She Got Her Period: Men's Knowledge and Perspectives on Menstruation

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She Got Her Period: Men’s Knowledge and Perspectives on Menstruation

By Ishwari Rajak

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Science in Gender and Women’s Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Mankato, Minnesota
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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

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Abstract

An abstract for the thesis of Ishwari Rajak for the Masters of Science in Gender and Women’s Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota.

Title: She Got Her Period: Men’s Knowledge and Perspectives on Menstruation

Research show that men and women often do not converse freely about menstruation. Shame, taboos and myths associated with menstruation silence the conversation. Silencing conversations about menstruation have negative consequences on women, including: objectification of women’s bodies, stereotyping of women as physically, morally and emotionally inferior to men and to extreme cases women losing their uterus due to unhygienic means of menstrual management. On the one hand, not addressing menstruation openly has devastating consequences on women but on the other hand, most men seem oblivious about the impacts on women. Therefore, it is important to engage in open dialogues about menstruation because research have found that such acts empower women and for men, it helps them to understand the construction of societies at a deeper level. I argue that despite considerable development in Science improving understanding of human biology, men in general do not have enough knowledge about menstruation and its effects on women. The purpose of this research study is to examine the knowledge and perspectives about menstruation of culturally diverse male students of Minnesota State University, Mankato. A qualitative semi-structured interview was conducted with nine male participants. It was found that most participants do not have adequate knowledge about biological process of menstruation. Menstruation was also supposed to be a women’s issue hence not important for men to understand it. A few participants who considered themselves allies of women had worked on their own to
change their perspectives into positive ones. This thesis will contribute to narrowing a gap in literature available on the topic.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Free and open conversations about menstruation help men to recognize how socialization influences their understanding and knowledge about menstruation (Knight, 1991). Women are affected in different ways. Fingerson (2005) writes that women who are comfortable with menstruation “refuse to be silenced” (p. 13). Therefore, when handled positively, menstruation provides opportunities for women to use their bodies and its functions as a source of power and claim their voice and their space within homes and outside. In case of men, their understanding of menstruation assist to analyze how social structures impact them and people around them. Thus, when benefits of free conversations about menstruation are examined, we realize that it is important to expand the dialogues beyond women (Bobel, 2010).

In most patriarchal families and societies, men have greater influence in either supporting or opposing any changes (Kothari, 2010). Therefore, it is important to understand attitudes of males, mainly of elderly and senior members, especially in family oriented or close knit societies. These male members highly influence decisions and various customs and rituals followed within families and societies at large. Due to my personal experiences of being from a particular society and cultural background I always wondered how men’s understanding of menstruation influenced ethnic practices I was a part of. Hence, I am using this opportunity to conduct a research on knowledge and perspectives of men about menstruation. This is a topic, which I have always been interested in throughout my life.

The literature review highlights prior research demonstrating that various myths, taboos and shame associated with menstruation limit conversation around it. Academic research too support that silencing conversations about menstruation has negative impact on physical, psychological and emotional development and well-being of women (Roberts et al., 2002; Lee,
1994). Therefore, free and open conversations are important for empowerment of women (Houppert, 1999; Fingerson, 2005). Conversations about menstruation also bond women and help to build solidarity among them. Lee (1994) conducted a research study interviewing different age groups of women, who shared their experience about menstruation. These women expressed that when they shared stories about their lived experience with other women, it helped build a sense of solidarity between them. I too had similar personal experience, thus, I share my story.

**My story**

My first experience of menstruation was somewhat confusing. I was happy that I had my period, but at the same time I was sad. I did not know why I was sad, but I knew why I was happy. As a Nepali from a Newar community, an ethnic group in Nepal, I was supposed to follow a ritual. This ritual was fun and I was happy it was finally my turn to be a part of the experience. In my community, when girls began their periods (I noticed it was usually around eleven or twelve years of age), they were kept in a room. Windows were boarded to ensure that sunlight did not infiltrated inside the room. If there were other girls about the same age in the house, most of the time, all of them were kept in the room together. The girl/s were in the room on their own for twelve days and their female friends and relatives came to visit them. The girl/s, however, could not have any contact with males. No male visitors were allowed and girls were also prohibited from hearing or seeing any males from inside the room.

Girls following the ritual were happy because this it was a fun experience for them (at least all my friends and I perceived it to be so). The girl does not go to school, she has her friends and relatives come to visit her, they chat, play games, eat and have fun. At the end of the twelve day ritual, girls are guided out of the room with their eyes covered, ensuring that the first thing
they see of the outside world is the sun. Later in the day a special ceremony is organized where girls are married to the sun, followed by a feast attended by family, friends and relatives. In this way, the whole community, neighbors and friends know that the girl had her period. I was happy that it was my turn to be that special girl and have fun. However, because my family could not afford a separate room for me, I did not fully experience the ritual and the isolation that came with it. My mum, nevertheless, bought me a new dress and at the end of twelve days a special ceremony was organized for me. I got a new set of clothes, money and a feast was prepared. I was very happy. Unfortunately, I have noticed that nowadays because of financial constraints and girls missing schools for weeks, the ritual is not followed to the same extent as when I was growing up. Nevertheless, parents are still navigating ways to preserve traditional customs by conducting mass rituals to ease financial burden (Singh, 2014).

I did not tell my mother for days that I had my first period. I still remember those early days, when I spotted blood and I knew what it was. Rose George (2012) conducted a research interviewing girls in India and most respondents did not know much about menstruation. These girls either thought they had cancer or were injured when they had their first periods. As for me, I knew I had menstruated. My best friend at the time was my cousin who was few years older than I. She had her period first and had told me what to expect.

Most of Lee’s (1994) research participants expressed that they had learned about menstruation from their peers and other female relatives (p. 358-359). These women reported that their mothers talked to them about menstruation; however, they did not want the talk to be very detailed. An Indian Council for Medical Research study also reported similar findings, 37.6% girls had learned from mothers, 32.8% from siblings and 27.6% from friends (as cited in Garg, Goyal & Gupta, 2011). I too learned about menstruation from a female relative, my cousin.
My mum may have talked to me about menstruation. However, I remember my lessons from long chats at nights with my cousin when I went to her place for sleepovers. I knew my mum would have been very supportive if I had told her about my period, but still, I decided to hide it for days.

I did not know how to care for my period. I sewed rags on my underwear to keep cloth pad in place and ensure that it did not drop on the floor and embarrass me. I washed the cloth at night when no one was around and hid it under my mattress, inside a drawer, or dried it under something else. I was embarrassed, shamed, confused and I did not want anyone, not even my mum, to find out about my period. The participants of Lee’s research (1994) informed similar practices and reactions. Saumya Dave (2011), a student travelled around Africa and asked women about their experiences during menstruation. Dave’s participants also informed that they hung washed menstrual rags inside huts because if others saw them it was embarrassing. Kothari (2010) conducted a research in Jaipur, India and interviewed ninety girls about menstruation; these participants also expressed similar practices. They dried washed rags under other clothes and hid them in dark, mostly unhygienic places. As for me, even after my first period was celebrated and I started having periods regularly, I continued to hide all traces of my period from everyone as much as possible. Therefore, experiences of Lee (1994), Dave (2011) and Kothari’s (2010) participants and mine suggest that embarrassment is a normal reaction and acts to hide traces of menstruation is a common practice among women around the world.

I realized my first period was a landmark of my womanhood. Growing up, I very actively participated in local sports, like playing marbles, cards and even setting up my own game station to make money during main festivals. These were “boys’ sports,” and most of the time I was the only girl playing among groups of boys. I was very popular within these groups because most of
the time I beat the boys and my game station made the most money. Sadly, with the start of my period my involvement in sports stopped. I clearly remember the day I stopped playing sports. I was playing a game of marbles and I was so preoccupied with the game (because I was winning), I did not realize I was surrounded by boys. The spectators were allowed to bet, so a few boys were betting, a few cheering and a few amazed I was unstoppable. Then I felt a tug on my arm and I was pulled away from the crowd. It was one of my male relatives. He told me in a soft but chilling voice, “What are you doing playing with boys? Go home. You want marbles? I will bring bags full tomorrow. Just stay home and do not ever play outside again.” I went home crying. Despite repeated encouragements from my mum, I never played at the same intensity as before the incident. I eventually stopped playing sports altogether. No one had problems with me and my sports before, but all of a sudden there were things I could or could not do. Just as Dave (2011) stated, woman’s first period is a transition point, which defines “before and after” in her life, I too now have “before and after” period chapters.

I felt that my male relatives began scrutinizing how I dressed and presented myself after I had my period. Similar were the experiences of Lee’s participants (1994). Along with my period, my body parts were developing and I was not allowed to run, skip or play sports anymore. I had become a woman: docile, passive and a good girl who walked slowly, spoke softly and stayed home. I had no idea menstruation could have such a huge impact on a girl until I started experiencing it myself.

With the start of my period I had become a woman. I was expected to stay home but boys of my age, the boys I played sports with, sat by road sides and teased girls. Clearly, a double standard existed in my society. However, it seems it is not only my society where girls are treated differently as they grow up. Lee’s (2004) participants shared “…boys are encouraged to
sow their wild oats and girls are chastised for similar behavior, resulting in closer monitoring” (p. 354). This reveals that a similar double standard exists in many societies when dealing with natural development of women and men’s bodies. Men learn to be free and women learn to be confined, just as in the case of my friends and I.

I have experienced good and inconveniences of using reusable cloth pads. Third wave menstrual activism in the United States focuses on making changes at the individual level rather than waiting for FemCare industry do so (Bobel, 2010). The menstrual activism now concentrates on Do It Yourself (D.I.Y.) of menstrual products; making reusable cloth pads popular. For many years I used homemade, reusable pads. The homemade pads did not have adhesive, so they did not stick and moved a lot. Depending on the kind of material used, most materials leaked. Also, pads had to be washed, dried (in the sunlight) and ironed (my mother said heat would disinfect and make the pads safe to store and hygienic to reuse). At that time I used to desire something convenient. I even had a conversation with my cousin about how inconvenient cloth pads were. Once when my cousin and I were returning home from school, my cousin told me that there was a bloody pad in her school bag with books, wrapped in a newspaper. Most of the girls I knew including me tried not to change pads at school. The girls had to bring the pad back home somehow as there were no proper disposal system at schools. My cousin quietly expressed, “sometimes I wish there was a pad I could just throw away.” I sympathized with her and we both hurried home before the books in her bag were stained. Comparing my experiences growing up I realize Nepal was then following what third wave menstrual activists in the United States are focusing on right now.

When industrial pads became available in Kathmandu, Nepal I was ecstatic. Kathmandu is the capital of Nepal, therefore, most “modern” things are introduced there. Once my neighbor
told me about pads, which her friend brought from America and had given her a packet. She told me how convenient they were, how they did not leak, how they would stick to underwear and how they could be thrown away if needed. I remember asking her if it could be washed and reused. We found out that it could not be reused after washing. When the awesome product from America was available in Nepal, I could not wait to have my period. However, even after we started using industrial products at home, my mum still insisted we continue to use homemade products most of the time. She told us that the homemade products were cheaper, healthier for women’s bodies and environmentally friendly. The concerns expressed by my mother years ago are also the concerns of current menstrual activists of the United States (Bobel, 2010).

If we consider concerns of the third wave menstrual activists with my personal experiences there is a little doubt that the current industrial FemCare products are expensive, unhealthy for both women’s bodies and global environment. FemCare products are in need of a huge change for better. However, as a woman who has used both cloth reusable pads and commercial products, I think a balance is required. Commercial products are convenient in many ways and cloth reusable pads have their own benefits. Therefore, a product, which incorporates best of both might provide a long term solution. It is difficult to determine whether FemCare industry will take responsibility to produce better products or not and women are left to wonder if any significant changes will be made soon.

Looking back at conversations I had with men about menstruation, I remember them to be mostly masked by other excuses. I noticed that this still happens. My regular experience of menstruation is not positive. I fall in a group of women who suffer physical pain for at least ten days a month, every month because of menstruation. Whenever I had to explain, especially to men, what was going on with me every month I often covered it with a stomach pain or a
headache. Also, there was no way I would mention menstruation to any senior males. Somehow, I learned that I was not allowed to talk to them about “that” as a girl. I do not remember anyone telling me not to do so, or maybe someone did, I do not know, but that was what I learned. When it came to sharing with men my age, depending on how close I was with them, I would either offer an excuse or explain real reason for my stomach pain. Maybe the men who were never told about my period knew what was going on but no one asked me directly or the word menstruation ever mentioned.

A few men in my life treated menstruation as a natural process. One of my best male friends who was also my colleague knows the pain I go through every month. One day when I told him I had a stomach pain, he surprised me by saying “You mean you have your period? You have stomach pain every month around the same time. So, I am guessing it is your period.” I was relieved that I did not have to hide, but embarrassed at the same time to talk about menstruation with a man. While growing up, I had a cousin who was my playmate. He and I used to play sports together and he helped me get through my period pain. He used to tell me stories and get me pain killers and soup while I wriggled in bed with pain. My cousin and a colleague are two males in my life who dealt with conversations about menstruation positively.

Many times, the experience was not so positive. Most men laughed at me or were awkward when they found out I was having my period. Like the result of Roberts, Goldberg, Power and Pyszczynski (2002), I noticed men mostly distanced themselves from me when they realized I was having my period. Apart from two men, other males in my life were not so positive. So, I always wondered how men learned and what they learned about menstruation. Who talked to them and what were they told about menstruation? Do men talk to other female friends and relatives like my cousin and friend? Do they talk with other men? I wondered.
Menstruation has been both a positive and a negative experience for me. Most men I know dealt with menstruation negatively and two men in particular treated it a little bit positively.

While growing up I noticed women and girls around me abided by menstrual taboos a lot more rigidly than followed at my home. My experience with menstrual taboos was liberal. In Nepal, on the fourth day of menstruating, women had to “purify” their mattresses and blankets by putting them outside homes before the sun was out. It was assumed dew or moisture in the environment would “purify” them. This meant the woman had to be up before five AM, or even earlier. The woman also had to wash all beddings, clothes they wore, dishes they used, take a shower and purify all spaces they had been around by sprinkling purified water. I was surprised to see a few women showered outside on public taps. I asked a girl taking a shower in a public place once and she said that if she showered at home the bathroom would get “polluted.” I did not have to follow restrictions to such extent. I did not go to kitchen, did not cook, took a shower on the fourth day and washed cloths I was wearing. One of my colleagues once told me that she was not allowed to sleep in a bed when menstruating. She had to use something, which was easier than her normal bed to wash as bedding for those four days. She was also not allowed to sleep in the same bed as her husband or sons. She informed that her mother-in-law was very strict and kept watchful eyes on her. My mother was liberal on most matters including using beds during menstruation. We were a nuclear family so we did not have elders keeping a watch on us, which made life easier.

Men, on the other hand, were treated completely different. They were pure creatures and menstruating women could not touch them. In case menstruating women touched men, pure water was sprinkled on men for purification. Men also could not eat food prepared by menstruating women. Someone explained to me that it was necessary to do this because men
would lose their power if they ate food cooked or touched by menstruating women. I noticed a few men ate at restaurants when their wives were menstruating. As a young woman, I wondered what women and children ate if fathers ate outside and mothers could not go to kitchens. Fortunately, there were men who were different and one of them was my father. My father cooked some time when my mother menstruated. I remember a few incidents when my father would cook and all his children would sit around and talk to him. My mother either sat away or would do something else away from the kitchen. When my father did not cook, he sometimes bought food from restaurants or as an eldest child I cooked. There were also a few men who used to tell their wives to rest would take care of house work. Sadly, these men were sometimes teased by people around them, by both men and women. Still, it was a change to see men who were responsible towards their families. If only more men would have courage to go beyond the norm, menstruation would not be such a taboo.

