

Spring 5-2017

Going with the flow: Using menstrual education as a tool for empowering post pubescent Nepali girls

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Running head: IMPACT OF MENSTRUATION EDUCATION

University of San Francisco

**Going with The Flow:
Using Menstrual Education as a Tool for
Empowering Post Pubescent Nepali girls**

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

by
GraceAnn Labaco Cadiz
May 2017

**Going with The Flow:
Using Menstrual Education as a Tool for
Empowering Post Pubescent Nepali girls**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

In

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by

GraceAnn Labaco Cadiz

May 2017

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Dr. Monisha Bajaj
Instructor/Chairperson

Date

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DEDICATION

To the 3.5 billion girls in the world who are told they cannot achieve their dreams and to the girls who still choose to pursue them. I dedicate this work to you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Monisha Bajaj, you have been my biggest inspiration in my work. I have been truly blessed to have you as a part of my academic life. Your influence on my research, pedagogy and critical analysis is immeasurable. Oftentimes, I find myself wondering, “What would Monisha do/say?” You have been truly the best professor, guide, and mentor. Thank you for all your wisdom, support and sharing your passion of education, human rights, and life. You truly represent love, authenticity, and generosity in everything you do for your community, students, colleagues, and the USF HRE and IME departments.

To my family, this is an accomplishment for our entire family. To my mother, the matriarch and foundation of my family, Elvira, you are the driving force in my pursuit to become a better woman. You have taught me what it means to be strong, and I cannot thank you enough for all the love, support, and prayers. To my father, sisters, brothers, niece, and nephews, your continuous support reminds me that I am not alone in this journey and the distance from San Francisco to you is not so far at all. Thank you for always encouraging me and pushing me towards my dreams.

To my partner, Tyler, you have been my biggest supporter in this journey. I am not sure I would have gotten this far in my work if you had not been there by my side. You inspire me to be a better person, partner, and human being. I am thankful that you not only genuinely want to know about my work, but challenge me to dive deep. I have been truly blessed to have you as my partner and my best friend.

Lastly, I must honor all of the research participants. Without their voices and their dreams, this research would not be possible. I feel blessed that they openly shared their most intimate and vulnerable experiences as well as their passions and their dreams. I hope that my work strengthens their dreams, and I pray that I have made them proud.

ABSTRACT

Global discourse and research evidence on the benefits of girl's education show that prioritizing girl's education is the most successful strategy of breaking the cycle of poverty, gender inequality, and overpopulation. Moreover, there is a growing interest on closing the gender gap in education, but there has been insufficient attention to the specific needs of girls experiencing menses or menarche within schooling environments. The beginning of menstruation represents a pivotal event in development of the adolescent girl but is under-recognized and deemed insignificant with a culture of silence present throughout the rest of their lives. While providing access to education is only part of the problem, the main interest lies in obstacles surrounding girls and their education. This paper strives to evaluate the impact of current knowledge, school experiences, and traditional education of menstruation on post pubescent Nepalese girls. Results indicated that girls are met with many challenges. Oftentimes, girls are presented with social taboos, gender expectations and marriage above continuing their education. Girls are transitioning through puberty with inadequate guidance and education on this pivotal developmental stage, physiological changes, or how to properly and hygienically manage their bodily menstruation with confidence. In this study, girls have realistic recommendations of how to improve school environments and incorporate different approaches on learning menstruation for young girls. Ultimately, girls have the pragmatic suggestions on how to improve school retention, develop self confidence, and empower other girls in order to be period proud.

Keywords: girls' education, menstrual management, empowerment, South Asia, adolescence

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There are billions of girls in the world. They are often left behind. They are thought to be weak and dependent when they are not. They have to do and be what others tell them they are supposed to be. They don't have enough self-confidence because of society's different opinions about them and how they should behave. We, girls, have to believe in ourselves if not for ourselves, but for the other billions of girls. How else are we going to change the world and (the world's) perspectives about us?

Interview, 03/01/2017

Statement of Problem

The Case of *Carrie*

During my childhood, the most iconic and public display of the start of menstruation was one of the most traumatizing scenes in the classic horror film, *Carrie*. In this scene, the main character, a high school aged girl, started to bleed while in the locker room shower. She was under the impression that she was bleeding to death. Instead of assisting and reassuring Carrie, her classmates taunted and tortured an already-terrified girl by continuously chanting "plug it up". While Carrie was grabbing for help, her classmates had thrown sanitary pads and tampons towards her and into the shower. While the first experience with menstruation is not as dramatic as this cinematic display, it appears that girls oftentimes have a less than great experience (Herz, 2006; Kirk & Sommer, 2006; Oster & Thorton, 2010; Reynolds, 2011; Sommer, 2009). This experience follows girls into adulthood where the consequences are apparent. A quote by Simone De Beauvoir is the driving force in my research journey:

In a sexually equalitarian society, women would regard menstruation simply as her special way of reaching adult life... the menses inspire horror in the adolescent girl because they throw her into an inferior and defective category. This sense of being declassified will weigh heavily upon her. She would retain her pride in her bleeding body if she did not lose her pride in being human. (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 317)

Although De Beauvoir was speaking about this issue in 1949 and the cinematic film, *Carrie*, was produced in 1976, the relevancy of menses persists.

The Background and Need of the Study

This paper investigates the negative impact of poor school experience, lack of access to schooling, the cycle of shame and medicalization of learning on post pubescent girls. Growing evidence suggests the positive impacts of educating girls in low income countries (Herz, 2006). Unfortunately, girls are still missing school for preventable reasons. Global research on menses suggests that many girls receive inadequate guidance and education including information on this pivotal developmental stage, physiological changes, or how to properly and hygienically manage their bodily menstruation with confidence (Herz, 2006; Kirk & Sommer, 2006; Oster & Thorton, 2010; Reynolds, 2011; Sommer, 2009). Global discourse and research evidence on the benefits of girl's education show that prioritizing girl's education is the most successful strategy of breaking the cycle of poverty, gender inequality, and overpopulation.

The Purpose of the Study

While providing access to education is only part of the problem, the main international interest lies in obstacles surrounding girls and their education. In this paper, I looked at the geographical region of Nepal and, with the nation's steadily declining economy and political turmoil growing, many Nepali people are unemployed and living severely below the poverty line. These circumstances deeply affect the ways in which post pubescent girls are able to experience and navigate their menstruation.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationships of adolescent girls' health, well-being, and confidence relevant to school retention, with a particular emphasis

on the intersections of post-pubescent girls' menstrual management, education, and overall school experience. Through an anthropological lens, I amplified the voices of post pubescent Nepali girls in order to understand where their education and understanding of menstruation is lacking. The findings of this study will contribute to the absence of research and literature on this topic. By drawing from individual experiences of school girls, this study investigates how the interconnectedness of school structures, education and curriculum, menstrual management tools, and self-esteem deeply affect school retention and success for post pubescent Nepali girls. This study will unpack the levels of experience and understanding that post pubescent Nepali girls have about menstruation

With this research, I will create a program that shifts the way Nepali girls view the experiences of menstruation and education. I believe that resisting dominant paradigms by creating an open dialogue about menstruation education prepares girls to know what to expect and give them the tools in order to be period proud.

Theoretical Framework

A sociocultural perspective is used to analyze menstruation through the properties of human relationships as well as cultural and individual variations in experience. By viewing menstruation as the biological and reproductive function of women, there is a negative value placed on individual variations of personal experiences and social influences managing menses. Britton (2008) describes that menstruation is an event that is affected by ritual practices and cultural attitudes that separate and define the experiences of women in contrast to men. This perspective stems from a phenomenological approach that emphasizes individual experiences over one, homogenous identity.

A phenomenological approach allows for the humanizing, individualization of perspective and understanding of the multiple experiences of all girls (Moas, 2010). Without this learning approach, girls are misinformed and thus, conform to social rules of defining femininity and menstruation. Through individual experience, this sociocultural learning enables girls to create a conceptual world that redefines menstrual experiences. This world is characterized by positivity, feelings of empowerment, and deeper mind and body connections. This can transform the relationship girls have with their bodies from a sense of disconnection to a feeling of positive connectedness. This agenda offers ways in which society can become healthier, more sensitive, and respectful and connected to the importance of the need to be in tune with oneself (Moas, 2010).

Another anthropological approach that is essential to understanding menstruation is Cultural Practice. Cultural Practice stems from lived realities of individuals. Cultural Practice originates from the intersection of multiple identities such as gender, class, and race (Figuroa & Sánchez, 2008). Cultural Practice allows for interpretation and understanding of the intersected, lived experiences. Girls are understood to be active participants and knowledge creators. By using Cultural Practice as a model, girls can understand the problematic messages of menstruation that infiltrates greater society.

By legitimizing an anthropological perspective of menstruation, society can validate experiences without compelling women to conform to norms. The information presented here should not be interpreted as a holistic view of the lives of Nepali girls; but rather it is a discussion on the challenges that affect their academic success. This study starts from understanding Nepali girls' experiences with menstruation within the frames of existing cultural notions and practices.

