

# Sustainable Menstruation

A case study of menstruation stigma and the effect it has on the individual in Mexico



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# Abstract

A menstruating individual menstruates for close to 40 years during their life on average, thus using nearly 10,000 products to manage their menstruation (Regional Health–Americas, 2022), each product contains plastic, a pad is produced of 90% plastic which is sown into the product in order to spread the blood on the pads (Ason, 2022). Further many menstruating individuals experience a stigma connected to their menstruation, which they suffer from (Research Diary, 2023) participate and unstructured observations. By explore the subjective ways of managing ones menstruation in a sustainable manner while also dealing with stigmas, focusing on each lived experience of the participants and finding patterns to analyze further by creating a framework to understand the embodied experience with an Ecofeminist approach to fully explore the mechanism within the Mexican society as a cause of patriarchy and capitalism (Warren, 2014). Additionally using the Communication Theory of Stigma (Goffman, 1963) to understand the stigma that is surrounding menstruation and what effect it has on the menstruating individual. Through conducting semi-structured interviews in both Spanish and English, we found that Mexican menstruating individuals experience a large amount of marginalization and oppression due to their gender, they are becoming jokes to males when expressing disappointment or anger, since it must be due to their menstruation. Thus has the research report acknowledged new ways to manage menstruation in a sustainable manner without decreasing the comfort of the products for the menstruating individuals by suggesting a new way of producing such products.

Keywords: *Ecofeminism, Discourses, Menstruation, Mexico, Sexism, Sustainability, The Communication Theory of Stigma*

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# Introduction

Over half the population in Mexico, precisely 52% are females (INEGI, 2023), who is going to, is or has experienced menstruation. That is a total of 67 million women in Mexico in 2023 (INEGI, 2023). “Menstruation is the monthly shedding of the lining of your uterus. Menstruation is also known by the terms menses, menstrual period, menstrual cycle or period. Menstrual blood — which is partly flows from your uterus through your cervix and out of your body through your vagina” (Cleveland clinic, 2022). This affects women in many different ways in their daily life. We found within the individuals a different way of managing menstruation. A participant stated, “I feel like just being at home, like my safe place. Like if an accident happens, like I know there's a shower, there's nobody to see” (Participant N2, 2023, p. 119). Contradicting, another participant stated “I don't want the period to take control of my life (...) I'm going to carry on doing it because i don't wanna train or teach myself not to pamper any kind of different feelings in my body” (Participant M2, 2023, p.90).

We are working within an interdisciplinary field of sustainability, embodied experience, and discourses surrounding menstruation. These three areas are well interconnected to each other as they all affect the menstruating individual, which is seen in a growing number of conducted studies. Newton (2016) addresses how “Much of what we ‘know’ about the world we live in is learnt through informal interaction with parents, friends and family” (Newton, 2016, p.2). Which focuses on the discourses, knowledge and embodied experience surrounding menstruation. Furthermore, Harrison et al. address on the topic that, “Despite this being a common and vital process, access to menstrual products, clean water, private sanitation facilities, and sexual health education are not secured globally” (Harrison & Tyson, 2022, p. 378). They focus on the environmental impact, access and the knowledge surrounding menstruation. Thus, our problem formulation emerged as a means to capture a snapshot of the perceptions held by the participating menstruating individuals in Mexico; *How do menstruating individuals manage menstruation sustainably, while addressing the stigma associated with it?*

Therefore, this project report is aiming to understand the experience of the individuals who participated in our study, whilst doing fieldwork in Mexico, namely Acapulco and Mexico City. There were 14 participants in the age range of 18 to 47 years, all of the participants were still in their menstruation phase. This report aims to understand the embodied experience and the surrounding discourses, to understand the effect it has on the

individual. With this project report we wish to acknowledge the menstruation individuals in Mexico and their experience. Furthermore, spread a new light on the topic of interdisciplinary fields combining these areas; sustainability, embodied experience, and discourses surrounding menstruation.

## Clarification of Concepts

### The Personal is The Political

The Personal is the Political or the Private is the Political became a slogan used by feminist Carol Hanisch in her article *The Personal is the Political*, who argued that what happened within the private sphere was also relevant for the political sphere, that those two were connected, mainly applicable for women (LEE, 2007; Miles, 2018). She argued that the personal experiences that women had in private were connected to the political due to the systematic power relations within society, these experiences are a result of societal oppression towards women. Her work had a huge impact upon second-wave feminism since the private and the political had been separated before within a western context (Miles, 2018).

However, this theme is also seen within a latin context, The Zapatista Army is a Mexican feminist movement who tries to remove themselves from the household and show that what happens within the private is also related to the political. Their work focuses on the rights of the indigenous Mexican individuals that are being held down by society, thus is their work defined by colonization and the marginalization of native individuals, they fight a duality by fighting for the rights as female within the household and as indigenous within the nation (Miller, 2021). Additionally, International Women's Day in Mexico has witnessed thousands of women taking to the streets to protest and demand a change in the society (Research Diary, 2023). They protest and demand safety for women as femicide is still a major problem and gender equality (Research Diary, 2023). The protest, this year the government covered up important statues within Mexico City, and the women felt angry and questioned, why does the government take better care of the statues than the women (Research Diary, 2023). It is a powerful reminder that gender inequality is still a major problem and that more needs to be done to ensure that all women and girls have equal access to opportunities and resources.

## Conservative In A Mexican Context

Conservatism has had a significant impact on the position of women in Mexican society. According to Bolles (2006) conservative forces in Mexico have actively worked to limit women's access to education, healthcare, and reproductive rights. Bolles writes, "Conservatives see the family as a sacred institution and women as mothers and wives, who should stay in the private sphere"<sup>1</sup> (Bolles, 2006, p.67). This attitude towards women has led to a lack of progress in promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights in Mexico. The 20th century saw significant changes in Mexico that affected women's position in society. In 1953, Mexico ratified the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which granted women the right to vote and run for office. However, despite these advances, women continued to face discrimination and violence in both public and private spheres. In the 1970s, feminist movements in Mexico began to gain momentum, with women advocating for their rights and challenging traditional gender roles. However, these movements faced significant opposition from conservative forces. Bolles writes, "The 1980s were particularly difficult for the women's movement in Latin America, as it was a decade of political, economic, and social regression that affected women in particular"<sup>2</sup> (Bolles, 2006, p.69). In recent years, there have been some positive developments in promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights in Mexico. In 2007, the Law on Access of Women to a Life Free of Violence was passed, which aims to prevent and address gender-based violence (Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, 2007). Despite some positive developments in recent years to promote gender equality and protect women's rights in Mexico, there is still a long way to go in addressing the entrenched conservative attitudes towards women that persist, hindering their access to education, healthcare, and reproductive rights.

## Well-Being

“The definition of well-being used by the National Wellness Institute states: “Well(being) is an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a

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<sup>1</sup> (Los conservadores ven la familia como una institución sagrada y a las mujeres como madres y esposas, que deberían mantenerse en la esfera privada")

<sup>2</sup> La década de 1980 fue especialmente difícil para el movimiento de mujeres en América Latina, pues fue una década de regresión política, económica y social que afectó a las mujeres en particular)

more successful existence.”” (College of Veterinary Medicine, 2018). Accordingly is the difference between well-being and health, is that health measures a state of being and well-being a that of living. There are 8 notions of well-being, which are emotional, physical, occupational, social, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, and financial. If parts of well-being are not met it will have an impact on the individual's well-being. The emotional notion of well-being concerns the skill to identify emotions and learn how to manage these emotions in a healthy manner, the second notion of well-being is physical focusing on the bodily dimension concerning exercise, disease management, and nutrition. Occupational well-being expresses the notion of satisfaction with one's career, Social well-being focuses on the social connections that the individual has, further the relations and personal expression. Additionally, Spiritual well-being involves the search of meaning regarding a belief of a higher power, Intellectual well-being covers the practice of growth using thought-provoking mental activities, the seventh dimension is Environment well-being which focuses on the impact of being environmentally aware and participating in sustainable habits. The last notion is financial well-being which is the skill to manage and plan financial expenses and revenues (Colorado State University PUEBLO, n.d.).

## Research paradigm

In this chapter, we will explain our research paradigm including our own position within the research, our bias, our ontology, epistemology, methodology etc. In order to fully be aware of our position and be clear on the way we as researchers see the world within this research, thus explaining how we collected our data.

## Researcher position

We as researchers acknowledge our own bias, since we are both female, white, european, and feminists. We believe that it would be impossible for us to remove ourselves from these biases, hence we will use them. Since we are female, we believe it might be easier for the menstruating individuals to talk about their menstruation with us, rather than a male. Due to the conservatism of the prevailing societal attitudes surrounding these subject matters, we had an implicit belief that such behavior of open discussions regarding menstruation were not, and in some instances, continue to be non-normative within familial contexts and non-conformist to cultural norms. These factors were carefully considered when designing

our research study in a society marked by distinct cultural norms. Furthermore, as feminists it is a topic we are very keen on and find very important, therefore we are willing to do lots of research upon the topic to fully understand. Furthermore, as we are two white Europeans we believe there might be some power relations that we must be aware of due to colonization.

Additionally, we as researchers have discussed the ethics of the project a lot, the question of what good does it do? Are we just taking information from the menstruating people? Are we creating a problem that before may not have been a problem for them? When we were gathering data in Mexico, we were asked by a young male, what the purpose of the project was, to which we realized we wanted to spread a light on the issue, which he liked, to where he continued that the local society could really use the information we had gathered. Some of the participants also asked the same questions as he. This left us the reflection of how and if we should get the information to the local community.