Looking at existence of double standards, some of my friends talked about how their husbands would sneak to their separate bed at night even when the wives were menstruating. I used to think, “Why can’t the mother-in-laws keep an eye on their sons instead of their daughter-in-laws?” “Why only women are forced to follow the rules?” As a curious child I asked my mother these questions. She told me that initially the practices were put in place so that women could have some time off from their regular heavy household and other chores. These practices later got distorted and did not serve women’s wellbeing anymore. I am not sure how much of this is true. Even though this research does not concentrate specially on Nepali men, this study tried to find out if any difference exist in knowledge and perspectives when race and culture of participants are considered.
This research study

My goal with this research study was to collect and analyze knowledge and perspectives of men regarding menstruation. As demonstrated by Roberts et al. (2002) research men’s beliefs about menstruation influence their behavior towards women. Therefore, if men are in positions to make decisions for women, their perceptions about women impact the choices made. In case of menstruation women are even more affected by men because most of the time men make decisions for them. Even when we consider only one company, decision makers of one of the most influential FemCare manufacturers, Johnson & Johnson, USA are mostly men (Johnson & Johnson Services, Inc., 2015). According to the official website, out of thirteen Board of Directors only three are women. Only two out of twelve senior management team are women. At grassroots level men perceive menstruation to be a women’s issue but decisions about how to care for menstruation are made mostly by a selected few men. Even though this difference is an ironic disparity we see that men continue to make decisions for women when menstrual management is concerned.

I hope by understanding what and how men learn about, whether or not they want to know more and how they perceive menstruation we are able to map out effective ways to communicate to men. When properly implemented, effective strategies will ensure that men realize that any issues stated to either effect only men or only women are intertwined, consequently affecting both. Men should realize that understanding similarities between men and women’s biology will help to bring harmony in families, romantic relationships and communities. Hypotheses of this study are that men will discuss this topic as a taboo and men will have limited knowledge on menstruation.
This thesis is arranged in four remaining chapters. Chapter Two: Literature Review provides an overview of literature related to taboos and myths regarding menstruation. It is necessary to understand how existence of such myths influence women’s and men’s attitude towards menstruation and women who menstruate. Additionally, this chapter also provides a discussion on why addressing menstruation is important since it significantly impacts women’s health, relationships and finances.

Chapter Three: Method, this chapter provides an outline of the processes through which I conducted the research. In summary, why I chose to implement qualitative research methods, specifically in-depth, semi-structured interviews in order to find answers to my research questions. I also provide discussions on how my position as a woman and a researcher and my personal experiences might influence the methodology. At the end of this chapter, limitations of this study are provided.

Chapter Four: Results, in this chapter I discuss my findings as related to the themes that were identified. My findings mirror results of other similar studies. However, my study is based on a different geographical region and concentrate on diverse sample. Therefore, this research will be an important addition to existing literature on the topic. I found that men agree they need to know more about menstruation but the amount of knowledge they wanted and methods of gaining information differed. Their opinions varied on how the information about menstruation would affect them personally. Race and culture of participants did not make any significant impact on the knowledge and perceptions.
Finally, in Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion, I discuss my project’s findings in relation to similar research. I argue that new ways of teaching men about issues, which affect women directly, need to be designed and implemented effectively. Also, I provide suggestions for those who wish to work with men to encourage healthy perceptions about menstruation.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Women are oppressed in almost all societies of the world. The oppressive situation of women makes issues related to women secondary to those of men. In this literature review I focus on how taboos, myths and shame associated with menstruation affect men’s and women’s learning of the topic. This knowledge production in turn affects men and women’s perspectives on menstruation, thus affecting all women who menstruate either positively or negatively. I begin this chapter by first investigating how men and women’s knowledge about menstruation is influenced by taboos and myths surrounding it.

Taboos and myths of menstruation

Beauvoir (1953) and Steinem (1983) argued that because women are considered to be secondary and inferior to men, women and women’s bodily functions are considered negative, private and shameful. Such opinions prevent free and open communication about women’s bodies and its functions. Thus, socially constructed inferior position and negative opinions about women affects how menstruation is perceived. Beauvoir (1953) wrote “man denotes human in general whereas woman represent only the negative and she is perceived to think with her glands” (p. xxxix). Therefore, a man is the Subject, an Absolute – a woman is the “Other” resulting in a men’s superior and women’s inferior position in the world (p. xl). According to Steinem (1983), “whatever superior group has will be used to justify its superiority and whatever an inferior group has will be used to justify its plight” (p. 337). Hence, for centuries conversations about women’s reproductive organs and menstruation have been considered to be women’s private issue. However, as Steinem wrote in *If Men Could Menstruate*, menstruation
would become an enviable, boast-worthy and masculine event if men were the ones to menstruate (Steinem, 1983).

Socially constructed taboos and myths silence conversations about menstruation resulting in discrimination against women (George, 2012). According to Montgomery (1974), “the degree of discrimination against menstruating women, though, range from mild uneasiness and distrust of menstrual fluid and menstruating women, to elaborate complexes of restrictions and ultimately to complete seclusion during the menstrual period” (p. 137). Many socially constructed explanations are provided to demonstrate that women are naturally inferior because of their biology. Therefore, anything relating to women, especially their biological functions are considered negative, disgusting, sick and shameful. This was also the findings of a research conducted by Roberts, Goldenberg, Power and & Pyszczynski (2002).

Various restrictions are imposed on women during menstruation. These restriction include but not limited to menstruating person’s diet, clothing, activity, communication and living arrangements (Meyer-Rochow, 2009). Restriction is also imposed on cooking, worshipping, seeing the sun and what the person can or cannot touch (Kissling 1996; Frazer, 1963). According to Durkheim in ‘primitive’ societies “since sex brought a man into closest potential contact with a woman’s blood taboos included sexual prohibitions above all” (as cited in Knight, 1991, p. 380). This prohibition seems to exist even in current age. According to Garg, Goyal and Gupta (2011) taboo of sex during menstruation is still followed in different parts and religions of the world. In case of cultures the authors particularly mentioned India and Nepal and for religions Hindu and Islam were stated.

Meyer-Rochow (2009) wrote in a global context that out of many taboos the unwritten food taboo exist in one or the other form in every society in the world. He explained that the food
taboo mostly exists for women during reproductive period. The author concluded that food taboo is a form of suppression by the more dominant sector of the society and the taboo ensures that the dominant group have access to better food resources. Beauvoir (1953) wrote, “myths justify all privileges and even authorizes their abuse” (p. 270). The three general areas of practice and belief regarding menstrual taboos are related to the concealment, activity and communication (Williams as quoted in Kissling, p. 293). Therefore, as Beauvoir stated in The Second Sex, the deprivation and abuse imposed on menstruators during menstruation is justified by various myths and taboos.

Menstrual myths and taboos are global. Menstrual myths and taboos exist in one or the other form all around the world. The belief that menstruating women attract bears have led the United States government to warn against menstruating women from hiking in bear country (Eldred, 1998). Myths exist to extremes: in Australia, it is believed that if a menstruating women touches a man, he will die (Frazer, 1963) and in India, a myth prevails that used menstrual cloth possesses an evil quality and if men see the cloth, dry or otherwise, they could go blind (Garg, Goyal and Gupta, 2011). In India and Nepal, there is a belief that menstruating women should not touch plants or food, otherwise they will rot. In many cultures, menstruating women are subject to exclusion and isolation (Knight, 1991). The taboos are followed not just in developing countries like India, Uganda, Nigeria and Congo but also developed countries like Venezuela, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Italy, Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom (George, 2012; Eldred, 1998; Frazer, 1963).

Most men and women have negative attitudes towards menstruation. Roberts et al.’s research, also known as tampons versus hair clip research, was conducted among 32 female and 33 male, mostly Caucasian university students in America. The participants of this research
interacted with a female subject who accidentally dropped either a tampon or a hair clip out of her handbag. The research aimed to find out how participants evaluated the subject’s competence and likeness and also how they maintained physical distance depending on whether a tampon or a hair clip was dropped. Dropping of a tampon or a hair clip suggested the subject’s menstrual status. Conclusions of this research demonstrated that dropping a tampon led to lower evaluations of the subject’s competence, decreased liking for her and a marginal tendency to avoid sitting close to her. Furthermore, gender schematic participants responded to the reminder of menstruation with increased objectification of women in general, an effect the researchers viewed as an effort to “protect” culturally sanitized views of the feminine. This research showed that negative attitudes towards menstruation exist even among young and presumably open-minded American college students. This further strengthens Meyer-Rochow’s conclusion that myths resulting in negative attitudes exist in one or the other form in every society in the world.

Menstruating women are dangerous and powerful. Strong hold of taboos and myths makes women dangerous. The strong beliefs make women dangerous, therefore, necessitate women to hide their faces and themselves from the society when menstruating (Frazer, 1963). The danger perceived to be inflicted by breaking the taboos, however, is imaginary (Frazer, 1963). Knight (1991) argued that there is nothing complicatedly symbolic about menstrual taboo. In traditional time, menstrual taboos were constructed by men to avoid the shame they would face by being with a menstruating woman (Knight, 1991). Therefore, taboos were believed to act as electrical insulators to preserve the people from suffering or inflicting harm on others (Frazer, 1963). Interestingly, menstruation has been feared as “the scared” but also as “dangerous.” When it is dangerous “men have gone to an extreme extend to sought to isolate and oppress women because of their intrinsic and much-feared menstrual powers” (Knight, 1991, p.
In this way men become a part of a cultural structure which subordinates and discriminates women.

Although menstrual taboos may not be universal, they are widespread and justified with socially constructed reasoning (Knight, 1991). Montgomery (1974) expressed similar thoughts that menstrual restrictions are not universal and some societies even seem to be casual, impose no taboos and even celebrate it at times. Societies which discriminate menstruating women aim to control supposedly uncontrollable power women are thought to have during menstruation. Religious texts, practices, traditions, language, tales, songs and movies justify existing myths and taboos (Meyer-Rochow, 2009; Eldred, 1998; Beauvoir, 1953). The taboos are also justified by many cultures by reasoning that women are closer to the nature because of their reproductive power whereas men are superior as culture because of their ability to rationalize (Ortner, 1974). However, we see that assimilating women to nature is simply an act of prejudice (Beauvoir, 1953).

**Evolution of menstrual beliefs.** Theories on menstruation have evolved over time. According to Knight (1991), menstruation taboos were initiated to prevent women from forming solidarity. He wrote,

> in traditional time menstruating women lived together and went on sex-strike, men envied this and commenced male menstruation. In this way, male menstruation become the rule, and taboos were placed so that female menstruation was considered dangerously polluting and a private affair. Whereas male menstruation was something to be celebrated, positive, magical, empowering and conducive to good hunting luck. (p. 387)
According to Alain Tetart (1986) taboos were imposed to ensure that two important forms of blood of traditional times – menstrual blood and blood of the hunt never mixed (as cited in Knight, 1991). Kothari (2010) mentioned a similar reason saying that taboos can be linked to the perception of blood itself - the menstrual blood being considered dirty and black and the hunters’ sacrificial blood as good and bright red. In Australia’s model of men’s menstruation “boys had to have their flesh cut to allow the blood to flow” so now instead of women synchronizing menstruation, men replicated it artificially. In this way, “men claimed the women’s space and kept women away” (Knight, 1991, p. 41). Thus, in the modern age menstrual taboos and myths serve different purpose than in the hunting era. In this age, taboos and myths apart from ensuring that women’s menstruation remains hidden also serves a political agenda; preventing women’s solidarity.

Different attempts have been made to interpret the origin of menstrual taboos, however, fear related to menstrual blood and women are common themes. The origin of menstrual taboos mostly fall into two broad categories: (a) psychogenic - fear of menstrual blood and (b) sociogenic - patriarchal social systems perceiving the menstruating woman as impure or dirty (Kothari, 2010). Montgomery (1974) mentioned many fears: one based on fear of women’s solidarity, another is a fear of pollution and another on the unknown or unexplainable that took place with menstruating women. The fear of unexplainable is, for example, women who are located close to each other seem to menstruate around the same time; the fact that women bleed without any physical injury; women seem to survive a considerable loss of blood in a regular basis and they menstruate around a particular cycle (Montgomery, 1974). Thus, menstruation adds a layer to women’s mystery. However, considering a woman to be a mystery is claiming that even though she is not silent her language is not understood (Beauvoir, 1953). Language
also seem to play an important part in origination of taboos, Knight (1991) explained that through the dual significance of the term tabu,

the Polynesian world is made up from the root ta, meaning to mark and pu which is an adverb of intensity; tabu, therefore, means “marked thoroughly.” Since in many Polynesian languages, “holy” and “forbidden” are inseparable concepts: a thing which is “holy” is by the same token “forbidden”; a thing which is “forbidden” is also “holy”. Therefore a Fijian woman may be termed dra tabu – meaning “holy blood” – tab also connotes both “danger” and “power.” (Sahlins as cited in Knight, 1991, p. 379)

The fear of menstruation keeps men and women from talking about it and also explains the inadequate literature available on the topic. It is necessary especially for men to understand that taboos and myths are socially constructed to serve a purpose; to maintain superiority of men. Enough awareness should be raised among men and women so that conversation about menstruation is not silenced anymore.

The social scientists over centuries have developed theories, which explain how understanding of menstruation reached to its present status. Few popular theories are:

Castration anxiety theory developed by Williams Stephens (1960): “the sight or thought of a person who bleeds from the genital (a menstruating woman) is frightening to a person who has intense castration anxiety.” According to Stephens, intensity of menstrual taboos should therefore vary cross-culturally in proportion to the intensity of male fear of castration (Stephens as cited in Knight, 1991, p. 376)

Vagina envy: Bettelheim (1955) argued that men are envious of women’s capacity to bleed from the genitals. In few cultures men even attempt to imitate this in customs like “male
initiation rites” which involve cutting the penises of boys or in other ways making them bleed (Bruno Bettelheim as cited in Montgomery, 1974, p. 138). Men seem jealously of power of menstrual blood (Eldred, 1998). According to Bettelheim and Montgomery resentfulness, jealousy and ambivalence men felt towards menstruation originated in taboos, thus, stigmatizing menstruating women.

Another recent theory with psychology component rests on the observation that menstruation can be a rare event among hunters and gatherers women who were badly nourished. It is said that because of its rarity it would understandably have been worrying and seemingly anomalous – therefore a “taboo” (Knight, 1991).

Theories relating to psychology also explain that it is more about psychology than matter because people are simply being scientific in avoiding menstrual blood. According to theorist, physician Bela Schick of 1920, menstrual blood is highly toxic containing “menotoxins.” (Schick as cited by Knight, 1991, p. 376). The theory of “menotoxins” further enforced beliefs that menstruating women should be avoided.

However, all these theories do not explain the social, symbolic, cultural aspects and why taboos exist. Even though completely new theories have not emerged, the new perception after public’s interest in women’s issues in 1960s-70s demonstrate that menstrual taboos and women’s oppression is closely linked (Knight, p. 378).

