Attitudes and Experiences with Period Poverty at Arizona State University

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Abstract

In recent years, feminist activists have taken their fascination with and concern over access to period products in developing countries and diverted their attention to period poverty that exists in the United States. Backed by globalist approaches and the deep history of Menstrual Activism in the US, the Menstrual Equity Movement aims to make policy changes at the state and federal levels to ensure that all menstruators have the products they need to manage menstruation. This exploratory study aims to understand the experiences and attitudes about period poverty at Arizona State University's campus. Undergraduate menstruators were asked to reflect on general, and on campus experiences with access to period products. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were utilized in conducting this research. This study concludes that menstruators' education would benefit from having access to free period products in all bathrooms.

Keywords: menstrual equity, period poverty, menstrual activism, period products

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Menstruation and the work menstruators do in order to manage this natural bodily process has come into the spotlight in the past five years. The topic brings with it a history of stigma, taboo, silence, and misunderstanding. In a misogynistic and patriarchal society, menstruators are socialized to keep their periods hidden, and are often left to figure it out for themselves. And in a capitalist society, they have to pay in order to do so.

Raising awareness of menstruation and reclaiming menstruators' power over their own bodies has been a part of American radical feminist activism for decades. At the turn of the 21st century, the focus was drawn to global initiatives to combat the shame of menstruation and lack of resources for those in least developed and developing countries. As menstruators in Western countries gathered resources to end problems inflicted by poverty in other countries, some activists opened their eyes to the issues affecting the most vulnerable menstruators in their own communities. This led to the 2015 birth of the American Menstrual Equity Movement, which aims to combat period poverty. Period poverty is defined as the "…struggle to pay for basic sanitary products on a monthly basis, significantly affecting hygiene, health, and wellbeing" (Kohmami, 2018, p. 1). The phrase comes from the similar efforts and initiatives currently taking place in Scotland. Western media acclaimed Scotland in 2018 when it was announced that all public schools would be stocked with free products for Scotland's menstruating students.

The Menstrual Equity Movement takes activism past the scope of demonstrative art and protest by making real changes in public policy. There are three distinct groups of people that movement leaders have drawn their attention and research toward in the United States: menstruators who are a) homeless, b) incarcerated, and c) in public schools. A great deal of funding and resources generated by the Menstrual Equity Movement have been diverted to these

three sources. As this has happened, Menstrual Equity movements have sprouted on college and university campuses nation-wide.

Research indicates that one in five American girls have missed school because of a lack of access to period products (Rifenburg, 2018). This statistic is derived from research conducted at United States public K-12 schools, and some gaps still appear in how period poverty impacts college students specifically. For example, Arizona State University, through the help of Planned Parenthood Generation Action at ASU (PPGEN @ ASU) and the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), has taken strides to meet the needs of menstruators on campus by providing period products in popularly used bathrooms. This research aims to address the dearth of research on period poverty amongst college students in effort to explore and better understand attitudes about and experiences with period poverty amongst menstruators at Arizona State University.

Literature Review

The Menstrual Equity Movement is rooted in third world feminist explorations of menstruation across cultures. In response to related research, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN) have taken up initiatives to address lack of education about menstruation that can cause often-hazardous conditions menstruators face in low income and developing economies (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). These initiatives focus on the barriers that menstruators face and concentrate on a lack of period products and private sanitation areas. They take what could be considered a deficit model approach that focuses on what is lacking in these countries. They also aim to end stigma in regard to menstruation (UNFPA, 2019). Activists' efforts have drawn toward India specifically, as they latch onto stories about Indian women being forced to miss school and work due to their menstrual practices that utilize other resources

besides Westernized sanitary products. According to Sridhar (2019), most of the outcry derives from one 2010 study that had an extremely small sample size. Follow up studies tell different stories about the actual experiences of menstruators in India. While the highlight on menstrual activism in India appears to come from a good place, many are incited by information from an Anti-Hindu sentiment. The criticisms of the menstrual practices in India, namely in Hinduism, come from a narrow-minded perspective with the assumption that what works in Western cultures is the magic bullet for all other cultures.

The movements led by the WHO and the UN have ignited some ordinary Americans to empathetically establish what could be considered "Do It Yourself" donation drives, raising money and gathering period products (e.g. tampons and pads) to distribute to menstruators in need in developing and low income economies. While Americans and researchers fixated on foreigners who "have it worse," very little focus fell on menstruators in the United States who also lack the same resources. In the past five years, the focus has shifted. Motivated by the work done to end period poverty in other countries, American menstruators have directed their efforts to those affected in their own communities.

Menstrual Equity Movement

Jennifer Weiss-Wolf noticed the DIY Donation Drives taking place in the United States and decided that it was time to take it a step further and demand accessibility from both state and federal government levels. Established in 2015, and coined by Weiss-Wolf, the Menstrual Equity Movement is an initiative and political movement whose aim is to acknowledge that the poverty that exists in the United States has real implications on autonomy concerning menstruation. Fueled by studies regarding poverty levels in American and a strong knowledge of the current laws in place, the Menstrual Equity Movement aims to take responsibility away from charitable

citizens and instead place it in the hands of public servants in order to make access to period products as equitable as possible. The Menstrual Equity Movement has effectively raised awareness of the issue to push for institutional change (Bobel & Fahs, 2018). Although current approaches replace responsibility for menstrual care on the individual, this movement frames it as a human rights issue. It is not sufficient to continue dealing with menstruation on an individual level, and the Menstrual Equity Movement presents this matter as a public health issue.

