

More Than a Period

Creative Engagement and Storytelling to Transform
the Menstrual Communication Landscape



by Priyanka Abraham Poulouse

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For *Maa*, who unknowingly showed me how to be a feminist.

ABSTRACT

This project addresses long-standing taboos, misinformation, and negative communication about menstruation that contribute to its persistent stigmatisation. It reveals discontentment experienced by menstruators in professional, institutional, and communal systems. This centres on dissatisfaction with menstrual leave policies and invalidation of debilitating menstrual pain by medical professionals, as well as insufficient emotional and empathetic support from non-menstruators. This thesis situates itself in the gap between the physiological challenges of menstruation and the psychosocial needs of menstruators.

These concerns are addressed by investigating how design can foster meaningful knowledge, positive messaging, and open communication about menstruation. By employing a practice-based methodology led by provocations in material form, this project initiates conversation around the power structures that assert control over women's bodies. Through ethnographic interviews, participatory workshops, co-creative projects, and storytelling, the research gathers significant insights into a diversity of lived experiences of menstruation.

The research culminates in the establishment of two interconnected menstrual communication networks—*Bloom Club*, a vibrant and inclusive community centred on knowledge sharing through personal accounts, the inclusion of non-menstruators to build allyship, and the use of playfully provocative messaging for accessible and engaging advocacy—and *Bloom Talk*, a podcast show that unravels a diversity of menstrual experiences through candid, personal stories. These outcomes serve as case studies of creative communication systems that foster community building to enable healthy, positive, and curiosity-driven attitudes toward menstruation.

KEYWORDS

Menstrual Stigma

Menstrual Communication

Reproductive Health Communication

Communication Design

Participatory Design

Community Engagement

Design for Discourse

Bloom Club

Bloom Talk Podcast

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Arts-based research

A form of qualitative research that utilises an assortment of art forms (painting, collaging, podcasting etc.) to conduct the research and extract information through artistic/creative processes (Greenwood, 2019).

Chums

A slang term meaning a close friend. As young girls, we used the phrase “I have my chums” to secretly convey to each other that we were in the bleeding phase of our menstrual cycle.

Communities of care

I define these as groups of people that converge in physical or virtual spaces towards a shared cause, working together to amplify and address individual concerns that impact the collective. The care exhibited by members towards each other in such a community centres on mutual respect, empathy, and sensitivity.

Discursive design

Design that extends beyond problem-solving and instead serves to initiate dialogue and self-reflection. Derived from “discourse” (Tharp & Tharp, 2019).

Endometriosis

“An abnormal state in which bits of endometrium-like tissue grow outside the uterus. Before and during menstruation, these bits of tissue bleed causing pain, often in the abdomen or pelvis and increased dysmenorrhea or menstrual cramps.” *Glossary*. (n.d.). The Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. www.cemcor.ca/resources/glossary.

Feminism

In the context of this research, feminism is defined as a social movement dedicated to eradicating the systemic oppression of women. “Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives.” (Hooks, 2000).

Feminist action research

A form of qualitative, democratic research that involves participants in shared decision-making through collaborative processes that centre lived experiences as key knowledge sources (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

Healthcare influencers

Individuals or groups with credible expertise and experience in healthcare who have an established social media presence and significant influence on their audience’s understanding of complex medical knowledge.

Menarche

“The first menstrual bleeding (period).” *Glossary*. (n.d.). The Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. www.cemcor.ca/resources/glossary.

Menstrual cramps

“A discomfort or pain caused by the uterus muscle contracting. They often occur just before and during the first days of menstruation.” *Glossary*. (n.d.). The Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. www.cemcor.ca/resources/glossary.

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM)

The availability of safe and clean menstrual hygiene products, and access to clean water, soap, and sanitary facilities for the use and disposal of these products during menstruation. (*Guidance on Menstrual Health and Hygiene - Resources • SuSanA, n.d.*)

Menstrual stigma

The negative socio-cultural perception of menstruation as an unclean, impure, or shameful phenomenon that supplements the ostracisation of menstruating persons in many societies and cultures around the world.

Menstruation

“Vaginal bleeding resulting from the process of periodic shedding of the endometrium. The first day of menstrual flow marks the beginning of a new menstrual cycle.” *Glossary*. (n.d.). The Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. www.cemcor.ca/resources/glossary.