Significance of Study

Globally, there is a growing interest and discourse about providing access to education, creating educational opportunities, and continuing towards higher education. This paper investigates the negative impact of poor school experience, lack of access to schooling, the cycle of shame and medicalization of learning on post pubescent girls. Growing evidence suggests the positive impacts of educating girls in low income countries (Herz, 2006). Unfortunately, girls are still missing school for preventable reasons. Global research on menses suggests that many girls receive inadequate guidance including information on this pivotal developmental stage, physiological changes, or how to properly and hygienically manage their bodily menstruation with confidence (Herz, 2006; Kirk & Sommer, 2006; Oster & Thorton, 2010; Reynolds, 2011; Sommer, 2009). Global discourse and research evidence on the benefits of girls' education show that prioritizing girls' education is the most successful strategy of breaking the cycle of poverty, gender inequality, and overpopulation.

Despite its relevancy, menstruation has been highly marginalized, devalued and overly-treated. Current education and knowledge of menstruation has been restricted to viewing menstruation as purely biological and reproductive event. Societal pressures to conceal the experiences of menstruation reiterate the private, unknown territory that young girls will enter. Current research on the topics of education retention and girls experience with menstruation fail to recognize the connection between understanding one's authentic self and school success (Herz, 2006; Kirk & Sommer, 2006; Oster & Thorton, 2010; Reynolds, 2011; Sommer, 2009). Moreover, current research tends to

explore one aspect of girls needs only such as structural (lavatories, washrooms, and adequate sanitation), hygiene (sanitary materials i.e. pads, cups, tampons), or biological (reproductive health) (Oster & Thorton, 2010, & Sommer, 2009).

Limitations & Considerations

Ethical Considerations

Some ethical concerns that I had to consider for this study were consent, confidentiality, and my potential impact and influence on participant responses. I ensured that all participants had parental permission, full disclosure statement of my research process, and background information about me as well as my story and my personal journey with menstruation, before I assumed their consent. I assigned aliases to the interviewees and secured all digital files of voice recordings. To reduce my potential influence on participant responses, I continuously asked students to be as honest and authentic as possible, and I reassured the participants that the purpose of the study is to understand their experiences and the information gathered would be used to create an alternative educational program that works for future girls and their community. I hope that by revealing my authentic self and my transparency of research purpose allowed for students to be sincere and honest in order to fully participate in the research process with me.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to be considered. The study could be furthered by analysis of different educational spaces such as private versus public institutions. The experiences and opportunities of participants may vary than post pubescent girls who have attended public and not privately funded institutions. Additionally, by interviewing

a larger sample of girl participants from various educational institutions and incorporating their voice, the study may have more depth and credibility.

The study could be enhanced by including interviews or surveys from male students. By offering an alternative perspective, the study could have an in depth analysis of the ways in which menstruation affects social and academic environments. Future research should examine how menstruation indirectly impacts student overall experiences.

Because of the high influence of culture and religion on Nepali society, another limitation includes social taboos and myths which have been transmitted and perpetuated to subsequent generations including the participants in my study. The cultural taboos exist in different forms but share origins that historically practiced unequal social, economic, and cultural relationships between men and women. Although some traditions present in Nepali society promote social cohesion and unity, the presence of taboos have negatively impacted individuals, particularly women and girls. Future research should examine the ways in which Nepali society directly perpetuate menstrual myths and social taboos.

The last limitation is my own status as an outsider, a Westerner, a researcher and an individual that has knowledge of the negative impacts taboos have on society. However, I came into this research space as an American who enjoys all the privileges that this label and residency gives me. I acknowledge my own critique of an outsider with privileges. I understand that there are serious problems of governance, infrastructure, democracy, and of law and order in Nepal. These problems are not simple in themselves. Such problems are both intricate and intensely local and specific to Nepal.

Additionally, by understanding the principle of *first do no harm*, I sought to work with the community I serve and consult with them the matters that are of most concern. I understand that social change is a lifelong project, and with this research, I plan to continue to do the in depth, grassroots work on these issues in the future.

Definition of Terms

Adolescence: defined as ages 12-15.

Adolescent: Of a young person in the process of developing from a child into an adult.

Authentic Self: The deeper self, inner knowing; Living from a place of profound authenticity being rooted in your deepest beliefs, values and truth and living a life that is a true reflection of them.

Caste System (Nepal): A traditional system of social stratification; 36 castes consisting of four broad social classes or varna: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra.

Gender Inequality: Refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles.

Gender Parity: The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a socioeconomic index usually designed to measure the relative access to education of males and females. This index is released by UNESCO.

Hegemony: The domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society—the beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and mores—so that their imposed, ruling-class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm; the universally valid dominant ideology.

Human Rights: A right that is believed to belong justifiably to every person.

Menses: The time of menstruation.

Menstruation: The process in a woman of discharging blood and other materials from the lining of the uterus at intervals of about one month from puberty until menopause, except during pregnancy.

Menarche: The first menstrual period of an individual.

Patriarchy: A social system in which males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.

Post-Pubescent: Occurring or being in the period following puberty.

Privilege: A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people.

School Retention: Being held back in education, or repeating a grade. School retention is the opposite of social promotion, in which students continue with their age peers regardless of academic performance.

Structural Violence: Systematic ways in which social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage individuals. Structural violence is subtle, often invisible, and often has no one specific person who can (or will) be held responsible (in contrast to behavioral violence).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Attacking a woman or girl means attacking a possible peacekeeper, police officer, professional or prime minister. The world will never realize 100 percent of its goals if 50 percent of its people cannot realize their full potential. Without changing the mindset of men we may not be able to change this current situation. In the 21st century, truly powerful men are those who believe in and work for the empowerment of women.

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 2015

The background of this research explores the context of current, traditional education and learning of menstruation and experiences of adolescent girls. The geographical focus is in Nepal where physical, socio-cultural, and economical challenges may render girls' menstrual management, education, and social experiences exceptionally difficult. First, I will begin with an overview of Nepal's caste system and ethnic groups, current political crisis, educational system, and educational barriers. Second, I will give a general introduction to women's rights including menstrual hygiene management, sexual rights, educational rights, and right to equality. Third, I will present current menstruation knowledge and education as well as its relationship to girls' experience, participation, and success in schooling. Lastly, I will look at current research studies on their approaches to menstruation and education.

Geographical Region: Nepal

Nepal's Caste System & Ethnic Groups

The Nepali caste system is a critical part of the development of political crisis in Nepal. Nepali people are known to follow a caste system that is essential for their identity and way of life. It affects their family relations, food, dress, occupation choice and culture. The Nepali caste system plays a vital role in the social stratification of the

country. There are many castes amongst various communities mainly in the hills, valleys and the plains. The communities living in the high mountains do not follow the caste system, and these communities are mostly Tibetan migrants. There are four Varnas (main groups) and thirty-six castes including 103 distinct ethnic groups who speak more than ninety-two languages (Sharma, 2004). The four Varnas in Nepal hold specific job titles including the highest caste, Brahmin (priests, scholars, educators), Kshatriya (soldiers, governors, kings), Vaishya (merchants, farmers, artisans), and, the lowest caste, Shudra, followed by untouchables who fall outside the caste system, both of whom serve the other castes. The caste system developed a structural class divide which continues to have lower castes and/or ethnicities socio-economically unequal to those of higher castes and/or ethnicities.

In Nepal, the caste system is still intact, but the rules are not as rigid and strict as they were in the past. In 1962, a law was passed making it illegal to discriminate against other castes which led all castes to be equally treated by the law (Sharma, 2004). The caste system is slowly being abandoned because of the difficulty to practice in the modern society. However, it dominated social reality in ancient Nepal and was the social compulsion of that time. It was once a convenient mean to integrate a multicultural society into one complex system.

Political Conflict in Nepal

The political conflict in Nepal is deeply connected to the reasons why girls do not get to go to school, continue school, or further their schooling. Until February 1996, Nepal was the birthplace of Buddha who widely preached of compassion and love (Yeo, 2008). However, on February 13, 1996 the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) who was

also known as the Maoist rebellion, transformed the country of Nepal into a battlefield by starting a guerilla war against the government of Nepal. The rebellion known as People's War of Nepal has claimed the lives of more than 13,000 individuals and forced more than 100,000 residents to relocate (Yeo, 2008). The revolution was launched from six of the most impoverished and disadvantaged zones of the west. The rebellion was led by Prachandra, the Maoist party chair, whose planning united the political struggles of the CPN and similar organizations with guerilla warfare carried out by military group called the People's Liberation Army.

The aim of the movement was to take state power and create a democratic socioeconomic system by getting rid of existing feudal state structures. In the beginning, the rebellion was carried out on a small scale and confined within rural zones with minor casualties (Yeo, 2008 & Kumar, 2003). Thus, the war received little to no attention. During this time, the police were sent to the affected zones in order to handle and oversee the Maoists. As the rebellion and conflict continued, the national army was sent by the government to zones throughout Nepal. The government of Nepal attempted to organize an unsuccessful ceasefire in 2001. In 2002, the war had spread across Nepal taking over 73 of 75 zones and eliciting extensive economic losses. However, in January 2003, King Gyanendra succeeded in organizing a brief ceasefire with the Maoist rebellion. As the rebellion intensified, the political conflict became bloodier with the Maoists gaining control of most of the rural areas in 2003 (Yeo, 2008 & Kumar, 2003). The People's Movement of April 2006 forced King Gyanendra to step down from his position and enabled a peace process between Maoist and political parties. In August 2008, Prachanda was sworn in as the prime minister of the new government (Yeo, 2008 & Kumar, 2003).