## Ontology

Ontology is the “existence and the nature of things that exist” (Williams, 2016, ch. 24), thus is the ontology, the nature of the knowledge we have, what we know. For this project we have decided to use Relativism as our ontology. Relativism is the understanding of reality as being multiple. Meaning that the truth and reality can be in multiple versions, since people understand the world differently thus is the truth vague since it can be many things due to the different constructs that people have which can change, thus can the truths and realities also change (Kanzian et al., 2017). As we are trying to understand menstruating individuals' experience with menstruation in Mexico, these realities will differ from person to person, due to it being an individual experience. We as researchers therefore felt it would be fitting to use relativism, since it allows us to further investigate each experience as a truth. These constructs are then based on a social construction which only works within the framework of the construction due to the belief of what is true in the specific social world it is constructed within. These social worlds have different norms and ideas; hence these constructs differ depending on the social world called cultural relativism (Williams, 2016). For the research the choice of ontology means that the menstruating people and the way in which they manage their menstruation will have different worlds and ideas of what it means to manage one's period. Further the understanding of managing one's menstruation in a sustainable manner will differ from area to area depending on the knowledge of the menstruating people and the



norms they have grown up with, thus will we be able to understand each lived experience with the knowledge that their experience is influenced by the social construct that they are within. This ontology choice is closely related to social constructivism, the research will understand the gathered knowledge from a social constructivism point of view as an addition. Social Constructivism is constructing the truth and reality by social interaction, these realities can further be understood within the social framework which they were created within. Arguing that what humans know as their reality, is their reality because of the meaning that they have given it (Williams, 2016).

Thus, will these two methodologies be mixed for this project, due to the belief that there are multiple realities and that these can change depending on the social construct the individual is within. As for this project report we understand reality as something that is created by people and their interactions. Allowing power dynamics to reproduce themselves and reinforce socially constructed norms. For this project that means that the realities/truths will depend and change depending on whom one is speaking with, hence these realities would be influenced by the social construct that they are living within. For the project that means that by going to certain areas in Mexico, we must be aware of the social norms in order to understand the experience of the menstruating individuals. We believe that by mixing the two it will allow the project to fully explore the stigma regarding menstruation in Mexico.

## Epistemology

Epistemology is the way in which we as researchers understand the knowledge we have gathered through our fieldwork, it is the methodology for how we know what we believe we know (Williams, 2016). Due to our choice of ontology, as being relativism and social constructivism, we believe it would be fitting for us to use an emic as our epistemology, since it allows us to understand the different truths/realities. Emic is used to understand relativism by having a subjective approach to reality, thus by interacting with people to understand a phenomenon in order to build an insider perspective, hence the truths created by the meaning and understanding placed within the interaction (Mishra, 2020). Therefore upon arrival in Acapulco, Mexico, the first period of time was spent on socializing in order to get to know the local culture and the local slang that was used within the area. Since the research ontology is based upon Relativism and Social Constructivism, the understanding of the truth/reality can only be obtained by participation and observation, hence the world of the menstruating

individuals in Mexico could be different than the understanding that the two researchers have. Thus, will this research involve interaction with Mexican menstruating people in order for the researchers to fully understand the data that is being collected, additionally observe the internal interactions between both the Mexican menstruating and non-menstruating people to fully understand the society.

## Methodology

When humans are within a world, we tend to assume things, we interpret things in certain ways and further tend to believe that others see things the same as we do, however this may not be true, according to phenomenology we as researchers must see through these assumptions in order to fully understand the phenomenon (Detmer, 2013). This works with the chosen ontology and epistemology, hence with the phenomenological approach, we explore the different individual experiences that the participants have connected to the position that there are multiple realities/truths and that these must be obtained by interacting. The aim for our project is to understand a phenomenon through individuals' experiences, thus a phenomenological approach fitting for this research, since “phenomenological studies make detailed comments about individual situations” (Lester, 1999). Using phenomenology this research wishes to describe a phenomenon from the perspective of the individuals involved within the phenomenon rather than the assumed perspective from the researchers, hence we wish to understand menstruation in Mexico by understanding different menstruating individuals' experience with menstruating. This methodology was chosen as it allows us to get the perspective of the individuals involved and the society surrounding them. Therefore, the perception of the experiences of the individuals is highly important for the research, it is also very important for the researchers to be true to the individuals and their experience (Lester, 1999). Further when using phenomenology the researchers are obliged to investigate the phenomenon through the eyes of the individuals involved in it, thus focusing on what the experience by the individual is, not what is the experience or the expected experience from the surrounding world/community (Detmer, 2013).

Hence using phenomenology, it is important for the researchers to become part of what is being researched, including doing interviews, participation, observation etc. From the data that is gathered from these methods whilst being in Mexico, we found some patterns which

we have categorized into groups that we wish to analyze them in, being the discourse surrounding menstruation in Mexico, the bodily experience, both mental and physical, and lastly sustainable alternative ways to manage menstruation. This integration of phenomenology with relativism and social constructivism allows us to examine the stigma surrounding menstruation in Mexico, capturing the nuances of how it is perceived and experienced. It provides a comprehensive lens to explore the interplay between individual experiences, social norms, and the reproduction of power dynamics. By employing these methodologies we seek to unveil the complexities of menstruation and contribute to a deeper understanding of the participants from Acapulco and Mexico City.

From these patterns hypotheses can be made, which can be tested and might turn into a theory upon the research collected. Nonetheless, it can be difficult to detect these patterns, since the data collected is individual experiences and therefore we as researchers must be careful when trying to find a pattern in order to limit our assumptions (Lester, 1999). However it was not possible to get the interviews we initially wanted due to the danger of going to these areas, which were smaller towns in Guerrero, thus can one argue that the quality of the collected data might not give a complete picture of the situation. Therefore, the project changed, which also meant that the menstruating individuals that we were able to talk to are from the middle class and up, however this data gave insights to all social classes within Mexico. Although, we believe that what was not said in the interviews and the fact that we could not get to the initially menstruating individuals, tells us a lot about the situation that they are in. Hence if the areas are so poor that it is dangerous for us to get there, the menstruating people most definitely can not afford products to manage their menstruation, thus can this unfortunate obstacle also be useful information, as a participant pointed out, most of the women in these areas do not have the economic means.

For this research we employed a mixed-methods approach that included snowball sampling, unstructured observation, semi-structured interviews, and a research diary. Each method contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and nuanced experiences of menstruating individuals in Mexico.

## Snowball Sampling Method

Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used for “interviewing a person’s immediate social environment by using social metric questions in the interview for sampling purposes” (Goodman, 2011). “This process is, by necessity, repetitive: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet other informants, and so on” (Noy, 2008). The snowball sampling design captures social knowledge, which is viewed as primarily dynamic, processual, and emergent, in line with qualitative and feminist conceptualizations of knowledge that emphasize movement over static notions of logos. This notion of social knowledge is central to the snowball sampling design, where the use of natural social networks enables the identification and exploration of emergent themes and power relations among the participants. Furthermore, the cultural norms that shape the production and dissemination of knowledge (Noy, 2008). Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that by collecting data through the snowball sampling method referrals may lead to bias since participants may refer to individuals with similar characteristics or experiences. As an additional disadvantage, snowball sampling may not provide an accurate representation of a population of interest.

The snowball sampling method was used to reach, according to Noy (2008) these “*hidden populations*”, as it was not feasible to obtain information through other means when we came to the different regions of Mexico. Upon our arrival in Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico, we initiated our research methodology, which involved conducting fieldwork in smaller towns. As stated before due to our safety, the snowball sampling method was utilized in Acapulco, specifically in the Bonfil region to identify research participants (Research Diary, 2023). Additionally, the first participant, a cafe owner, provided references to other eligible individuals. Occasionally, when we saw a new opportunity to gather new data from a new social circle we actively started a new snowball. Through the phenomenological approach and our commitment to understanding their truth, we aim to enrich our research with a profound appreciation for the individuality and complexity of each participant's experience. By acknowledging and mitigating our biases, we seek to ensure that our findings authentically reflect the diverse range of perspectives and lived realities surrounding menstruation in Mexico.

## Unstructured Observation

In unstructured observation, the observer does not have a preconceived set of categories or variables to record, which makes it flexible as it allows the experience being studied to unfold naturally, without interference or manipulation from the researcher (Manen, 2014). This approach allows the researcher to capture the essence of the experience being studied, including the tacit and subjective aspects that may not be readily apparent through other methods, as it brings this openness to the studied theme. Nonetheless, the analysis and interpretation of unstructured observations pose challenges as they necessitate our ability to discern pertinent themes or patterns retrospectively. In our study, we encountered such difficulties while conducting observations in diverse settings, including public restrooms and supermarkets. In the former, we closely examined the contents of waste bins, aiming to identify the specific menstrual products utilized by individuals. Simultaneously, in the latter, we observed and documented interpersonal interactions among people. Furthermore, the subjective interpretation of the researcher may influence the observations made, leading to potential biases in the data (Manen, 2014). To avoid prejudice it is essential that researchers approach unstructured observation critically and reflectively, by acknowledging the influence of our own preconceptions of our researchers position.

## Participation Observation

According to Manen (2014) participant observation is characterized by the researcher immersing themselves in the natural setting of the experience being studied as an active participant, interacting with participants and taking notes of their observations. Thus, to achieve a more comprehensive comprehension of menstruation in Mexico. By observing the experience first-hand, we could form a rich and detailed picture of the experience. Simultaneously, gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of lived experiences, including the subjective and implicit aspects that may not be readily apparent through other methods. However, participant observation also presents some challenges. Navigating the balance between the role of an active participant and that of an observer can be challenging for the researcher. In addition, us as researchers should be aware of how their own biases may affect their observations and interpretations (Manen, 2014). In order to overcome these difficulties, we adopted a strategy of observation that involved familiarizing ourselves with the setting, building trust with participants, and maintaining a reflective and critical perspective (Manen,

2014). This approach was consistent with our emic epistemology, which required a significant investment of time in socializing and integrating within the social circles of Bonfil and other communities, as documented in our research diary (2023). By utilizing this method for rigorous and meaningful participant observation, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Firstly, we planned to use the template for open-ended interviews, hence it offers a distinct advantage by uncovering the unique experiences and perspectives of the participant, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of the data (Manen, 2014). We traveled to Acapulco where a majority of interviews were conducted due to unforeseen illness upon arrival in Mexico City (Research Diary, 2023). Considering the possible language barrier that could arise as the majority of the interview were in Spanish, we felt more comfortable using semi-structured interviews. Therefore we decided to make a small question guide, to ensure that we had the right vocabulary and could formulate questions the right way. The questions however had to be open without bias, an example of the questions could be “Describe when and how you first learned about menstruation?”. However half way through our fieldwork, we had a supervisor meeting to which we reflected upon our questions, therefore we made a few small changes, after these changes we experienced a different openness from the participants, it was easier to get the conversation flowing nevertheless we are not sure if this change is due to the slight change in questions or if we as researcher became more comfortable interviewing and learn to follow up better on what was said by the participant. Semi-structured interviews allow us to delve into the participants experience with a broader nuance and complexity, further it provides a structure but also the flexibility and spontaneity to the conversation (Manen, 2014), since “The goal of interviewing is to evoke rich descriptions of the meanings and structures that define people's experiences" (Manen, 2014, p. 68). By this we are able to enter the participants' world through their experience and thus understand the patterns within the Mexican society surrounding menstruation.

