hygiene products on the market.

“If you look at the category, it hasn’t been touched in almost a decade,” said Siciak. “Summer’s Eve has been around forever, and for Millennials, it’s considered your grandma’s douche.”

The pair couldn’t find an aesthetically pleasing wipe geared for design-savvy Millennials – thus, Goodwipes was born.

After launching the Below the Belt wipes “for guys,” Siciak and Nebel launched the Down There wipes for women. Now, feminine care – which includes individually wrapped, single-use wipes and in-home packs – represents 70 percent of the total business. The wipes come in two scents – lavender and the new Shea-Coco.

Goodwipes, which this year received funding from Cincinnati’s Brandery firm – Procter & Gamble Co. is a sponsor – just got a design overhaul and is entering more than 600 Wal-Mart Stores Inc. doors this month with its feminine-care line. Nothing is priced at more than \$4. Siciak declined to talk specific financials, but said annual sales could increase fivefold in 2017.

Young consumers, attuned to using face wipes, are more likely to buy into cleansing wipes for feminine hygiene. Of those surveyed, Mintel found that 50 percent of consumers aged 18 to 24 felt cleansing products specifically formulated for feminine areas were more effective. For the 25- to 34-year-old group, that number jumped to 57 percent; for 35- to 44-year-olds, it was 55 percent; for 45- to 54-year-olds, it was 42 percent; for 55- to 64-year-olds it was 40 percent and for those older than 65, it was 37 percent. Products specifically aimed at vaginal cleansing had particular pull with Hispanic consumers, with 64 percent

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responding that they felt the products were more effective, according to the Mintel survey.

Also according to Mintel, 76 percent of women understand the benefits of feminine hygiene products, but may not understand the benefits of feminine wash versus general body wash. “Messaging that clarifies the differences could draw in more users,” the agency noted in a report.

“Marketers are taking a more open mind about it,” Gilbert said. “It’s a fact of nature...[people] are taking the approach of the overall wellness aspect of it. Women are paying attention to their whole selves, and their hygiene in feminine areas is just as important as their health in their guts or in their lungs.”

Retailers have taken note.

“Our feminine-care offerings continue to evolve based on customer-driven insights,” said George Coleman, vice president of health-care pricing and business planning at CVS. “By listening to customer feedback, which is increasingly Millennial-based, we’re increasing our selection of both natural products as well as the overall variety of products to choose from.”

Among the feminine care lines that have rolled out at CVS this year are Organ(y)c, a Summer’s Eve-owned brand of organic pads, liners and tampons. The CVS Health brand also launched pH-balanced tampons and expanded its own range of 100% Pure Cotton line tampons and pads.

Coleman noted that many CVS locations are due for a layout overall in the feminine-care aisle. “Our research has shown that the biggest barriers for feminine-care shoppers is the overwhelming complexity of the shelves,” he said. In 6,000 CVS doors starting this month, there will be new signage calling out natural and alternative options such as menstrual cups, displays for new launches and bolder “protection guide” displays to direct shoppers to the best size options for them.

Millennials are a big part of the equation, too.

Like skin care, color cosmetics and nearly every other sector of beauty that’s begun to cater to the Millennial consumer, feminine products are the latest to try to capture wallet share from them. Less likely to adhere to the “taboos” surrounding personal care that their mothers might have subscribed to, twenty- and thirtysomethings are increasingly more open to talking about, and as a result spending, in this category. This is sending brands like Summer’s Eve, which has traditionally catered to more mature consumers, into a tailspin trying to appeal to the Millennial mind-set. This month Summer’s Eve launched Simply – a “free from” chemicals brand targeted to Millennials and a marked change in direction for the 45-year-old brand.

According to Matt Steele, senior brand manager at Prestige Brands, women are viewing vaginal health as part of their overall routine. To market Simply Summer’s Eve, the company is focusing on “tech-savvy Millennial women,” he said, and will use television spots, as well as social media campaigns and sampling with bloggers, influencers and college students, to generate buzz.

Lo Bosworth’s Love Wellness range of feminine care products, Goodwipes and SweetSpot are also expressly targeted to the Millennial segment. So is Fur, the pubic hair oil.

The uptick in entrants to the feminine hygiene sector raises the concern that the

vagina is just the latest body part to be commoditized by the beauty industry. But brands can get around that stigma, said Greene, if they focus their positioning on female empowerment, “rather than trying to tell women they should feel insecure about yet another thing.”

Fur cofounders Laura Schubert and Lillian Tung set out to prevent insecurity and encourage freedom of choice with their line of products for Millennial women – and men, as the items are designed to be unisex – to care for their pubic hair or lack thereof.

“[The market] had been talking about body hair as a problem and removal as a solution...The modern woman wants to define what [she] sees as beautiful – if you want to keep your hair or remove all your hair, it’s whatever he or she wants to do,” said Schubert, ceo of Fur. “When we started thinking about body hair, a lot of the products weren’t natural and no one thought about ingredients or the idea of care.”