During the following year, Prachandra stepped down from his position due to conflicts with new government and disagreements between the Communist Party of Nepal and other political parties. Although CPN ceased their guerilla warfare and other acts of violence, Nepal has not abandoned political activism or opportunity of revolution. The country continues to be in political unrest. The constant warfare has caused the education of the young people of Nepal to be halted and political turmoil has produced an unstable and unpredictable academic environment.

Nepal's Education System & Barriers to Education

Neighboring countries, especially India, have been of significant influence in the construction and implementation of Nepal's modern education system. In Nepal, the government education system has only been adopted since the early 1950s. In the pursuit of executing and refining the government education system, the National Planning Commission (1954), the All Round National Education Committee (1961) and the National Education Advisory Board (1968) were founded (Reynolds, 2011). Lastly, the New Education System of 1971 was designed to acknowledge government, community, and individual concern with respect to education development. The government's initiatives have allowed for widespread access to education for those traditionally ostracized. Marginalized individuals included those who had been affected by the caste system, women and girls. Historically, education was confined only to the male elite and highest castes (Reynolds, 2011). Recently, education has been declared a fundamental right and positive attitudes towards education have been more prevalent within the society and country (Reynolds, 2011; LeVine, 2006). Although the government has had success of increasing the number of schools, the conditions of schools and hope for

educational change remain low in rural areas where the majority of Nepal's population reside.

Young educational policy is only one reason girls do not get to go to school, continue school, or further their education. For young Nepalese girls, the lack of familial financial capital and the burden of early marriage play an important role in whether they get to go to school. Young girls are expected to fulfill traditionally appropriate roles such as kamlari or indentured servant, domestic worker, young bride, wife, or mother before being a student (Perczynska, 2008; LeVine, 2006). The expectation for young girls to attend school and to be able to finish their domestic work are low. Nepalese girls are either married or sent as a kamlari to a family at an early age. Child marriage rates are forty-one percent, and the average age of marriage is 13 years old (Perczynska, 2008; LeVine, 2006). When educating daughters cost too much, parents may choose not to put their daughters in school because the current cost does not justify the future returns of education (Perczynska, 2008).

The modern education system continues to carry many obstacles that are bound to culture and terrain. To ensure the safety of their daughters and to observe cultural traditions, young girls require a male escort to protect them while going to school (Herz, 2006; LeVine, 2006). Young girls may also require other modes of transport other than walking in order to ensure safety. In Nepal, the majority of parents prefer their daughters to attend schools with female teachers from their own community (Herz, 2006; LeVine, 2006). Lastly, schools that are far away from communities may require many different modes of transportation such as walking, driving, and riding a bus through difficult

terrain. Moreover, difficult terrain and distance may cause schools to not get the support or management required to upkeep school buildings, administrators, students or teachers.

Girls' access to schooling and gender disparity in education has been a high interest global issue. In recent years, it is being recognized that the existing knowledge related to girl's education and gender disparity is very limited and more studies are needed. In Nepal, thousands of girls drop out of school every year and are being deprived of their educational career. As many girls drop out of school, a large number are never sent to school in the first place. Nepal's literacy rate for children ages 6-15 year olds is 60%, of which 72% of boys and only 49% of girls (LeVine, 2006; Reynolds, 2011). The literacy rate steadily declines as children get older and the gender discrepancy widens. According to the Central Bureau for Statistics (2010), 40% of Nepali women are literate and 18% of Nepali women have a secondary education or higher (LeVine, 2006; Reynolds, 2011). Among Nepal's government leaders, only 10% are women (LeVine, 2006). Global discourse about low participation of girls in education cite culture, poverty, and society as main reasons. However, the institutional setup and policies engendering the disparity is the least attributed, and there is little information on how the institution of the educational system creates barriers and promotes gender disparity.

Women's Rights as Human Rights

In Nepal, there is a culture of silence surrounding menarche, menstruation awareness and education. Periods are shrouded in taboo and stigma, rooted in false but common beliefs. Girls on their periods are treated as something dirty, impure, and contaminating (Acharya, Van Teijlingen, & Simkhada, 2009; Levine, 2006; Regmi, Simkhada, & Van Teijlingen, 2008). Girls and women are alienated from society, family

members, and friends during their menstruation. Oftentimes, they are forced into harmful social restrictions, experience inhumane conditions and humiliation. Across Nepal, the access to basic resources generally follows socio-economic and gender lines that imply that girls are often denied the basic right to reasonable access to health and sanitation, education, and dignity (Acharya, Van Teijlingen, & Simkhada, 2009; Levine, 2006; Regmi, Simkhada, & Van Teijlingen, 2008).

Within Nepali society, women and girls are often held responsible for ensuring the livelihood of their families, siblings, relatives, and community. From a human rights standpoint, the ability of women and girls to exercise good menstruation practices cuts into the heart of dignity and gender equality (WaterAid, 2009). The lack of access to basic menstruation needs and education is an abuse of women's human rights. It is within this frame that the following section resulted in the interconnectedness of the deprivation of the right of menstruation hygiene management, the underrepresentation of females in education, and the persisting and pervasive gender inequities that exist throughout Nepali society.

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Rights

Properly handling periods or menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is not synonymous with human rights. However, menstrual hygiene management links vital human rights issues such as equality, non-discrimination, transparency, access to information, participation, and accountability (Wateraid, 2009 & Sumpter, & Torondel, 2013). Moreover, MHM includes the ability to manage menses with safety, privacy, and dignity by providing space and amplifying voices, accurate and pragmatic information, raising awareness and confidence, challenging societal views and gender stereotypes,

ability to exercise choice, negative impact on education, and access to materials, disposal, and infrastructure. Hygienically managing menstruation should not be a luxury, yet in many places of world, it is. Many women and girls have no options.

Menstrual hygiene management involves three key features: (1) information and awareness about menstruation and how to manage it with dignity; (2) adequate water and safe spaces for women and girls to stay clean during their periods; and (3) the ability to dispose of sanitary products in a cleanly and private manner (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013). Less focused aspects of MHM include access to health services, positive social standards regarding menstruation, and effective advocacy and policies. MHM is essential as women and girls face many challenges during menstruation that hinder their full potential of realizing their human rights. A biological event that half the population has or will experience creates divides and barriers to gender equality. Moreover, MHM rights are clear human rights as stated in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...Whereas it is essential, if (wo)man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law...Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge, Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction. (The United Nations, 1948)

Without practicing proper menstrual hygiene management, dignity is impossible for many women and girls.

Menstrual hygiene rights affect other aspects of the overall human rights agenda. For menstruating women and girls around the world, a focus on sanitation and hygiene is an effective way to link one vital narrative to sustain another: women's rights. Dignity is vital in the conversation of proper and private sanitation in schools for menstruating girls. By having separate washrooms with access to water, girls are able to continue their lives as normal while menstruating. In 2005, UNICEF held a summit on global sanitation issues and discussed the link between sanitation and girl's education.

Many girls are denied their rightful place in the classroom by lack of access to separate and decent toilets at school, or else the daily chore of walking miles to collect water for the family. Education for girls can be supported and fostered by something as basic as a girls-only toilets. Parents are more likely to allow their daughters to attend school if they believe that girls' safety and dignity will be protected. And fewer girls will drop out once they reach adolescence. (UNICEF, 2005)

Lastly, MHM helps amplify issues such as environmental justice by saving water and waste as well as deconstructing negative societal norms by tackling common menstruation taboos and myths in society.

The discussion on menstruation is breaking down barriers, allowing for a deeper reflection on multiple forms of inequality and gender discrimination. The average woman menstruates for 3000 days in her lifetime; however, the subject is hidden by myths and taboos. Empowering women and girls to manage their periods with dignity, is not an issue that women and girls should be left to deal with on their own. Many have argued that now is the time to move towards pioneering the efforts and raising the global standard of what girls deserve.

Sexual Rights

Sexual rights are a critical component of the human rights discourse. Human rights discourse state that every person has the freedom and is entitled to live in dignity. Sexual rights refer to the human rights associated with all aspects of sexuality and reproduction and recognized in national law and international human rights documents (Garcia & Parker, 2007; Thukral, Koeber, & Wang, 2012). These rights include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to: the highest attainable standard of health in relation to sexuality, including access to sexual health including reproductive health care services; sexuality education; and respect for bodily integrity. The responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others (World Health Organization, 2002). Because social norms related to sexuality are enforced and perpetuated by political, economic, social and cultural spheres of power, the re-imagination of what constitutes a human right is critical. Sexual rights attempts to correct exclusions and provide enforceable rights around issues of sexuality in order to emphasize common humanity over the stigma-laden history of sexuality (Garcia & Parker, 2007; Thukral, Koeber, & Wang, 2012).