Politics of Periods, Using Legislation

Carol Hanisch's assertion that "the personal is political," from her 1969 feminist paper of the same name, has been utilized to describe the inherent politics of periods. The experiences of menstruators deserve to be heard and the public laws of this country should reflect the lived realities of more than half the population. For those involved in the Menstrual Equity Movement, taking initiative through policy and legislative changes is the first step to making menstruation a dignified and accessible experience for all menstruators, no matter their financial situation. Weiss-Wolf has partnered up with numerous leaders in American politics, ranging from the state to the federal level. Notable forces in the movement include Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-NY), Congresswoman Carolyn Mahoney (D-NY), and City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras-Copeland (D-NY), who have all taken strides to introduce policy that not only ensures menstruators have access to affordable period products, but that they also do so in the safest manner currently possible (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). While Weiss-Wolf has been directly influential on the work done in New York, the state of Arizona itself has also introduced policy to combat period poverty. Current initiatives include working to create consistency in the ways that period

products are defined in public policy and getting all states on board to acknowledge that menstruation is a natural bodily process that necessitates the use of these products.

The Tampon Tax

One of the first issues that the Menstrual Equity Movement has tackled is the Tampon Tax. Weiss-Wolf (2018) pointed out that for states that have sales tax placed on non-essential items, period products were included. Weiss-Wolf found that this was an accessible first step in the movement and asserts that she has found a surprising bi-partisan support for this initiative. Not only do most Liberals want equity for those who menstruate, but most Conservatives do not turn their noses up to alleviating taxes (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). Menstruators not only have to pay for goods that are essential in their period maintenance, but they also have to pay extra in tax, and this can add up. According to Webster (2016), menstruators pay an estimated $3,000 in period products over their entire lives, and a tax can add hundreds of dollars to that figure. Factor in that women, on average, make less money than men, and you can see how this is something that potentially further disadvantages menstruators.

A stance that Weiss-Wolf has taken in her fight to end the Tampon Tax is that it is a women's rights issue. Women have had to pay a disproportionate amount of dollars on products that they need in order to function, and no other product is comparable to that in men. By eliminating the Tampon Tax for menstruators, Weiss-Wolf sees it as an opportunity to support gender equity as well. She is even working on including menstrual equity initiatives in the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), hoping that this will provide another resource to start the discussion on menstruation and create more legislative consistency (Weiss-Wolf, 2019a).

By taking a closer look at social programs already in place, it was found that the Supplemental National Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), while providing many menstruators with other key resources in relation to nutrition and health, did not include menstrual products as a necessary item. Weiss-Wolf (2019b) found what could almost be considered a loophole in the Tampon Tax policy fight, acknowledging that all products provided by SNAP and WIC are exempt to sales tax. If those who qualify for SNAP and WIC were allotted period products, this could effectively skip the step of calling upon individual states to alter their sales tax laws. This could grant access to those living in poverty more immediately.

Access to Period Products

The Menstrual Equity Movement has not only taken initiative in ending the Tampon Tax, but it has also focused on distributing free products to those who are most vulnerable to period poverty. There has been a particular focus on three vulnerable groups: the homeless, the incarcerated, and students.

Focus on Homelessness.

The Menstrual Equity Movement takes a keen look at how homeless menstruators deal with their periods on a monthly basis. When there is a lack of access to basic necessities such as food and shelter, it can be difficult for people to prioritize purchasing safe (and expensive) period products (McNamara, 2017). Not only is there an issue with attaining products, but there is also a concern over safe and hygienic places to effectively change products. The movement is striving to not only provide more access through shelter and food banks, but to also provide more secure and viable options for homeless menstruators to take care of their periods.

Focus on the Incarcerated.

Those involved in the Menstrual Equity Movement noticed that not only do incarcerated women get rationed amounts of period products, but they are also often used as a form of

punishment. Because guards are responsible for distributing the goods to incarcerated women, they have notoriously used that power to control and penalize inmates (Bobel & Fahs, 2018). The Menstrual Equity Movement aims to create consistency and accountability for the prisons in America. Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) have given this movement a big push in their federal initiatives.

These issues are apparent in Arizona prisons as well. In 2015, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Arizona took the Arizona Department of Corrections to court in a groundbreaking class-cation suit that address a multitude of issues with the health care system in Arizona prisons. While this suit, Parsons v. Ryan, did not directly address the health care issue of a lack of access to period products, testimonies of prisoners taken during ACLU of Arizona's investigation revealed that Arizona women inmates were not receiving an adequate or regulated number of pads (Fettig, 2018). Representative Athena Salman (D-AZ) successfully introduced and passed HB 2222 that guaranteed every women prisoner the right to unlimited, unconditional, and free period products.

Focus on Schools.

Schools have also been a key part of the movement for free access to products in an attempt to end period poverty. As adult menstruators began to openly discuss their access to the period products they so fiercely need to operate, the conversation was opened to the younger generation of menstruators as well. Weiss-Wolf (2017) discovered that young girls often had to miss school because they did not have adequate supplies or support to comfortably attend. For those that did, they often were left to construct make-shift products through the use of toilet paper or socks, a solution that is only temporary as it can result in bleeding through, or might even perpetuate infections (McCarty, 2016).

Representatives in Arizona have started the initiative to provide free period products in their Grades 6-12 schools as well. At the beginning of 2020, Representatives Athena Salman (D-AZ), Charlene Fernandez (D-AZ), and Pamela Powers Hannley (D-AZ) introduced HB 2883, which would appropriate $800,000 in general funding to provide period products in women's and gender-neutral restrooms to all Arizona school districts and charter schools.

Colleges and Universities.

While much of the policy work being done by the Menstrual Equity Movement looks at Grades 6-12 public school education, some college students have also taken it upon themselves to acknowledge period poverty on their own campuses. A large hole stands here as to how much free period products are actually needed and wanted for menstruators on college campuses, which is what this specific line of research seeks to answer.