**Menstrual rights as women’s human right**

This section of the literature review examines why menstruation is a human rights issue for women. This also analyzes development of menstrual rights within feminist movements. The three parts of this section are: menstruation as women’s human right; history of women’s right movements and transnational women’s response on menstruation and intersectionality.
Menstruation as women’s human right. Menstruation is closely linked to women’s human right to live with dignity. According to Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). Out of three broad categories of human rights, one is related to the bodily integrity, community self-determination and rights to land and other natural resources. Menstruation may not be something everyone connects to human rights of women (Klasing and Sharma, 2014). However, when women’s ovaries have to be removed because of infection sustained due to unhealthy menstrual management and women with disability are sterilized before menstruation due to a fear of pregnancy and to reduce burden on the caregiver, menstruation becomes a human rights issue for women (Sharma, 2014). Many women and girls around the world also risk physical violence and even rape or death when abiding by customs imposed on menstruating women (Uprety and Bhandari, 2010). Many poor young girls in Africa are forced to have sex with older men to be able to purchase menstrual products (Klasing, 2014). In India, unhygienic menstrual management have been reported to have resulted in Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) which is also linked with incidence of cervical cancer, HIV/AIDS, infertility, ectopic pregnancy and many other symptoms (Garg, Goyal & Gupta, 2011). Therefore, the fact that menstrual taboos and management have life threatening consequences on women’s health, safety and dignity make menstruation a human rights issue for women (Klasing, 2014).

Even women do not seem to have adequate and correct information regarding menstruation. When George (2012) interviewed girls in India about their first menstrual experience, one of them thought she had cancer and other one thought she was injured. All the girls interviewed expressed having negative experiences including mental stress, body shame and
discrimination during menstruation. Similar were the experiences of women in Nepal who lived in isolation during menstruation (Uprety and Bhandari, 2010). Interviews conducted by Uprety and Bhandari showed that extreme violence against menstruating women have been committed. They found that a few girls had been raped and a few others died due to poor living conditions of huts they lived in during menstruation. The negative experiences and violence inflicted on women during menstruation demonstrate that addressing menstruation parallels to addressing women’s human rights issues.

**History of women’s right movements.** It has been a constant struggle to achieve women’s reproductive rights. Revolutionary message “personal is political” of second wave feminism movement publicized what was considered a family or a woman’s personal issues like domestic violence, abortion and reproductive health. The movement highlighted women’s reproductive rights in political, social and cultural arenas. During the movement, even though women activists prioritized other issues, problem of menstrual taboos did capture some attention (Bobel, 2008).

Main focus of initial menstrual activism in the United States in 1973 was women’s experiences with menstruation. The initiation of the first menstrual activism was made by three women, Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton and Emily Toth in 1973 in a friend’s house as a first staged “Bleed-in” (Bobel, 2008). Bobel wrote that as part of their activism the first three menstrual activists “shared stories of their first periods, viewed educational films and scrawled menstrual graffiti on a piece of paper attached to the bathroom wall” (p. 738). The menstrual activism has come a long way since then. Bobel (2008) mentioned a health resource, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which was inaugurated in 1970 by Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. However, a very few academic works were found which mentioned activism associated with
menstruation before 1970 during this literature review. According to Bobel (2010), “the early menstrual activism was pioneered by feminist-spiritualists who worked at the level of individual self-transformation, framing menstruation as a source of untapped female-power and woman-centered identification” (p. 8).

Focus of menstruation activism changed in 1980s from 1970s. The menstrual activism in 1980s changed its priorities as activists focused their attention on companies producing feminine products in 1982 (Bobel, 2008). This shift to safety of menstrual products during 1980s with emergence of Toxic Shock Syndrome, shifted the activism from political, social and cultural aspects of menstrual consciousness to product safety and medicalization of women’s bodies and health (Bobel, 2010). Also, the environmentalist movements of 1980s are credited for mobilizing efforts to thrust menstruation out of the closet and into public consciousness (Bobel, 2006).

Concerns of current menstruation activism have shifted from its phases in 1970s and 1980s. Concerns of the contemporary menstruation activists are: impact of current menstrual products on environment and women’s health; safety of the products; environmental devastation brought by the commercial non-biodegradable products and financial costs to women. One part of current activism is more abstract. This revolves against the message promoted by the companies that menstruation is a problem to be solved, a problem to be ashamed of and necessity to hide menstruation (Bobel, 2006).

**Transnational women’s response on menstruation and intersectionality.*** Third wave movement is more inclusive and addresses intersectionality of women’s experiences and identities. Participation of women of color was not very active in second wave women’s movement (Price, 2010). Price (2010) wrote “the women of color were frustrated by the
individualist approach of the choice paradigm used by the mainstream reproductive rights movement in the U.S.” (p. 42). A main difference of third wave movement is their attempt to break the racism, heterosexism and classism that second wave movement did not address and similar has been the case with menstrual activism (Bobel, 2006). Price (2010) wrote “women of color voiced for intersectional analysis and the acknowledgement of oppression in order for women to truly gain freedom” (p. 43). According to Price with the participation of color of women and more inclusive third wave movement, a global, transnational women’s movement was initiated, which placed human rights at the core of the feminist movement.

Contemporary menstrual activist movement are mainly spiritual-ecofeminists and radical menstruators (Bobel, 2010). One of the main efforts of current menstrual activists is to “reject the construction of menstruation as a problem in need of a solution which provides women as disgusting, annoying, taboo and best kept out of sight and out of mind” (Bobel, 2010, pgs. 6 & 7). The earlier menstrual conscious raising activism were through creative rituals, music and poetry whereas the contemporary radical activists focuses on promoting “free bleeding” through social media (Bobel, 2010).

The menstrual activism differ in degrees and forms from 1970s to 2014. The current activists employ a rich variety of tactics, from sacred to ribald and practical to abstract (Bobel, 2010). In America, current menstrual activism is focused to ensure that feminine products are environmentally friendly, less costly and healthy to the users and the planet. The activists are also encouraging to promote alternatives to current menstrual products (Bobel, 2006). Outside America different kinds of activism exist. In May 18, 2014 a Menstrual Hygiene Day was celebrated in eighteen countries. During the program the organizers realized that “talking about menstruation makes many people uncomfortable only because their views are colored by long-
standing societal stigmas” (Keiser, 2014). According to Keiser (2014), even naming the day with “hygiene” needed justification since the word reinforced “the myth that women and girls are dirty during menstruation.” Such difficulty in organizing public program regarding menstruation further emphasis importance of having open conversation about it by everyone, irrespective of gender, sex and gender identities.

Current menstrual awareness activities, however, need to be more inclusive of gender. The menstrual hygiene management lab set up during a menstrual awareness program in India provided a channel for girls and women to talk about menstruation and learn how to safely make and maintain cloth sanitary napkins (George, 2012). Such activities and free conversations about menstruation are revolutionary and empower women and girls (Houppert, 1999). However, men were not a part of such campaign, therefore, separating men disseminate negative message that menstruation is a women’s issue (George, 2012). Therefore, more inclusive approaches are required, which will expand conversations of menstruation beyond women (Bobel, 2010).

The intersectionality of women’s identities form different experience during menstruation. Due to inadequate information, in Bangladesh women misused contraceptive pills to prevent menstruation (BSR, 2010). Most of these women also suffered from infection due to use of unhygienic menstrual products, which is a result of health taboos and prejudices on women’s menstrual hygiene. A girl with disability is sterilized before menarche to prevent her from being pregnant (Sharma, 2014). In Nairobi neighborhood of Mukuru, young girls reported having sex with older men to be able to afford sanitary napkins (Klasing, 2014). Therefore, intersectionality of women’s identities of being poor, marginalized, uninformed and third world women affect their wellbeing. Not enough attention on healthy socialization during puberty has
led to menstrual stigma that has affected the health, well-being and agency of women across lines of race, class and sexual orientation (Bobel, 2010).

It is important to talk openly about menstruation if we want to challenge consumerism surrounding menstrual products and current culture of concealment. Menstrual activism is also essential if we want healthier options to experience menstruation positively, to fight current negative menstrual culture and to develop positive interventions (Bobel, 2010).

The impact of taboos and myths about menstruation on women

This section of the literature review analyzes physical, psychological and emotional impacts of taboos and myths regarding menstruation on women. It also discusses social, financial and environmental costs of current menstrual products.

Bodily impact. Negative attitudes towards menstruation impact women’s physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing. Beauvoir (1953) stated “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (p. 281). Therefore, a person learns to be a woman through socialization, environment and exposure to cultural beliefs. Tuana (1993) wrote “science is social institution influenced by the cultural, political and economic conditions under which it is practiced but this science is gendered. Sexist biases permeate the entire structure of science” (Tuana, 1993, p. 1). Over years results of many scientific studies have been provided to support women’s inferiority to men but as Tuana (1993) proposed science is biased towards women. It is unfortunate to see that scientists like Charles Meigs (1885-1959) claim that education affects the ability of women to menstruate resulting in imbalance in reproduction. Meigs proposed “intellectual endeavors must be suspended during menstruation for women but men should be encouraged to cultivate their brains” (Meigs cited in Tuana, 1993, p. 75). Tuana (1993) cited Meigs who proposed that because nature interrupts women’s participation in their intellectual endeavors they can never be
intellectually equal to men. Such scientific opinion support menstruation causes temporary mental instability if not total insanity in women (Tuana, 1993). Both society and science try to prove that women are inferior beings. Therefore, it is not surprising that a young woman’s menarche is not celebrated but hidden with a quick, furtive talk about the menstrual supplies (Bobel, 2010). The need to hide menstruation provide a message to girls that their bodily functions should remain a secret and well hidden from everyone around them, resulting in constant and unnecessary stress on their psychology.

Women are also perceived to be morally inferior because of menstruation. Women are seen not only physically inferior but also morally inferior to men because of their inability to control passion. This is cited to be a result of their coldness because of their biological deficiency such as reproductive organs and menstruation (Tuana, 1993). Roberts et al. (2002) stated women’s reproductive functions are seen not only as a sign of inferiority but with the development of their bodies, women are also viewed as objects of beauty and desire (2002). They wrote “the objectification status of women has shown to lead to a host of psychological problems for women, from being unable to attain peak emotional experience to adhering to standard gender-related behaviors” (Roberts et al., 2002, p. 133). Lee (1994) conducted a research study, which interviewed different age groups of women on their experience of menstruation. Most girls and women of Lee’s study expressed that their first menstrual blood made them feel dirty and unclean, ashamed and fearful. Frazer (1963) also wrote that menstruating women are considered unclean, impure and polluted. Therefore, the findings of Lee (1994) support Roberts et al.’s (2002) results that menstruation is viewed as impure even by most women. Nevertheless, with the onset of menarche girls become objectified as sexual objects, which in turn affect their ability to build healthy self-esteem and sexuality (Roberts et al. 2002).
Men’s and women’s perceptions about menstruation also affect their attitude towards women. The results of Roberts et al.’s (2002) research, “tampons versus hair clip research,” support that both men and women perceive menstruating woman to be less likable, competent and people maintain a physical distance from her (Roberts et al., 2002, p. 135). Roberts et al.’s result provides a base to the stereotype threat theory. Stereotype threat states that a negative stereotype image impacts cognitive ability of the perceived stereotyped group (Wister, Stubbs & Shipman, 2013, p. 19). When a woman is aware that she is not liked, or viewed as incompetent, it affects her ability to perform in daily life. Interestingly, Wister et al. (2013) concluded there are no negative effects of menstruation on cognition. Therefore, a myth relating to incompetence of women during menstruation is only a myth and not a reality.

Negative attitudes towards menstruation exist in both men and women. Roberts et al. (2002) also mentions a study conducted to find reactions of participants about menstrual products. According to this study, 46% of male and female participants refused to touch a new tampon to their lips, 69% refused to put a tampon in their mouth and 3% would not even touch it. The study shows menstruation is linked to feelings of disgust and revulsion (Roberts et al., 2002). Sadly, due to negative attitudes associated with menstruation many women take extreme measures to live without periods. A 2003 study found that one-third of women surveyed indicated that they would eliminate their menstruation permanently if they could (Bobel, 2010).

Menstruation is linked to mental status of women. Tuana (1993) provided many scientific theories, which relate hysteria of women to their womb. One particular nineteenth-century theory of physiology “reflex action” provided that “women are far less stable than man due to her “periodicity” – the cycle of menstruation and pregnancy” (p. 98). Scientists who provided such theories support women are mentally instable because of their natural bodily function. Due to
negativity related to menstruation, nowadays, there are trends to use oral contraceptives and other medical means to suppress or even stop menstruation permanently (Johnston-Robledo, Barnack and Wares, 2006).

**Other costs.** Social, financial and environmental costs produced by myths and taboos associated with menstruation is high. Menstrual myths and taboos present women as polluters, incompetent and unlikeable beings with unstable psychological and emotional health. These perspectives establish that women need treatment, which might result in high social costs (Tuana, 1993). A study of women in garment factories in Bangladesh found 73 percent of female workers interviewed said that they missed an average of six days of work and pay a month due to vaginal infections, often caused by unsanitary menstrual materials. Missing so much work and pay is not only bad for the women but also for a nation’s economic growth (Klasing, 2014).

Not addressing menstruation openly and positively impact formal education of women negatively. Lack of safe and clean sanitation facilities at schools have led to low attendance and high dropout rates for girls (Klasing & Sharma, 2014). Findings of a UNICEF study estimated that 1-in-10 African girls missed school during menses; in Burkina Faso 83 percent of girls had no place at school to change their menstrual materials Klasing (2014). In India 16.18% girls missed schools during menstruation (Garg, Goyal & Gupta, 2011). Klasing (2014) stated a study in Uganda, which found that girls missed as many as five days of school a month because of inadequate sanitation facilities at school, lack of hygiene products and physical discomfort associated with their periods. The girls’ absence from school during menstruation can have both physical and psychological causes and in long term affect overall health status of nation’s population (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013).
Lack of awareness to effectively dispose used menstrual products, which once again may be attributed partly to the shame and silence associated with menstruation is costing governments around the world millions of dollars. According to a report, *Global Review of Sanitation System Trends and Interactions with Menstrual Management Practices: Report for the Menstrual Management and Sanitation Systems Project* (Kjellén, Pensulo, Nordqvist, & Fogde, 2012) billions of non-degradable menstrual products are strewn on cities, villages, rivers and forests all around the world. These unmanaged disposal not only harm the environment but are also causing unpredicted and expensive challenge like pipe blockages. The report published expenses of many water and sewage companies around the world spent on unblocking pipes. The report showed that a company in Yemen spent US$ 24,000 a month unblocking 1,200 blockages in 2011 and 80-90 percent of the time menstrual pads were removed from blocked pipes. This was only one expense of many companies the report published. Therefore, shame and silence associated with menstruation is costing a lot of money to governments and societies.

Women bear high cost of menstrual management. A monetary cost of menstrual products for a Western woman is approximately $2,200 in her life time (Bobel, 2006). This does not account additional pharmaceuticals sold to aid in pre-menstrual syndrome symptoms, such as pain killers and birth control pills used to minimize the pain and complications associated with menstruation (Bobel, 2010). In 2012, according to an online magazine, Jezebel (Morrissey, 2012), depending on whether a woman uses tampons or sanitary pads the cost varies. A yearly cost of tampons could be up to $61.11 and maxi pads $59.43. Considering an average cost per woman per year is $60 and a woman menstruates from age 12 to 55, an average cost of pads or tampons in 2012 was $2,580. Once, again the calculation does not consider other additional products used by women to maintain her feminine health or manage other conditions associated
with menstruation. In India, the cost per month in average was Rupees 48, which is expensive by Indian standards and in Nepal, majority (about 38%) reported not being able to afford commercial menstrual products because of its price (Garg, Goyal & Gupta, 2011). Unfortunately, girls who reported having sex with older men to be able to afford sanitary napkins in a part of Africa said that sometimes men do not pay them (Klasing, 2014). Therefore, despite taking an extreme measure, these girls are unable to afford commercial products. Apart from a high cost, in India, girls said they were embarrassed to purchase products from men-run stores, therefore, do not use commercial products (Kothari, 2010). Interestingly, girls in America too mentioned it was awkward to buy menstrual products from male clerks (Fingerson, 2005). Therefore, there are many reasons why women are unable to manage menstruation hygienically.