Globally, record numbers of countries are now actively advocating to ensure sexual rights recognition as human rights. At the 58th Commission on the Status of Women in March 2014, country after country, including from the Global South broadly and Nepal specifically, expressed disappointment on their inability to agree on sexual rights and their commitment to keep fighting for those rights (United Nations Women, 2014). At the 47th Commission on Population and Development in April 2014, 59 countries voiced support for sexual rights during negotiations, and 58 governments

signed on to an official statement calling for sexual rights to be included in the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

Sexual violence, oppression and discrimination are among the most serious threats to human security at every level of societies including at the level of the family, the neighborhood or community, the nation-state, and the international community. In reality, sexuality affects every aspect of human development and social interaction, but the topic has been actively repressed in spaces such as education and health systems in many parts of the world (Thukral, Koeber & Wang, 2012). Behind these debates lie fundamental struggles for equality, freedom, and human dignity where ownership of the body is the value premise. Such highlights are necessary in order to classify sexual rights as fundamental and inalienable.

Education Rights

Education is one of the most powerful tools for women and girls. Education enables equal platforms in contributing to addressing forms of gender inequality and actively participating in seeking effective ways of resolving societal conditions and enhancing peace (Herz, 2008 & Asian Development Bank, 2010). Education provides women and girls with the knowledge, skills, self-worth and critical decision making vital to becoming active citizens (Asian Development Bank, 2010, pg. 21). It enables women and girls to have more social, political, and economic capital within their homes, communities, and nation. Thus, individuals without education are stripped from their human rights and their full participation in society.

Growing evidence suggests positive impacts of educating girls in low income countries. Throughout the world, education has played a key role in addressing issues

related to all forms of violence through instruction within and beyond the school walls. However, girls receive less education than boys and according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), educating girls "is one of the most important investments that any developing country can make in its own future" (1994, p. 20). Girls are not educated in part because of cultural or traditional beliefs that they will only become wives and mothers. Scarce financial resources are often reserved for boys' education as girls are kept at home to help raise younger siblings and perform domestic labor to assist their mothers, families, and communities (UNICEF, 1994, p. 22). Consequently, educational rates are immensely gender biased. A primary reason for this disconnect is that girls and women experience structural violence, the systematic ways in which social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage, within their own societies.

A human rights framework demands that the social progression and economic development of humanity must actively include all individuals of society. Educating women and girls and empowering them should be vital towards securing human rights for all as well as investing in the development of the nation. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights which was adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10th December 1948, under Article 26 states,

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom... and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of Peace. It is recognized that high-quality, basic, universal education is the basis of world health and economic security. All indicators of international progress including nutrition, infant and maternal mortality, family planning, child health, and women's rights is "profoundly affected by whether or not a nation educates its girls. (UNICEF, 1994, p. 20)

While not a panacea, education provides the positive outcomes of lower fertility, lower population rates, lower infant mortality rates, healthier children, and a more productive economy (Asian Development Bank, 2010, pg. 21).

Nepal's Human Right to Equality

Structural Violence

Evidence suggests that the expansion of women's rights can help relieve a country from poverty. Yet, historically, gender inequality deeply rooted in patriarchy, tradition, and religion has been ingrained in male dominated Nepalese society (Asian Development Bank, 2010, pg. 15). The women of Nepal remain trapped in the cycle of poverty and gender-based discrimination that has plagued the country for generations. The patriarchal system also assigns women a subordinate status and position in society (Taylor, 2015). In Nepal, a woman can run a farm in a rural area, yet have no access to the profits the land yields (The Nepal Law Commission, 1972). Currently, Nepal's laws, Constitution, and Civil Code guarantees the right to equality for both men and women, but disparities in basic right – in access to and control over resources, in employment and earnings and in political voice disproportionately disadvantage women in relation to men (Asian Development Bank, 2010). While the government has made strong advances in legal reform and institutional changes, achieving gender equality and transforming Nepal into a more inclusive democracy will also require changes in public attitudes.

The male bias has led to forms of structural violence that relegate women and girls' issues to the private realm, where they become private matters that are not addressed in larger society. Structural violence is

one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way...The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the

political and economic organization of our social world. They are violent because they cause injury to people ... neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress. (Ho, 2007, p. 3).

Thus, structural violence can be seen as synonymous with social injustice. Education would enable girls to have an equal platform in contributing to addressing forms of structural violence and actively participate in seeking effective ways of resolving societal conditions.

Structural Violence has sustained asymmetrical power relations, socio-cultural stereotypes and institutional biases against women with the binary preoccupation of male dominance and female subordination. Gender, as a social status, has therefore produced an ordinal hierarchy between men and women in terms of access to resources, power and status (Connell, 2005, p. 25). It is now understood that social exclusion is both a structural and a social problem. At a more fundamental level, violence against women and girls persists because of structural gender inequality and discrimination.

Gender inequality is shaped by deeply ingrained socially constructed gender norms and expectations in regards to behavior and the roles of women, girls, men, and boys. Patriarchy is the root informal institution that has disadvantaged women across all ethnic/caste groups and classes even though its impact varies across caste, religious and ethnic groups. It may be sustained by aspects of religion, kinship, political system, social structures, and men's control over property (land or house), income and women's labor (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity has been conceptualized as norms and institutions that seek to maintain certain men and boys' authority over women and girls and over subordinate masculinities, and thus becomes naturalized through socio-

cultural hierarchies and mediums, as well as through violence and force (Connell, 2005, p. 23). Social practices and norms at the household level are major factors in discrimination against and the marginalization of women, and they cannot be eliminated by ending legal discrimination alone.

Although there has been an increase in the proportion of economically active women, their earned income is about one-third that of men and they continue to have low access to property ownership, financial credit, and political power (Asian Development Bank, 2010, p. 17). Female participation in political processes is historically low, but due to the 33% quota for women candidates in the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections and in all state and decision-making levels, female participation has increased significantly power (Asian Development Bank, 2010, p. 18). The challenge lies in ensuring that women elected to the different political bodies are able to voice their agenda and that woman from socially excluded groups and regions are also represented in the political processes. Gender parity in enrollment has improved at all levels in education, but enrollment disparities across caste and ethnic groups increase with the level of education power (Asian Development Bank, 2010, p. 21).

As these numbers show, gender is a system of power that privileges certain groups of people and disadvantages others with the former being males and the latter females. In Nepal, this categorical imperative has produced a gendered social order in which human interaction is deeply embedded, and has subsequently been structured around. According to social constructionist feminist theory, inequality is at the core of this social order since differential valuation serves as a means to justify imbalances in the distribution of power, status and resources (Locher & Prugl, 2001). In this way,

interlinking systems of power and status operate in such a way that make men politically, economically and socially dominant, and position everyone else in a complex hierarchy of increasing disadvantage (Locher & Prugl, 2001).

Physical Violence

Physical violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic, widespread human rights violations in the world. It affects women and girls in every country, regardless of their age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, physical ability, sexual orientation or gender identity (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Violence against women and girls is perpetrated in private homes, schools, work, on the streets, refugee camps, during natural disasters, peace and conflict. At the heart of this violence lies deeply rooted gender inequality and discrimination that women and girls face in numerous aspects throughout their lives. According to the Nepal Demographic Health Survey (2011), 22 percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence at least once since age 15, and 9 percent experienced physical violence within the 12 months prior to the survey. One in ten women reported having experienced sexual violence.

A recent joint study, *Nepali Masculinities and Gender-based Violence*, (2014) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the MenEngage Alliance in Nepal found that while Nepal has a strong legal framework on criminalization of gender-based violence, the patriarchal social structure and the justice system cause challenges for victims opting for legal recourse. The study found that men witnessing violence growing up have a higher degree of propensity to use violence as an adult, unless they have other positive, non-violent role models of manhood. The majority of men, women and transgender people interviewed in the study believed that men were by nature aggressive

and polygamous (UNDP, 2014). A very high proportion of Nepali men interviewed displayed high masculinity norms and high acceptance of violence against women with 70% of men reported that a man needs to be tough and 44% believed that a woman deserves to be beaten (UNDP, 2014). Forty percent of men had used violence towards their female partners in the last year and nearly half of the men reported perpetrating emotional violence followed by physical violence (UNDP, 2014).

In Nepal, achieving substantive equality therefore requires a committed and collective effort to deconstruct long-standing gender ideologies and institutional biases against women. Because such ideologies are systematically ingrained through institutions, the advancement of women's rights and achievement of gender equality begin with equitable access to opportunities in education and educational outcomes. Additionally, equitable access to the range of opportunities presented outside of education is of similar importance to overcoming the discrimination and undervaluation of girls. By recognizing the larger processes of gender inequality that exist beyond education, such as disparities in basic rights, access to resources, economic opportunities and political representation, this research underscores the need to establish a more balanced evaluation of the social, economic and political potential of both women, girls, men and boys in Nepal.

Overview of Menstruation and Education

Menstruation and Adolescent Girlhood

Adolescent girlhood is a critical time of identity formation and a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Moreover, many girls from low income societies have little knowledge and understanding of puberty, menstruation, and sexual health

(Herz, 2006, Kirk & Sommer, 2006, Oster & Thorton, 2010, Reynolds, 2011, & Sommer, 2009). In these communities, the physical and psychological changes of puberty and menarche are issues that are silenced. Along with a lack of knowledge and understanding about menstruation among girls themselves, community and family members are uninformed with little factual knowledge on menstruation (Kirk & Sommer, 2006). In some societies, menstruation is seen as a mysterious weakness of women rather than a normal experience for post-pubescent girls (Sommer, 2009). Lack of knowledge reinforces misunderstandings and misconceptions about bodily processes and perpetuates stigmas that are attached to menstruation (Sommer, 2009). The inability to discuss experiences of menses and having limited access to information means that menstruation becomes shameful and hidden. This secrecy transitions into all aspects of post-pubescent girls' lives.