## Research Diary

The research diary is a sensemaking tool for us as researchers to understand the ambiguous data that was collected as a part of the conducted field work in Mexico. We see the process of sensemaking as the interpretation and understanding of reality through the social interaction of individuals, furthermore, “[It] consists [of] extracting elements [from the environment] and linking them within a representation that by establishing order produces meaning” (Laszczuk & Garreau, 2018). Sense-making is vital to us in this process, as it enables us to communicate the findings effectively and draw meaningful conclusions from their data. During the process, new insights and feedback continuously refine our interpretation of the data, nevertheless, it is a way of reverting back to the data and drawing new insights and reflecting. Due to the possibility that we as researchers are “faces an unforeseen situation, where he is unable make sense of events or the environment. In such a situation, the actor does not possess the cognitive schema” (Laszczuk & Garreau, 2018).

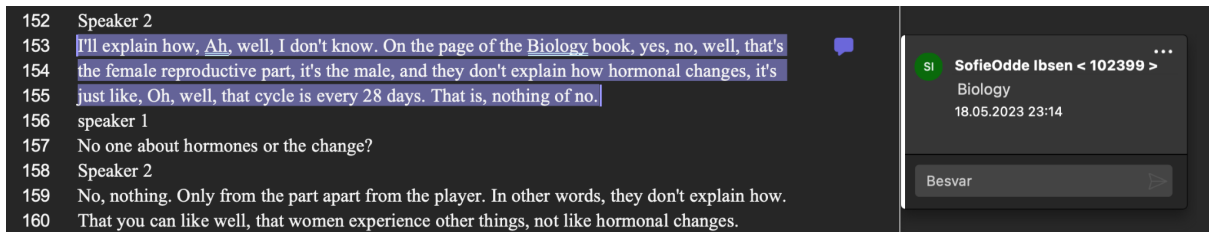
We planned to use the diary to reflect upon the day. Therefore, while in the field doing interviews, observations we plan to write our thoughts, then reflect after collecting data, and then reflect further at the end of the day. Due to the idea that we will get the most information by doing so, and by reflecting that we can adjust our style of collecting data for the next day. The research diary were also kept as an observation tool for interviews as one researcher would conduct the interview and the other making observations notes. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that potential limitations exist due to language barriers during the observations, as only one of the researchers possessed proficiency in Spanish and the majority of interviews were conducted in Spanish. There was the possibility of certain observations being lost in translation.

Thus the reflective research diary was kept in the timeframe of the 28th of march to the 12th of april 2023, as we were conducting fieldwork in Mexico during this timeframe.

## Coding Of The Data

Using a phenomenological approach in which researchers look for patterns within the gathered data (Lester, 1999), we read through our conducted interviews and our research diary to find patterns which could be further analyzed, thus we used certain words to divide (Strauss, 1987) the data within such as biological, bodily experience, information and

discourse, these themes were then divided into codes, for example information turned into information from mothers and from the educational system.



After finding these codes, we acquired a deeper understanding of the collected data and thus were able to find fitting theories, Ecofeminism and The Communication Theory of Stigma, that could support our data and further be used to analyze the data. Thus giving a profound understanding of the interviews and the research diary. We therefore divided the analysis into topics of our codes in order to make sure the information was sufficient but also as close to what the participants expressed, hence keeping their experience as it was.

Additionally, some interviews were conducted in Spanish, however for the project report, we wished for them to be in English for it to be more readable. Furthermore, by having an emic epistemology, we attempted to get a good understanding of the local language and slangs by socializing a great deal to minimize loss of translation, since we ourselves will translate the quotes that we have used. Accordingly, have we changed some words due to the closeness in language and the meaning, such as toallas=towels=pads, tampax=tampon, furthermore, Mexico could be Mexico=country or Mexico=Mexico City, depending on the context.

## Summarizing The Research Paradigm

To summarize, the research paradigm used in our study upon menstruation individuals in Mexico. We acknowledge our biases as female, white, European, and feminist, and recognize the importance in understanding menstruation individuals experiences. We consider the conservatism and cultural norms surrounding menstruation in Mexico and aim to shed light on the topic. We have adopted relativism and social constructivism as the ontology for understanding that realities and truths can vary based on individual experiences and social constructs. We used an emic approach for epistemology, seeking subjective perspectives to understand the phenomenon. The chosen methodology is phenomenology, focusing on individual experiences and avoiding assumptions. Therefore, the chosen methods were



snowball sampling, unstructured observation, participation observation, and semi-structured interviews to better understand the participants. Overall, we aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of menstruation experiences in Mexico by combining various methods and perspectives.

## Theory

For our theories, we have decided on using two different theories that combined can help us analyze our data, these theories are 1) Ecofeminism, which will allow us to understand the notion and connection between the environment and female rights, we are aware that this theory is based in a western context, but believe its values can be applicable for our data, 2) The Communication Theory of stigma, allowing us to understand the discourse around menstruation in connection to the stigma, that we found in our data. We have chosen these two theories since Ecofeminism will be used to understand the society and the experience the menstruating individuals have, further The Communication Theory of Stigma hence it allows us to analyze what these menstruating individuals experience and how they deal with it.

We have chosen to base Ecofeminism on multiple academics, Buckingham, Warren, Shiva, Sallah, and Jabeen, as we believe that it would give a better framework for our analysis, as it provides a ground understanding of Ecofeminism. We believe Ecofeminism argues that there is a connection between female rights and environmental rights, thus bringing together feminism and environmentalism by arguing that these two both are consequences of capitalism and patriarchy. Therefore to fight one or the other, one must take both into consideration, hence they are connected to fighting the same societal construction (Buckingham, 2015). This connection between the two is also argued to stem from the discourse and embodied connection between females and nature. Ecofeminists argue that females have a stronger connection to the environment than males, since they can reproduce as the so-called mother earth, which is applied in wordings as the soil is fertile, like a female is fertile to reproduce. Accordingly, the English language is used to justify the marginalization of females and nature, “Within a patriarchal context, they function to devalue women, animals, and nature in a way that reinforces the unjustified dominations of all three”(Warren, 2014). Further Shiva argues that development often comes at the cost of women by reducing their status thus also their labor, accompanied by the technological

advances, development increases the destruction of the environment, which then again affects females since they often are the ones working within agriculture (Clark, 2012). Additionally, Shiva connects ecofeminism to colonialism, suggesting that European colonialists claimed ownership of the land and the indigenous females, thus colonising the female body and the environment (Nirmal, 2020). This notion of postcolonial ecofeminism tries to explore the study of the human–nature and women–nature relationship by understanding the relation between the oppression against women and nature from a postcolonial point of view. Arguing that males have connected nature to the female body and thus justified the colonization of the female body and nature all at once, “Oppression and exploitation on the basis of the embodiment of women and nature” (Jabeen, 2020). Accordingly, Sallah argues that due to insecurities and a disconnection to their identity, males often take on a more macho approach, which further marginalizes females and nature (Salleh, 2017). Additionally, this identity perspective is connected to the concept of embodied materialism, claiming that the embodiment connects knowledge and experience, hence the marginalization of females due to the embodied experience of males being above females and nature (Lindberg, n.d.). For the project we have chosen ecofeminism as a theory, since it combines our focus on feminism and environmentalism with a common grounding in patriarchy and capitalism. After our trip to Mexico, we searched for patterns in our collected data and found that most of our participants mention a patriarchal society being the reason for the lack of women's rights. Thus is the grounding very suitable with our findings and can therefore be used to understand and analyze our data further in the project. Ecofeminism can help us analyze the gathered data from Mexico as a framework to develop a deeper understanding by using the concepts of dualism criticizing the separation of nature and culture, the grounding of marginalizing of females and nature by patriarchy and capitalism, and the embodied experience.

The next theory is Goffmans’ Communication theory of Stigma (Goffman, 1963). Ecofeminism and Goffmans’ Communication theory of Stigma is complementary as the two theories' shared focus is on power dynamics, oppressions, and the need for societal change. Ecofeminism highlights the exploitation and marginalization of both women and nature, while emphasizing on the importance of challenging, additionally, transforming the dominant systems and structures that lies within society (Buckingham, 2015). The Communication Theory of Stigma examines how stigmatized individuals are subjected to social norms, stereotypes and discrimination (Goffman, 1963). Moreover, both theories emphasize the importance of communication in addressing oppressive systems and structures.