Menstruation management

The appropriate use and disposal of menstrual products like sanitary pads, tampons, cups, and period underwear.

Menstruators

All persons with a uterus (cisgender, transgender, non-binary) who have menstruated and continue to menstruate, as well as those who stop menstruating due to hormonal intervention. The terms “girls” and “women” are sometimes used in this document to refer to all menstruators regardless of their gender identity.

Myth

“A popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone especially: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society.” (Merriam-Webster online).

Non-menstruators

Any person who does not possess a uterus, who has never menstruated and will never experience biological menstruation.

Patriarchy

A social construct or “system of institutionalised gender roles” (Hooks, 2004), which upholds male dominance over women. “*broadly*: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power.” (Merriam-Webster online).

Period poverty

“A lack of access to menstrual products, education, hygiene facilities, waste management, or a combination of these.” Canada, W. and G. E. (2023, December 4). *Government of Canada*. Women and Gender Equality Canada. www.women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/funding/menstrual-equity-fund.html#

Period shaming

Any language (spoken/written), visual, or action, that shames menstruation and discriminates against menstruating people. Defined as “any negative and/or disrespectful behaviour in relation to the menstrual cycle and menstruating girls.” (Intrapathway et al., 2023).

Playfully provocative messaging

I define this as an accessible and inclusive language—both written and visual—that employs a playful tone of voice using humour, rhyming, and wordplay to provoke self-reflection and galvanise support towards serious socio-cultural and political issues.

PMSing

A pejorative inference of a woman's irritable/hysterical/negative mood or behaviour as related to or influenced by the menstrual cycle.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

“The conventional medical way of diagnosing the problem when a woman has evidence of one of three problems: 1) androgen excess (usually hirsutism or acne); 2) “funny periods” like amenorrhea, oligomenorrhea or irregular cycles, past or present ovulation disturbances (anovulatory or short luteal phase cycles); 3) many ovarian cysts in larger-than-normal ovaries.” *Glossary*. (n.d.). The Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. www.cemcor.ca/resources/glossary.

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)

“A severe form of PMS affecting less than 8% of menstruating women, and may be a cyclic form of depression (Huo et al, 2007; Klatzkin et al, 2010); Taylor, 2006).” Society for Menstrual Cycle Research. (n.d.). *SWS FACT SHEET. The Menstrual Cycle: A Feminist Lifespan Perspective*. www.menstruationresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/fact_4-2011-menstruation.pdf.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)

“The abbreviation for premenstrual syndrome that some experts believe is a mental illness. Also used for premenstrual symptoms, a set of physical and emotional changes before menstrual flow that occur when estrogen is too high and progesterone too low.” *Glossary*. (n.d.). The Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. www.cemcor.ca/resources/glossary.

Radical menstruation movement

The radical menstruation movement is characterized by its rejection of commercial FemCare corporations through DIY menstrual management technologies, dissociation of gender from menstruation by using the term ‘menstruator’ for anyone who menstruates, and opposition to the romanticisation of menstruation by detaching it from reproductive capabilities and treating it as just another regular bodily process (Bobel, 2010).

Second-wave feminism

A feminist movement that followed the first wave, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s in the Western world. It advocated for women's liberation and focused largely on issues like reproductive rights, gender roles, women's suffrage, and legal rights. However, it has been widely criticised for its lack of intersectionality by White feminists in the exclusion of the voices and socio-economic conditions of women of colour (Hooks, 2000).

Stigma

“A set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something.” (Merriam-Webster online).

Glossary of Terms

Taboo

“A prohibition imposed by social custom or as a protective measure; something that is not acceptable to say, mention, or do.” (Merriam-Webster online).

Tacit knowledge

Knowledge that stems from intuition and personal experience which is subjective and interpretive to context.

Tactile exploration

Discovering and uncovering new knowledge through the sense of touch, allowing for a more nuanced understanding that stems from the body and the ways in which it interacts with objects.

Third-wave feminism

Beginning in the early 1990s, this wave of feminism, sought to address the limitations and exclusions of the second wave by embracing diversity, intersectionality, and inclusivity. It challenges the gender status quo (Bobel, 2010) and emphasises the importance of recognizing and valuing the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds, including race, sexuality, and class (Hooks, 2000).