Mensuration and School Environments

Along with the practice of restrictions, another main concern for young girls are their basic safety and comfort at school. Many menstruating students confront barriers within their school environment. Some challenges include inadequate water and sanitation facilities, lack of access to water near restrooms for washing menstrual stains from clothes and uniforms, and lack of proper disposal mechanisms for used menstrual materials or waste (Kirk & Sommer, 2006). The insufficient facilities and sanitary protection may create discomfort for girls in the classroom and an inability to fully participate. In low income communities, schools do not have sufficient numbers of private, safe, and clean restrooms. According to UNICEF (1994), less than one-third of schools have separate lavatories for boys and girls. Schools without separate lavatories or

areas that girls can clean themselves properly will cause menstruating girls to not want to go to school especially during menstruation. There are additional challenges for menstruating female students including lack of self-care cleaning supplies, lack of female teachers, and insufficient supplies of adequate sanitary materials (Kirk & Sommer, 2006).

Menstruation and Practice of Restrictions

In many global communities, menstruating girls are considered untouchable with many restrictions. The restrictions of menstruation or practice of chhaupadi can immensely impact the family, community, and country. The tradition of chhaupadi is not legal, but it is still widely practiced today. In the most rural areas, girls practice restrictions during their period which includes isolation from family members and absences from school (Perczynska, 2008). The tradition of chhaupadi dictates the way that schoolgirls spend the days that they are menstruating because they are seen as unclean or impure. Some of the restrictions include not touching books, not touching males, and eating and sleeping away from other family members (Perczynska, 2008). Thus, girls who practice chhaupadi and cannot touch their books for up to seven days each month, can negatively impact their ability to learn and go to school.

Even if chhaupadi is not performed, the traditions of excluding menstruating girls from normal, daily activities or tasks and public spaces are commonly practiced. The practice of restrictions constructs significant challenges for girls who are trying to manage normal difficulties of menstruation along with the gender-related barriers in order to participate fully in society. Moreover, menstruation is frequently observed in a negative light with little to no positive images of a normal and healthy, menstruating girl.

Current Research on Menstruation

Although current research on the impacts of menarche and menstruation on girl's education remains limited, a number of small and qualitative research has explored schoolgirl knowledge and experiences of menarche and menstruation in low-income countries (Herz, 2006, Kirk & Sommer, 2006, Oster & Thorton, 2010, Reynolds, 2011, & Sommer, 2009). These studies are provoking discourse identifying some of the gaps in menarche and menstruation education, sexual health awareness, and challenging cultural taboos. Such studies aid to explain local and culturally specific attitudes and beliefs around menarche and menstruation that can guide programs and interventions. The most significant research findings include case studies from Tanzania, Nepal, and United States.

Tanzania: Experiences of Menstruation and Schooling

In Tanzania, Sommer (2009) conducted a comparative case study in rural and urban northern Tanzania that explored girls' experiences of menstruation and schooling. Sommer (2009) Tanzania study identified girl's menstrual challenges within school environments including little to no guidance and insufficient education on managing menstruation, lack of water, sanitation and disposal facilities, sociocultural difficulties, and scarcity of sanitary materials for managing their monthly menstruation. In the study, differences were seen in rural and urban communities specifically around the strength of cultural myths and silencing of menstruation. Critical to the findings were recommendations made to the Ministry of Education in Tanzania. These recommendations were solutions prompted from the adolescent girls who participated in the study and were revealed through different activities. The study included participatory

activities including writing “menstrual stories”, designing a puberty curriculum, and drawings of the ‘perfect girls’ toilet’ (Sommer, 2009).

Nepal: Impact of Menstrual Cups in School Settings

In Nepal, Oster and Thornton (2009) conducted a study in four schools located in Chitwan District, Nepal. The study explored the notion suggesting that the provision of menstrual cups or sanitary materials will increase schoolgirl’s attendance. The Nepal study discussed their findings that the provision of menstrual cups did not have a significant impact on school attendance. However, the study provided insight into menstrual-related issues and peer dynamics that hindered school attendance and participation (Oster and Thornton, 2009). Although, the Nepal study contributes to the current literature, it must be emphasized that the introduction of menstrual cups alone will not have significant impact without the accurate accompaniment of menstrual information and support.

The Curse: Medicalization of Learning

In the United States, Britton (2008) argue that, when educating women about menstruation, traditional learning emphasizes biological and reproductive functions of females. Traditional discourse and learning ignore individual variations of experiences and social influences in managing menstruation. The removed-ness of the individual woman’s story from menstruation reinforces false information, medicalization, and taboos. This disembodied perspective of learning fortify the hierarchy of truth premised on superiority of medical knowledge. Women are often in need to be “fixed” and disciplined by medicine. Women are put into one, homogenous group and menstruation as a universal process. In the article, the author’s examination of the source of primary

education on menstruation reinforce negative images of menstruation that become very powerful in female personal construct of self. The author argues that “when women talk about menstruation it’s always in a negative context, like the pain they get- it’s seen as an illness. Women take time off sick and you go to bed” (Britton, 2008, p. 651). Thus, menstruation was seen as a way to explain “out of character” actions, erratic behavior, and illness.

Summary

There is a growing interest in the global community on closing the gender gap in education, but there has been insufficient attention to the specific needs of post pubescent girls experiencing menses or menarche within schooling environments. Menstruation should not result in absences, and girls should not miss out on an education as a consequence. The beginning of menstruation represents a pivotal event in development of the adolescent girl but is under-recognized and deemed insignificant with a culture of silence present throughout their post pubescent lives. While providing access to education is only part of the problem, the main international interest lies in obstacles surrounding girls and their education. This paper strives to evaluate the impact of current knowledge, school experiences, and traditional education of menstruation on post pubescent Nepalese girls. In this review, I looked at the geographical region of Nepal including the Nepali caste system and their ethnic groups, the political environment, young educational system, and the educational barriers that follow. I introduced a general summary of women’s rights topics such as menstrual hygiene management, sexual rights, educational rights, and right to equality. Current menstruation awareness and education was presented with its relationship to girls’ experience, participation, and success in schooling. Current

knowledge and experiences were amplified with three research studies on their approaches to menstruation and education.

In conclusion, the intersection of menstruation and girls' education along with the impact of the geographic region of Nepal is of growing interest. The frame of this literature review is based on the idea that a nation's overall stability and development depends highly on how it utilizes female capacity across all aspects of society including political, economic and social spheres (Asian Development Bank, 2010). However, from what literature and research is available, it appears that Nepali girls' knowledge levels and understandings of menstruation are very low. Even fewer studies are specific to the topic of how different aspects of menstruation affect girl's success in schooling. This research is not meant to provide a complete understanding of Nepali post pubescent girl's educational experience in reference to menstruation. Instead, this literature review is to provide varied perspectives of what information already exists, and the significant role that menstruation is playing on educational experience and success. Additionally, this information will help guide me and give me the opportunity to conclude more targeted questions and explications from my field research.

CHAPTER III: THE STUDY

The interactions and interviews only deepen my understanding that the experiences of menstruation are transnational and global. I see myself in each and every intimate and fearful experience that these girls have shared. I, too, have felt shame. At the core of this, we are all connected in this way. Their stories are my stories. How do we elevate our voices and our stories? Because they are beyond powerful.

Researcher journal, 03/11/2017

The purpose of this research study was to collect the voices and experiences of post pubescent girls from the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. These narratives seek to challenge the dominant paradigms of a girl's place in society and menstruation stigmas that have existed in Nepal. The narratives provide insight into the multi-tiered relationships between school retention, self-esteem, and menstruation. Through the participatory activities, the goal was for the participants to unpack how menstruation affect their educational success, social identity, and self-confidence. Through the interviews, the goal was for the participants to identify shortcomings in current menstruation education and offer suggestions for new ways to educate girls about menstruation. The ultimate goal of this research is to empower girls and shift the ways Nepali girls view their experiences of menstruation and education in order to become period proud. I believe that educating girls heals the next generation of women and works towards the goal of healing society.

Setting of Study

The research took place in the capital of Nepal. Nepal is a landlocked country situated between India and China's Tibetan region. Nepal has a population of around 29 million as of April 2017. Nepal population is equivalent to 0.39% of the total world population. It is a multi-ethnic country including origins from India, Kashmir, Tibet,

Burma, and other Central Asian countries. Nepal is a predominantly Hindu country with 81% of the population being Hindu, 9% Buddhist, 4% Muslim, 3% Kiratist, 1.5% Christian, and 1.5% other. The country is relatively small at 147,181 square kilometers with eighty percent of its territory occupied by the Himalayas. The country is known for its mountainous and hilly topography. As discussed in Chapter II, Nepal has been deeply affected by the political conflict and rebellion, with a recent transition to new government reorganization in August of 2008 (Yeo, 2008; Kumar, 2003).