Concerns are also expressed about environmental implications of disposing current non-biodegradable menstrual products (Bobel, 2006). 73-92% of European and American and 10-11% Indian women have access to commercial menstrual products and most use disposable products (Garg, Goyal and Gupta 2011). An average woman in North America uses more than 11,000 disposable pads or tampons in her life (Porter, 2002). Porter further wrote that 20 billion disposable feminine hygiene products are flushed or tossed annually. Also, chemical used to whiten tampons and different materials on sanitary pads are not only harmful to women but also to our planet (Porter, 2002). Menstruation is already stigmatized enough impacting women negatively. On top of that, women should not be held responsible for polluting environment too. Free and responsible attitudes towards menstruation will serve women, save millions of dollars and assist in keeping a cleaner environment. Therefore, contemporary menstrual activists are demanding more environmentally friendly products (Bobel, 2006; Porter, 2002).
Conclusion

Taboos and myths associated with menstruation have existed from traditional to contemporary era. The degree and type of taboos and myths, however, have evolved since traditional time. The existence of taboos and myths ensure that both men and women are not comfortable talking about menstruation. The literature review showed that women mostly refrain from talking about menstruation because they learn it to be disgusting, shameful and something to hide. Men, on the other hand, keep away because they are socialized to think that menstruation is a women’s issue. Therefore, even though both men and women do not talk about menstruation openly, there is a difference why they do so.

It is necessary to have free and open conversation to develop positive attitude towards menstruation. Having open and educating conversation about menstruation is necessary because talking about menstruation help women to gain control over the event, appropriating it and defusing the pain and anguish (Lee, 1994). Also, free conversation about menstruation are revolutionary and empower women and girls (Houppert, 1999). Studies have also found that positive attitude towards menstruation is used by women as affirmation of their femininity and womanhood, as well as an indicator of good health, fertility and pregnancy status (Johnston-Robledo, Barnack and Wares, 2006). Sadly, even in the modern world mothers are not ready to talk about menstruation to their daughters. Those mothers who did talk to their daughters felt that their daughters still felt some shame and embarrassment (Lee, 1994). Lee further found that women and girls learned early to hide all evidences of menstruation from boys and men including brothers and fathers.

Menstrual taboos and myths, which develop perceptions about menstruation as disgusting and shameful have negative impacts on girls and women. Menstruating women and at the end all
women are stereotyped in negative ways because of their reproductive organs and functions. Women also bear financial burden, psychological stress and social stigma impacting their self-esteem and ability to live a healthy and life with dignity.

We see that not addressing menstruation openly affect men too. Taboos not only affect women but mystery surrounding it also prevents men from having conversations about an issue, which affect their mothers, sisters, wives and female friends. Men and women should be empowered enough to talk freely about menstruation to understand the deeper level of why societies treat most issues affecting women as taboos. Understanding true intentions of why taboos and myths exist can help men and women analyze why society exists the way it does. This will lead menstruation not to be a woman’s curse but an empowering and indeed a magical experience (Knight, 1991).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study is to understand the knowledge and perspectives of men on menstruation. Specifically, I explored from whom, how and what men learn about menstruation to contribute to the academic literature on the topic. To examine how men learn about and perceive menstruation, this research is guided by three questions:

Research question # 1: From whom and in what ways, do men learn about menstruation?

Research question # 2: What do men report knowing about menstruation? Do they talk about menstruation? If yes, with whom and what do they talk about? If not, why they do not and what prevents them from talking about it?

Research question # 3: Do men know any taboos or myths associated with menstruation? If yes, what are they? Where did they learn about such taboos? Do they abide by any taboos or myths themselves?

Participants

Nine undergraduate male students of Minnesota State University, Mankato who were enrolled in the spring semester of 2015 were interviewed. Eight participants ranged in age from eighteen to twenty three years with an average age of 20.5. One participant didn’t disclose his age but informed that he is above eighteen. Two participants responded to recruitment flyers, five were approached by the researcher and two were recruited through class invitations. For the purpose of anonymity, real names of participants were not used during interviews and reporting of research findings. Participants were only asked to identify themselves by age, race and major on the consent forms. Race wise four were white, three black and two Asians. All four white and two black men were Americans, both Asians and one black man were international students.
Looking at relationship status of participants, one was dating, one specifically mentioned having a girlfriend currently and three mentioned past relationships with women, three were single and did not mention any past relationships and one mentioned LGBT community. Interviews typically lasted 40 minutes.

**Recruitment**

First, participants were recruited through flyers. Flyers announcing the research study and inviting interested male students to participate were put on the boards around the Centennial Student Union, the Women’s Center, the LGBT Center, the Gender and Women’s Studies department, the Student Health Center, the Relaxation Center, the Otto Recreational Center and the Multi-Cultural Center. Interested male students contacted the researcher through email or phone, information for which was provided on the flyers.

Second, the research study was announced in two gender and communication studies classes. During class announcements, the flyers were shared and names and telephone numbers of interested participants were collected. Later, the researcher contacted interested participants to set a date and time for interviews. Respondents participated mainly for two reasons, seven out of nine took part to “help out” and for two $10 incentive was the motivation. One participant specifically mentioned that he proactively participates in activities, which contribute to make the lives of women better. This was also his motivation for participation apart from helping the researcher.

**Procedures**

Participation in the research was voluntary. All participants were provided a $10 gift card each as a token of appreciation. During the first interaction between participants and me, they were screened to ensure that inclusion criteria of being a current male student of Minnesota State
University, Mankato and at least 18 years of age were met. Participants were requested to commit about an hour for the whole process. Interviews took place in a sound proof study room of the library to maintain confidentiality.

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the university to ensure ethical treatment of the human participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014). At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself, briefly stated the purpose of the research and explained the consent form (Appendix A). Participants were notified that participation is voluntary and they have a right not to answer any question or to opt out at any time without giving any reason. According to Hesse-Biber (2014) “when the participants knew their rights, the knowledge provide them choice to either voluntarily participate or not to participate in the research study” (p. 193). Those participants who decided to participate signed two copies of the consent form; one was given to the participant and I kept one. Participants were also informed that their names will not be taken during the whole interview process to maintain privacy. I then began recording the interview via an electronic voice-recording device.

A qualitative method was used to collect data. A semi-structured open-ended questionnaire (Appendix B) was used for in-depth interviews between 30-60 minutes. Informal nature of the interview assisted in building a relationship to explore the issue of menstruation more sensitively with male participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014). The semi-structured interview method provided me flexibility to be spontaneous and ask any new questions if needed. Nature of the interview also provided participants an opportunity to share their experience openly and without interruption of continuous questioning. This helped minimize hierarchy that is often created by a completely structured questionnaire. Face to face interview also allowed me to observe how participants responded to the questions, note their body language and emotions.
These unspoken and subtle but powerful gestures assisted me to add to what was expressed verbally.

I started interviews by asking participants opening questions, such as why they chose to participate and how they learned about the research. I then concentrated on directing the interview with the help of interview script. During the interview, instead of influencing the responses of participants by actively expressing my opinions, I encouraged them to express more through silent probing (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I tried my best to ensure that I fulfilled ethical obligation by contributing to the common good (Sprague, 2005) as I chose a topic, which is important for women but not much explored academically. Finally, I asked participants if they had any questions or suggestions to improve the research.

All recordings and transcripts are stored on a password secured computer, which only the researcher and the advisor (Dr. Shannon Miller) have access to. Signed consent forms are stored in a locked drawer and will be destroyed after three years along with transcripts and recordings.

**Positionality**

As a feminist researcher and also the interviewer, I initially decided to start this research with a cultural experience where men do not address the issue of menstruation openly. As I was growing up, I realized that men in my culture were not encouraged and at times even shamed for trying to understand menstruation. My father, male cousins and other male relatives never openly talked about menstruation. It was such a taboo issue that even women did not talk about it openly. On the one hand, there was no open conversation about it, especially with males and on the other hand, my culture follows a ritual, which celebrates first menstruation of girls. With the existence of a double standard, as a young girl I was confused. However, as I grew up I adapted to the environment but always wondered how and what men learned about menstruation.
Through this research, I felt I finally had an opportunity to fulfill my curiosity to find out men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation.

While I conducted interviews I had to be aware of my positionality. Feminist standpoint theories place “include attention to diversity of individual experiences as well as the specific social context as identified by economic, demographic and other measures (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 20). Even though a goal of a feminist research is to reveal the subjugated voice of women (Hesse-Biber, 2014), this research is a little different as I seek to gain perspectives of men. I decided to implement an approach of “Study Up” (Sprague, 2005, p. 186). Study Up approach studies privileged group of societies, in this case, men. It is important to focus studies on this group of the society because only studying women makes privileges held by men invisible. Therefore, personally I believe that we should not isolate men from feminist research. Instead we should draw attention to privileges men hold and they should be held accountable towards their responsibilities to the communities they belong to. This is one of the reasons why I chose to implement Study Up approach.

According to the feminist approach, Study Up is considered important “to generate feelings of indignation, which is energizing and also helps to expand our view of the social system vertically” (Sprague, 2005, p. 186). When we look at companies, which manufacture menstrual products, we see that majority of influential positions are held by men. The composition of Board members of Unilever USA support this; out of fourteen only five are women and all of them are non-executive directors (Unilever, 2013). This discrepancy becomes bigger with executives since there are only two women out of sixteen members. So, even when we look at just two companies, Johnson & Johnson USA and Unilever USA, we see that men hold most important positions. Therefore, focusing research on men is important. Interpretation,
reporting and dissemination of this research aim to contribute to enact real-world social change by reporting the results to scholars and public (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

I, a female researcher interviewed men about their knowledge and perspectives on a so-considered women’s issue. As a feminist researcher, I had to be aware of the authority and power that could have played out during the interviews (Sprague, 2005). During the interviews, the authority and power position could have been held either by the participants or me depending on who is more vocal and can lead. As a female researcher interviewing men, I had to ensure that male participants did not overpower the process. Since men were talking about menstruation, a few of them were uncomfortable. Therefore, bearing in mind the ethics of feminist research practices I treated male participants with respect and without pre-existing biases (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I addressed the discomfort and worked to make this experience as positive as possible for participants. I also informed them that I too was a little uncomfortable talking about what is considered a woman’s issue with men I was unfamiliar with. This reflexivity on my part helped to build a mutual understanding and rapport with respondents (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

At the beginning of each interview, I asked participants their initial reaction on how they felt about participating in a research about menstruation. To wrap up the interview, I once again asked them the same question. Difference or similarity of responses helped to analyze any changes in the attitude towards menstruation after participating in this research. I also asked participants for their feedback on making interviews or even the research more productive. In this way, by including voices of participants in the research process, I incorporated the feminist participatory research model in the interview process (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

I pretested questionnaire on one black male graduate student. During pretest I realized that I would have to encourage participants to speak more. When I developed the questionnaire I
had hoped participants would be enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. However, the pretest showed that more probing, encouragement and questions would be required for participants to be comfortable to respond.

**Theoretical Perspective**

I use an integrative theoretical framework in this study, drawing from Standpoint theories- Sociology versus Everyday Life developed by Dorothy Smith (Sprague, 2005, p. 43) and Psychoanalysis and (Privileged) Male Consciousness developed by Nancy Chodorow (Sprague, 2005, p. 48). According to Smith,

men who dominate the conceptual realm in knowledge institutions are free, if they choose, to almost ignore their bodily existence in every sphere of their lives. This has been possible because women and their work have been invisible, which benefit men, allowing men to take women’s work for granted and to have their own authority and contribution bolstered in the process. (as cited in Sprague, 2005, p. 44)

The theory of invisibility works in two ways in the context of menstruation. First, women are solely responsible for managing menstruation, therefore, it remains invisible to the world. Second, because women are responsible for hiding menstruation, men’s knowledge and perspectives have remained invisible. Lack of enough academic literature for the literature review demonstrate that men are invisible not only at social but also at academic level in regards to menstruation. The Psychoanalysis and (Privileged) Male Consciousness theory developed by Chodorow observes,

in contemporary Western society, the relationships, which form the need to connect emotionally and physically with other people, are organized by gender in two crucial
ways: men are relatively uninvolved in nurturing, and we learn to use a person’s gender as a key indicator of how to treat one another. (as cited in Sprague, 2005, p. 48)

Therefore, boys and girls learn different meanings and expectations regarding menstruation (Lee, 1994). This leads to physical, psychological and emotional distancing between men and women.

**Data Analysis Technique**

When I started interviewing process, I kept a field journal simultaneously. As soon as the interviews were over, I made notes of unspoken cues from participants and also my observations about their reactions to the questions. These memos assisted to compliment the spoken answers with unspoken responses. Since qualitative data analysis is an iterative process of data collection along with data analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2014) these memos helped me to identify areas I had to reevaluate, emphasis more or spend extra time on probing participants.

After interviews, data analysis took place in two phases. First, I transcribed the interviews. I conducted a thematic analysis using a constant comparative method of all nine interviews. The analysis was guided by three bodies of knowledge of the literature review, the three research questions and my multiple readings of the transcribed interviews. I read the transcribed interviews multiple times and open coded each interview, noting the ways in which participants expressed their experiences. A summary of about one page was created describing main themes in each interview (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Themes were created on what and from whom participants learned about menstruation (specific person, class or other experiences); how they learned it (told, read, heard); how they described their thoughts, feelings and behaviors about menstruation (women’s issue, negative, shameful) and if they reported their knowledge had changed over time. These themes were developed depending on the frequency, repetition
and use of certain words and phrases by participants. Efforts were also made to find cases that did not fit the hypotheses of this research; men will discuss this topic as a taboo and men will have limited knowledge on menstruation.

Second phase required an intensive examination of each themes and developing categories. For example, different categories emerged within one theme: What men actually learn about menstruation. Different categories were developed within that theme: (a) Education (b) Knowledge, perceptions and feelings about menstruation (c) Conversations, perceptions and feelings (d) Myths and taboos and (e) Conclusion: Continuing the conversation.

Potential Limitations

Even though this research was interesting and academically fruitful, limitations existed too. Initially, I started the research with biased perspective that men do not have adequate knowledge and their perspectives about menstruation is negative. However, I consciously made an effort to overcome my own limited perspectives on the research topic since I did not want unreflective attitude on my part to conflict with the purpose of this research (Sprague, 2005, p. 171). The sample size is small, mostly young undergraduate students, therefore, this study cannot be generalized to a larger population.

The results also do not reflect diversity in age and experiences of a larger population. Due to the nature of how participants are recruited there is a possibility that only those men have been interviewed who are used to talking about menstruation or may view menstruation positively. This left out a big portion of men who are unwilling to share their experience or are introvert. There is a likelihood that even those who participated were not completely truthful sharing their experiences. Since only I was responsible for coding the answers, the coding may be different than how another person would do it. This research is also mostly American centric with the
literature review and participants being based on the United States experience. Therefore, this research like most research have its own unique limitations.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter, I present results from interviews, which directly relate to each participants’ personal experience, knowledge and perspectives of menstruation. While there were many similarities between participants in regards to their general knowledge and perspectives, their personal experiences and opinions about menstruation varied. In the following section, I outline commonalities and differences in knowledge base and experiences. There were commonalities in how men learned about menstruation, their initial knowledge and perceptions, their opinions on how other men might perceive menstruation and their beliefs on how future generation should approach the topic. However, there were differences in their current knowledge and perceptions and factors which influenced their perspectives and their comfort level talking about the topic.