One of the major initiatives that made headlines was that of the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) at Brown University. These student leaders decided that period products should be considered as essential as toilet paper and soap are in bathrooms (McNamara, 2016). One big step in their action was that all bathrooms were stocked with period products, taking the necessary stride to acknowledge that menstruators are not solely women.

While the measures taken by Brown University were fundamental in bringing the Menstrual Equity Movement to college campuses, it should be noted that instead of petitioning to the school, the USG has decided to purchase and continuously supply the period products to campus restrooms themselves. In working to avoid the DIY charitable donations that so many people have latched onto, it is imperative that actual policy on colleges is altered and that we hold these places of power accountable. If they can pay for toilet paper and soap, they can fund menstrual products.

Menstrual Activism Movement, A Spectrum

While the Menstrual Equity Movement is a recent development spurring from work officially beginning in 2015, it follows immensely important work done in Menstrual Activism: movements formed from feminist, environmentalist, and consumer protectionist initiatives. Radical acts of raising awareness of menstruation have been going on since the 1960s, utilizing demonstrative art and humor to draw attention to the stigmatized act of menstruating. Beginning in the late 1970s, women began to acknowledge that the period products being sold to them were not safe. Toxic Shock Syndrome was affecting women rampantly, causing an exceptional amount of deaths because there was no consistency or accountability in the way that the Big Four Feminine Care companies were educating their consumers about their products (Bobel, 2010). Even though menstruators successfully produced standards for these major corporations and the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), radicals still felt a general distrust. Not only were period products expensive, they were also disposable, a potential to wreak havoc on the environment. Bobel & Fahs (2018) acknowledged that much focus was diverted into promoting the use of reusable products that were free of chemicals and gave menstruators ultimate autonomy over the maintenance over their periods. Ultimately, many activists have stopped trying to work directly with public officials and major period product corporations to create change. Instead, they are focusing on change within themselves and education campaigns to encourage others. This reflects a phenomenon that sociologist Anthony Giddens calls life politics (Bobel, 2010).

Critiques of the Menstrual Equity Movement

So, where does the Menstrual Equity Movement fit into this long history of Menstrual Activism? Bobel & Fahs (2018) are quick to point out that the actions taken to provide people with more access to tampons and pads conflict with the work done for decades by feminists and

environmentalists to end the use of tampons and pads. For many activists that choose to free bleed without the use of any menstrual product, they view pads and tampons as a misogynistic suppression of menstruation. From this viewpoint, the work being done by the Menstrual Equity Movement is harming the safety of menstruators and perpetuating the anti-feminist perspective that menstruation needs to be concealed and hidden in order to make men feel comfortable. It those involved in the Menstrual Equity Movement are willing to work within the political and legislative systems of America, they are ultimately supporting the capitalistic qualities that so many involved in Menstrual Activism abhor.

Consensus: Human Rights and a Choice

While there are some tensions between the long-standing American Menstrual Activism movements and the recent Menstrual Equity Movement, they are ultimately fighting for a very similar outcome. One key similarity between the two is that they are all inclusive of all gender expressions, acknowledging the importance of using wordage such as "menstruators" instead of "women" or "menstrual products" rather than "feminine products." Gloria Steinem's *If Men Could Menstruate* essay has been influential for both, especially in regard to activists acknowledging that some men do in fact menstruate. It is just as important to include those who do not identify as female in the fight for menstrual awareness.

Another similarity between the two movements is the ultimate longing for both a safe and environmentally friendly approach to taking care of periods. While Weiss-Wolf admits that her original steps to provide tampons and pads to those experiencing period poverty were not necessarily grounded from a feminist and consumer protected outlook, she now valiantly strives for menstruators to also be aware of reusable products and to use their voices to encourage the FDA to provide every menstruator with the safest possible product (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). While it

can be empowering to make the decision to not contain menstruation with a tampon or a pad, those living in poverty do not currently have the opportunities to make that decision. As long as we live in a society that stigmatizes menstruation, it is important to even the playing field out for all menstruators and give them the products they need to function and flourish.

As this movement continues to spread through the United States, it is important that university and college students' voices are included. Although the available data purports that period poverty can be an inhibitor to a menstruator's education, there has not been enough research conducted specifically about higher education. The growing amount of student government leaders taking the stand to incorporate the Menstrual Equity Movement onto their campuses is a telling sign that period poverty is an issue, and that college students need access to period products. This research aims to determine Undergraduate menstruators' attitudes and experiences with period poverty at Arizona State University.

Methods

Purpose and Design

The purpose of this study was to understand the awareness and attitudes toward period poverty by Undergraduate menstruators at Arizona State University. Students were encouraged to reflect on their awareness of period poverty as well as their own experiences with menstruation. An IRB-approved (Appendix C) study consisting of Likert-scale questions was generated and distributed through Qualtrics (Appendix A). The survey included four sections: Consent, Demographic Info, General Questions, and ASU Campus Specific Questions. In addition to collecting quantitative responses, respondents were given an opportunity to elaborate more on their answers to General Questions and ASU Campus Specific Questions. By consenting to the survey, participants confirmed that they were an Undergraduate student

currently attending Arizona State University, between the ages of 18 and 54 years old, that experienced periods (Appendix B).

I invited Arizona State University Undergraduate students involved in the W.P. Carey School of Business, T. Denny Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics, School of Politics and Global Studies, New College School of Mathematical and Natural Sciences, and Barrett, the Honors College to take the survey through an anonymous link distributed by ASU professors. While most professors were responsive and willing to distribute this survey to their students, three male professors from the W.P. Carey School of Business expressed objections. Two argued that the survey did not pertain to their specific class content. Another felt the need to only distribute the survey to the students he felt were menstruators so as not to provide discomfort for others. It can be assumed that he was planning on separating out female sounding names for this email list. However, it should be noted that this survey was not designed solely for female students, but instead for all students who menstruate. Students were not only reached by email, but they were also encouraged to take the survey through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The survey was completely online through Qualtrics and took students no more than 20 minutes to complete.