According to Goffman's perspective, a stigmatized individual is defined as someone whose attribute or characteristic deviates from society's normative expectations, leading to the discrediting or devaluation of their social identity (Goffman, 1963). These attributes can take visible forms, such as physical disabilities or disfigurements, as well as less visible forms, including mental illnesses or sexual orientations (Goffman, 1963). Normals, on the other hand, are individuals who conform to society's expectations and do not possess stigmatized attributes (Goffman, 1963). They act as the reference group against which stigmatized individuals are evaluated, perpetuating the construction of stigma within social contexts. Central to Goffman's theory is the concept of impression management, which encompasses the various strategies and techniques employed by stigmatized individuals to actively shape the impressions others form of them (Goffman, 1963). Impression management involves both concealing the stigmatized attribute, a process known as covering, and managing the information about the stigma through selective disclosure. Goffman (1963) argues that individuals engage in these strategic efforts to mitigate the negative consequences associated with their stigmatized status and to maintain positive social interactions. In Goffman's (1963) perspective, impression management becomes a vital tool for individuals to navigate social contexts while dealing with the challenges of their stigmatized identities. The process of covering allows individuals to downplay or conceal the stigma associated with menstruation, thereby reducing the potential for social devaluation (Goffman, 1963). For example, someone menstruating may strategically use different clothing, personal items, or a somewhat discrete behavior to divert attention from their menstrual status and enhance their social acceptance to conform to the normals. Moreover, stigmatized individuals engage in selective disclosure, carefully choosing what information to reveal about their stigmatizing characteristic and to whom (Goffman, 1963). By controlling the narrative surrounding their stigma, they aim to shape how others perceive and understand their identity, reducing the likelihood of being solely defined by their stigmatized attribute. This strategic management of information empowers stigmatized individuals to present themselves in ways that align more closely with societal norms and expectations, thus facilitating positive social interactions (Goffman, 1963). Goffman's (1963) theory emphasizes that impression management strategies are not mere acts of deception or manipulation but rather pragmatic responses to the challenges imposed by stigma. Stigmatized individuals are motivated to actively shape the impressions others form of them in order to counteract the devaluation and negative stereotypes associated with their stigmatized attribute (Goffman, 1963). By

presenting themselves in a manner consistent with prevailing social norms, they seek to elicit more positive responses and interactions, thereby striving for social acceptance and inclusion (Goffman, 1963).

Thus, in the context of menstruation in Mexico, the Communication Theory of Stigma provides insight into how menstruating individuals manage their identities in response to cultural and social stigma. As Goffman (1963) recognizes that stigma is not solely an individual phenomenon but is deeply embedded in cultural beliefs, values, and norms. Cultural stigma refers to the broader societal attitudes and prejudices that contribute to the devaluation and marginalization of certain groups or attributes. Within the cultural context, stigmatized attributes are often socially constructed as undesirable or deviant, leading to the formation of negative stereotypes and beliefs (Goffman, 1963). These cultural beliefs and attitudes shape the perceptions and evaluations of stigmatized individuals, influencing how they are treated, included, or excluded from various social groups and opportunities (Goffman, 1963). Additionally, Goffman emphasizes the role of social interactions in the perpetuation and reinforcement of stigma (Goffman, 1963). Social stigma refers to the specific interactions, behaviors, and attitudes that stigmatized individuals encounter within their social environments (Goffman, 1963). Stigmatized individuals face discrimination, prejudice, and negative reactions from normals due to their stigmatized attributes, which can result in the exclusion, marginalization, and spoiling of their social identity. Goffman's theory provides a framework for examining how cultural beliefs and values shape the stigmatization process and how social interactions reflect and reinforce these cultural norms (Goffman, 1963). Thus, cultural and societal expectations surrounding gender roles and behaviors may add to the complexity of this process, as individuals may experience additional challenges. This study aims to employ Goffman's theory as a theoretical lens, as well as, an analytical framework tool to understand the contemporary situation of the 14 menstruating individuals in Acapulco and Mexico City.

Having established Ecofeminism as a theory to understand the societal and experiential aspects of menstruating individuals, we now turn to the analysis of the collected data. The prevalence of stigma associated with menstruation, including feelings of impurity and shame, as well as negative social interactions, has been well-documented (Barrington et al., 2021; Bolles, 2006). Drawing upon Goffman's Communication Theory of Stigma, we aim to delve deeper into how menstruating individuals manage their identities in response to cultural and social stigmatization, taking into account the complex interplay of society and expectations

(Goffman, 1963). By doing so we gain a deeper understanding of the communicative processes involved in stigma, identity management, and social interaction. Furthermore, employing an analytical framework encompassing the embodied experience, the discourse surrounding menstruation, and sustainability considerations, we seek to gain comprehensive insights into the contemporary situation of the 14 menstruating individuals in Acapulco and Mexico City, where Ecofeminism as a support for the analytical framework inspired by Goffman's Communication Theory of Stigma.

## Analysis

The analysis will be divided into two sections. The initial section focuses on the types of discourses experienced by the participants within the Mexican society and their corresponding response. Secondly, the bodily experience along with the lack of information, to which we wish to explore the emotions and experiences of the menstruating individuals that we have interviewed in connection to Ecofeminism. Moreover how information about menstruation is spread and how this affects the menstruating individuals.

### Exploring Menstruational Stigma Positions

Various discourse types have been identified in relation to stigmatized identities. These discourses shed light on the ways in which menstruation is constructed, evaluated and negotiated within society. Manago et al. (2022) argue that there are “three value-oriented categories: stigma as deficit, value-neutral diversity, and value-added pride”. The stigma discourse-value framework comprises three distinct elements that contribute to our understanding of stigmatized identities surrounding menstruation. Therefore, this analysis will explore the actions and experiences of the menstruating individual that we interviewed to understand these different types of discourse value, and not analyze the stigma surrounding it.

#### Devaluations of Emotions

The first aspect is the deficit discourse is the devaluation of stigmatized individuals and the expectation that they conform to social norms (Manago et al., 2022). It reinforces

negative stereotypes and marginalizes the stigmatized attribute by emphasizing the perceived deficiencies associated with it. Furthermore, as Goffman (1963) argues that it can lead to impression management in an attempt to pass as a member of the dominant group who are the normals and minimize their stigmatized associations with menstruation. According to Newton (2016), this can come in the form,

“that women are encouraged to seek treatment for PMS because, as Martin argues, while society allows men the right to express their anger, this right is denied to women” (Newton, 2016, p. 76)

PMS is premenstrual syndrome. A participant pointed out one of two comments she has heard, “Oh, obviously she is in a bad mood because she is on her days (...) Oh she is angry because she has menstruation” (Participant M1, 2023, p. 5). The comments exemplify the deficit discourse and its impact on stigmatized individuals. The assumption that a woman's mood is solely attributed to her menstrual cycle reflects a devaluation of menstruating individuals and reinforces negative stereotypes associated with menstruation. It also highlights the pressure on individuals to manage impressions and conform to societal norms, as Goffman (1963) suggests. This aligns with Newton's argument that women are often denied the right to express anger, reinforcing gender-based expectations and inequalities (Newton, 2016). Another participant expressed a similar experience while she was at work, “I’m not angry because of that, I’m angry because you did the job badly, not because I’m on my period, I’m angry because of something else.” (Participant E1, 2023, p. 40). Furthermore, one of the participants pointed out a comment her husband had told her,

“you’re very sensitive, you’re very sensitive, you are on your days huh, very angry, very angry (...) because then he says to me. Hey what’s wrong with you? Why are you angry? Why are you annoyed? He says, obviously you’re menstruating. Your hormones” (Participant N1, 2023, p. 75).

These participants' experiences from close relations to professionals highlights the perpetuation of negative stereotypes in the societal sphere, which devaluates the menstruating individuals. Simultaneously, the participant experiences highlight the gendered expectations and inequalities present within societal discourse, reflecting the ideas from ecofeminism. The

pressure for women to conform to social norms and engage in impression management perpetuates the minimization of the stigmatization of menstruation.

Another participant mentioned,

“Yes, obviously you hear, no, comments from the parents. Education in the villages is very different from education in the city (...) Like there are things that are. It is forbidden to talk to the children, to the daughters. Well, no, I did not know anything good, I knew it a little, because at school he already told us. (...) You couldn't get into the adult conversation” (Participant G1, 2023, p. 48).

The participant's statement sheds light on the prevalence of a deficit discourse surrounding menstruation, particularly in rural communities. This discourse is characterized by the lack of open discussions and the prohibition of talking about menstruation to children, particularly daughters, which signifies the devaluation and marginalization of individuals who menstruate. It aligns with the deficit discourse, which highlights perceived deficiencies associated with menstruation and perpetuates negative stereotypes. Furthermore, the participant's experience of being excluded from adult conversations further illustrates the societal expectation for stigmatized individuals to conform to social norms and refrain from openly discussing menstruation. This resonates with Goffman's concept of impression management, where individuals strive to pass as members of the dominant group and downplay their stigmatized associations with menstruation (Goffman, 1963).

### Jokes and Remarks

Subsequently, during the participants' interactions in daily life, they have encountered various experiences in the form of jokes and remarks about menstruation. “Jokes, and joking as a unique exchange of discourse, a social process, and a form of the exercise of power” (Newton, 2016, p. 147). These encounters with jokes not only reveal the presence of negative stereotypes but also underscore the significant role of jokes as a unique exchange of discourse, reflecting the exercise of power within social interactions. Newton (2016) categorized jokes into three types, each serving a different purpose; the innocent joke, the hostile joke and the obscene joke. One of the participants mentioned,

“I feel like girls understand more. For example, I have a friend who menstruates like the same week as I do, yeah. So like, sometimes we just get it. Sometimes we just look at each other. And we know. That's why you were so mad today” (Participant A2, 2023, p. 69).

It sheds light on the fact that the participants feel more comfortable joking with other menstruating individuals, as they put it, “we just get it” (Participant A2, 2023, p. 69). The participant continues,

“But when a guy says it, he's like, he says it like in a sarcastic joke way we don't really like sometimes. Sometimes this can be really mean. Like, oh, it's because you're on your period or oh, you're so grumpy today did you get your period? (...) Sometimes they say like oh. You're mad, probably you're on your period.” (Participant A2, 2023, p. 69).

The participant experience the jokes from the male counterpart as more sarcastic. These sarcastic remarks insinuating that a woman's emotions or behavior are solely attributed to her menstrual cycle reflect a demeaning attitude and simultaneously it reinforces the power dynamics within the society. By making such comments, men contribute to the marginalization and invalidation of women's experiences. In the context of obscene jokes a participant mentioned,

“I remember hearing like school boys in my school like. Did you hear? She had her period in that class and it was all like she got stained and her skirt ahah. (...) But I remember hearing later after that class finished that the guys from that class were talking about. Oh, and did you hear she had she? Got her period in class hahahah and she well, she had to go change and it was like bloody and eew” (Participant G2, 2023, p. 86).