The central location where the research participants met and conducted sessions was located in the capital, Kathmandu. Kathmandu is in the middle hill region of Nepal, and is the most densely populated city with most of the nation's population. As of 2011, the population was 2.5 million. The center of all economic outputs including most of the country's industrial and commercial centers is located in Kathmandu. The majority of universities, primary and secondary schools, social services are based in Kathmandu. The city itself is comprised of many historic buildings and sites, temples, and high rise apartment buildings. Due to construction, the city has a thick layer of dust and smog and car exhaust have caused many residents to wear face masks daily. The architectural heritage of Kathmandu is integral to that of the Kathmandu valley. In 2006, UNESCO declared five monuments as a "World Heritage Site" including Durbar square of Hanuman Dhoka, Hindu temples of Pashupatinath and Changuarayan, the Buddha stupas of Swayambu and Boudhanath; and two monuments outside Kathmandu city limits, in the satellite towns of Patan and Bhktapur – Durbar square at Patan, Durbar square at Bhktapur. In April of 2015, Kathmandu suffered a massive earthquake which

the damage is still very much visible. Because of the earthquake, many buildings are either destroyed or have external support holding them up.

Background of the Researcher

The policing of women's bodies has been a common theme in my life. My two older sisters were teen mothers, and our community did not let my family forget that. As I reached the age of womanhood, I began to understand what it meant to truly be a woman. I saw how I was expected to act, but somehow became seen as a sexual creature overnight. I did not have the proper guidance or emotional outlets in order to unpack all the layers that came along with bleeding every month. My community placed expectations for me to "do the right thing, follow the right path, and be a good woman" without truly letting me know what that path was or what it meant to be good woman. I still find myself wondering, if I was given the guidance and tools in order to be self-confident, would I have not been in the same situation as my sisters? And when I choose not to be, would I have felt less shameful or less fearful? To this day, my feminist agenda is fueled by those who believe they have the right to decide what happens to my body, the capacity of my mind, or the degradation of my soul.

A large part of my motivation to do this research are my experiences with girls around the world who are always on the agenda, but are never invited to the table. During my undergraduate and graduate career, I travelled to many global communities and encountered many young girls in and out of schools. I observed that young girls were not getting the support they needed after getting their first period. There was a common thread of shame, disgust, fear, and many period taboos that surrounded various global communities. As I continued to travel and get a deeper understanding, I was told

countless times the fallacy that young girls' bodies were not their own. At the same time, I encountered strong and vibrant young girls who were following their dreams that was often, an education. This divide helped me to understand that we are not hearing from girls, not because they are not talking, but because we are not amplifying their experiences or their voices.

My awareness and learning about the experiences of girls globally have re-conceptualized the way I talk, speak, and share about periods, education, and my body. I truly believe in the celebration of bodies without judgments and without worries. I believe that resisting social view by creating an open dialogue prepares girls to know what to expect and give them the tools in order to have dignity and to be proud. Through my work and life, I have come to the understanding that woman and girls will often fall behind in society. I dream of the day that my future children, my niece and nephews, will be a part of a society where fighting gender inequality is not the norm. However, I find solace in knowing that there are many likeminded individuals, who love their communities and are making steps towards bettering society, and I find peace in knowing that there are individuals who believe in education and its radically, transforming capabilities. I close my introduction to my study with a quote by one of the most influential women in my life, Angela Davis, in which she stated:

Of course we never know what the outcome is going to be, we can never predict the consequences of the work that we do. But as I always like to say, we have to act as if it is possible to build a revolution and to radically transform the world. And we must do this all the time. (Sackler Center First Awards, 2016)

Methodology

This study design included a background survey, open-ended and in depth interviews of adolescent girls and their experiences of daily life while menstruating, and

participatory activities. This paper focused on findings from interviews and participatory activities. From the research, the themes guided recommendations of ideal program design, understanding body health, self-esteem and confidence building, and improving girls' overall school experiences post menstruation.

I sampled girls who are post-menarche because I am interested in perspectives and experiences on how to develop a program that is tailored for future generations of girls. Secondhand analyses of applicable observation data and general school environment were also incorporated. To protect the students in this study, I have changed all of their names to pseudonyms.

The study was approved by through Professor Monisha Bajaj's blanket approval for Masters-level research through the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), the ethical review board for approving social science research at the University.

Setting

The setting for this study was held in a private, mostly English immersion school located in Kathmandu, Nepal. The school is considered a not-for-profit. The school has an attached co-ed hostel for students to board. The students' ages range from 3 years old to 17 years old. Based on school records, the school's ethnic composition includes 85% Nepali born, 5% Chinese born, and 10% born in Thailand and Myanmar. Ten percent of students are on scholarship and fifteen percent of student's board at the school's hostel facilities.

Participants

The population for this study was twenty female students in grade nine attending

high school. The participants ranged in age from 13-15 years old. Of the twenty research participants, nineteen participants identified as Hindu and one participant identified as Muslim. Four participants lived in the school hostel and fourteen participants lived with family in surrounding areas of Kathmandu. Among the participants, the average age of menarche was thirteen years old.

I have intentionally chosen to pick an age range in order to capture the diversity of experiences. Participants were invited to participate via an in-class announcement. Participating girls were selected subsequent to extensive discussion and consultation with the school director and principal. The majority of participants volunteered to participate. All participants participated in each methods assessment. All participants provided informed consent prior to commencement of activities.

Instrumentation

The Background Survey

The background survey as used in previous studies suggested a strong starting point for all other research design (Lew, 2007). The paper background survey was used to record general information of girl's place of residence, familial ties, grade levels completed, current age, and religion. The survey also included a series of questions about menstruation including age of onset of menses, types of management tools currently used, remedies used, current knowledge of menstruation, attitudes towards menstruation, and any questions the participants have about menses. The background survey served as a basic assessment in order to understand each individual girl.

The Interview

The use of interviews with adolescent girls was important for gaining insights into

local meanings, social expectations, and social relations with peers and other community members that would never otherwise be openly discussed (Sommer, 2009). The interviews were held in English and voice recorded. The interviews were held prior to group meetings and over a span of seven days. The use of interviews with open-ended questions encouraged reflection and assessment of feelings as well as personal perspective (Sommer, 2009, 2010, Fontana & Frey, 2005, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The interview topics allowed for insight of cultural and local meanings, social expectations, and the implications of the onset of menses and puberty on school experience and identity formation. The interview questions were structured as follows, with time for follow-ups and additions:

1. What positive or negative experiences have you had during your menstruation?
2. What practices or cultural beliefs are held about menstruation?
3. If boys also got their monthly periods, what would change socially?
4. If you had to teach about menstruation as a mother or a teacher, what would you teach? What do you think is most important?

The Participatory Analysis

The participatory analysis derived from activities done with participants including describing their menstrual experiences through performance poetry, photo stories, role playing and creating skits, and developing a social media campaign to challenge perceived experiences of Nepali girls. The use of participatory activities was essential in creating a more inclusive, alternative, and active dialogue between researcher, participants, and other participants (Sommer, 2009, 2010 & Moas, 2010). By using alternative methods of gathering research, activities allowed for participants to feel

empowered in what and how they share their stories (Sommer, 2009, 2010). All activities were submitted without names and no identifying information was recorded in order to address and encourage confidentiality, trust, and comfort.

Grounded Theory

Throughout the research process, I used grounded theory to unpack and understand the needs of Nepali adolescent girl's menstrual education. Glasser and Strauss' (1967) work on grounded theory explains a system in order to develop theory from collected data research. Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. Generating a theory involves a process of research. A highlight of grounded theory is the ability to develop theory from personal experiences, data collected, and observation. By using my own personal experiences to guide my interview questions, I was able to deeply reflect on the responses given. Through grounded theory approach, I analyzed the participatory activities and my observations in order to understand the experiences of menstruation for adolescent Nepali girls. When I completed my research design, I analyzed and coded my research in order to identify the major themes.

Data Collection and Analysis

For eighteen days in February and March, I traveled to Kathmandu, Nepal. I collected materials from school including all required consent and permission forms, conducted one-on-one interviews with participants, and created and provided the space for participatory activities. The interviews were held in the morning from 10:30-12:00pm. The assessment and participatory program were held Monday-Saturday during

hours of 1:00-3:30pm. I reported on the correlations between information provided on survey data and overall understanding of menstruation and body awareness. I was able to meet with participants on their day off from school for more in depth and follow up interviews for insight. I conducted the participatory activities in the school's prayer hall. I collected all activities and kept handwritten observation notes. I conducted the interviews in a private room that was once an office. I recorded interviews using a voice recorder application on my laptop. After each session, I listened and facilitated the transcription. Once all the interviews had been transcribed and accounted for, I examined the text and to look for major themes. I compared the interviews, survey responses, activities, and observation notes.

The major themes that emerged and will be discussed included: (1) the transition from girl to woman in society; (2) the challenges faced by post pubescent bleeding bodies; and (3) participant recommendations for social and educational change. Themes from the data analysis will be illustrated by direct quotations taken from interviews, activities, and my own research journal entries. As stated in methodology, all participants have been given pseudonyms in order to protect participant identities.