Description of participants

A detailed overview of participants’ demographics is listed in Chapter 3, Method. There were a total of nine participants ranging in age from eighteen to twenty three and one chose not to disclose his age. Four participants were white, two African American, two Asian and one African. The four white males were Nick 21, James 21, Nash 20 and Jason 18 years old. The two African Americans were Arthur 23 and Ibrahim 21. The two Asians were Beezay 21 and Akash chose not to disclose his age. One African male was Abdullah, 18 years old.

How men learn about menstruation

Questions were asked to find out how participants initially learned about menstruation and the impacts of factors from which they gained such information.
Education. In this section, formal and informal sources of knowledge will be discussed.

Formal education and immediate reactions. Participants gained initial knowledge about menstruation either from their schools or mothers. Eight participants first learned about menstruation at schools. Jason was the only participant who learned at home and said that he “kinda grew up with it” when his mother experienced symptoms, which he described as “cramps and stuff.” Apart from Jason, all other participants informed learning about menstruation in sexuality classes at various levels of schooling. Abdullah, Beezay and Akash completed high schools outside the United States and first learned about menstruation in health classes in secondary and 10th grade in their native countries. The American students reported being introduced to information about menstruation at the earliest in late elementary school and latest at junior to high school. The average age when participants first learned was fifteen, Jason being the youngest learner at the age of eight. Interestingly, despite popularity of different forms of media, no one reported their initial learning to be from any form of media.

Five participants reported that their initial reactions about menstruation was “dirty,” “unclean,” “gross,” “ewww,” and “disgusting.” Jason, Akash and Arthur experienced multiple feelings. They were “grossed out” by knowing that blood was involved and were nervous for the same reason, but were relieved to find out that men do not menstruate. Four participants, James, Nick, Nash and Abdullah did not mention any negative words to describe their initial feelings. Nevertheless, they had difficulties finding positive words to describe their first reactions. Therefore, Nick and Nash settled with neutral expressions like “confused,” “shy away” and “nervous.” Abdullah informed with a laugh that when they talked about the topic in his high school, boys shied away and girls “became embarrassed.” James recalled his initial experience in class as,
Umm…well, my first reaction was ummm…let me think here. I guess I wasn’t too shocked, it was not that surprising. I was like ‘oh, ok so that is how it is,’ you know almost like when you find out like you know cars need more than gas, you know, oil changes all these other things. I was like ‘oh, ok it is how it is.’

Most participants were introduced to information about menstruation in schools; however, sadly, participants confessed that they were not comfortable with what was being taught. Therefore, they did not remember much then. Ibrahim and Arthur both were of opinion that when the topic was introduced in schools, it was too early for boys to take it seriously. Hence, most boys probably covered being uncomfortable either by mocking or laughing at others. James and Nick added that during puberty the topic was definitely awkward, so, instead of concentrating on learning “boys just want to get over” with chapters. Nick remembered that he mugged up topics to pass tests and chose to forget that he ever came across such details. Even Abdullah, who is a biology major at this university and asserted to know almost everything about female anatomy, hence menstruation, had difficulty remembering details. He said, “I took a lot of classes in high school and college, so I believe I know. I knew a lot but I forgot this semester so I don’t think there is more to know about it than I already know.” Nick said when asked if he learned about it in 7th grade, “it could have been. I honestly can’t remember. If it could have been I was even less interested than in high school. So, it is entirely possible but I don’t recall.”

Therefore, participants received scientific and factual information about menstruation at schools but they grew up being uncomfortable with the topic. Their initial perspectives were stereotypical and mostly negative.

**Informal sources of education.** Participants reported building up on their basic knowledge from sexuality classes through various sources as they transitioned into adulthood.
James surfed the internet, which was mentioned as a secure place, to find out answers to his curiosity and for others this was convenient because “they do not have to ask anyone.” However, seven reported adding to the knowledge they gained at schools from close female friends or girlfriends. Nick, Nash and Beezay credited their female friends for helping them to understand menstruation better. Interestingly, all three of them talked about symptoms more than menstruation process. Beezay talked to his female friends but it was indirect information. He expressed,

before some of my close female friends talked and shared things. When things were wrong I would say ‘hey what happened?’ They would say ‘nothing.’ I would keep insisting and keep on caring and they would say ‘oh it is stomach pain.’ I kind of got the hint.

Jason, James, Akash and Arthur, who are either currently or had been in relationships with women, informed that they learned more about menstruation from their girlfriends. Unfortunately, all their conversations were once again were about symptoms and not details about biological process. James and Arthur informed that their girlfriends “do not go into details” or “they just leave it at that.”

Respondents also assumed that not having girlfriends could be one of the main reasons why men do not know more about menstruation apart from what was learned at school. Males who do not have girlfriends also perceived that men mostly talk about menstruation with their girlfriends. Therefore, not having a girlfriend limits men’s real-world knowledge. Abdullah expressed how his conversations were limited to classrooms, “I haven’t talked about it personally but I have heard people say that their girlfriend is on her period, but personally I don’t have a girlfriend so I don’t talk about it.” So, as speculated, men did talk about menstruation with their
intimate partners. However, sadly even these conversations were brisk and not detailed. Arthur reported a rare and very brief conversation around “that time of the month.”

Ummmm being that I have a girlfriend it has come up but it is not comfortable because she is not gonna fully talk about it. She is just like ‘that time of the month’ and we won’t go into details about that. I think when she goes through her period her face breaks out on the side or something like and I don’t know why. I asked her ‘you usually don’t have that on your face?’ and she was like ‘it is how it is.’ She won’t go into details, it is uncomfortable. She was like ‘ya it is what happens when I get my period that’s how I know that it is coming.’ I was like ‘that’s cool’ and that’s where we left it at.

Overall, participants do not have detailed conversations regarding biological process of menstruation with anyone, whether it is their female friends or women they are intimate with. However, whenever there was a conversation between a man and a woman regarding menstruation, it was mostly about symptoms. Women were not comfortable giving details and participants did not dig deeper.

**Family members.** Seven participants reported that they had their first real-world experience of knowing about menstruation at home. James, Nick, Beezay and Abdullah informed that they noticed their mothers had started having separate conversations with their sisters or female relatives. Since participants had some information about menstruation from schools, they suspected secret conversations between female members might have been about menstruation. Regrettably, no participant had ever been a part of conversations at home. Neither their mothers nor anyone else, male or female, directly informed them what was going on. They were left to assume what was happening.
However, Jason remembered that his mother told him about symptoms she had. Ibrahim also recalled very short conversations with his mother about menstruation cycle as “maybe long it takes, just the cycle wise and how it is different for each female” but there were no specific details. Nash recounted asking his mother about “weird wrappers in the bathroom,” but did not give details of interaction during this interview. James, Akash, Abdullah, Nick, Beezay and Nash realized that there was more to menstruation than the information they got in schools when their sisters started periods. They had either seen blood, weird wrappers or noticed their sisters were in “pain at certain time of the month.”

Respondents conveyed that physical separation and secrecy at home fueled the idea that menstruation is a “women’s issue.” Even Nick’s mum, a medical professional, never talked about menstruation with her boys. Nick explained, “my mom would definitely explain that to my sisters but as for the specifics of that interaction I wouldn’t know because she didn’t have the conversation with me.” James and Nash also recalled their mothers talking about menstruation with their sisters but not any male siblings, including fathers who were never a part of the conversations. Therefore, it seems most mothers, sometimes even a medical professional believe that menstruation should not be discussed with males, even their sons and husbands.

Abdullah and Arthur indicated that men are not included in conversations regarding menstruation in black communities. According to Arthur, “no one knows. Everyone is really, I don’t know how it is in your culture, but parents are really guarded. The parents are parents and they would not discuss the things with the kids. So, it was not something that was brought up.” Abdullah, who is an international student from a country in Africa, also expressed a similar experience, “I don’t think parents in my country talk to their sons but she might share with the girls, women’s issue.” Ibrahim talked about menstruation with his mother, “just basics,” but
informed that he does not know any men in his culture who talk about menstruation. Therefore, Ibrahim believed men in his culture do not talk about it.

The fact that only James and Akash reported seeing blood at home support that menstruation is kept a secret by women by removing or hiding all traces of it. James and Akash both saw blood only by accident when one sister forgot to flush toilet and another was not quick enough to hide a trace. This is even more amazing since all participants have mothers and eight have at least one sister who menstruate. Jason, Arthur and Abdullah had never seen any menstrual blood. Nick, Beezay Nash and Ibrahim reported seeing used menstrual products, so they had an idea that menstruation involves blood.

While other participants noticed used menstrual products or female members’ symptoms at home, Nick and Arthur’s first lived experience was at schools. They saw their female classmates have periods during class. However, both of them noticed that their female classmates’ periods were quickly hidden. They said that other female friends or teachers provided menstruator a “sweatshirt to wrap around the waist” and “escorted her to the bathroom.” All these happened before others were able to figure out what had happened. Once again, Arthur recalled boys in his class being immature and laughing. This incident demonstrates that women, no matter young or old, feel a need to keep their period a secret and most young boys tend to be immature and make fun of public incidences of menstruation.

Participants were left out of conversations at home, therefore, Nick, James, Abdullah and Arthur considered menstruation is treated as a secret at their homes. Jason, Akash, Beezay and Nash assumed that it was not a secret at their homes. They considered it even open and normal even though no one talked about it with them. Beezay expressed,
I know it is painful but they keep things to themselves. They feel kind of uneasy too and I think that is uneasy for everyone because it is bad and they have to feel uneasy. They have to feel shy, thinking ‘if other knows what will they think?’ they might wonder like that. I felt that uneasiness but it is treated as normal.

Participants credited different factors for influencing their perceptions about menstruation. The factors acknowledged were school friends, cultures, traditions, socialization and their surroundings. Six participants specifically mentioned that culture had shaped their initial perceptions. Nash and Jason stated that apart from culture and socialization, friends and schools are important too. Ibrahim mentioned religion to be an important part of what he learned about and follows in regards to menstruation. However, he did not remember if someone told him or if he read it in religious book about what to do. Beezay talked about his cultural influence, Culture and traditions in my country is that they keep things to themselves. They are not high contact culture. It is low contact and people take things private. No one needs to know what’s inside or what the person is going through. They don’t show it at all. So a belief develops itself that it is a thing people should not talk about and keep things to themselves. If a daughter is in trouble she would ask other female members or mother but she won’t talk to other male members.

The responses demonstrate that race, culture or background did not influence participants’ knowledge and perception about menstruation. All respondents had similar experiences at home about menstruation that no one talked about it with them directly and they were left to figure out the details themselves. Females outside homes are a main factor, which helped men to understand menstruation better. Women, as friends, seem to be more comfortable talking about menstruation with their male friends than girlfriends with their intimate partners.
Knowledge, perceptions and feelings about menstruation

Participants were asked questions to find out details on men’s knowledge and perspectives of menstruation. They were asked what they thought happened biologically and any information provided by them beyond biology is also noted.

Knowledge. Menstruation is a natural and a biological process most women experience at some point in their lives. When men were asked if they knew what happen biologically, Jason, Nick and Beezay reported knowing basics with mention of expelling eggs, uterus and fertilization. Nash and Ibrahim informed that they have basic ideas but did not give details. James and Abdullah explained the process in details with mention of eggs, ovary, fallopian tube and fertilization. Arthur had “no idea at all” and Akash said “he does not care to have information.” Arthur traced his lack of knowledge to separation of boys and girls at school. He said,

We are not taught. It is just different. Even when you are young in school, boys go to different room and girls go to different room. You watch anatomy videos of the boys and then you watch anatomy videos of the girls but they won’t go in depth about menstrual cycles or anything like that.

Participants had a vague recollection of what they learned at schools. Only James, who had built on his knowledge through the internet and Abdullah, a biology major at the university, were able to give detailed and correct information. James’ capability to be able to give the most detailed description supports that information provided by school curriculum may not be sufficient and men should take charge to educate themselves.

When talking about biology, eight participants mentioned either physical or emotional change women go through during menstruation. Physical changes were described as “extreme
pain,” “stomach pain,” “stomach cramps,” “cramps,” “head-ache” and “face breakout.” Beezay and Ibrahim added that irregularity in menstruation reflect other health issues, which might require medical attention. Emotional changes were mentioned to be “crying,” “happy,” “not happy,” “easily get mad,” “frustration,” “wanting chocolates and ice creams,” “hating everything” and mood swings.

Participants paused to think when asked if they thought there are any positive aspects of menstruation. Jason and Akash thought there are no positive aspects. Nick agreed that “it might be neutral but not positive.” Interestingly, remaining six participants related menstruation to pregnancy. They articulated that when women menstruate it means she is not pregnant, which is a positive aspect for couples who do not want children at that moment. Beezay and Ibrahim shared that “flushing out the dirty inside” is a positive aspect of menstruation. Beezay had a fascinating thought, he shared,

It is a cleansing process. I don’t know exactly but that’s what I learned in my 8th class. I think it is a cleaning process. It is good that it happens. It cleans. It is a period when the female reproduction fluid, I don’t know what to say, eggs change. It is also related to fertility. It improves fertility and is a natural process.

Most common replies were related to pregnancy and somewhat similar. It was,

When if someone is having a pregnancy scare and they are waiting for their period to happen, when it happens they are sure they are on clear. That’s a positive aspect that they are not going to have a child because the girl is having her period. It is a good aspect of period.

Seven respondents, who were asked, quickly detailed out negative aspects of menstruation. All seven supposed negative aspects exist. Nick, Ibrahim and Beezay believed that
current stereotypical perceptions are negative aspects. Nash and Abdullah considered physical pain and Akash and Arthur supposed emotional changes to be negative aspects. Beezay conveyed concerns about current perceptions,

How people take it. How they misunderstand. The misconception in cultures where superstitious prevails more. Maybe they think menstruation happens because of some superstitious like if the girl did something bad. Maybe that should not be. I am not sure if that is but I think that happens because there are so many ethnicities, culture in this world. Even within a country there are so many ethnicities, religious groups so they have different beliefs.

All participants except James commented that women go through physical or emotional changes during menstruation. Nash and Abdullah specifically mentioned physical pain and Akash and Arthur talked about emotional changes. However, Jason, James, Akash and Arthur, who are either currently or had been in romantic relationships with women, shared that they have never been affected by women’s emotional or physical changes. Arthur commented on whether it is reasonable for women to show their true emotions. After a thought he said,

Girls try to play it off too because they know that everyone makes jokes that girls around that time of the month they get upset and agitated. So the girls are also like ‘I am not going to play with what they are expecting.’ I can tell that part of her is different because she is trying to be happy but it is more of a playing cool.

When asked if women can show any kind of emotions, he added,

It is a good question. I think it is good for people to show emotions in general regardless of what the emotion is. I think a lot of people fake emotions so it is good thing to show real emotions but once again it is putting yourself in their shoes. We can’t be sympathetic
with girls because we have no clue what that pain is like. So once again you going through that you will be like ‘he has no clue what pain I am going through, so I am not gonna cause him to be mad or anything so I am gonna just smile.’

Overall men were more aware of negative aspects of menstruation; nevertheless, two participants related menstruation as a cleaning process, which they reflected energizes women and also is good for fertility. All men noticed that a change takes place on a woman around menstruating time. Yet, no one had experienced any impact of changes in their personal lives. Thus, there is a difference between knowledge and experience of participants regarding changes they supposed women go through. This difference shows that a gap exists regarding what is assumed to happen and what actually happens in relationships. This gap may show that women are now burdened with one more task, which is to “play cool” with emotional or physical changes they might experience around and while menstruating.