It demonstrated how the topic is humorously exploited multiple times with a touch of immaturity and ignorance, as the idea of stains amusing, which can happen to any menstruating individual. The participant continues to share their experiences in the context of school,

“even when you're small and the guys are like, oh, who's had their period and who has it and it's like a bit of a joke to them (...) Because of the ignorance, because it's not really talked about in an open, completely open way and it's made to feel like it's a taboo, or like it's a



uhuh. (...) when I was in school, it did feel like. Hide it or they're going to make fun of you” (Participant G2, 2023, p. 85-86).

The participant's experiences in the context of school shed light on the prevalence of a childish and jokey atmosphere surrounding the subject of menstruation. This atmosphere is primarily influenced by the lack of open discussions and the perpetuation of a taboo surrounding menstruation. Due to the ignorance that often surrounds discussions about menstruation, it is treated as a taboo subject, resulting in an environment where jokes and mockery thrive. As a result, humor derived from these jokes tends to exploit the natural bodily process, reinforcing existing stereotypes and perpetuating the notion that menstruation is something to be ridiculed or made fun of. This perpetuates the marginalization of menstruating individuals, creating an atmosphere where impression management in the form of hiding one's menstruation becomes necessary to avoid becoming a target of jokes (Goffman, 1963).

### Biological Perspective Within Society

Notably, women's descriptions of their own menstruation often centered on the biological aspects and lacked deeper exploration of personal experiences. When asked about their menstruation the participants sometimes required multiple questions or rewordings of the same question regarding their menstruation (Research Diary, 2023). Nonetheless, when we had talked for a while we would sometime redirections into menstruation again. The focus on the biological aspect can be seen in participants' responses, such as, "Oh well, every month I have my menstrual cycle. Duration? It lasts me 3 to 5 days" (Participant A2, 2023, p. 58). This suggests a prevailing perception that menstruation primarily relates to the physical process and duration, rather than encompassing the multifaceted experiences and impacts on individuals' lives. The limited emphasis on the psychological and emotional dimensions of menstruation within societal discourse is echoed in participants' recollections of their education. One participant mentioned, " Since we were in a Catholic school (...) They didn't really teach it to us. They were kind of like a little scared about biology" (Participant A2, 2023, p. 70). As menstruating individuals were limited by the information provided by the school, this highlights the deficit discourse and devaluation of menstruating people because a deficit-oriented approach emphasizes the biological aspects of menstruation while neglecting

the psychological and emotional aspects. Leaving out discussions about emotional impact, personal experiences, and societal attitudes surrounding menstruation leaves individuals with an incomplete understanding and may internalize the idea that menstruation is shameful or hidden. Furthermore, a participant stated

"although they had already explained it to me at school. They don't say, how you going to feel. What's going to happen. Just biologically they tell you. The whole process. How it's going to be. But that's as far as it goes" (Participant A1, 2023, p. 62).

Another participant explains how the books looks like,

"In the page of the Biology book (...) is the female reproductive part, the male and they do not explain how the hormonal changes, it is only like Ah well every 28 days is the cycle and nothing more" (Participant M1, 2023, p. 4).

It takes in the notion of impression management as the social pressure from society goes into the school system to minimize the stigmatization of menstruation by not providing enough information. The school leads to impression management efforts aimed at conforming to dominant societal expectations, which the normals prefer not to talk about the subject in general (Goffman, 1963). As a participant stated "Mexico is a very sexist country" (Participant M1, p. 11). This highlights the prevailing cultural norms and sexism in Mexico. Where some participants continue to highlight the influence of education and societal attitudes, stating, "it's because of education in Mexico they are very macho. Here in Mexico yes, right now the best has changed a little, but most are macho" (Participant E1, p. 33). The cultural limitations around discussing menstruation were also acknowledged, with one participant stating, "That culturally we cannot move beyond that" (Participant R2, 2023, p. 27). The limited educational emphasis on the psychological and emotional aspects of menstruation contributes to a narrow understanding of this natural bodily process. Menstrual education must address the multifaceted experiences and impacts of menstruation on individuals through a comprehensive and inclusive approach that goes beyond the biological discourse.

## More Open Positive Conversations

Additionally, diversity discourse aims to minimize the significance of stigmatized traits (Manago et al., 2022). As a result, these discourses tend to downplay the importance society places on stigmatized aspects of people (Manago et al., 2022). Participant N2's reflected upon how the influence of different environments have on one's perception of menstruation, "So kind of like you feel like a different depending on which kind of environment you're in, how people treat you, yeah" (Participant N2, 2023, p. 123). This quote highlights the impact of societal attitudes and treatment on individuals' experiences of menstruation. It suggests that the diversity discourse, which treats menstruation as a value-neutral trait, can lead to varying experiences depending on the acceptance and understanding of menstruation within different environments. The participant continues with positive experiences within their group of friends,

"Just they talk like about like. I don't know like talking about guys. Yeah, yeah. Feels like that, like talking about menstruation it's like, oh, my God, I got my menstruation, Oh my God me too. And we're like all happy, like, Oh my God. Hey, we connected like, yeah, it's weird. But like, it's funny too, because we talk like, oh, como te vas, how do you feel?" (Participant N2, 2023, p. 124).

This exemplifies how open and joyful conversations about menstruation can foster a sense of connection among individuals. It suggests that within a diverse and accepting group, where menstruation is normalized and openly discussed, individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves and sharing their experiences without stigma or judgment. Other participants share similar experience, but with male friends by saying the perception of open-mindedness and support from male peers. They state,

"I also imagine that many guys that I know from here... I feel like the open-mindedness of them, I don't know, it might not happen, you know, it might be completely like. Oh, help her. Or even like, tell a girl hey your friend has, like you know something. I don't know. But still with the feeling of like of. Like oh, she needs help with because she has her period, although it's a normal thing" (Participant G2, 2023, p. 87).

This quote suggests that some male individuals in their social circle demonstrate an understanding and willingness to support others during menstruation, challenging the stigma and contributing to a diverse and inclusive environment. However, the participant acknowledges that menstruation is a normal biological process. However, the phrase "she needs help" (Participant G2, 2023, p. 87) suggests that there is still a perception of needing assistance or support when someone is menstruating, which implies that it is seen as a deviation from the norm or something requiring special attention, which reflects the tendency of diversity discourses to downplay the societal significance placed on stigmatized aspects of people, as mentioned in Manago et al. (2022). This highlights the societal stigma associated with menstruation. As the participant G2 states "although it's a normal thing," they recognize that menstruation is a natural occurrence. However, the use of the word "although" implies that despite its normalcy, there is still a need to address or assist someone during their period, implying a deviation from the expected or normative experience. Another participant emphasizes the importance of open communication within the family regarding menstruation, stating, "It is different because, for example, my children do know, my men children and it is something that I do not hide or we do not hide my daughter or I in my house" (Participant E1, 2023, p. 35). This emphasizes the role of education and transparency in shaping positive attitudes towards menstruation and menstruating individuals. By openly discussing menstruation with their children, Participant E1 contributes to the diversity discourse by challenging the norm of secrecy and creating an environment where menstruation is accepted as a natural and normal part of life.

### Progression within Mexican Society

Subsequently, discourse of pride are transforming forces that highlight stigmatized features while rejecting normative standards (Manago et al., 2022). Through these discourses, individuals are empowered to embrace their stigmatized identities and take pride in them. Cultural narratives can be reshaped and menstruation becomes more positive by challenging societal expectations and reclaiming agency through discourses of pride. Participant J expresses a self-care routine during their menstruation, emphasizing the importance of nurturing oneself during this time. They state, "Right now, like the first day, I don't do anything like I stay in my home like I treat myself like I eat a lot and I'm just like, chilling, drinking a lot of water" (Participant J, 2023, p. 97). It demonstrates an active choice to

prioritize self-care and create a positive environment during menstruation, reflecting a sense of agency and pride in their experience and making it a positive moment. The participant continues by sharing their encounter with their tantra teacher who has embraced a free cycle approach. They explain,

"tantra teacher (....) Well, she learned how to have, like, a free cycle. So, like, she knows when she's gonna like release. So she goes to the bathroom and she releases. And then like she doesn't have to wear like nothing" (Participant J, 2023, p. 99).

By having this tantra teacher who is a gate holder of informations of different alternative practices related to menstruation the participant stated that "And well, I'm trying to train myself to, like, go to the bathroom and release and then like to have a free cycle" (Participant J, 2023, p. 99). This quote highlights the empowerment derived from understanding and tracking one's menstrual cycle, leading to a sense of liberation from traditional menstrual products. Additionally, it exemplifies how embracing alternative practices can contribute to a positive and prideful relationship with menstruation. Additionally, a participant stated,

" So the first day I just don't use pads, because I just menstruating like a little bit. Yeah, so I just put my bikini on and go the beach because all the morning I go in with my baby." (Participant N2, 2023, p. 121).

By embracing the surrounding and their daily activities, they challenge the misconception that menstruation should be restricted or limited. Instead, they choose to prioritize their own comfort, demonstrating pride in their menstrual experience by embodying an alternative solution, such as wearing a bikini instead of a traditional product on their first day of their menstrual cycle. Subsequently, a participant emphasized the importance of education and respectful dialogue around menstruation,

"I think you have to talk to the boys and say this, this is going to happen with your body and it's going to happen with the girls' body. So please don't make jokes about it and don't laugh about, you know, respect the girls" (Participant M1, 2023, p. 95).

It underscores the significance of challenging societal norms and educating others about menstruation, especially the male gender, as one of the participants stated

“because right now my sister’s son, the smallest one asked his mum. What did they ask, what do they want and she said they are asking about menstruation. Argh ok, he already know, he has already seen it in school (...) although my husband is like Ay, I taught my children something different.” (Participant E1, 2023, p. 42).

This is aiming to foster an environment of respect and understanding regarding menstruation, as it aligns with the discourse of pride by promoting open discussions and advocating for the recognition and celebration of menstruation as a natural and normal part of life.