She and chief marketing officer Lillian Tung launched the line last year. The brand’s products – Fur Oil, Stubble Cream and Ingrown Concentrate – are sold on its e-commerce site, furyou.com, and in about 150 boutiques across the U.S. The brand is designed in sleek, minimalist

packaging inspired by “YSL and Chanel,” said Schubert.

Bosworth’s six-product offering launched on lovewellness.co in October, and due to high demand, has been unable to keep The Killer, a boric acid suppository to fight female infections, in stock. In addition to being a Millennial herself, Bosworth cited the political climate as motivation for women to take ownership of this sector of the beauty market.

“Because of the current presidency, women around the world are standing up and finding their voices, and these kinds of products have a place in the market now because we’re no longer afraid, embarrassed or ashamed. We’re experiencing powerful movement across the board in terms of a reinvigoration of women’s rights,” Bosworth said, noting that the response when the company launched pre-election in October was not as warm as she had hoped.

She added: “People were shocked and surprised [at first]... and in a matter of months the market has completely changed, and it’s possible that we have played a helpful role in that. And I hope we have.”

SweetSpot Labs’ focus on the younger demographic seems to be working: according to ceo Amy Gordinier-Regan, the brand is seeing incremental growth. Industry sources estimate that the company posted more than a 180 percent increase from 2016 to 2017 with products like pH-balanced body washes and wipes. The brand was relaunched into the market by Skinfix in Target and Shoppers Drug Mart in 2016.

“We reformulated the product to take it to a much more natural place – repackaged, repositioned it so it would stand out in the mass market and be bright and colorful and call attention to itself,” said Gordinier-Regan. When it was originated about 12 years ago by Shari Creed, SweetSpot was mostly in the spa channel.

“Consumers are getting savvier...they understand that runoff from other products can cause gynecological issues, and they are interested in seeking out products that are

specifically formulated for women and their chemistry and their pH,” Gordinier-Regan said. “Category growth is driven by...new consumers coming into the category.”

SweetSpot is adding Wal-Mart to its list of distributors as of May 13, where two new fragrances – Coconut Lime and Unscented – will make their debut. The company’s marketing focus has included more traditional print and radio spots, but SweetSpot really focuses on off-shelf displays in retail, as well as the occasional influencer (sometimes athletes). “It definitely is a completely different conversation than it was even five years ago,” Gordinier-Regan said.

Medicine Mama Apothecary’s Vmagic is another product that has been generating buzz lately. The organic skin cream, designed specifically to relieve vulva irritation, comes in both a jar and stick format and is sold in doctors’ offices, on Amazon, and at about a 1,000 Whole Foods and Sprouts doors. Khloé Kardashian posted about it on her blog, calling it “Aquaphor for your vagina,” and in March, Buzzfeed published a video about the product called “Women Try a Vagina Lipstick,” which looks exactly as it sounds.

“Khloé Kardashian posted a blog about how she takes care of her vagina, Gwyneth Paltrow is speaking about her vaginal steamings – social media is giving us as women a platform to be comfortable to have these conversations,” said Naomi Whittel, chief operating officer of Medicine Mama Apothecary. She noted that Vmagic’s target audience is not just menopausal women or women going through childbirth – it’s Millennials wearing tight leggings, exercising on SoulCycle bikes and getting Brazilian bikini waxes and laser hair removal treatments. The brand is planning to launch a line of serums for the vulva in the next year.

Cindy Barshop, the woman who pioneered the Completely Bare hair-removal business and is behind VSpot – a “revagination spa” – says the conversation about vaginas hasn’t changed a ton, but it seems to be on its way. “We’re at that tip right now where I feel like it’s going to completely change around,” Barshop noted.

VSpot offers vaginal steaming, as well as noninvasive procedures like the Femilift, which tightens the vagina and helps with other localized concerns. “This is really about empowering women,” Barshop said. “This is about making sure women feel good.”

Vagisil ceo Keech Combe Shetty – who started her career in global marketing with the Estée Lauder Cos. Inc. – is bringing her beauty background to the business her grandfather started 68 years ago. Specifically, she’s bringing it into Vagisil, which recently launched ProHydrate Natural Feel Internal Vaginal Moisturizing Gel, a lubricant that contains hyaluronic acid and is meant to provide long-term benefits to vaginal skin. It’s also formulated to be bio-adherent and “stay in place,” Combe-Shetty noted, meaning it can be applied ahead of time without leak-related concern.

“You can imagine that growing up with Vagisil in our family company portfolio was super-duper fun for me – especially around 12 years old, that was a blast – but I’ve really grown to be incredibly passionate about Vagisil and intimate health,” Combe Shetty said. “There’s an opportunity for a shift from something that’s taboo and not talked about – if you can’t say the word vagina, then how can you treat it properly. It’s not a bad word, it’s a body part.”

And related care products are slowly working their way into the normal zone. Combe Shetty wouldn’t reveal specific sales figures, but said the ProHydrate product is seeing “unprecedented growth.”

“I’m bullish about vaginas,” she said. “I think there is a lot of opportunity to move the needle. We’re at the beginning of the conversation, but there’s a long way to go.”



Vagisil ProHydrate Natural Feel



Love Wellness The Killer, a boric acid suppository treatment.



Goodwipes Down There Stash & Dash Singles