MY BODY_MY DATA
THEIR RULES

what period apps do
with our data

eticas

Menstruation, despite having existed since the dawn of humanity and affecting half of the world's population, remains largely unknown in many aspects. Paradoxically, however, for years, control over the menstrual cycle **has been a lucrative source of income** in different sectors. This has recently been extended to the digital sector, where menstruation has become an area for the development of business models based on data about menstrual cycles and the fertility of menstruating women and menstruating individuals.

In reality, these apps have **great potential to contribute to promoting health research and education**. Therefore, through period tracking apps, we can find out the dates of our next period, the length of our cycles, the most and least fertile days, and even which are the most common symptoms we will experience at each stage of the cycle. This type of application is part of what is known as Femtech, [which has received more than a billion in investment in recent years](). But what do these apps do with all the information collected?

This brief study **has been motivated by the recent events** that are taking place in the United States derived from the leak carried out by the media outlet Politico in May. They shared **[a draft from the Supreme Court is in favor of overturning the ruling of the Roe v. Wade case](), by which the right to abortion was legalized in the country in 1973**. While countries like Colombia or Mexico have recently regulated this right, the United States seems to undo the steps taken towards the sovereignty of women over their bodies. In this sense, **the data collection about the menstrual cycle** and, especially, the fact of sharing it with third parties, **is especially dangerous, since it can be a way of accusing and persecuting those people who are considering this practice**, as [it is beginning to happen in the United States based on other types of data]().

We are aware that our menstrual data is a doorway to valuable information about our sexual and reproductive health that can reveal to third parties whether or not we are pregnant. In this context, something as **seemingly harmless** as entering our data into an apparently simple period calendar **becomes a reckless exercise that puts us at risk**. With this piece, we want to help women make better decisions about their data, while **urging authorities to acknowledge** the particular gravity of recent developments and the role that data plays in them.

We welcome comments, ideas, suggestions or even some experiences you would like to share.
It is important to act together when it is clear that improvements are needed!

Methodology

To carry out our study we have taken into account **12 applications**. Mi Calendario Menstrual (with more than 100 million downloads on Google Play Store), Flo (more than 50 million) and Clue (more than 10 million) **are among the most used and known in Spain**:

- **Flo**, developed by Flo Health Inc.
- **Clue**, developed by BioWink GmbH
- **Cycles**, developed by Perigee
- **WomanLog**, developed by Pro Active App SIA
- **Stardust Period Tracker**, developed by Stardust App LLC
- **Cycle Tracking**, developed by Apple
- **Period Calendar**, developed by Simple Design Ltd.
- **My Calendar - Period Tracker,** developed by SimpleInnovation
- **Period Tracker**, developed by GP International LLC
- **Euki**, developed by Women Help Women ORG
- **Clover**, developed by Wachanga Ltd.
- **MyFitness**, developed by Xiaomi

To evaluate them, we have established **5 indicators**:

- If it has an **accessible** privacy policy
- If it is **clear and understandable**
- If it is necessary to grant **invasive permissions** to use it
- If it **does not collect** unnecessary **personal data**
- If it **does not share** this data with **third parties**.

In this way, they have been scored with **2, 1 or 0 points** depending on whether they act well, so-so or bad, respectively. Based on the results obtained, we have made a **ranking**.

Results

One of the most surprising findings has been that **most of them fail at the last two indicators mentioned** (if they collect personal data and if they share it with third parties). Contrary to the innocuous appearance of their simple interfaces, **many of them share data with third parties**. They often do it **for commercial purposes**, These purposes, beyond the vulnerability to privacy that they entail, are of concern since. **Through that information, they know that the user is probably a woman, when is she menstruating, if she is looking for a baby or if, on the contrary, she wants to avoid it.** From there, the **ads that will appear to this user can be profiled**. Among them it may appear, for example, fertility clinics or clinics where they perform abortions about which the user does not have more reference than the ad itself.

Other times they only share information if the user grants her consent. But, **are users really aware of what they are giving consent to when they click 'accept' the first time they open the app?** These purposes are often found within the lines of extensive privacy policies.

On the other hand, we found that **4 of the 12 applications** studied **don't have easy access to their privacy policy** and **5 of them use complex and unintuitive structure and language.** Additionally, in 2021, [**Flo was sanctioned**](#) **for breaching its privacy policy and selling its users' data** to companies such as Facebook or Google. This only raises the alarm about the practices of these applications and their motivations for collecting sensitive personal data.