Conversations, perceptions and feelings. This section will look at duration and context of participants’ conversation. Details on when and what led them being comfortable with the topic, their current perceptions and whether the topic is discussed among men’s groups will be provided.

Conversations: duration and context. There is a big difference when timeline of respondents’ last conversations about menstruation are compared. James, Nick and Nash reported they had conversations one or two weeks ago. James talked with his girlfriend and Nick and Nash talked with their female friends. Jason and Arthur talked about it two to five months ago, both with their current girlfriends. At least a year had passed for Akash and Ibrahim. Ibrahim talked to his mum and Akash did not remember who he talked to. Beezay’s last conversation was 7-8 years ago with his female friends at school back in his native country.
Abdullah realized that he never had conversation about it outside academic curriculum. The researcher is the only person Abdullah has ever talked to about menstruation out of classrooms. Abdullah pondered,

Good question. I would say apart from the education this is the first time going deep into the topic. I haven’t talked solely about menstruation but I have mentioned it. I don’t think I have had conversation just about menstruation before.

All conversations participants had, whether it was with their female friends or girlfriends, were short. Ibrahim’s question to his mum, reported to be about five seconds, was the shortest. Nick’s conversation with his female friend about symptoms, which might have reflected health concerns, was probably the longest. Conversations of James, Beezay, Nick, Arthur, Nash and Ibrahim were once again related to symptoms of menstruation. Therefore, most conversations whether short ranging from five seconds to a minute long. Interestingly, these conversations never went beyond discussions about symptoms and its effect on women’s health.

Participants were asked how comfortable they were talking about menstruation. James, Beezay and Nash were certain that they were comfortable talking about the topic. Jason, Ibrahim, Nick and Akash were a little reluctant and replied with sometimes a quiet and sometimes a little high pitched “fine,” “ya” and “a little bit.” Out of Abdullah and Arthur, Abdullah was sure he was uncomfortable with a “no” and Arthur replied with an uneasy laugh that he was “probably not” comfortable. Jason agreed that his mental picture might be scarier than a reality, “just for me at least, the mental picture I get because I haven’t actually seen it. It is probably worse than what actually happens, but that’s what makes me uncomfortable.”

When asked if perceptions have changed overtime, James, Nick, Beezay, Arthur and Nash responded confidently that progressive changes have occurred. They currently view
menstruation as “natural” and being “comfortable” talking about it. Abdullah, Ibrahim and Akash reported that not much attitude modification has taken place with Abdullah responding “no,” Akash expressing “I don’t care” and Ibrahim stating “not much.” For Jason, the grossness he initially felt had become worse. According to him, “ya. I look at it as a natural phenomenon, it is just that it is a gross part of the nature. I think, since I have better understanding of it but I still think it is the same…gross. Since I have learned it to be mucus, it has gone worse.”

Some participants attributed their relationships with females for making them comfortable about menstruation. Nick and Nash opened up about menstruation after their sisters started their periods. Akash found this to be a good question and he responded after a thought that he became comfortable about the topic after he had sexual experiences when he turned eighteen. For participants who were enrolled in any gender related courses, being a part of these courses at the university had assisted them to better understand women’s issues as a whole.

Overall, more participants’ initial negative views have changed due to continuous exposure to positive environments. For all participants whose attitudes have changed, women were the factor which helped them to understand that menstruation is more than just typical stereotyped and vague concepts. Positive attitudes were expressed as “natural,” “normal,” and “serious topic” and neutral languages as “way body of human works,” “neutral,” “physical process” and “just biological stuff.” Therefore, constructive discussions and exposure to positive surroundings can make significant and progressive differences.

Conversations between men. Questions were asked in an effort to figure out whether men talked about menstruation within their circle. Akash, Nash, Arthur, Abdullah and Ibrahim supposed that menstruation is not a topic within men’s groups because men consider it to be a “women’s issue,” “men are not affected,” or just something “women do.” However, James, Jason
and Beezay agreed that menstruation is a topic within men’s groups. Their answers were not definite but rather an unsure “sort of” or “probably.” Nick did not have any experience in this regard to be able to comment. Therefore, opinions of participants were almost equally divided for this question. Interestingly, respondents considered that most “other men” would probably view menstruation negatively and would not be comfortable talking about it. Abdullah expressed that even though men may not talk about the topic within their circle, men should not be completely unaware. Fascinatingly, he compared menstruation with tears. He said, “man shouldn’t be completely unaware of it. It is like tears, if I see a person crying I should not say ‘what is this?’ to tears. I should know that happens. He should know that happens but it is not necessary that he knows everything in details.” Beezay shared that it is a common topic among teenage boys. However, Nash supposed that men do not talk about menstruation within their group, which “signifies gaps in knowledge of men about women’s issues” in a broader social perspective.

Conversations about menstruation, if any, among men are not serious in any way. James, Beezay, Arthur, Jason, Nash and Ibrahim assumed that when men talk about menstruation it was always in a context of sex. James, Beezay, Jason and Arthur had either talked or knew someone who talked about menstruation, therefore, added “joke” and “fun” while describing such conversations. Even though Ibrahim had never talked to any men about the topic, his response was based on exposure to social media. Nick and Abdullah were “not sure” because they did not have any male friends who talked about menstruation. Akash did not remember talking to any men and he was confident that it is not a serious topic for him to even keep a note of. Nash, Arthur and Nick reflected that how men perceive menstruation depends on their maturity level. They believed that men need to be mature to be able to take the topic seriously and understand
that women are affected by this in real life. Participants also observed that whenever a male friend or they themselves mentioned menstruation, which was mostly either in a context of sex or non-serious way, conversation was brief and swiftly changed to different topic.

There are reasons why participants perceive menstruation is not taken seriously by men in general. James emphasized strongly that men will never take it seriously because “they are not affected by it.” Nash added “foundation of privilege, the male privilege” and expressed that is “how power stuff works,” since men are more powerful and privileged than women, they can ignore what do not affect them. The negative perceptions, the topic not “pertaining” to men, “discomfort regarding the topic on both men and women’s side,” “fear of unknown” and “misinformation” were cited as other reasons why men are not much invested in the topic. James and Arthur believed that if women are comfortable with the topic, it will also trickle down to men. Therefore, James believed that women should be comfortable with themselves first. He said,

I feel women are more insecure about their bodies and that is almost a barrier. If women are taught from early age, you know, take control of your sexuality, it is ok to be a girl, you know, if there were more encouraged, if they were more empowered, there will be less negative stigma to period. Then you can talk about it more. If there was more sex education, there will be fewer teen pregnancies. I don’t know, maybe even fewer rape.

Arthur’s articulated reply was about women’s empowerment. He said,

It has to be acceptable within women’s groups first because once again men might be seen as pervs if girls walk by and they are talking about period. It is not open on the side of the girls yet.
Participants expressed that most men do not take conversations regarding menstruation seriously. However, all respondents except Akash agreed that it is important for men to talk about menstruation and they had different reasons for believing so. For Ibrahim there was a religious motive, Arthur trusted it to maintain family peace, Akash realized it brought harmony in relationships and Nick believed free and open conversation will assist to eradicate stereotypes. They, however, agreed that menstruation is still not an acceptable topic in workplaces. They also predicted that it will take a while for societies to treat menstruation as any other natural bodily functions, like “sneezing,” “peeing” or even “nose bleed.”

Participants advised other men who wants to be educated about menstruation to “just talk about it,” “not wait for the information to come to you,” “seek out information,” “google,” “search online,” “watch videos,” “go to school” and “read articles.” The advice demonstrates that participants believe men need to make extra efforts to educate themselves and information from formal source, such as schools, is not enough. Arthur was glad that even taking part in this research was not as scary as he supposed it would be.

Participants’ responses for this segment support that menstruation is not a topic within men’s circle. Even when men talk about menstruation, it is not a serious topic and happened either in a context of humor or sex. The men agreed that all men should know about the topic although their reasons differed on why it is important for men to know and understand menstruation.

**Myths and taboos**

**Exposure to myths and taboos.** Respondents were questioned about their familiarity with myths and taboos associated with menstruation. Six males, Nick, Akash, Beezay, Nash, Arthur and Ibrahim were aware of some kind of myth. Nick and Akash recollected something
they watched on television. Nick reported an interesting belief portrayed in a show. Nick recounted,

I think that once I heard in Parks and Recreations. It is a tv show, Amy Poehler and it is kind of local government type of a show. It is a comedy with Amy Poehler. The scene in which this myth came up, they obviously portrayed this as a myth. It was like an older white man talking about how this woman should not be in local government because she can’t think properly because her blood flow is not going to her brain. It is going to her uterus and I thought that was hilarious. In the scene it was a look of ‘what is he talking about?’ it was obviously a myth. It was hilarious.

Akash, too, recollected ghost stories from television shows, which depicted women dying gruesome deaths because “they had been bad girls and blah, blah.” Arthur and Ibrahim mentioned emotional changes as myths. They mentioned something they had heard about women “wanting ice-cream,” “being mad” and “being different emotionally.” Beezay’s myth was connected to a taboo in his native country and it was a hear-say. Nash related a myth of “not touching menstruating women” to the Bible. He said,

that it (PMS) affects every woman. Like I have always heard a joke. I remember it was like every woman who has her period has PMS in a bad sense. That definitely comes up from past times where menstruation was, I can’t remember which culture or society it was but menstruation was seen as almost an evil thing. Especially in the Bible, I don’t remember or have reference or citation for this but I do remember in Old Testament it says to avoid a woman who is currently menstruating.

James, Jason and Abdullah were not aware of any myth. However, it was a little different for Abdullah. He said that women in his native country believe that menstrual blood possess some
kind of power. He also narrated a practice linking it to voodoo. Hence, women make sure that menstrual blood is hidden and disposed of properly. Thus, it also makes sense that Abdullah has not seen menstrual blood.

Males believed myths start and exist for different reasons. Ibrahim mentioned religion, Beezay thought it was a social thing and Nash commented that ignorance fuels knowledge about taboos. He expressed that due to fear of not understanding, small misconstrued information becomes crazy myths. He also supposed more myths about females exist than for men. Remarkably, Akash observed that women in his country probably are not affected by the myths because if it did impact women in a negative way, someone would stand up. Since no one has stood up, he assumed it does not affect women. Nick believed that existence of any kind of myth “devalues women as a whole.” Participants who were aware of any myth did not remember anyone explaining it to them. They notified that they “just knew” about the myths and were unable to pinpoint any source, which initiated their beliefs. Nevertheless, social media, religion and online sources had strengthened their beliefs.

All respondents were aware of a taboo. Five males, James, John, Akash, Nash and Arthur, said that having sex during menstruation is a taboo. James emphasized that it is a “huge one.” Nash considered that silence surrounding menstruation is a taboo. He also believed that people abide by this taboo the most since they avoid talking about menstruation as much as possible. Ibrahim informed praying is not allowed during menstruation in his religion. Beezay, too, talked about religion and mentioned pollution by touch. He revealed that menstruating women are forbidden to touch anything religiously scared and are also not allowed to touch people of high prestige. He also added that not abiding by taboos is considered inauspicious. Participants reflected that schools, friends, girlfriends, culture, society, family traditions and
religions influence their beliefs about taboos. Three religions were specifically mentioned, the two American students talked about Christianity, one mentioned Islam and one international student referred to Hinduism.

**Impact on personal life.** Two out of five who referred to having sex as a taboo reported that they comply by it only because they respect their partner’s choice not to have sex during menstruation. Another two were observing abstinence. James was the only one who made a personal choice not to have sex when his partner was menstruating. He said, “I don’t think I can do it. It does not appeal to me.” Abdullah’s knowledge of myth was associated with traditional rituals and he said that he is not personally involved in such practices. Ibrahim and Beezay informed that only women at their homes abide by the taboo. Ibrahim’s sisters and mother do not read religious book when they are menstruating. For Beezay, he noticed that women showered at specific days after menstruating.

Culture and traditions did not seem to make much difference on men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation. Remarkably, Abdullah and Ibrahim thought that being from a particular ethnical background or nationality may impact men’s knowledge. Arthur and Nash assumed social class might make a difference. Arthur commented that women from middle and lower classes might struggle with managing menstruation because of the cost of menstrual products. Nash interestingly speculated that upper class would be “more uncomfortable” and “shy away” from the topic. He assumed that there is a greater need to keep women’s issues “private” in upper class. Ibrahim considered the United Stated and western countries to be liberal in women’s issues compared to a few other nations.

The knowledge and views expressed for this section show that participants are not personally affected by taboos followed around them. Any taboos respondents might have been
affected by, they had a personal choice not to be a part. Even though culture and traditions may not impact men, class might influence men’s knowledge and perceptions, participants supposed. Also, western countries were considered liberal in case of women’s issues.

**Conclusion: Continuing the conversation**

**Current generation.** All participants agreed that exposure is important to be comfortable about the topic. When asked who is responsible for the exposure, eight participants cited more than one source; from taking the responsibility oneself, health classes, educational institutions, policy makers to family and partners. This question was among a very few, which was answered elaborately. Nick believed, “it is not every woman’s responsibility to explain to every ignorant man as why they should not be negative.” Therefore, for him, “every person in the society should take a responsibility to be educated on these sorts of issues.” Beezay thought incorporating such issues in academic courses will remove awkwardness surrounding menstruation. Nash believed this can be a social and political issue; therefore, measures only from Minnesota House might be effective and powerful enough to make long lasting differences. Arthur and Ibrahim emphasized on early learning at school because parents may be inclined to teach about the topic only to girls but not boys, because for them it is the girls who “go through it.”

All respondents agreed that men should have proper knowledge and right information about menstruation; however, only three participants expressed definite comfort talking about it. Therefore, males were asked what they thought would make men comfortable talking about the topic. Once again, importance was given to constant exposure to positive reinforcements at educational institutions, friend circles, homes and social environment. It was also stressed that one should work towards self-improvement, which means challenging one’s old beliefs and habits. Arthur predicted a possibility in the future to be,
I don’t think men learn but just deal with it. They probably learn on the circumstances when their girlfriends or wives tell you to go get tampons or those things from the store. She wouldn’t go into details why she needs it but you gonna know why she needs it.

According to participants, different factors would motivate them and also other men to learn more about menstruation. They once again emphasized on exposure, which would ultimately motivate men and make them comfortable with the topic. For two, Akash and Arthur, it was related to their relationships with women. Akash expressed that in the context of America, men might be more invested to learn about women’s issues if they are taught techniques to “hook up with girls,” but he was not very sure. For him personally, having a girlfriend in the future might be a motivation to find out more. Arthur believed because he wants to get married in the future; it is a motivation enough to know more about issues which affect women. Beezay had interesting take and he expressed,

If you relate classes about menstruation with their family, their neighbor, their close teacher or other person at work like the hardship they go through for e.g. pain go through. They might be motivated.

Arthur stressed the importance of present,

I think it is better to start now. Even this research has helped because it is not something I would have mentioned or even discussed openly. I am obviously not going to go in depth, make that my conversation, the aim of my life but just to be caught up, look into, study and go “ok.” It is going to be uncomfortable, it is gonna be weird because you are a guy looking at this, but it’s gonna help.