#### Summarize of Exploring the Different Positions upon Stigma Positions

To summarize, the analysis highlights the complex interplay between societal discourses, stereotypes, power dynamics, and personal experiences surrounding menstruation. The data indicates three different positions upon stigma surrounding menstruation such as devaluations of emotions, jokes and remarks and a biological lens within Mexican society. The devaluations of emotions perpetuates negative stereotypes, devalues menstruating individuals, and emphasizes conformity to social norms, where the women as to conform to fit the normals. Jokes and remarks reflect the power dynamics within the society and it reinforces marginalization through the use of sarcastic or obscene comments in regards to menstruation. The biological lens focuses primarily on the physical aspects of menstruation, neglecting the psychological and emotional changes, therefore, this limited understanding reinforced by the educational systems through the societal attitudes from the normals that treat menstruation as taboo and maintain gender-based expectations and inequalities. However, there is a progression of more open positive conversations within the society, which helps to minimize the significance of stigmatized traits. Nonetheless, even within diverse and accepting groups, there may still be a perception of needing assistance or special attention during menstruation, reflecting the societal stigma associated with it.

Expanding upon the previous analysis of the discourses surrounding menstruation that the participants experienced. The next section delves into the embodied experiences of the participants. By examining the personal narratives of the participants, we aim to gain deeper insights into the embodied experience surrounding the female circle.

## Exploring the Subjective Relationship around Menstruation

Using a phenomenological approach, our gathered data is reflected by each participant's individual experience with their menstruation. The goal was to explore their experience and feelings towards menstruation, thus we asked them to describe their menstruation step by step. Our findings show a disconnection to menstruation, it shows an individual and then a different individual when having their menstruation, further a clearly biological approach to menstruation, a sexualization of women when they first experience menstruation and a lack of knowledge. In this part of the analysis we will try to delve further into these topics using ecofeminism as the framework for recognizing these tendencies and explore them further.

### Duality of Me vs Me on My Period

The notion of Me vs Me on my period “There is me on my period and me outside of it” (Participant G2, 2023, p. 84) explores the disconnection between the females and their menstruation which could be linked to the distinctly biological attitude towards menstruation. According to Eco Feminism, this notion could be due to the idea that females are within a stronger connection to nature than males, which is seen in the use of the language. The data indicates that the females and nature as a connection, allows males to justify marginalizing females and nature, by this marginalization females are not allowed to experience their menstruation further than a biological experience, which is seen in our data,

“Normally, that is, the first day is always the strongest, that is, but since before as this part of the premenstrual syndrome lasts me, I think that about 3 days as I already begin to feel irritable and a little inflamed abdomen” (Participant R, 2023, p. 14)

and

“Well, usually it's always. It's never late. I mean, it's never never late the only time it was late, I was on vacation. (...) But it's normal and the first two days. It's a lot, yeah. It's very heavy, very heavy and I usually didn't have cramps, but now I do, and it's mostly one day before I start, yeah. But then, after the third day it. Normal and I can. I can feel like safe with what I have on. And the first two days are always. A bit scary” (Participant A2, 2023, p. 66-67)

In the quotes it is clear that when asked to describe their female cycle, it is described as very biological, there is very little emotion within the context only what happens on which day of the cycle, however the quote from participant A2, words like safe and scary appears, which describes some sort of emotion towards menstruation, nevertheless it is mainly biological, arguing that females within the Mexican context are used to not speak about their feelings during their menstruation, which also explains the disconnection to their menstruation, hence they are not allowed to feel it, thus their emotions are neglected

“No, well. When you're in a bad mood. It's like Ay. It's in your days in your period here in Mexico, it's that of Ah, you're in your days because you're angry even if you're not in your days because you're in bad, it's like a way to bother you. You are in your days” (Participant E1, 2023, p. 40)

Indicating that the only reason females could be in a bad mood would be by having their menstruation, thus neglecting their feelings. Further reproducing the macho society that many of the participants express, to which the male is above female and nature as suggested by ecofeminism earlier in this section.

### Period = Womanhood

We found that many participants express a sexualization of females as soon as they receive their first period. As a participant stated, “You are big. Eh, I mean, you're not a girl anymore. We say that you're already a woman” (Participant E1, 2023, p. 34), which according to many participants means that one must be careful now, since males now will be sexually interested in them, therefore they must be careful “As for sexual relations, it is the girl who has already gotten it and who is already menstruating there you have practically a girl becoming a mother” (Participant L, 2023, p. 107). They argue that this sexualization and lack of knowledge of the young females leads to them becoming pregnant, since they do not know that they can become mothers when they receive their menstruation. Accordingly, this sexualization can be argued to be Ecofeminist postcolonialism, since the theory describes the notion of males taking ownership of females and nature, thus colonizing their body and the land, which is then justified by the lack of connection that males have to nature, which is



again seen in the gathered data “they sexualize you, they don't see you as a person” (Participant R2, 2023, p. 24), within a Mexican context our participants argue that this Ecofeminist postcolonial is due to a macho society, a patriarchal society, which marginalizes females and nature, which according to Ecofeminist theory stems from the lack of identity of the males.

### The Lacking of Information in One's Social Circle

Furthermore, the data shows a clear lack of knowledge of sexual relations and menstruation. The topics are taboo, hence something that is not talked about in Mexico. Most participants learn about their menstruation from their mothers, however it occurs that the knowledge shared by the mothers is mostly practical, many participants explained the knowledge their mothers past as biological, what will physically happen to their body and what changes they will now go through as seen in the quotes

“Yes, Ah, no, when I mean they explain and it stays like that. Aha, and when you get it is when they already explain to you, what you have to do, use the feminine towels” (Participant E1, 2023, p. 32)

and

“No, because she was there, well my mom was the one who I talked to, because I was very young and said to myself, why is this happening to me? It was not the best moment, because I was a girl. Even then, when this happened to me, she was the one who told me, Look, this was going to happen to you every month, you're going to feel strange, you have to use this, well I had to be careful, how I had it, how I had to use it, Well, now the feminine pad and all that” (Participant E2, 2023, p. 115).

Both quotes show knowledges shared between mothers and daughters, which is in rather simple manner, others explained that due to their family constellation being catholic, their mothers would not talk to them about menstruation until they themselves asked about it once the educational system started to teach them about it,

“Well, it's like secret, you know, and the school need to teach you that. No moms are kind of ashamed to talk to those topics. Well, that was my family because I grew up in a really conservative and Catholic family, so my mom start talking to me about the menstruation when I ask her when the school start to teach me so she answered all my questions, but she never started” (Participant M2, 2023, p. 94).

Whereas other participants express that their mothers told them that they now must be careful, since they now are seen as a women which means that males will now be interested in them in sexual ways, showing the reproduction of the Ecofeminist postcolonial aspect of males being above females, further in the act of having to hide the menstruation products, “Aha, that is, they wrapped them in a paper and gave them to you like that in the store so that people did not know what you had bought” (Participant E1, 2023, p. 35), however the participants explain that this hiding of the products within the store is not applicable any longer, but had a clear embodied impact on the participant. Moreover, both the minimal knowledge shared between mother and daughter, and the hiding of the products shows the embodied experience that the participants have, that the experience and knowledge of the mother is shown and engraved in the daughter. This embodied experience is further present within the research diary, to which it is clear that the females are uncomfortable talking about their menstruation, hence a lowering in their voice and a tendency to look around as if to make sure no one is listening “Speaks a bit lower when talking about menstruation. Looks at the table a lot while talking (...) Laughs quite a lot maybe in a nervous way” (Research Diary, 2023, p. 23). According to Ecofeminist this tendency is due to the embodied materialism, meaning that the females have seen and thus applied this need to hide their menstruation as a result of a patriarchal society.

### The Lack of Information in the School System

Supplemental, the knowledge shared within the educational system is plainly biological, the participants express the education as learning about the organs, which organs does a female have and which does a male have, however nothing of the emotional or rather hormonal changes that the students will explore

“In the school there is a basic subject called natural sciences. So, in primary, between the third year and fourth year, you are 8 years old, 9 years old or so. And they begin to explain to you, right? as they begin to define the body of the man, right? the body of the woman, and already begin to describe right their organs, female organs, male organs. And they begin to say, the woman goes through a physiological process where she will ovulate and have a bleeding, right?” (Participant R1, 2023, p. 18)

Moreover some participants explain this by coming from a catholic society where such a topic is much of a taboo, therefore they do not touch much upon the subject,

“Yes, here in school menstruation are taught at 7 years and for the same reason that girls become pregnant, very young and had no knowledge of. That when menstruation arrived they could already have children, and that they have to take care of themselves and do certain things, but here in Mexico not and the teachers are already many, most are great and they are sad to talk about it with the students” (Participant E1, 2023, p. 42).

Further that due to the taboo of menstruation, the teachers feels uncomfortable talking to the students about it, thus do they keep it mainly biological, which according to Ecofeminist theory suggests that due to the connection of females and nature, there is no need to explain further than the biological, because it is a natural thing that females goes through and due to patriarchy males does not need to understand it further than the females bleed due to a physical development. Moreover, this lack of information on menstruation allows the marginalization of females and nature to continue since it leaves the females oppressed with little knowledge and understanding of their body.