Participants

126 Undergraduate students submitted survey responses. Students who did not meet the requirements of being an Undergraduate menstruator who currently attended classes on campus at Arizona State University between the ages of 18-54 were removed from the sample. Survey responses that were incomplete and did not fulfill all four sections of the survey were also removed. 94 student responses completely met the consented to requirements of the survey and were utilized for further analysis of this study.

When asked to provide gender identity, 91 out of the 94 respondents identified as Female. One selected Transgender Male/Transgender Man, one selected Genderqueer/Gender Non-conforming, and one selected a Different Identity, specifying that they identified as Non-binary. Although the three menstruators not identifying as Female provided important insights regarding their lived experiences that should be specifically analyzed, this particular study does reflect that a majority, 97%, of the respondents identified as Female.

72 of the participants were between the ages of 18-24 years old, 17 were 25-34 years old, and six were 35-44 years old.

41 lived in an off-campus apartment or house, 25 lived in an Arizona State University dorm, and 24 lived with their parents. Three of the respondents selected that they had other housing arrangements, and one specified that they lived in their own house.

55 respondents' Ethnicity Origin (or Race) was White. 19 were Hispanic or Latino, five identified as Black or African American, ten were Asian, two were American Indian or Alaska Native, and three identified as another race/identity. Those who selected Other race/ethnicity all elaborated that they were multi-racial.

28 of the participants were Full Time employees, meaning that they worked 35 or more hours per week. 40 of the participants were Part Time employees, working less than 35 hours per week. 26 identified as Not Employed at all.

As an Undergraduate menstruator attending Arizona State University myself who identifies as a White Female between the ages of 18-24 years old, who works Part-Time, and lives in an off-campus apartment/house, it is interesting that my recruitment strategy of a convenience sample produced majorities in the same demographic groups. Because of this, the study conducted is not generalizable and is an exploratory study.

Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative responses were utilized for analysis. Pseudonyms were randomly assigned to all 94 respondents to maintain anonymity. Those who identified as Female were assigned from the Most Popular Names of 1990 in the United States of America, retrieved from the Social Security Administration (*Top Names of the 1990s,* n.d.). For those who did not identify as Female, unisex and gender-neutral names were given. Following is a list of respondents whose personal accounts were utilized in the qualitative analysis of this study:

Table 1

Assigned pseudonyms of respondents.

Pseudonym	***Gender***	***Age***	***Current Housing***	***Ethnicity Origin (Or Race)***	***Employment Status***
Sarah	Female	18-24 years old	With Parents	Hispanic or Latino	Not Employed
Samantha	Female	18-24 years old	Off Campus Apartment/House	American Indian or Alaska Native	Part Time – working less than 35 hours per week
Hannah	Female	18-24 years old	Arizona State University dorm	Hispanic or Latino	Not Employed
Kayla	Female	18-24 years old	With Parents	White	Not Employed
Lauren	Female	18-24 years old	Off Campus Apartment/House	White	Not Employed
Amber	Female	18-24 years old	Arizona State University dorm	White	Part Time – working less than 35 hours per week
Christina	Female	18-24 years old	Arizona State University dorm	White	Part Time – working less than 35 hours per week
Vanessa	Female	18-24 years old	Arizona State University dorm	Black or African American	Full Time – working 35 or more hours a week
Sydney	Female	18-24 years old	Off Campus Apartment/House	White	Part Time – working less than 35 hours per week
Kelly	Female	18-24 years old	With Parents	Hispanic or Latino	Part Time – working less

					than 35 hours per week
Marissa	Female	18-24 years old	Arizona State University dorm	White	Part Time – working less than 35 hours per week
Paige	Female	18-24 years old	Arizona State University dorm	White	Full Time – working 35 or more hours a week
Alicia	Female	18-24 years old	Arizona State University dorm	White	Full Time – working 35 or more hours a week
Molly	Female	25-34 years old	Off Campus Apartment/House	White	Full Time – working 35 or more hours a week
Veronica	Female	18-24 years old	With Parents	White	Part Time – working less than 35 hours per week
Jordan	Genderqueer/Gender Non-conforming	18-24 years old	No Response	White	Not Employed

Qualitative accounts were considered and specific patterns, or themes, were identified through the elaborations and details provided by these respondents. These stories were the most helpful in the analysis of this research.

126 responses were submitted, and 94 of the respondents were actually Undergraduate Menstruators that attended Arizona State University on campus, which is a good response rate. All responses by the 94 respondents were included in the quantitative analysis of the data. Distributions of responses were analyzed in order to calculate which responses were more commonly experienced. Average Likert responses were also calculated, averaging the scores given on the 1-4 scale (Strongly Disagree weighted 1, Disagree weighted 2, Agree weighted 3, Strongly Agree weighted 4) in order to identify comparisons between different demographic groups.

Limitations

There are some important limitations to note. Most respondents identified as cisgender and Female in this study. The recruitment strategy of having professors send out a mass email as well as posting it on social media most likely resulted in the recruitment of so many Female menstruators. Less generalized and more specific efforts could have been taken in order to recruit fewer conventional and more underrepresented communities of menstruators in this study. The Transgender Male/Transgender Man respondent provided insightful and unique qualitative responses. More of these menstruator's stories deserve to be told. This was an exploratory study, that relied on convenience sampling. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable to all Undergraduate menstruators on college campuses.