**Future generation.** All participants agreed that their sons should have positive or “at least not negative view” about menstruation. Eight will talk to their sons and responded with a
“yes,” “ya,” “definitely” or “sure.” Abdullah considered a different scenario. He thought that talking to his son will not make much difference because it has nothing to do with men. However, he felt that if his son comes to him with questions he will definitely answer them. According to Nick, he will talk to his daughter first since women being comfortable with their bodies is an important step for change. Ibrahim will share age appropriate information with his son and the conversation will not mention vagina. All participants seem to realize that men’s understanding of the topic does make an impact on how they react to it.

Eight participants will talk to their sons about menstruation themselves. James, Beezay, Nash, Arthur and Ibrahim considered it to be both mother’s and father’s responsibility to talk to their children. They assumed this will result in daughters and sons growing up with positive attitudes towards menstruation. Jason and Nick understand that they need to know more first to be able to talk to their sons. Abdullah is happy with his wife taking the responsibility of talking only to their daughters. James noted having a free atmosphere at home is a sign of good parenthood. He explained,

I think that it should be mutual thing between both parents because they offer mutual perspectives from a man and a woman. So if I have a son or a daughter, or both, when the time comes, I personally believe sooner rather than later I think it should be a discussion that is talked about with my child, myself and my wife. Because I think that a man can offer man’s perspective and a woman can offer woman’s perspective. The only reason these weird taboos exists, you know, is that men talk about sex to men and women talk to women about sex or all these taboos, like, well, it is better for them just to be absent and not talk about it at all. I feel like those things are more harmful so if you take away the taboo and you are comfortable enough to say ‘let’s just not make it a taboo, let’s just not.’
You can really talk about it and you can really help your child and chances are they will never have a teen pregnancy because they will know about it. They will understand the importance of safe sex and if my kids choose to have sex even when they are super young, I would rather have them safe and not get pregnant and not ruin their lives rather than they end up getting pregnant because they could not make a right decision because I wasn’t a good parent.

During the literature review it was found that top management positions of menstrual products are occupied mostly by men (Unilever, 2013). Participants of this study were of views that menstruation is a “women’s issue” and “men are not affect by it” and believed these to be the reasons why men do not talk about menstruation. Interestingly, all nine agreed that men are involved in a business of “women’s issue” because of “money involved.” Participants also added words such as “power,” “control,” “male domination,” “profit,” “inequality,” “income,” “long term historical power issue” and “profitable business.” For Nick and Nash it was more of a power issue.

Respondents had different opinions on whether men in menstrual product industries may view menstruation otherwise than general men. Ibrahim, Arthur, Jason and Beezay assumed that men in menstrual industries may view menstruation differently since “they are in the business.” However, Abdullah and Akash supposed that all men are similar; therefore, their opinions would depend on their personal understanding and is not influenced by their jobs. Abdullah also assumed that jobs at the industries would act as a “bridge” between the men and the menstrual products. Therefore, men in the industries may not be ashamed to be associated with the products, whereas it would be difficult for general men. Interestingly, Beezay, Jason and Ibrahim presumed that men of the industries would have more relevant academic background, like
research or medical making it comfortable for them to be involved in such companies. James talked about domination of other industries by men as,

We still live in a male-dominated society and it is only real recent that women have started to get jobs. You know take control of her sexuality and become more equal so I suppose part of the reason it is still male-dominated industry. They may just be like many other industry where they say, you know, there may be a glass ceiling, you know, in the birth control industry or anything industry, like, condom industry, anything involving sex and anything involving just women. Men may have dominated that industry and want to keep it that way because no matter what industry it is an industry and there is money involved in it. So, they want to keep it that way, so that, you know, keep the money flowing.

For Nick it was male privilege, especially white men and said,

I feel like it goes back to power differential and inequality. It has existed for a long time.

It is interesting but again it does not surprise me because due to the male privilege and all that stuff, especially white men are in those kinds of management positions that part doesn’t surprise me.

Respondents predicted that major changes in favor of women will take place within the next fifteen years. James believed that the current generation is the most diverse and open-minded, thus, will bring a huge change within next fifty years. Beezay mentioned female presidents of Pakistan and India and pointed out how changes are already taking place.

Most participants wanted to know more about menstruation and stated that it should be viewed as a normal part of women’s lives. Some of them decided to find out more about the issue on their own and even share their participation in this study. Interestingly, vagina as a
biological term was used only twice by one respondent during hours of informal conversations before and during interviews.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this study, I analyzed the knowledge and perceptions of menstruation of nine racially and nationally diverse undergraduate male students of Minnesota State University, Mankato. This research was conducted in order to better understand men’s knowledge and perceptions of menstruation and participants were between the ages of eighteen and twenty three. The literature review supported that menstruation is regarded to be a women’s issue and viewed negatively by most men. It was also found that myths and taboos assist to maintain the existing perceptions of menstruation. The literature review also demonstrated that there is a lack of research in the topic, thus, this study will be an addition to a few number of existing studies. This study is also unique than other research I came across during the literature review since its sample is racially and nationally diverse.

The struggle faced with recruitment of participants for this research shows that men are not comfortable talking about menstruation. More than twenty-five posters announcing the research were put around the university. Only three men responded to the flyers. Out of those three respondents, only two were recruited since one contacted the researcher after the recruitment process was over. All three males were white. The recruitment and interview process took a month.

When I realized there may not be enough participants, I reached out to males at various events and asked them if they would be interested to be a part of this study. Out of more than twenty males reached out only three offered to be a part of this research for their own reasons. A group of males were approached during a social event and when they found out the research was about menstruation, all but one physically distanced and moved far away from me. I noticed that they were a little reluctant to talk to me and stayed away even during social after the event. I also
observed that they were noticeably uncomfortable and did not want to be associated with the research. Other men stared at the person who volunteered to participate, probably wondering why someone would do it.

Recruitment of male participants for research regarding menstruation seems to be a struggle. A few research articles in the literature review also demonstrated a similar struggle. Allen and Goldberg (2009) collected narratives regarding students’ experiences of sex during menstruation over a course of three years from 120 undergraduate students enrolled in a human sexuality course at a public university. Out of 120, only twelve were males compared to 108 females. Another study by Allen, Kaestle and Goldberg (2010), with voluntary participation of writing about their experiences in five topics in a human sexuality course faced similar problem. Only twenty-three males participated compared to 231 females who chose to write on a topic of menstruation. Therefore, incidents, which occurred during recruitment for this research study and struggle faced by a few other researchers show that menstruation is not a comfortable topic for a majority of men.

Men learn differently about menstruation than women (Lee, 1994). Participants of this study expressed similar experiences. At home, the men were never a part of conversations regarding menstruation. There was always a physical separation between participants and their female siblings. Participants also informed me that male and female students were physically separated for biology lessons in schools. The separation between males and females both at home and at school, resulted in men being confused and ignorant about menstruation. It also instilled in participants the idea that conversations about menstruation are only for women. These seemingly innocent perceptions distorted into problematic opinions as they grew up. Since nobody explained the realities and truths of menstruation to my participants, they nurtured
stereotypical opinions about menstruation as “disgusting,” “gross,” “unclean” and “impure.” This finding supports earlier research by Frazer (1963) which suggested that menstruating women were considered unclean, impure and polluted. Similarities between opinions of participants of this research in 2015 and Frazer’s findings in 1963 support that perceptions about menstruation have not changed much in more than half a century.

Interestingly, many participants attributed these negative perceptions to a culture of silence in societies regarding menstruation. They also talked about a “fear of the unknown” regarding menstruation, which was also mentioned by Montgomery (1974). Montgomery wrote how due to unexplainable events, people feared menstruation. Therefore, even though men in 2015 may not be able to pinpoint the fear to be the same as Montgomery explained in 1974, they seem to understand that a “fear of the unknown” exists regarding menstruation.

As with any type of scientific and academic knowledge, schools were referred to as the first site of knowledge about menstruation by respondents. However, they confessed that it was too early for them to take the topic seriously and they did not remember much at schools or even now. They also expressed concerns about inadequacy of knowledge provided at schools. Thus, myths, misconceptions and wrong information overshadowed participants’ knowledge and perceptions until they decided to learn more themselves. Positive attitudes and perceptions seem to be a result of personal efforts, whether it was browsing internet for more information, taking courses at university or making an effort to learn more from their female friends. As Sharma (2014) pointed out, it is necessary for both men and women to have proper and adequate knowledge about menstruation because menstrual health is related to women’s human rights. Thus, schools and higher educational institutions can be effective means of delivering positive messages regarding menstruation and other issues.
Participants agreed that schools should be a primary source of correct information and should also be responsible for continuing the education at higher levels. All men believed and emphasized that men should know more about and have positive attitude towards menstruation. School curriculum and personal efforts to learn more about the topic can have a positive impact on men’s knowledge and perceptions. However, current methods of education at education institutions of teaching men and women about each other’s biology is not effective, most of the time. This is also supported by the fact that only two out of nine participants mentioned menstruation to be positive as a “cleansing” process. One of them remembered learning that in his health class in school. Therefore, even though his initial perception about menstruation was slightly negative, he was one of the participants who had a broader knowledge and seemed to understand that menstruation is an important part of women’s overall health.

Women have used positive attitudes towards menstruation as affirmation of their femininity and womanhood and have realized free conversation to be empowering (Johnston-Robledo, Barnack & Wares, 2006; Houppert, 1999). This research also suggests that men believe that women have the power to change current negative perspectives about menstruation. Men expressed that women should be comfortable talking about menstruation with everyone, leading it be an accepted topic within women’s circles first. The men believe that if women are comfortable talking about menstruation with people around them, whether they are males or females, this easiness will then will trickle down to men adapting the same attitude. One exceptional response was that if men started talking about menstruation before women are comfortable with the topic, that category of men would be viewed as “perverts.” A man in India popularly known as A Menstrual Man seems to have experienced what that participant feared. A man in rural India decided to impress his wife by replacing rags she used during menstruation by
making a decent product himself. Unfortunately, in the process of learning to make a pad he was labelled as a “psycho,” “pervert” and “mad,” which ultimately led his mother and wife to leave him (Venema, 2014). Therefore, the fear expressed by the participant seems likely if not probable. However, the responsibility of creating awareness cannot be placed solely on women.

Addressing menstruation has become important for issues beyond women and their health. Therefore, everyone including parents, school teachers, legislators, policy makers and politicians should take charge of making a positive and long lasting change. Businesses are making money because women menstruate but silence surrounding it is costing millions of dollars in money, health and environment of the world (Kjellén, Pensulo, Nordqvist, & Fogde, 2012). Thus, it is important to address menstruation in a broader perspective and positively.

Menstruation remains invisible to men. As explained by Dorothy Smith in Sociology versus Everyday Life standpoint theory, “men can choose to ignore their own bodily existence in every sphere of their lives because women and their work have been invisible” (as cited in Sprague, 2005, p. 44). Similar was the experience of participants of this study, most of them had never seen blood nor talked about menstruation with anyone. Participants had only a basic knowledge of the biological process of menstruation. Still, a few participants believed that they knew everything and did not want to know more even if opportunities arose. Respondents expressed that men are not affected directly by menstruation, therefore, will never fully understand it. However, provided that all respondents agreed men should know enough about menstruation, when asked if they would be interested to take part in a workshop or a class, most cited reasons why they will not be able to attend it. Therefore, there is an inconsistency on what men believe should happen and personally will choose to do, which parallels with Smith’s theory.
All participants were aware of one taboo and myth, which associated menstruation with sex and pregnancy. The women of Lee’s (1994) research expressed that their male relatives scrutinized and limited their movements once they menstruated. The women respondents supposed that it was because of a fear of pregnancy. All participants of my study were able to link menstruation to pregnancy. This understanding reflected on their knowledge about a taboo of not having sex during menstruation. The literature review revealed many myths and taboos regarding menstruation which existed in almost all cultures of the world. According to Durkheim, sexual prohibition was a taboo, which was considered above all in primitive societies (as cited in Knight, 1991). If knowledge of participants is to be considered, sexual prohibition seems to continue to be a well-observed taboo and a popular myth even in 2015.

Most men in my study reported being comfortable not abiding by the only taboo they knew, prohibition of sex during menstruation. One remarkable finding about this taboo was most men expressed that they would be comfortable having sex during menstruation if their female partners felt the same. Those who had been in an intimate relationships shared that their female partners were not comfortable having sex when menstruating. Result of Allen and Goldberg (2009) demonstrate that majority of women who are sexually active are not comfortable having sex during menstruation. Unfortunately, female participants of Allen and Goldberg’s felt sex during menstruation was “disgusting,” “smelly,” “bloody,” “awkward,” or something similar (p. 539). Participants of this study also reported that they did not have open conversations even in intimate relationships because their women were silent and hid menstruation. According to them, even in intimate relationships menstruation remains a mystery, a secret. Interestingly, one constant opinion was that women should be comfortable having conversations about menstruation with others, with their bodies and even having sex during menstruation. Personally,
this continuous emphasis on women’s responsibility has forced me to think why women are repeatedly held responsible to make others comfortable about menstruation.

It is not women’s responsibility to educate others about themselves and their bodies. Why should women be really accountable for the silence and awkwardness surrounding menstruation and conversations related to it? As Beauvoir (1953) indicated “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (p. 281). On the one hand women are socialized to develop feminine traits, which includes being nurturing, however, on the other hand men do not learn to be involved in nurturing but instead treat women differently (Chodorow as cited in Sprague, 2005). This suggests that part of becoming a woman is a process of learning to hide/be silent about menstruation. If women and men learn different gender roles, is it women’s responsibility to educate others about their bodies but still continue to hide their bodily functions? Finding answers to this question has become important to gain justice for women around the world.

Print and digital media, internet and social media are important tools, which shape the knowledge and perceptions of general population. Participants of this study mentioned using the internet to find answers to their curiosity about menstruation. They also commented on how social sites portray moods of and environments around menstruating women, which was in the context of either humor or satire. Constant use of media, internet, social sites and virtual interactions between new generations show that the internet can be very influential for men to find out details about menstruation. Therefore, different mediums of media shape men’s knowledge and perspectives. Sadly, over the years we have seen media abide by a social norm of secrecy in regards to menstruation. Menstrual blood has remained hidden when menstruation is portrayed by blue fluid instead of its true color, red in advertisements.
It is time to challenge old attitudes in media of hiding menstruation behind blue fluid. We can slowly see change taking place when Procter & Gamble featured a red dot on a menstrual pad advertisement (Stampler, 2011). This advertisement was described as “historical advertising move” and “red dot ends taboo” in media (Stampler, 2011; “red dot ends taboo,” 2011). Once again in 2014, Procter & Gamble started a campaign #LikeAGirl associating it with a feminine hygiene product, Always (Goldberg, 2014). Kotex seems to be applying the similar approach in China to get women talk about their menstruation (Gray, 2012). These advertisements might be more of a marketing strategy but still business are realizing a demand for a positive change. We see that one huge company dared to ignite a positive change and challenge the norms regarding menstruation and another followed. We can hope this spark will spread further to be a huge flame of revolution against taboos and break the silence of menstruation.

Celebrities and their social networking media are other factors, which influence people’s perceptions. With millions of fans following Twitter, Instagram and other social network sites, celebrities and their voices have become powerful than ever. In sports, recently British tennis player, Heather Watson, said that she lost her Australian Open round due to “girl things” (McKenzie, 2015). McKenzie’s CNN article mentioned that this comment was referred to be “quite groundbreaking” and credited to have sparked a global debate on “if sport’s last taboo has been broken”? The article also featured other sportswomen’s remarks on how silence surrounds menstruation in sports and finally Watson’s statement might open discussions. In the current digital world of technology, celebrities and digital media are very powerful and we can see that things are changing for the better. Powerful women are breaking their silence and daring to
express how their bodily functions are a part of who they are, which we can hope to trickle down to other women and ultimately eliminate the silence surrounding menstruation.