### The Sudden Surprise of Menstruation

Correspondingly, the clear lack of information indicates that when the menstruating participants first receive their menstruation, they are not prepared for it, meaning that some of the participants are shocked and scared when they first get it,

“The first time I learned about menstruation was really scary because I was 12 and I just started bleeding and I was so scared thought there was something wrong with me. I was like

we should go to the hospital. Like right now! And then my mom explained everything to me. She said no, you know, in biology, you have to see this and then this is works like this. And she showed me some pictures. She mostly explained what she does every month. And then I was, I think in 3rd grade. So we were just starting to see it. And since we were in a Catholic. We didn't really like. They didn't really. Teach it to us. They were kind of like a little scared about biology” (Participant A2, 2023, p. 70),

in the quote above it is clear that the lack of knowledge about menstruation scared the participant, she further described that she thought she was going to die, because she was bleeding, and wished to go to the hospital to get examined. This lack of knowledge leaves the menstruating individual alone and scared once they first receive their menstruation, believing there is something wrong with them. Additionally, creating a traumatic experience to which they will build a negative attitude towards menstruation and further feels the need of hiding it, which was also seen when interviewing the participants within their body language as mentioned earlier in the analysis, once more reproducing the embodied experience of having to hide their natural menstruation, because it is not something to be talked openly about in a Mexican context. Moreover, this embodied experience where the females first receive their menstruation, they are told how to manage it by their mothers, usually by using pads, thus when they are firstly exposed to this product it seems as their will stick to that product throughout their life out of convenience, hence it is what they know, “Well, it's only this one, because it's cotton yes, and I use it because my mom used it then like it was aha” (Participant M1, 2023, p. 8). Additionally, they find it scary to use other products such as the menstruation cup,

“Nothing more than pads. I'm afraid to use the. The cup, because as menstruate a lot, I feel that it is not going to hold, and I don't use the tampon unless I had to go to the sea, but nothing, but regularly I do not use it” (Participant N1, 2023, p. 74)

Multiple participant express this emotion towards the cup, some argued that it was due to a lack of knowledge about the cup, arguing that they do not know how to use it or find the right cup, others express that they found it as too time consuming to use the cup, since they would have to wash it and clean it every time they used it, further it being too expensive even if they knew it would be financial beneficial in the longer run thus most continue to use pads or

tampons, however mainly pads, since it is frowned upon to use a tampon due to the conservative catholic society,

“No, because here is another taboo. That the tampon is not supposed to be used before you haven't had sexual relations, before having sexual relations, you can't use it. I don't know from the idea, like Catholics, that it is a device that enters your vagina. like, you can't that, like it's socially, that you can't. In other words, if you already use it, you are no longer a virgin and in Mexico, it is very satanized” (Participant M1, 2023, p. 3)

Another aspect of the Ecofeminist postcolonial thought implemented in Mexican society in which the male has ownership of the female and nature, which is also visible in the research diary within our daily reflections, we discussed the reaction we encountered with males when describing our project, most males, younger and older, got uncomfortable and started to make bad jokes surrounding the topic (Research Diary, 2023).

### Managing Menstruation Sustainably

Furthermore, we found in the gathered data from the participants, a wish to use more sustainable products such as the cup or the menstrual panties,

“Yes, I think I would like to use something more like the Cup, which does not generate waste (...) I think it is better because it does not generate waste and does not pollute. ” (Participant M1, 2023, p. 9)

Indicating that there is a want for such products as some participants wish to adopt to a more sustainable lifestyle by changing their single use product to a reusable one, suggesting that there is a wish to preserve the environment, which according to Ecofeminism could be argued to be due to the duality between females and nature. However it seems that the culture is not allowing the change of products that the participants ask for, since it is not looked well upon to use tampons, which could be seen to be the same concept as a tampon. Further there seems to be a lack of information spread on how to use a cup, clean it, find the right size and positioning the cup within the uterus,

“Since I started (...) at the age of 12 as that only now, as that product, that product, because it is like very normal. I think here in Mexico is just that product. And the cup and tampon, those things are not normal here. Well, it's not, it depends, well, most don't, maybe few people (...) Therefore, I have never tried another product” (Participant M1, 2023, p. 8)

Additionally, there is a lack of a fitting infrastructure within the society for reusable products, since these types of products needs extra care and areas to which females can sanitize them before inserting them again, further with the menstruation panties. It is crucial for them to be completely dry before using them again, thus would the females in Mexico struggle to use such products, since they lack clean water, a safespace to change and enough money to have multiple menstruation panties to wear while the used ones dry, “Had to leave interview because they didn't have water and the baby needed water” (Research Diary, 2023, p. 6). As seen here it is quite common for the local community to not have access to clean water, which makes it difficult to properly clean reusable menstrual products. Furthermore, it seems that what was most important to the participants were not the environment itself, but rather comfort and many participants argued that it was more comfortable to use natural pads,

“For me not and then sanitary pads. And they make them, I think of synthetic materials. And they give me allergies. And it will come to me as an itch. I've been buying a brand that is Mexican that makes them like 100% cotton. And then no, they are not full of chemicals and then that makes me not itchy, like that material is more accepted by my body in that part. I think it has already been years of using the same” (Participant N1, 2023, p.74).

As participant N1 argues the pads are not made of cotton itches and gives them allergies, which they find uncomfortable, thus they have been using cotton pads for years in order to feel comfortable while menstruating, which other participants have also mentioned.

Nonetheless, it is hard to manage one's menstruation in a sustainable manner, when the infrastructure, the culture and the amount of information is not available. However, a participant mentioned how her yoga teacher have gained the knowledge of free bleeding and learned to manage their menstruation by only releasing blood when using a bathroom, as mentioned earlier,

“Yeah, like my tantra teacher. (...) Well, she learned how to have, like, a free cycle. (...) she knows when she's gonna like release. So she goes to the bathroom and she releases. And then like she doesn't have to wear like nothing” (Participant J, 2023, p. 99).

This connects the notion of free bleeding to Ecofeminism, since by free bleeding the participant is fighting both patriarchy and capitalism, by connecting to their body and learning their cycle, but also stop the production of menstrual products.

#### Summarize of the Subjective Relationship around Menstruation

To summarize, the analysis revealed that the participants experienced a disconnection to their menstruation. This experience was predominantly viewed through a biological lens, which can be attributed to how the educational system primarily focuses on the biological aspects of menstruation, while the emotional and hormonal changes were often neglected. The lack of comprehensive information regarding the female circle contributes to the marginalization and oppression of menstruation individuals. Furthermore, this biological disconnection is reinforced by social norms that marginalize females and nature, perpetuating a patriarchal and macho society. Additionally, participants expressed the early sexualization of females upon receiving their first period. Nonetheless, the participants exhibit a limited understanding of menstrual products, often relying on the product pads due to cultural and religious influences. The analysis gives an understanding of the embodied experience of the participants, as they express discomfort and a tendency to hide their menstruation, further perpetuating societal norms, additionally understanding the different ways to manage menstruation sustainably.

The two sections from the analysis provide valuable insights into the experiences of the participants in regard to the embodied experience and the presence of different discourses surrounding menstruation. These findings from the two sections prompt a deeper reflection on the broader implications and consequences of such societal attitudes and norms.

In the following section, we will reflect upon the impact these norms have on the participants and society as a whole, we can begin to explore potential strategies for challenging and transforming these rooted perspectives.

## Reflection

For this project, we have decided not to write a discussion, but rather a reflection, since we came to the conclusion that we were not able to discuss others' feelings nor experiences however we could reflect upon them. Simultaneously, will we reflect upon present societal perspectives. Additionally, will we try to come up with new solutions that could benefit the environment and the menstruating individuals. Lastly, we will reflect upon the spread of knowledge and the male attitude towards menstruation.

## Societal perspectives

Through our conducted field work we encountered various aspects of societal attitudes and cultural beliefs that contributed to the marginalization of women in Mexico. One recurring theme that emerged from participant experiences was the prevalence of a deeply ingrained macho culture. Participants described how this cultural norm assigned higher value and importance to males, perpetuating gender stereotypes and undervaluing the contributions of females. As one participant remarked, "For families, it was like a pride, right, that the firstborn was a man. And then, as women, we didn't have that much value" (Participant G1, 2023, p. 49). Such attitudes reinforce gender inequalities and hinder progress toward gender equity, as the woman is placed second. This deeply reproduces macho culture, perpetuates gender stereotypes and enables the perpetuation of ecofeminist, wherein males continue to marginalize both females and the environment.

Another aspect that our data demonstrates is influence of the educational system in perpetuating sexism as other participants' experiences as they express "Mexico is a very sexist country" (Participant M1, p. 11) and "(...) it's because of education in Mexico they are very macho. Here in Mexico yes, right now the best has changed a little, but most are macho (Participant E1, p. 33). This underscores the influence of the educational system in perpetuating sexism. Additionally, according to an Ecofeminist approach that to fight one issue one must fight both simultaneously otherwise one can not fight either, we found that as mentioned before there is a huge lack of knowledge surrounding menstruation and products to use for managing one's menstruation.

Furthermore, our data demonstrates a cultural stigma surrounding certain menstrual products, such as tampons, which was influenced by the Catholic Church. Participant M1



stated that “In other words, if you already use this, you are no longer a virgin and in Mexico it is very demonized” (Participant M1, 2023, p. 3), consequently this cultural perspective places a significant burden on the menstruating individuals, as the socially constructed theme surrounding tampons, as it is limiting their choices and reinforcing the notion that using a tampon is socially unacceptable or *dirty*. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy to consider some of the participant’s remarks in regard to that they felt the tampon was not sanitary,

“And I might use tampons, but I'm not in. I mean, they're very convenient sometimes, but I'm I'm I don't like them that much. I feel like it's not very sanitary” (Participant G2, p. 81).

Additionally, some mentioned that they felt that the tampon was not safe to use as they stated “I used to use tampons, but I stopped using it because I heard that they were super toxic, so I stopped using tampons.” (Participant M2, p. 91). Furthermore, many females find it uncomfortable to use a tampon thus they would rather use a pad,

“Pads for me are more comfortable. Aha, and well, I think it's customary, because I have also used tampons and they also turn out to be very uncomfortable” (Participant A1, p. 59).

It could be argued that they find it more comfortable since they have been told their entire life that tampons are dirty, therefore they find them not usable., which could be argued it affected by the conservative notion within Mexico, which has been pushed forward by the catholic church, explaining why one should not use a tampon. These varied perspectives on tampons show the complex interplay between cultural beliefs and individual preferences, and knowledge surrounding menstrual products.