A second limitation was related to two problematic questions. Specifically, Question 9 of the survey asked: "Access to period products affects my ability to live my everyday life (e.g., attending class, going to work, staying physically active, etc.)" This question was not specific enough, and it was so open ended that it could have been interpreted in many different ways. Christina, a White Female who chose "Strongly Agree" expressed in her response:

> I interpreted this question to mean that the type/level of access I have to period products does/does not enable me to live my everyday life, and it absolutely does which is why I picked Strongly Agree. Did I not have easy access to period products I would find it difficult to go to class, work, etc.

While some also understood this question in the same manner that Christina did, others derived the question to mean something else entirely. Alicia, also a White Female, chose "Strongly Disagree," specifying that, "I am able to obtain products and live my life normally."

Another question that caused discrepancies was Question 12, which asked: "Period poverty is an issue on campus." For those who had expressed an understanding of Period Poverty

in Question 6 of the survey, they did not have any issues answering this. However, quite a few people who did not know what Period Poverty was felt that they could not articulate whether or not Period Poverty was an issue on campus. Sydney, a White Female, selected “Disagree,” elaborating that, “I wish there was an I do not know button because I do not know.” If this survey were to be replicated, it would be more effective to include the definition of Period Poverty before asking participants to identify Period Poverty on campus.

A third limitation worth noting is that I did not collect sufficient demographic data. In retrospect, I should have included a measure of household income in addition to housing status.

Despite these limitations, I was able to glean valuable insights into attitudes about and experiences with period poverty at ASU.

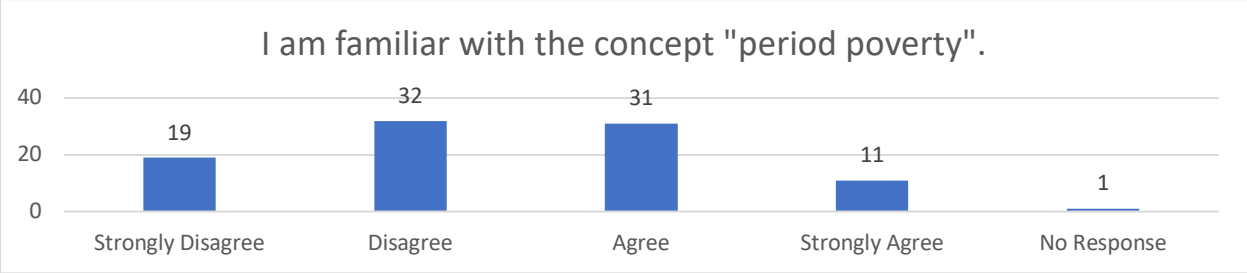
Results

Period Poverty Awareness

The main purpose of this study was to explore awareness of period poverty and to identify the current issues that Undergraduate students at Arizona State University experience as menstruators. To get at the question of awareness, participants were directly asked whether or not they knew what period poverty was.

Figure 1

Distribution of Likert Responses when asked of familiarity with the concept of period poverty.



Those who Strongly Disagreed to knowing what period poverty was asserted that they had never before heard the term. Participants who Disagreed were more likely to provide a guess

or presumption as to what it could mean. For example, Sarah, a Hispanic/Latino Female, elaborated, “I assume it has something to do with lack of accessibility to period products?” When asked this question, the amount of people who Disagreed (34%) was almost exactly the same as the amount who Agreed (33%). This showed a pattern of lack of awareness in general. Molly, a White Female who Agreed to knowing what period poverty was, provided a quick definition, saying, “I believe it means being too ‘poor’ to afford period products.” The major discernable difference between those who selected Agree and Strongly Agree was that those who Strongly Agreed to knowing what period poverty was had a strong tie to the Menstrual Equity Movement. Christina, a White Female, described, “I have founded two menstrual equity groups in the past focused on improving access to menstrual hygiene products for homeless/low income folks.” Christina’s work can most closely be compared to that of the “Do It Yourself” charitable efforts that Jennifer Weiss-Wolf first noticed before starting the Menstrual Equity Movement (2017).

Period Poverty on Campus: The Work Is Not Done

The overall understanding of period poverty as a concept tended toward a lack of understanding. None of the respondents expressed that they personally had experienced period poverty. Some participants even alluded to the existence of period poverty in developing countries, but not here in the United States. This sentiment was still reflected when respondents were asked if period poverty was an issue on Arizona State University’s campus specifically. Most participants agreed that even though they did not personally know anybody on campus that experienced period poverty, they felt that the campus did not have an adequate amount of resources for those who might struggle with access to period products. Jordan, a White Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming person, articulated the common thought:

> Not everyone has access to supplies, and I think it is ridiculous that so many people are denied access to necessities. I haven't seen any instance of this personally, but I am certain it is an issue. It's something a lot of people have to keep quiet about because of the argument that supplies are a 'luxury.'

Amber, a White Female, had the same thought. She said, "Even tampons in public restrooms cost money. This creates a barrier to access." Many menstruators on campus were not aware of where period products were in restrooms on campus, and a multitude felt that they were only available in tampon and sanitary pad dispensers that menstruators have to pay to use.

In May of 2019, approximately a year before this study was conducted, Arizona State University's Undergraduate Student Government (USG) and the Planned Parenthood Generation Action at ASU (PPGen @ ASU) teamed up to petition ASU's President, Michael Crow, to provide all campus bathrooms with period products (De Alba Cardenas, 2019). Crow agreed to initiate a Pilot Program in coordination with the USG and PPGen to supply period products in all of the restrooms in ASU Tempe's Memorial Union as well as in the Sun Devil Fitness Complexes on all four campuses. Lauren and Hannah, two Females who felt they had a strong prior understanding of period poverty, both made reference to this specific multi-campus movement. Lauren expressed that she felt PPGen @ ASU was able to stock most restrooms with period products. Hannah was able to provide a bit more detail by articulating:

> …I also am aware that PPGen @ ASU got Michael Crow to pass an initiative to have the University supply feminine hygiene products in every twin bathroom in big buildings on campus. I forget the details, mostly because it didn't get passed in every bathroom on campus. So, the work is not done.