It is necessary for both men and women to know more about each other to close current gap in understanding each other. One of the participants talked about men’s erections and how it is a serious issue for men, especially for young men. He compared menstruation with erection. He said that most men’s incapability to take menstruation and its impact on women seriously can be related to women not being able to understand psychological effects of unwanted erections on younger men. A few other respondents linked silence around menstruation to male privilege and power. Association between existing gap in understanding each other and male power is important. If we explore deeper, for me personally, I feel there is a connection between male power and why efforts are not made to teach more about men and women. As long as men and women struggle to understand each other, male privilege and power will continue to exist and thrive. While most men may directly or indirectly gain from the struggle, women have been and will continue to be at a disadvantage. Therefore, it is important to learn more about men’s and women’s bodies to lessen the existing gender gap.

The findings of this study were interesting in regards to research questions. Eight participants learned about menstruation from their school. From the way menstruation was treated around them, participants grew up with a mentality that not only they need not but also should not be a part of the conversations. Only a few males were able to correctly identify how menstruation works biologically. However, only two viewed menstruation as a positive biological function. Men avoid talking about menstruation, those who did, talked to females outside homes and families, with either their girlfriends or close female friends. Menstruation is not a topic of conversation among men. One of the main reasons men did not consider
menstruation to be a topic for them is because it is a “women’s issue.” A few men knew about myths associated with menstruation and they mostly learned about them from television shows and their surroundings. One common taboo men mentioned was a prohibition of sex during menstruation and most preferred not to abide by them.

Patriarchy divides people making solidarity difficult and at times impossible. Power of patriarchy was also visible in this research. Many participants of this research expressed either positive or neutral perspectives towards menstruation. However, as a researcher I felt that each of them were unaware of another person who held similar opinions. When asked about men’s attitude, participants assumed that all other men viewed menstruation negatively. Since silence about menstruation prevails in the society, most men seem to protect themselves from being viewed as “perverts” abiding by such norms. As demonstrated by A Menstrual Man daring to question rules of patriarchy needs courage, determination and unflinching perseverance. Such qualities may be challenging to retain for a long time for most people. Therefore, silence surrounding menstruation is assisting to reinforce patriarchy by dividing and isolating people. On the other hand, participants of this research also seem to have defied patriarchy by taking part in this research. Motivations to participate may have been different, however, participants consciously or subconsciously demonstrated that they are ready to go against the norm of societies if right forum and opportunity is provided. Future research should explore how participants knowingly or unknowingly comply with norms of patriarchy and its correlation with their understanding of issues like menstruation.

**Recommendations**

Addressing menstruation and menstrual management has become a critical part of women’s human rights and also a necessary step to save environment (Sharma, 2014; Bobel,
Participants of this study agreed that open and free conversations about menstruation is necessary to maintain harmony in families, intimate relationships and better understand women as human beings. They also envisioned a positive change in the near future. However, there seems to be a gap between what participants believe, practice and predict for the future. The respondents are ready to learn more about menstruation and also agreed that it is important to have correct information. Unfortunately, right forum are not available for them to gain knowledge and there is also a lack of motivation to do so. If these are to be matched, some bold, effective and result-oriented steps have to be taken as soon as possible for positive and long lasting changes.

Current school curriculum about human biology is not able to produce desired effect on students. The participants confessed they did not take the topic seriously at school, laughed about it, remembered chapters to pass tests, did not remember then or now what was taught at schools. These disclosures demonstrate that a different approach is required at school level to address the topic of human biology. It was also revealed that courses was introduced too early at schools, was insufficient to have an impact on young minds and separation of boys and girls during class resulted in confusion and mental separation. Since schools are first sites of gaining scientific and factual knowledge, a better way of integrating the topic of menstruation is necessary at education institutions. Physical separation of boys and girls for human sexuality classes at school should be approached cautiously. New approaches should ensure that there is no awkwardness at the moment of learning but knowledge is retained for a long term, hopefully well into adulthood.
Since I am not a professional in a field making policies I cannot recommend ways or techniques to do this, however, trained professionals should be able to develop ideas to achieve these goals.

A dramatic shift in family culture is also required. Most participants were ready to be involved in the conversations with their families at some level but there was no such opportunities. However, they agreed that they want their sons to have positive attitude towards menstruation even though their degree of knowledge differ. Addressing menstruation at family level can be a sensitive issue and also challenging since changing attitudes towards menstruation means questioning people’s beliefs, traditions and cultures. Therefore, even if results might be slow materialize, steady and effective awareness programs should be developed targeting parents of all genders and gender identities.

Incorporating topics of human biology and sexuality with other empowering issues like positive body image, health, self-development and career mapping at university level may also ensure continuity of education as men and women transition into higher education institutions. This should spread across all majors and not just a few gender or sociology related courses. As we can see from the literature review and results of this study, menstruation has become more than just a social issue in the current world.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, this study possesses some limitations. One of the most prominent limitations is the sample of this study. A study with a bigger sample, which is racially, nationally and includes different majors in educational institutions would reveal results, which are more reflective of a larger population. It might also be worth conducting research incorporating more diverse age groups and also studies outside university levels. Studies of high school students, professionals and adults in societies like fathers, grandfathers and even mothers,
grandmothers might help to develop effective strategies to combat silence and stereotypical attitudes towards menstruation at a larger scale. Effective implementation of strategies might be a little challenging, therefore, long term plans should be developed. People who work for changes should be consistent and high perseverance is required since changes might be slow to take place.

The results of this study revealed men have limited knowledge about menstruation. Their negative perceptions have changed to be either positive or neutral as they transitioned to university. Families, schools and friend circles highly influence men’s knowledge and perceptions, therefore positive changes at different levels of society and schools are required. This change will assist to combat an issue, which has helped to maintain women’s subjugated position in societies around the world.
APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM

She Got Her Period: Men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation

You are invited to share your experience through taking part in research about what and how men learn about menstruation. This research study is led by Dr. Shannon J. Miller, Assistant Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This research study is part of the thesis of Ishwari Rajak, a second year graduate student in Gender and Women’s Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research study is to understand the knowledge and perspectives of men on menstruation. Issues like from whom, how and what men learn about menstruation will be explore. Also, questions examined are: whether men talk about menstruation or not with women and other men? If men do talk about menstruation, what influence them to talk about it? If not, what prevents them?

Procedure:
If you are at least 18 years of age or above and agree to be in this study and sign this consent form, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded 30-60 minutes interview with the researcher, Ishwari. An electronic voice recording device will be used to record the interview. After you have answered all interview questions, you will have the opportunity to ask Ishwari any questions that you may have about her experience of conducting this research.

What you will be asked to do:
Approximately seven male participants will be interviewed for this research study. You will be asked to answer questions that directly relate to your experience of learning, knowledge and perspectives about menstruation.

Risks and benefits:
The risks level of this research are no greater than experienced in everyday life.

This research will provide you with an opportunity to talk about your experience about menstruation. This research will also benefit the larger audience by providing insights into men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation.

Compensation:
A gift card of $10 will be provided as appreciation token.

Confidentiality:
You may choose a pseudonym, which you will be referred to as throughout the interview, if you desire to do so. The researcher will not identify you in any way outside the research unless you prefer to do so. However, if you want you may contact me to get information regarding the research.
All recordings and transcripts will be stored on a password secured computer that only the researcher and the Principle Investigator (Dr. Shannon Miller) will have access to. The signed consent forms will be stored in Dr. Shannon Miller’s locked drawer in a locked office and destroyed after three (3) years along with the transcripts and the recordings.

In the published thesis of the study, the researcher will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. Your real name will not be recorded in data or in transcripts. All data transcription will be done by the interviewer.

Voluntary nature of the study:
Participation in this research is voluntary. Even if you sign the consent form, you are free to refuse to participate and can stop participating at any time without giving any reason and without repercussion. You do not need to participate if you feel uncomfortable doing so.

Participant Rights and Research-Related Injuries
You also may contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 389-2321 or barry.ries@mnsu.edu with any questions about research with human participants at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Researcher(s) contact Information
This research study is led by Dr. Shannon J. Miller, Principal Investigator. You may contact her by calling 507-389-5024 or email shannon.miller@mnsu.edu.
You may contact the student researcher, Ishwari Rajak by calling 507-351-0749 or email ishwari.rajak@mnsu.edu

I agree to provide basic demographic information such as age, race, major at school, how I heard about this interview etc. I also understand that I will be eliminated from further participation in this study if I am under the age of 18.

I have read the above information and understand that this survey is voluntary and I may stop at any time. I consent to participate in this study. I am provided with a signed copy of the consent form.

_____________________________                     _______________________
Name & signature of the participant                     Date

_____________________________                     _______________________
Signature of the researcher                     Date

IRBNet ID number of the research study: 689529
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW SCRIPT & QUESTIONNAIRE

She Got Her Period: Men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation

Introduction:
Hi. My name is Ishwari Rajak. I am a second year student of Gender and Women’s Studies here at MSU, Mankato. As part of my thesis I chose to conduct this research study titled, “She Got Her Period: Men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation.” The purpose of this research study is to understand men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation.

Before I start the interview, is it ok if I ask you few questions to check if you meet inclusion criteria.

1. Do you identify as male?
2. What is your age?

Checklist for inclusion criteria.
1. Participant identify as male.
2. Is at least 18 years or older.

(inform potential participant whether or not they meet inclusion criteria. If so, continue with interview process. If not, thank them for their interest in participating in the study.)

Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without giving any reason. The information you provide will remain confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form. The results of the research study will be used for the thesis and published, but your name will not be used. No social, legal, economical, physical or psychological risks are anticipated as a result of participating in this study. I understand you may feel some discomfort, please feel free not to answer any question if you feel uncomfortable.

Are you interested to participate in this research study? (If the participant replies positively, hand a consent form), I am handing you two copies of consent form, please sign both. One copy of the consent form is for me and one for you. Also, please free to contact me after the interview, however, I will not acknowledge you in any way outside of this interview if you choose not to. This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB).

[Once the formalities of consent form is fulfilled], are you ready to participate in the interview? Is it ok if I call you by your first name or do you want me to address by any other name? Ok, I will address you by ………….. I will start the recorder. The interview is being recorded now.
Opening questions:
So, what made you want to participate in this research study?

How did you hear about this research?

Did you tell anyone you are participating in this study? If yes, who and what did you tell them? If not, why not? Will you tell anyone that you participated?

Are you comfortable talking about menstruation? Also are you comfortable with the word menstruation or is there any other word you prefer to use instead (if the word is not derogatory, use it otherwise period / menstruation is good).

Research questions: (I will aim to get answers to the main research questions. The below questions are guidelines only, the interview will be guided by the answers of the participants)

Research question # 1: From whom and in what ways, do men learn about menstruation?

When and how was your first experience knowing about menstruation? How old where you? From whom? What were you told? How did you feel about it then (disgust, good thing)? Who did you hear use the expression first? How is menstruation treated at your home? Is it a secret or people talk openly?

Which female in your life do you talk about menstruation? How often?

Research question # 2: What do men report knowing about menstruation? Do they talk about menstruation? If yes, with whom and what do they talk about? If not, why not and what prevents them from talking about it?

What is menstruation? Do you know what actually happens (biologically)? Do you know anything else about menstruation? You said you are comfortable talking about menstruation and you also talk to [insert who]? What made you so comfortable talking about it?

[if not] If you don’t talk about menstruation, why not? What do you think will happen if you talk about menstruation? If you don’t talk, do you wonder about it? Do you think it is your personal choice not to talk about it? If not, what do you think prevents you from talking about it? Do you wish someone would talk to you about it? What do you want to know?

Do men talk about menstruation among themselves? If yes, what do they say? In what context? Do all men talk about it? If one talks about it, how do others react? Who are comfortable talking about it? Do you think most men are uncomfortable talking about menstruation? If yes, how? not, why?

Do you think men and women react differently talking about menstruation? How so?

When was the last time you talked about menstruation? With whom?
Is it important for men to have correct information and positive perspective about menstruation? What do you think will happen if men (basically everyone) is comfortable talking about menstruation? What will make men comfortable talking about it?

Do you think you know more about menstruation than you were young [first experience]? Has your perspectives changed over time? How so?

Do you think you being from a particular social circle or belonging to your race or culture influence your perspectives on menstruation? Which culture/society do you think is most liberal or conservative?

*Research question # 3:* Do men know any taboos or myths associated with menstruation? If yes, what are they? Where did they learn about such taboos? Do they abide by any taboos or myths themselves?

Do you know any myths or taboos associated with menstruation? What are they? How did you learn about them? Is there any particular person who informed you about taboos/myths? What were you told? Why do you think such taboos exists? Why do you think taboos exists mostly only for women? Do you follow any taboos or myths? If yes, what?

**Wrap up questions:**

What was your first reaction when I said menstruation? Where and how did you pick up such reaction?

You earlier said no one knows about your participation in this research? After this interview will you tell anyone that you participated in this research? Why that particular person? What do you think will be their reaction? [What about your girlfriend?] Your male friends?

Do you wish you had known more about menstruation when you were young? Choosing from your father or mother, who would you have preferred talked to you about it?

Do you think participating in this research will help you talk menstruation a little more comfortably?

Is there any question(s) you would have wanted me to ask you?

Is there anything I left out that would be good to address?

What advice do you have for someone who wants to know more about menstruation?

What do you think a parent should tell their sons?

Will you talk about menstruation with your son? What will you tell him? If not, why not?

What is your advice on parents to teach boys about menstruation?
At the end
Thank you for participating in this research. I appreciate it. Like I said, I will not contact or acknowledge you outside this research if you prefer not to but feel free to contact me regarding this research.

Thank you once again.
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

She Got Her Period: Men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation

1. Age: _______________________

2. Race/ethnicity: _______________________

3. Highest level of education attained: _______________________

4. Current major: _______________________

5. Martial/relationship status: _______________________

6. Number of children (if any): _______ daughters _______ sons

7. Number of siblings (if any): _______ sisters _______ brothers

8. How did you hear about this interview? _______________________

You are invited to participate in a research study

Seeking men to share their knowledge and perspectives on menstruation

All perspectives and experiences are welcome!

To participate you must be a male student at least 18 years of age

Are you interested?

Please contact Ishwari Rajak – 507-351-0749 or email at ishwari.rajak@mnsu.edu to schedule an interview.

Schedule now!

Interviews will last 30-60 minutes in a group study room in our MSU library

The purpose of this research study is to understand men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation

A gift card of $10 will be provided as a token of appreciation.

This research study is led by Dr. Shannon J. Miller (shannon.miller@mnsu.edu), Assistant Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies and approved by IRB of MSU, Mankato
PARTICIPANTS WANTED

Seeking men to participate in a research study and share knowledge and perspectives on menstruation

To participate you must be a male student at least 18 years of age

Interested?
Please contact Ishwari Rajak
507-351-0749 or email ishwari.rajak@mnsu.edu to schedule an interview

The purpose of this research study is to understand men’s knowledge and perspectives on menstruation.

How do men learn about menstruation? ...sisters, mothers, girlfriends, male friends or ......? All perspectives and experiences are welcome!

A gift card of $10 will be provided as a token of appreciation.

This research study is led by Dr. Shannon J. Miller (shannon.miller@mnsu.edu), Assistant Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies and approved by IRB of MSU, Mankato.
REFERENCES


BSR. (2010). Female factor workers’ health assessment: Bangladesh. Author HERproject Bangladesh.