## Current Reusable Products Clash with Societal Norms

Subsequently, we were interested to know which reusable products were in use besides the fabric and what was known. When looking at the data the most known reusable product in Mexico was the cup, however, the cup is the same concept as a tampon, therefore many females did not find it comfortable, additionally, we found that there was not a large span of knowledge of how to use the cup or which size would fit them, therefore it seemed too overwhelming, arguably since it would also indicate that the female has had sex, which is

frowned upon. Nonetheless, most participants wished for a more sustainable product, and few had heard of period panties, which could fit the culture better. However both products have the issue of seeming like too much work for the females to manage in their everyday life, thus the product must be extremely easy to use and be able to change fast, due to the safety and comfortability of the females, many of the participants talk about a safe space, which in most cases were in their homes

“Like you just want to be like in a safe place, like into commodity. (...) My safe place for me is my house. Yeah, it's always going to be my house.” (Participant N2, 2023, p. 123)

A lack of a safe space to manage one's period makes these sustainable products difficult to use, since there is a lack of place to change products further to clean them, as the participants argued that these products may require more work than single use products as

“cups require sterilization, and reusable pads need to be fully dried before use to avoid risk of infection, complicating its use in places with high humidity. In places where clean water, electricity, or gas for heat are a challenge, these alternatives are still not ideal. Integrating access to these basic rights can then allow those who menstruate to have a more dignified MHM and access to sustainable and affordable menstrual products” (Regional Health–Americas, 2022).

These requirements for the use of such products are difficult to meet with a lack of a sanitary place to do so, it seems that there is a lack of infrastructure that allows females to use reusable products even if there is a wish to try them. Further, these single-use products are unhealthy for the female body since they are produced with a large amount of plastic which the body can absorb easier by vaginal transmission, thus can the tampon or pads easily transmit toxic plastic than if one were to orally absorb it (Ason, 2022). Which was also the concern of the participants. According to our participants the most important notion for the participants when menstruation management is comfort and undemanding, therefore they tend to turn to single-use products mainly pads, however many of them use natural pads since the participants found them more comfortable and found the environmental improvements of the natural pads as a benefit.

Accordingly, we found it more useful to create products that are in single-use format, however for the production to be more environmental as well as the material since feminine

products to manage menstruation are manufactured of 90% plastic (Ason, 2022). Furthermore, menstruating individuals on average menstruate for 38 years resulting in a use of about 10.000 feminine products in their lifetime (Regional Health– Americas, 2022). Thus, with half the world's population menstruating, the amount of pollution being released is large, therefore the products have high importance when it comes to the environment. Inspired by a concept of the book *Den Bæredygtige Stat* in which they suggest to use Karl Marx's idea of surplus value and turning it into surplus nature value (Willig & Blok, 2020, pp. 66–67), in which companies increase nature space further than what they need to produce their product thus also decrease their CO2 emissions. Accordingly, we suggest a personal is the political approach, since these private issues have an impact on society, further these issues are larger than the individual and in order to shift to a different type of production, we believe that the government must be included, thus force the production of menstrual products to align with a sustainable measure. Therefore, following the ecofeminist core by both making the products easier for menstruating individuals to manage their menstruation, but also fighting plastic for the sake of the environment. However one participant explained another way to manage one's menstruation that contains none of the above mentioned products,

“tantra teacher (...) Well, she learned how to have (...) a free cycle. So, like, she knows when she's gonna like release. So she goes to the bathroom and she releases. And then like she doesn't have to wear like nothing" (Participant J, 2023, p. 99)

Which is free-bleeding, a way to manage one's menstruation by learning to know one's body and the signs it gives, thus one can learn to control the blood flow and only release when using a toilet but relaxing the pelvic floor (Wiebe, 2019). This way of managing a menstruation is within the core idea of Ecofeminism, since it fights both the patriarchy and capitalism by ending the production of menstrual products and thus saving a large amount of plastic use, further by allowing females to connect to their bodies and not neglect their natural bodily experience, rather embracing it.

## Implications of Gendered Knowledge

Another aspect that we wish to reflect upon is according to the participants, we found that many males in Mexico do not have a lot of knowledge surrounding menstruation. It seems that they do not wish to know much about it due to a belief that it does not concern them, since they do not experience a female cycle,

“I'm telling you, it depends a lot on the family, no. If, your family is closed-minded. Well, it can greatly influence menstruation, because you can't ask your brother, a man, or your father, a man, to buy you some pads because (...) you take care of it, you're a woman, you take care of do. It's like exclusion. Ah, you are a woman, you take care of that” (Participant R1, 2023, p. 17).

This confirms the core of Ecofeminism in which males believe they are above females and nature since they are of belief that it does not concern them, however, menstruation affects females' daily life and with the products currently being used, it has an impact on the environment as well, thus are they elevating themselves above females and nature and marginalizing females and nature. Further this lack of openness towards menstruation and being able to talk openly about it can lead to negative feelings towards menstruation for the menstruating individual,

“negative feelings towards menstruation usually start early in children's lives and can be increased due to the lack of discussion with their family members, resulting in limited information and sometimes misinformation on the topic. Lack of knowledge leads to insecurity and low self-esteem, which can be further exacerbated without access to menstrual products and proper hygiene management” (Regional Health– Americas, 2022).

Using a personal is the political approach, we believe would be fitting in order to spread information, by implementing such knowledge in the educational system, to make sure both males and females have access to information, since it could lower the stigma connected to menstruation. Therefore by males not taking an interest in menstruation, they reproduce the societal hierarchy in which females are below males further allowing females to feel insecure due to their menstruation leading to many young females not attending school when being having their menstruation nor attending as many social events due to the risk of

embarrassment (Philipp, 2021) as our participants points out “Now if you get dirty soon, if you had an accident and you get dirty, it's like they see you and they start to judge you” (Participant R1, 2023, p. 16). This is further seen in the research diary since it was obvious during the interviews that the participants were not comfortable talking about their menstruation, “Seems serious, but also nervous laugh. looks a bit conscious talking about it.... seems to be joking a lot while talking” (Research Diary, 2023, p. 8-9). Thus when the participants were joking, laughing, lowering their voices, and checking their surroundings whilst talking about their experience with menstruation and their surrounding society, affecting menstruating individuals' well-being. Additionally, the multiple of the 8 dimensions is at harm from such experience as the participants describe since almost all of the dimensions are affected when an individual is menstruating, further by menstruating in an unsafe environment. The notion of emotions is affected by the negation of the menstruating individual's emotions when it comes to menstruating, instead, they experience becoming a joke, further the physical aspect by the sexualization and strictly biological approach they meet in schools and in conversation with their mothers. Furthermore, the lack of a way to properly clean reusable products affects the health of the menstruating individual, which then also affects the environment since pads contain 90% plastic (Ason, 2022), which then has to be removed from the earth since it is not made to be recycled yet. The intellectual notion is affected since many young girls do not attend school while having their menstruation, due to the risk of embarrassment if they were to bleed through their products, which also affects their social aspect since their relations will be affected when they are made fun of for having their menstruation. The occupational dimension is further affected since the menstruating individual has to attend work, due to a lack of the law protecting females when menstruating, thus is there a culture to which an employer would reward a male employee over a female in the asset of salary even with the same qualifications as mentioned by one of the participants

“Ah, that you as a woman. Like what. Even though men and women have the same academic level, it's like we're not the same, that is, no, no, we don't earn the same, women don't earn the same as men, even though they have the same level of studies” (Participant G1, 2023, p. 50).

This also affects the financial dimension, since it will be more difficult to find a job, further are the feminine products expensive, thus is it, not all women who can afford the single-use product, however without clean water, this again affects the physical aspect

(Colorado State University PUEBLO, n.d.), thus while earning less the menstruating individuals also have to spend more in order to manage their menstruation as a participant mentions,

“we earn 30% less than men doing the same work and the same hours, so imagine earning this less this salary and having more expenses because it is an expense that is for all women, for your whole life.” (Participant M1, 2023, p.11).

### Summarize of the Reflection

To summarize, the issue of period poverty in Mexico, the lack of knowledge about menstruation, and the male attitude towards it. Furthermore, the cultural perspective in Mexico, influenced by the Catholic Church and a macho culture, stigmatizes certain menstrual products like tampons and restricts their use. Reusable products like menstrual cups and period panties are not widely known or used due to a lack of knowledge, cultural barriers, and a lack of safe spaces for changing and cleaning them. The lack of knowledge about menstruation and limited access to products negatively impact girls' education, perpetuate gender stereotypes, and contribute to poverty, domestic violence, health complications, and child marriage. These aspects challenge the menstruating individual as it becomes harder to manage one's menstruation. Where the ideas of a new way of managing one's menstruation in a more suitable manner through creating a new production to which companies give more back to nature than they take and only use sustainable material.

Upon the completion of our reflection and analysis, we will now present our final thoughts concerning the project and our understanding of sustainable menstruation in Mexico.

## Final Thoughts

Our problem formulation for this project report is; *How do menstruating individuals manage menstruation sustainably, while addressing the stigma associated with it?*, in this section we aim to give our final thoughts upon it. It has been and still is a difficult topic to address as the society is constantly changing, so it is like a snapshot of the contemporary situation. Furthermore, it is a theme within Mexican context where a lot of different stigma

positions are still in play, where women are being devalued due to their stigmatized attribute, which is menstruation. The normals within this snapshot use tactics such as devaluation of emotions, jokes and remarks to marginalize the stigmatized individuals. This discourse leads into the biological perspective within the educational system as well, which leads to an unideal image of menstruation. Additionally, the discourse affects the preference of products as many of the participants are not comfortable using or trying new products other than pads. This is also present in the participants' embodied experience as many of them do not feel comfortable expressing loudly their experience with menstruation and their needs, further it is also due to the embodied experience that they have while growing up as the products choice of the mother sticks with them as well, not only the products, but even the brand in this Mexican context. However, the snapshot highlights a slight progression within the Mexican context, where some of the participants are starting to feel comfortable with talking more openly with their close cycle and trying new products or ways of managing their menstruation. Therefore, to support this progression we have suggested that the government provides new materials in the educational system, so more people get access to knowledge and makes it less as a stigmatized, so that in the future as is leading to potential new ways of producing products for women, as we have suggested with a new form of production. As being a menstruating individual in Mexico one of the most important aspects is comfort.

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