Although these were the only two menstruators who knew about PPGen @ ASU and USG's strides in the Menstrual Equity Movement, others did notice that there were free period products being offered on ASU's campus. About 28% of the respondents reported that they knew of buildings with free access to period products, and many made reference to the Memorial Union. With that being said, nobody mentioned that they had access in the Sun Devil Fitness Complexes. Other buildings such as Hayden and Nobel libraries, Barrett, the Honors College, and the Post Office at the Downtown Campus were referenced.

The fact that 65% of survey respondents were not able to identify any buildings on the four ASU Campuses supports Hannah's point. There is still more work to be done.

Why We Supply Schools

One of the major issues that the Menstrual Equity Movement focuses on is spreading access to period products to schools. Weiss-Wolf (2017) spells out that her research in public Grades 6-12 schools found that 12% of students resorted to using make-shift products and that 49% had missed school because of their periods. It was important in this research to identify where those problems might also appear on Arizona State University's campus.

Toilet Paper: "It Happens to Everyone"

In City Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras-Copeland (D-NY)'s bid to supply period products in New York public schools, she exclaimed, "They're as necessary as toilet paper!" (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). The fight for Menstrual Equity argues that we must make period products as accessible as the toilet paper and soap that all public restrooms are required to provide. As the fight continues, many menstruators have had to turn these publicly funded goods to use as makeshift products.

Survey respondents were asked directly if they have had to use a makeshift product such as toilet paper in lieu of a preferred menstrual product in the past 6 months. 48% of respondents said that they had not, while some specified that they have had to do so in the past, just not in the stated time frame. For the 52% of menstruators who had to use a makeshift product, many expressed that they had to use it when their periods came unexpectedly at school and they did not have their own supply of period products on hand. Having to do this upset respondents like Lauren, a White Female, who declared, "Any mall, any restaurant, any public… restroom. I have shoved toilet paper… It's ridiculous the amount of access women don't have."

With that being said, there was a general sense of compliance from many respondents. Veronica and Amber, both White Females, articulated that it happens to everyone at least occasionally. Paige, another White Female, explained, "Honestly, we've all been there – even if you're just at an event and did not happen to have a tampon in your bag, it's really not a big deal."

Many menstruators at Arizona State University have had to resort to using makeshift products in order to continue along with their preset schedules. Although some seem to have succumbed to apathy regarding the inconvenience, research shows that using makeshift products can lead to dangers such as infection (McCarty, 2016). As Menstrual Equity Activist Rebekah Rennick from Grinnell College said, "When we menstruate, however unexpectedly, we should not feel fear in pits of our stomachs because of your lack of foresight" (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). Menstruators at Arizona State University deserve the stability and consistency of always having the products that they need to fully function. If these items are provided in all bathrooms, it allows menstruating students to be fully present in their classes. This can relieve any mental burden of having to constantly police their own bodies.

Missing School

Another key concern for student menstruators is that many around the United States have reported missing school due to a lack of access to menstrual products. A study conducted by Always found that one in five American girls have had to miss school by reason of a lack of period products (Rifenburg, 2018). Participants in the study were asked how many days of school they have had to miss in this past six months due to this, and 99% answered 0 days. Hannah, a Hispanic/Latino Female specified, “Even if I didn’t have those things (though it would be pretty unlikely for me), I would probably use toilet paper and wear black pants,” as her reasoning for not having to miss school due to her period. She felt as though her menstruation was an individual problem and that it was ultimately her responsibility to figure it out. Jordan, a White Genderqueer/Gender Non-conforming person agreed by stating, “If I ran out while at school, I just wore pads for longer than I should have or made makeshift ones.” One menstruator, Samantha, an American Indian/Alaska Native Female, shared that she was in the hospital due to “odd and irregular bleeding,” which caused her to miss one day of school. Other than this specific instance, no other menstruators in this study felt that a lack of period products took them away from their obligations to attend classes at school. The menstruators’ compliance and adaptability in using makeshift products seems to have allowed them to persevere and do everything that they can to still attend their classes.

Current Access to Period Products

It was evident in this study that, while some menstruators were caught off guard occasionally without period products, nearly all of them had a consistent supply of period products at their disposal in their homes. Helpful and interesting stories were shared by these

menstruators regarding their access to period products, even though most if not all had not experienced period poverty themselves.

Strong Social Network

When asked if they had always had access to period products in their own home, 91% of participants responded “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” With this being said, many also followed up with a “because…” in their qualitative explanations. A common theme that was noticed was that many menstruators felt that they had access to period products because they knew someone else who menstruated. Menstruators with a strong social network of other menstruators felt supported in having period products.

Mothers

There were multiple accounts from these Undergraduate menstruators that their mother played an important role in them having a consistent supply of period products in their own homes. Marissa, a White Female who lives in the Arizona State University form, explained that, “I grew up with a mom and a sister, I have had products in my home.” Sarah, a Hispanic/Latino Female living with her parents agreed by saying, “I live with my parents, and my mother or grandmother buy period products for the household.” In research conducted by Joan Jacobs Brumberg published in 1997, young girls in Western cultures have historically relied on their mothers for all things pertaining to periods. As young girls reached the moment of menarche, their first period, they would historically turn to their mothers for an explanation and for a “hygiene” product to take care of it. Many of these respondents felt that their mothers still were a key player in their access to period products. On the other hand, not all menstruators had strong supports at home. Vanessa, a Black/African American Female added, “When I lived with my dad, he wasn’t always great at having what I needed.” Brumberg (1997) also found that,

historically, men have not been included in their daughter's menstrual experiences. Lauren, a White Female, joined this sentiment by saying, "I live with men and one woman in a household. Women buy their products, it's not like toilet paper where it's a household necessity." She felt that since she was the sole provider of her own period products, she did not always have easy access to them in her own household.

