

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Menstruation

GHI Global Classrooms/Cultural Exchange Experience

Dr. Leah Sneider

Cultural Exchange

- Screening of the Oscar Award winning documentary *Period. End of Sentence.*, which focuses on the cultural perceptions and practices of women's menstruation.
- Discussion with Indian-American female staff and community members about their perspectives and experiences having grown up/ lived in India. Niyati Pandya (MC Librarian) & Urvi Mehta (Physician)



Global Competencies

AACU Global Competency: Global Self-Awareness

Identifies some connections between an individual's personal decision-making and certain local and global issues

AACU Global Competency: Cultural Diversity

Explains and connects two or more cultures historically or in contemporary contexts with some acknowledgement of power structures, demonstrating respectful interaction with varied cultures and worldviews.

AACU Global Competency: Understanding Global Systems

Identifies the basic role of some global and local institutions, ideas, and processes in the human and natural worlds.

Global Course Outcomes

- Applies an intersectional feminist analysis to various texts, films, performances, and cultural artifacts from India.
- Identify intersecting dimensions of power and analyze how constructions of gender, race-ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, class, age, and ability impact contemporary Indian men's and women's experiences and lives.

Assessment Tool

Pre and Post-encounter survey asked attendees about the level of their knowledge of women's menstrual cycles in general and in India.

Based on the outcomes, please answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5 where 1 means not at all and 5 means very.

How much do you know about women's menstrual cycles?

How comfortable are you talking about women's menstrual cycles?

How much do you know about Indian/South Asian cultures?

How much do you know about women's roles and expectations in Indian/South Asian cultures?

How much do you know about Indian/South Asian perceptions of women's menstrual cycles?

Please briefly identify what you learned from this film viewing and discussion and why this might be important to you.

Discussion

- Global institutions and systems informing societal roles and knowledge about women's menstrual cycle: Health/Medicine, Religion, societal gender constructions, media, business, etc.
- Women in the U.S. learn about menstrual cycles from mothers, grandmothers, in school, online, and with their Doctors
- Women in rural India have limited knowledge and practices that result in restricting them from spaces including school, temples, and even their own homes
- Women in India feel empowered when they earn their own money, help other women by producing and selling menstrual pads, and work to break taboos about menstruation

Comments from Post-Survey

- "I learned about challenges women face in India with regards to access to and attitudes about menstrual cycles. [It is] very helpful to have that perspective."
- "The culture is a bit relatable. I wasn't aware that they used cloths [instead of products] but [cloth] could possibly be more sanitary."
- "I learned that education and opportunity is lacking for girls. While they are starting to get educated, there is still work to do."

Worldwide Taboos

THE WORLD-WIDE MENSTRUATION TABOO

In rural Venezuela. menstruating women are forced to sleep in special **huts** for the duration of their period.

In rural Ghana. a woman is **forbidden** to enter a dwelling with a man or cook him food while she is menstruating.

In Islamic tradition. menstruating women are not allowed to **pray, touch the Koran, nor observe fasting traditions.**

In India. a menstruating woman is not allowed to touch **cows.**

In remote areas of Nepal. a woman is not allowed to interact with anyone during her menses; **she is banished** to a special clay hut in the wilderness **until her period is over.**

In many Southeast Asian communities, menstruating girls are not permitted to use the same water facilities as the rest of the community, **for fear of contamination.**

In Kenya, women in the semi-nomadic **Masai** region are not allowed to enter goat pens or milk cows while they menstruate, for fear they will **contaminate the animal.** They are also not permitted to consume animal products.

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Sources: Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council, UNICEF, A Global Village, New York Times, Huffington Post