Results

What it Truly Means to Become a Woman

Results indicated that girls are met with many challenges. The most significant finding regarding Nepali post pubescent girl's transition to womanhood are the overwhelming messages that girls' bodies are now used for marriage, reproduction, and objects of pleasure. Oftentimes, girls are presented with social taboos, gender expectations and marriage above continuing their education. Social structures and

patriarchal oppression continue to pressure girls to demonstrate one's fertility and readiness for marriage at the time of menarche. The following excerpts from individual interviews capture the expectations that society has for these girls:

Because I know, if we get our periods, that means we are not young and free anymore. We have to get married. This is what I fear and that is why I cried. My mom did not tell my father for a long time. She told me not to tell boys, because they will be thinking things. She said they will say that we are ready to be brides, and they can do anything they want now. (interview, 03/04/17)

I tell my mom that it is not right, but she is really religious. So, I don't argue. I think it's very bad, and it's very backwards... We should be allowed to go anywhere and do what we want. We can't go to school or have a job. It's like we live in a cage, we can only be in the home, a wife and we cannot do anything. (interview, 03/06/17)

When I had my first period, my mom told me that when a female gets a period she shouldn't have any connection with boys. Because once a girl has menstruation, she can be a bride and pregnant also. My mother told me that I have been given more responsibility, and I must learn how to be a good wife. (interview, 03/06/17)

The above excerpts show the very real reality of post pubescent Nepali girls. It reiterates that girls must get married, and marriage is the end goal. The excerpts indicated the pressure to demonstrate one's fertility and readiness for marriage. Girls are simultaneously frustrated at being denied equal rights and the responsibilities associated with being a wife and mother. This finding was consequently verified by a group activity campaign called, "The Future is Female" in which the girls wrote down what they wanted to be when they grew up, girls reported a range of careers including: professional athlete, teacher, doctor, dentist, social worker, gynecologist, software engineer, lawyer, and prime minister. When I asked the girls if they believed they could achieve these goals, one girl stated, "*only if my husband allows for it.*" The onset of menses and puberty were found to introduce challenges and restrictions into girls' lives inhibiting their abilities to continue their education and pursue the future careers they desired.

She told me I was not a child anymore. I am a menstruating woman. My mother said, “You are something from the period. So, please be careful when you are talking to boys because menstruation does not mean a small thing. Only one small mistake and make a big problem to your future, so be careful. You are now adult, a grown up. Carry yourself!” I feel kind of disgusted- like why am I different now? (interview, 03/04/17)

After my period, my mother told me that I can’t walk with the boys for a lot of time. In Nepal, there are a lot of rape cases so you should not walk alone. If you do, you will surely get raped. So don’t walk at night. (interview, 03/04/17)

My mom told me to be careful around boys, to keep away from them especially walking to school. Parents do not allow their daughters to go outside or be near boys. They are conservative and they think that if girls are with boys than something bad will happen to the girls. (interview, 03/04/17)

As the above excerpts show, it is a common practice that girls cannot have any social interaction with their male counterparts. The excerpts show the restriction of young girls’ movement and that more often than not, they are treated like objects. Moreover, their bodies are seen as sexual objects with no regard of how this makes girls feel. This finding was concurrent with a group activity in which girls stated the good and the bad about becoming a woman. There was an overwhelming positive outlook, except for the discomfort experienced with a new kind of attention that they received from boys and men. Girls were unsure of how to navigate this new type of attention and emphasizes a need for different types of guidance and educating to navigate challenges presented post menarche particularly sexual pressures.

The Challenge of Bleeding

Girls who are able to continue their education face many challenges once they enter school grounds. Findings suggested that once girls arrive at school they are met with issues such as shaming, teasing, and harassment. Most girls discussed their high levels of discomfort at school because of long periods of class time before there is a break

to change and clean themselves, teachers (often male) not allowing girls to use the restroom during class, or not enough private stalls with trash bins in the girls' restrooms. Thus, many girls have experienced poor menstrual hygiene management and have soaked through their sanitary napkins at school. The following excerpts describe their experiences:

When I was at school, there was blood on my skirt and all over the bench. My friend told me, "you have blood on your skirt!" I was so worried and I felt embarrassed. I knew my teacher would not let me leave the class, and I did not want to get up. I knew if I did, the boys will tease me and I will cry. My friend helped me. She lives in the hostel. She covered me, gave me a new skirt, and a pad. (interview, 03/06/17)

The boys say, "See! There is a blood on your skirt!" They tease and they tease. They don't know that it's just blood though. They think it's something else. (interview, 03/07/17)

Because it is different, shameful. If boys will see (the blood), they will for sure tease you. They would say, "Oh, I see your blood" or something like that. (interview, 03/07/17)

An environment of shame is created by the harassment and teasing that girls experience at school. Teasing may be rooted in the lack of knowledge about normal physiological changes and development stage reinforced by traditional and cultural beliefs about menstrual blood. In conversations with one girl, she explained, "When I get my period sometimes, the blood sticks to my frock (skirt) and when I stand up the boys see that and they tease me. The boys say don't touch me. When that happens, I get so angry towards the boys. I can't easily stand or sit in school." Moreover, teasing may be augmented when male teachers show insensitivity towards the challenges of a menstruating girl. As stated in the first excerpt, teachers do not recognize the sense of urgency or need to use the restroom and will insist girls wait until the end of class or the next break time.

The vast social and emotional effect of menstrual-related shame was confirmed

by a group activity called “If The Tables Were Turned”. In this activity, the girls discussed in small groups their experiences with their periods and reflected on how the school environment would change if boys were the only ones to have a monthly period and/or also had a monthly period.

Boys should get periods. When they will also get periods, they will know the real reality. It isn't the girls fault for getting periods. They would be more understanding. They would not tease girls during her periods. (Group Activity, 03/07/17)

Yes, boys should also get periods because they should also experience how painful it is being a girl in society, and in the family both physically and mentally. They should also feel the same pain and if they could feel the pain, they would not tease us. They would be more understanding. (Group Activity, 03/07/17)

If boys got periods, boys would be more understanding and seeing that boys have periods, girls would be more confident. They wouldn't have to be embarrassed by getting blood on their skirts. If they were the only ones to get periods, they too, would get awkward, weird, and embarrassed. I think it would just be normal. Everyone would just bleed and it would be okay. (Group Activity, 03/07/17)

As the excerpts demonstrate, there is an overwhelming theme of empathy. In every group, all girls agreed that only when boys truly understood their experiences by also having a period, would their male peers resist teasing and harassment. Thus, school environments where girls are misunderstood and mistreated, are unlikely to be a space where they can develop a positive self-image and confidence.

Girls' Recommendations and Reform

Findings revealed valuable and pragmatic recommendations on how to improve school environment and education for younger girls transitioning through puberty. During each interview, participants were asked how they would change the way menstruation is taught in the classroom and in their communities. The following excerpts demonstrate proposals:

I only learned about periods once in grade 7, but I think girls should be taught earlier when we are 10 years old in grade 5 or 6. Even though we will be young, not so mature and we might not care about it. If we always talk about it year after year, it will be on our minds more. We all can be more confident in talking about it with everyone and it will be normal to everyone. There would be less teasing. (interview, 03/08/17)

Girls should be taught younger because more knowledge is better. So, students should be taught earlier because it will be easier to handle the situation later as it comes. Starting to teach in class 5-6 is good, the more it is taught the less boys will tease girls. (interview, 03/08/17)

Because I got my period when I was ten years old, I think girls should learn earlier at grade 5, and with both boys and girls. It will be easier to understand each other if we keep talking to it. Students should be taught every year after that. (interview, 03/08/17)

As the excerpts show, the girls strongly recommended that early education and continuous visibility of menstruation and menstruation issues would highly benefit both boys and girls. School curriculum on menstruation often happens one time during grade 7 (ages 13-14) and covers basic biological process. It does not cover all areas of menstruation and puberty in a girl-friendly way, and it does not help girls to understand changes in their bodies, social expectations, and their emotions while menstruating. Because the participants experienced menarche from a range of nine years old to thirteen years old, the suggestion to teach students about periods early would highly benefit younger girls. Not being able to talk about their experience and having limited information means that menstruation becomes something insignificant, shameful and private. This poor ideology is reinforced in how school curricula and learning about menstruation is experienced.

Another finding revealed that participants noticed the lack of women teachers:

Boys and girls should learn together with both a boy and girl teacher, but I think there should be a separate class with a separate girl teacher teaching us sometimes. So, the girl teacher can show us how to use pads, hear all our

problems, and give us advice. They have gone through periods, so I think she could teach us a lot. (interview, 03/07/17)

I wish we had a girl teacher to talk about periods. We will feel comfortable with all the things and questions we have about periods with her. We will feel much relieved because we will know that the girl teacher will have had the same problems. I think it would be good to have a girl teacher. (interview, 03/07/17)

As the excerpts suggest, the girls repeatedly recommended having a woman teacher to educate students about menstruation. At their school and at the secondary level more broadly, teachers are mostly men and having a woman teacher is not very common. This adds to the school curriculum on menstruation being highly influenced by male perspective. With a lack of women presence, there are fewer chances that perspectives would relate to the specific needs of girls. Practically speaking, this means that there are fewer teachers with whom girls can discuss their experiences with menstruation or any uncomfortable health discussions that may arise. In an interview conducted with teachers of grade 6-7, findings suggested there was a lack of knowledge and understanding about menstruation. One teacher stated, *“a period is a weakness of woman... something only dealt by woman.”* Findings suggest that the level of knowledge was based mainly in traditional and religious knowledge rather than factual information on menstruation.