Based off of these observations, it appears as though gender does matter when it comes to having products in the household. Those who had female figures, such as mothers, felt that they could rely on them to provide what they needed, while those who lived with fathers or male roommates did not feely supported or understood. One might draw the conclusion that it is empowering for women to lean on one another and bond over their common sisterhood of menstruation. However, this is more likely than not a sign of the larger issue of male-dominated spaces and persisting patriarchal control over menstruation. Men in the household do not have to deal with menstruation, and their male privilege allows them to remain unconcerned with the products involved.

Friends

A strong social network of menstruating friendships caused by a perception of sisterhood and sodality was also documented in this research. Jordan, a White Genderqueer/Gender Non-conforming person explained that their whole supply was based off of a connection to their friends, "My friend and I save money to buy them together, and we share the supply." For others, having friends came in handy when supplies ran low at home, and they did not have time to get to the store. Paige, a White Female, articulated, "I've needed to borrow from a friend or roommate before because I physically did not have time to go to the store yet." Not only did these menstruators feel that they had enough access to period products to supply their own

menstrual cycle, but they were also willing to share and give them to friends when it was needed. It is interesting that so many menstruators are willing to give up a commodity so freely, and more research should be conducted regarding this observed phenomenon.

Free Products on Campus

As the Menstrual Equity Movement has spread to universities and colleges around the United States, most initiatives have focused on supplying free products in all bathrooms for students. Although it was evident that the menstruators in this study felt they had the resources and support to have menstrual products for the majority of their periods, many still improvised with makeshift products at the onset of their periods when away from home. When asked whether they would benefit from access to free period products on campus, Alicia, a White Female, expressed, "I'd be able to be out of my dorm building if I run out of my stash in my backpack…" Some menstruators felt that this service would be more convenient for them, and many of them felt that others would use the service. Because of that, it should be implemented.

Figure 2

Calculated Average Likert Responses when asked if free products were offered on campus, if they would use the service versus compared to if others would use the service.

An average of the Likert Scale Responses was calculated and compared. Respondents were more likely to feel that others would use and benefit from the service than to use it

themselves. A surprising number of respondents said that they would not use free products, and two patterns in qualitative respondents were identified as reasons for this.

Taking Free Products, Taking from Others

After selecting that they would not utilize free products on campus, many articulated that they would feel guilty as it would be taking from other students who might need the period products more. Kelly, a Hispanic/Latino Female, expressed, "I would be grateful for the option, but would use my own to prevent me from feeling like I would be taking resources from others who are in need." Christina, a White Female, gave a very similar response:

> I probably would not because I have the money at my disposal to purchase and would not want to utilize a resource that other students need much more than me. I would leave the available products to those that need them.

It is interesting that so many menstruators felt as though this publicly funded, free product would have a quantity limit or eventually run out. It is almost certain that most people using public restrooms do not abstain from utilizing the public toilet paper out of worry that others after them will not have access.

Quality of Free Products and Brand Loyalty

Another pattern noticed in those who would not use free products was that they felt these products would be of less quality than what they were used to. Kayla, a White Female, specified that, "Depends on the type and quality of the supplies." Hannah, a Hispanic/Latino Female, also Disagreed to using free period products by articulating, "I usually invest in higher quality, more expensive products for comfort." Hannah's story was specifically interesting, considering that she referenced multiple times through the survey that she has had to use toilet paper as a makeshift product in order to go about her day.

A large part of Menstrual Activism and the Menstrual Equity Movement has given attention to the major producers of period products. The owners of Tampax, Always, Kotex, and Playtex control a large majority of the market, and they have for decades (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). Many menstruators feel that these brands represent a higher quality and they tend to continuously buy them. Research done by Brumberg (1997) showed that many menstruators will stick with the brand that they were first introduced to, whether that be by their mother or by their friends. As free products are offered on campus, it is important that the safest and most accessible products are provided to menstruators.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The objective of this research was to determine the attitudes and experiences with period poverty in Undergraduate menstruators at Arizona State University. Efforts to bring the Menstrual Equity Movement onto campus have already begun, and it was a goal to understand how this community could best be served. This pilot study tells a story of 94 menstruators, which is a very small sample size compared to that of the 74,878 students that attended school at ASU on campus in 2019 (*Facts and Figures,* n.d.). For future studies, more specified approaches to gathering data from menstruators experiencing period poverty at ASU can be used. Additional representation from specific Ethnic/Racial classes as well as Gender classes should be pursued in order to deliver a true embodiment of period poverty on ASU's campus.

My findings suggest that period poverty is experienced as a personal issue at home or on campus for participants. Most of the menstruators felt comfortable with their personal supply of period products. However, as the narrative accounts suggests, menstruating students are still often caught stuck at school without a period product and forced to make-do with toilet paper as a makeshift product.

Some respondents expressed gratitude at the idea of having free products to manage their periods, while others reported that they would feel guilt. One reason is that they would feel bad taking a free product away from somebody else who needed it. More research could be conducted into this, possibly analyzing how humans are conditioned to perform their social class, or maybe even looking into how period products are so ingrained in Westernized society as a commodity that it would be a challenge for users to view it as a public product available for everyone.

The second reason that respondents felt they would not use free products is because of the assumption that the quality of free products would not be up to their personal standards. Tampon and pad companies have advertised for decades about new, fancy, expensive products to keep their users buying. It is possible that some menstruators are so loyal to the brand recognition that they would prefer to buy what they are familiar with.