In order to make it easier for users to decide which application to choose when it comes to tracking their periods, **we have compiled the following ranking**:

Period Apps Ranking

According to their use of data
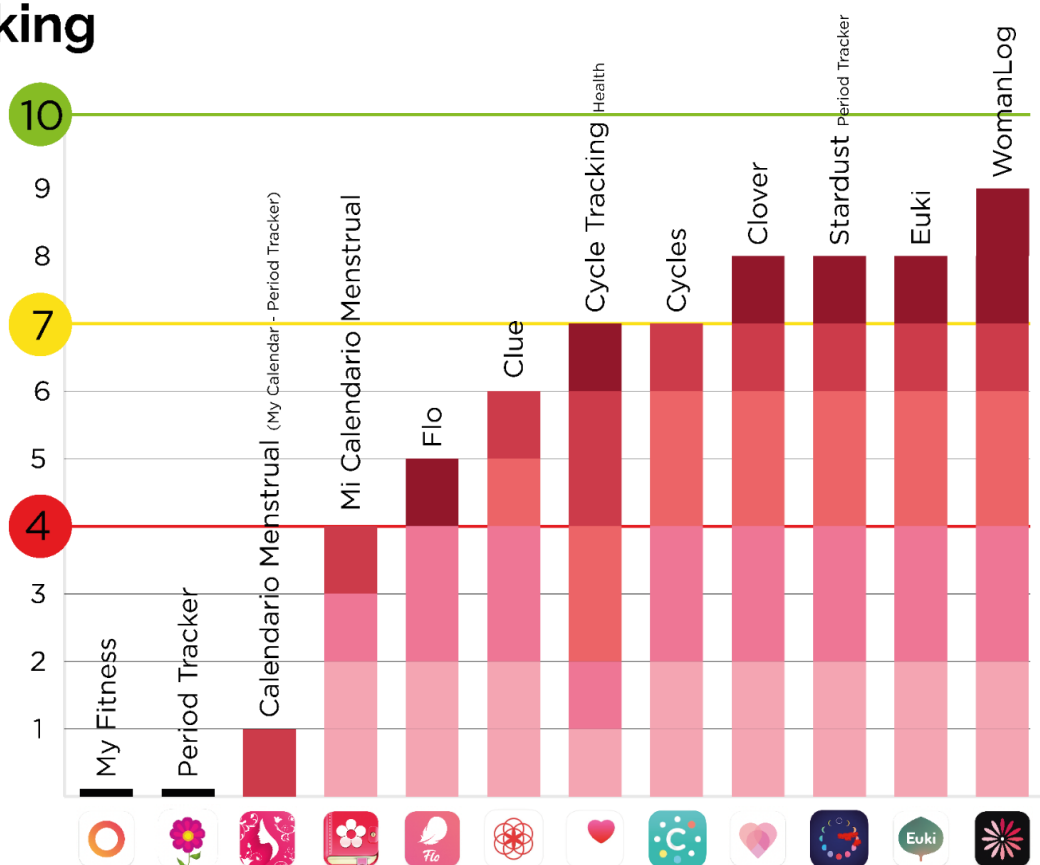
The **average score** for the privacy respect of these applications is a pass mark: **5'25**.

We have been struck by how **some of them have obtained an absolute 0**, as is the case of **Period Tracker** (by GP International LLC) or **My Fitness** (by Xiaomi). Others, such as **Calendario Menstrual** (developed by SimpleInnovation) or **My Fitness,** do not even have a privacy policy that users can access.

It is also striking how **only 1 of the apps, WomanLog** (developed by Pro Active App SIA), **is forthright in its privacy policy** when it claims not to sell or share data under any circumstances. Of the rest, most share data with third parties just for the sake of using the app, while others rely on consent and integrated third-party services to leave open the possibility that data may be shared in some way.

> *"Unless indicated otherwise, the Privacy Policy does not apply to third party products or services or the practices of companies that we do not own or control, including other companies you might interact with in or through Cycles"*
>
> Cycles Privacy Policy

They don't only share personal data with third parties, but **also information about the user's health**, such as the symptoms she experiences, as it happens with **Cycles** (developed by Perigee), even though in this case, they claim they share it anonymously.

For this reason, we recommend users **to choose apps that do not require the creation of an account**, as this will reduce the amount of information given to the app and also reduce the possibilities of linking this information directly to them. In addition, **whenever possible, we recommend using these services in web format**, by creating a direct link on the mobile screen, in order to avoid installing software on their devices.

Although outside the scope of the objective we initially set, it is also **relevant to highlight** the **continued use of pink** tones and **childish language** that we have observed in many of these apps. **We hope that one day women's services will treat us like adults**.

We end the study alarmed and confirming our worst suspicions about this type of digital service. Despite the historical neglect of menstruation as an object of study and treatment, its use as an excuse to exploit our personal data has not gone unnoticed. **Digitalisation**, instead of giving place to services that protect our privacy and focus on improving our sexual and reproductive health, **seems to have fostered** in period monitoring **a business model** in which a service is nothing more than the **bait to get hold of our data and monetise it**. When this data reveals sensitive information that can expose intimate processes or bring us to justice, the importance of protecting ourselves and demanding that our data is protected is more urgent than ever.

For more information about this research, you can find the complete analysis here.