The last finding suggest that girls have a deep understanding about the injustices in their country and believe that it is their duty to educate and create awareness within their communities:

I think periods should always be taught at school, at home, in Nepal. We will get more knowledge about that. We can also teach our siblings, friends, parents, and community. We can even teach about periods in the remote areas to encourage girls to learn and understand their body. Some communities have superstitions regarding periods, they think that we are not human being but treated like an animal or worst- they don't give food or water. That is not fair and we need to help. (interview, 03/08/17)

In remote areas, the parents take the daughter out from the home and they do not give enough food to eat. This is because of the lack of education—they don't know that girls have to take care of themselves, washing themselves, using sanitary pads, rest, and eat. I think there should be an education and awareness program in the remote areas of Nepal. I would like to do something so they will know that there is help. Girls are the mothers of Nepal. I think they deserve more. (interview, 03/08/17)

When girls are on their periods, they think that girls are dirty and some of them keep girls in a small house made of bamboo and straw. She is not allowed to enter in the family house. It is practice when girls get their period and it is called chhaupadi. I think it is a wrong way... It is the wrong way. It is very wrong because every girl has a period, and its not out fault. Its actually a blessing, I think. Doing in this way would spread the that menstruation is not civilized and is dirty. I think girls should be educated. We need to bring an awareness class or raise our voices against chhaupadi. (interview, 03/08/17)

In places in Nepal, there is a separate house for girls to go if they are menstruating. The place looks like animals live there. They are not allowed to touch anyone, anything, or even plants. It is said that if they touch plants, they will die. No, I don't think its right, but for those girls, its just simple bleeding, nothing more than that. Society must be understanding of the problems of the girl. We need to say something against this. (interview, 03/08/17)

In Nepal, it is common knowledge and practice that menstruation and specifically, the blood is considered a polluting factor. As the excerpts demonstrate, in some places in Nepal menstruating girls and women are considered untouchable and are excluded from normal activities and public areas. This practice creates even more of a divide for post pubescent girls who face challenges navigating proper menstrual hygiene management and gender-related barriers each month. These practices disrupt any positive view of menstruation as it perpetuates very negative messages about what is expected of menstruating girls. However, the findings suggest that the girls feel they have a responsibility to create curriculum and programs in order to help girls in rural areas. By creating visibility and awareness programs for period shaming, this may help dispel their own personal shame and lack of confidence related to menstruation.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If girls are open to change than our thoughts will change, but girls have to take the lead. They have to have the self-confidence to lead others. We can keep our traditions alive by praying and other things like festival, but it shouldn't be that traditions stops us. I think that's a moral problem. We should just keep doing what we are supposed to be doing and not let anyone or anything stop us. We need to trust ourselves and push forward.

Interview, 03/04/2017

Conclusions

This study investigated the relationships of adolescent girls' health, well-being, and confidence relevant to school retention, with a particular emphasis on the intersections of menstrual management, education, and overall school experience for post pubescent Nepali girls. This study, examining how menarche may disrupt girls' experiences of menstruation in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, provided insight into girls understanding of social expectations of becoming a woman, challenges faced in proper menstrual hygiene management, and their pragmatic suggestions for how to improve school environment, curriculum, and how to better their community for other menstruating girls. The findings supported the limited empirically-based research available on the challenges adolescent girls experience in South Asia, and reinforcing the value of capturing lived experiences impacting their everyday lives (Kirk & Sommer, 2006, Moas, 2010, & Sommer, 2009).

The research methods utilized demonstrate that girls have mixed emotions about reaching puberty and managing menstruation, specifically navigating coed school experiences and social expectations (Herz, 2006, Kirk & Sommer, 2006, Oster & Thorton, 2010, Reynolds, 2011, & Sommer, 2009). The findings reiterated the challenges of social expectations of marriage and preparation for reproduction, managing

their periods in male dominated school environments, and providing recommendations (yearly curriculum, female teachers, and awareness projects) that would enable future generations of girls' transition through puberty in school. Girls' recommendations for a more practical curriculum provides guidance on how to eliminate poor learning environments and dispel negative reactions towards menstruation. Findings strongly supported that girls had a high level of understanding about the consequences of traditional and religious beliefs on education of menses. In an interview, a student stated,

I believe it is traditions and education that we should try to change. It's not the same. I don't think blood (from the vagina) is impure. The blood from the whole body is the same thing- black or blue, it's all red so we shouldn't feel like its bad. It's just simple blood like biology. We shouldn't be held back...I think that is why our country is not progressing. We are always held back and we don't have enough self-confidence to even say anything. It's very sad.

For girls aged 9- 13, menstruation is a very relevant and real issue. Girls are at the entry point into womanhood while trying to navigate critical physiological changes, identity development, and proper menstrual management. Moreover, the findings highlighted the difficulty of peer dynamics and gender disparity in the school environment while menstruating. The use of multi methodology approaches are needed in addressing menstruation challenges and barriers for girls in ways that go beyond building private bathrooms or providing sanitary tools (pads, cups, etc.). It is vital to connect all systems from micro to macro levels in order to address the many obstacles of menstruation in a holistic way for post pubescent girls in Nepal. By doing so, girls will have an improved route to pursue their education and the future careers they imagined.

Recommendations

Although menarche may occur at different ages for different girls, puberty is an important time for identity formation and a shift to womanhood. The study provided

findings on how girls interpret and navigate their lives in school environments. In order for the findings to be most effective, an understanding of the impact of language and social media on perceived experiences, an understanding of the difference between religion and reality, and girls' stories must be heard must be explored and acknowledged.

Media portrayal of menstruation and periods support the traditional and cultural stigmas that make girls feel unnecessarily embarrassed and shameful about the biological process. In the dominant conversation about periods, there is a practice of using vague euphemisms (such as "*that time*", "*getting it*", "*girl flu*") or cutesy nicknames (Aunt Flo, Code Red, Leak Week). Moreover, media portrayal often associate periods as messy, leaky, disruptive, and problematic. Menstruating women in media are seen as overly emotional, hesitant to engage in physical activity, and embarrassed. As discussed in Chapter III, for boys who do not experience menstruation first hand, periods become something unspeakable, mysterious, and gross. For girls who do experience periods, this alternative educational space can leave them confused and ill equipped to properly manage periods. A recommendation of an added lesson to menstruation curriculum about the impacts of language and social media in dominant discourse of periods would benefit young girls navigating menstruation.

As stated in Chapter II, taboos and myths keep girls from going to school during their periods, setting them back in their education. Overall, culturally produced period shame reinforces the idea that women are incapable of things that men are capable of. In Chapter III, findings suggest that girls understood the presence of intricate systems of taboos and restrictions relating to menstruation. However, male students and teachers had little actual factual knowledge about the biological process and normal maturation. The

lack of information and the prevalence of cultural taboos creates a divide in understanding the difference between religion and reality. Girls are mismanaging menstruation and their experiences are not appropriately addressed. Due to the cultural or religious beliefs around menstruation, a recommendation of varied approaches that are locally specific should be developed to reflect social and cultural attitudes and perspectives for girls and their families. Approaches must challenge current myths and taboos, moving away from traditional biological explanations and towards discussions that include meanings and beliefs.

In order to better meet the needs of menstruating girls, it is imperative to hear their stories and amplify their voices. By listening to girls share their lived experiences, we can understand the problematic messages of period shaming and develop menstruation curriculum that works for them. As stated in Chapter II, the use of cultural practice for interpretation and understanding of intersected, lived experiences is highly beneficial in menstrual program planning. Programs should include varied techniques including participatory approaches and individual and group interviews in order to engage with girls to understand the challenges they face from their perspectives (Sommer, 2009). A last recommendation includes more inclusive and diverse research to fill the gaps in awareness of experiences of different abled girls, gay or queer girls, and girls of various castes. This research adds to more accurate and accessible information for girls about their bodies.

This thesis hopes to go beyond the practical issues of menstrual management in school environments and use education as a tool to challenge and overcome traditional negative attitudes and lack of awareness of menstruation in order to empower girls. For

Nepali post pubescent girls, menstruation is a time of restriction, rules, confinement, and social expectations. The physical acts of menstruation and the lack of safe, dignified hygiene management has created a complex culture of silence and shame. This culture has resulted in restrictions of self-expression, school, mobility, freedom, and many more negative impacts as described in Chapter I and II. Current research and menstrual advocacy must go beyond exploring one aspect of girls needs only such as structural (lavatories, washrooms, and adequate sanitation), hygiene (sanitary materials i.e. pads, cups, tampons), or biological (reproductive health) (Oster & Thorton, 2010, & Sommer, 2009). Girls must have a safe space in order to resist dominant paradigms with open dialogue about menstruation experiences in order to educate and prepare girls to know what to expect and give them the tools to be period proud.

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