Another theme that appeared in this study is that of menstruation being associated with networks of women. Many respondents articulated that they were reliant on their mothers or friends to have period products for them. For those who were dependent on males, they did not feel supported. Future research could be conducted on how stigmatization of menstruation performs at a micro level, starting in the home.

Conclusion

The Menstrual Equity Movement is fairly recent, only established within the past five years. Led by the work of Weiss-Wolf and other legislative forces, pivotal work has already been done in creating accessibility to key sectors of the United States that face period poverty. Just as student leaders have petitioned their colleges and universities to combat period poverty on their campuses, little research has been conducted regarding the experiences and needs of

menstruators in higher education. Even though many menstruators in this study felt confident in their ability to purchase their own period products, providing tampons and pads as a public good in all restrooms, much like toilet paper, would ensure a dignified and accessible learning experience for all students.

As the Menstrual Equity Movement continues to develop and spread, it is imperative that the work done by prior Menstrual Activists is not glanced over. Not only do menstruators deserve access to period products, but they also warrant products that are safe and sustainable. It is imperative that the Menstrual Equity Movement continues an educated conversation about the choices that menstruators have over their bodies and their period products. As Arizona State University continues its journey in providing free products, the health and safety of menstruators must be of top priority.

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Appendix A: Electronic Survey

Attitudes and Experiences with Period Poverty of Undergraduate Menstruators at ASU

Consent The purpose of this research project is to understand the personal experiences of menstruators and how their access to period products effect their lived realities. This is a research project being conducted by Kirsten Ronning at Arizona State University. You are invited to participate in this research project if you are an undergraduate student who also has periods.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 20 minutes. Your responses will be confidential, and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. The survey questions will be about your personal experiences at ASU and your experiences with others at ASU. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

We will do our best to keep information anonymous. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your anonymity, the surveys will not contain information that personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Dr. Jennifer Haskin at jhaskin5@asu.edu or Kirsten Ronning at keronnin@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair and the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of this study.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "Agree" button below indicates that: You have read the above information You voluntarily agree to participate You are at least 18 years of age

○ Agree (1)

Demographic Info Demographic Info

Q1 Gender:

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Transgender Male/Transgender Man (3)
- ○ Transgender Female/Transgender Woman (4)
- ○ Genderqueer/Gender Non-conforming (5)
- ○ Different Identity (6) _____
- ○ Prefer not to state (7)

Q2 Age:

- ○ 18-24 years old (1)
- ○ 25-34 years old (2)
- ○ 35-44 years old (3)
- ○ 45-54 years old (4)

Q3 Current Housing:

- ○ Arizona State University dorm (1)
- ○ Off Campus Apartment/House (2)
- ○ With Parents (3)
- ○ Other housing arrangement: (4)

_____

Q4 Ethnicity Origin (or Race):

- ○ Black or African American (1)
- ○ Asian (2)
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (3)
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native (4)
- ○ Hispanic or Latino (5)
- ○ White (6)
- ○ Other race/ethnicity (7) _____

Q5 Employment Status:

- ○ Full Time - working 35 or more hours a week (1)
- ○ Part Time - working less than 35 hours per week (2)
- ○ Not Employed (3)

Q6 General Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I am familiar with the concept "period poverty". (1)	○	○	○	○

Q6 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q7 General Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I always have access to period products in my own home. (1)	○	○	○	○

Q7 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q8 General Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
If I ever run out of period products in my own home, I have easy access to the resources needed to get more. (1)	○	○	○	○

Q8 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q9 General Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Access to period products affects my ability to live my everyday life (e.g., attending class, going to work, staying physically active, etc.) (1)	○	○	○	○

Q9 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q10 General Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I have had to use something other than a tampon, pad, etc. to use as a makeshift product to manage my period in the past 6 months (e.g., toilet paper, sock, etc.) (1)	○	○	○	○

Q10 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q11 General Questions

	0 days (1)	1 day (2)	2 days (3)	3 days (4)	4 days (5)	5 or more days (6)
In the past six months, I have missed school because of lack of access to period products (e.g., tampons, pads, menstrual cups, menstrual underwear). (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q11 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q12 ASU Campus Specific Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Period poverty is an issue on campus. (1)	○	○	○	○

Q12 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q13 ASU Campus Specific Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I would benefit and use the service if free period products were offered on campus. (1)	○	○	○	○

Q13 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q14 ASU Campus Specific Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Others would benefit and use the service if campus offered access to free period products. (1)	○	○	○	○

Q14 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Q15 ASU Campus Specific Questions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I know of buildings on campus where there is access to free products. (1)	○	○	○	○

Q15 Can you tell me more about your answer to this question?

Appendix B: Recruitment Script

Hello,

My name is Kirsten Ronning and I am a senior at Arizona State University completing my Barrett Honors Thesis Project. I am conducting a study in an attempt to gather information regarding the personal experiences of menstruators and how their access to period products effect their lived realities. If you are an undergraduate student at ASU, 18 years or older, and you have periods, please consider completing this survey. Completion of this survey should take no more than 20 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Thank you for your time, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Kirsten Ronning

Appendix C: IRB Approval

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Jennifer Haskin
CLAS-SS: Social and Family Dynamics, T. Denny Sanford School of (SSFD) 480/965-8748
jhaskin5@asu.edu

Dear Jennifer Haskin:
On 2/7/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review: Initial Study	
Title: Attitudes and Experiences with Period Poverty of Undergraduate Menstruators at ASU	
Investigator: Jennifer Haskin	
IRB ID: STUDY00011442	
Funding: None	
Grant Title: None	
Grant ID: None	
Documents Reviewed:	• Ronning_Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Ronning_IRB Social Behavioral 2019.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Ronning_RecruitmentScript.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Ronning_Survey.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 on 2/7/2020.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Kirsten Ronning Jennifer Haskin

Kirsten Ronning