Note: *All glossary terms are hyperlinked in this document upon their first appearance.*

PREFACE

Across my career as a communication designer in the private sector, I have cultivated creative partnerships with brands that have a social, cultural, or environmental impact. I particularly valued collaborations on the development of products and services for women—whether it was a menstrual hygiene brand focused on tackling **period shaming** through the packaging design of their products or a community-based, digital lifestyle fitness application aimed at uniting women of all ages and body shapes. Paradoxically, I had to constantly confront men in positions of power controlling the narrative on the design of these products and services with scant knowledge of female bodies, experiences, and relationships in society. Moreover, in the private sector, commercial gain often eclipsed societal benefits, which ultimately dictated my design approach. Seeking a paradigm shift that aligned with my moral compass, I envisioned equipping myself with investigative tools to forge design solutions rooted in socio-cultural change. This led me to the graduate design program at Emily Carr University where, building on my interest in women's health, I began exploring the role of design in social discourse about **menstruation**.

Advocacy and allyship form the backbone of my creative practice. As a woman of colour, aligned with the ideals of **feminism** and equality, I am resolute in using my design platform to amplify the voices of women in undoing the damaging narratives that diminish our agency and power in the world. Everyday news cycles brimming with horrific tales of sexual assault, violence, and systemic oppression of women around the world, provoke my rage and disgust but also bolster a resolve to harness my design prowess in advocating for women's rights. As an ally, I acknowledge the importance of self-reflection by actively challenging my own biases and using my privilege as a middle-class, urban-educated, English-speaking, cisgender woman, to enable concerted efforts to dismantle the **patriarchy**.

My approach to this research area is a multifaceted engagement rooted in humour, creative expression, and community building. As much as my project aims to amplify women's agency, it is also an open invitation for men to be a part of the conversation and learn to be better allies. My process reflects a holistic strategy, emphasising the interconnectedness of design, healthcare, individual, and collective agency. With this research, I have unearthed the essence of my design practice—an unwavering curiosity coupled with creative engagement, all in service of catalysing social and cultural transformation.

My goal isn't merely academic or professional, it is a personal intent to effect meaningful change through design, that continues to unfold with every project and interaction in my practice. I look to the future with a deep sense of responsibility, knowing that my work holds the potential to positively impact lived experiences, challenge norms, and ultimately contribute to the cause of women's equality.

INTRODUCTION

As a teenager growing up in Mumbai, one of the most progressive urban cities in India, my girlfriends and I still referred to our menses as “chums”, a term passed down to us from previous generations. The menstrual education I received in high school focused solely on the management of periods—how to correctly use and dispose of a soiled napkin—taught to us in a dull seminar by a female doctor with a few teachers present. Most of us were too shy to ask questions, and the ones that did were bombarded with technical information and complex diagrams of the female reproductive system. Looking back, I realise that there was no attention given to the physical or emotional aspects of experiencing menstruation for the first time—sudden and unexpected changes in the body, menstrual cramps, constantly checking for stains, and the ever-looming dread of being accused of irrational behaviour or as the boys termed it “PMSing”. It was also peculiar to me that in an all-girls school, we felt the need to hide our sanitary products on trips to the bathroom for fear of scandalous looks from colleagues, teachers, and staff.

When I turned 30 a couple of years ago, I experienced a whole new phase of my menstrual cycle. Unlike my 20s, this phase was characterised by severe menstrual cramps that would often lead to bouts of fainting, feelings of depression leading up to my period, dietary problems, erratic sleep patterns, and a great deal of stress. As a working professional, I felt immense guilt and comparatively decreased competence each time I had to request time off to deal with the physical challenges of painful **menstrual cramps** and the emotionally draining time that followed. Never having experienced this severity of the menstrual cycle, I turned to the internet for answers. Barraged with complex scientific information about conditions like **Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)**, **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)**, **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)**, and **endometriosis**, I felt alarmed, overwhelmed, and confused. In revealing this newfound anxiety to my girlfriends, I was both relieved and concerned to learn that some of them had experienced similar changes, but somehow, we had never spoken about it with each other. They comforted my apprehensions and directed me to the world of **healthcare influencers** like Dr. Tanaya who identifies as the Millennial Doctor on Instagram (@dr_cuterus).

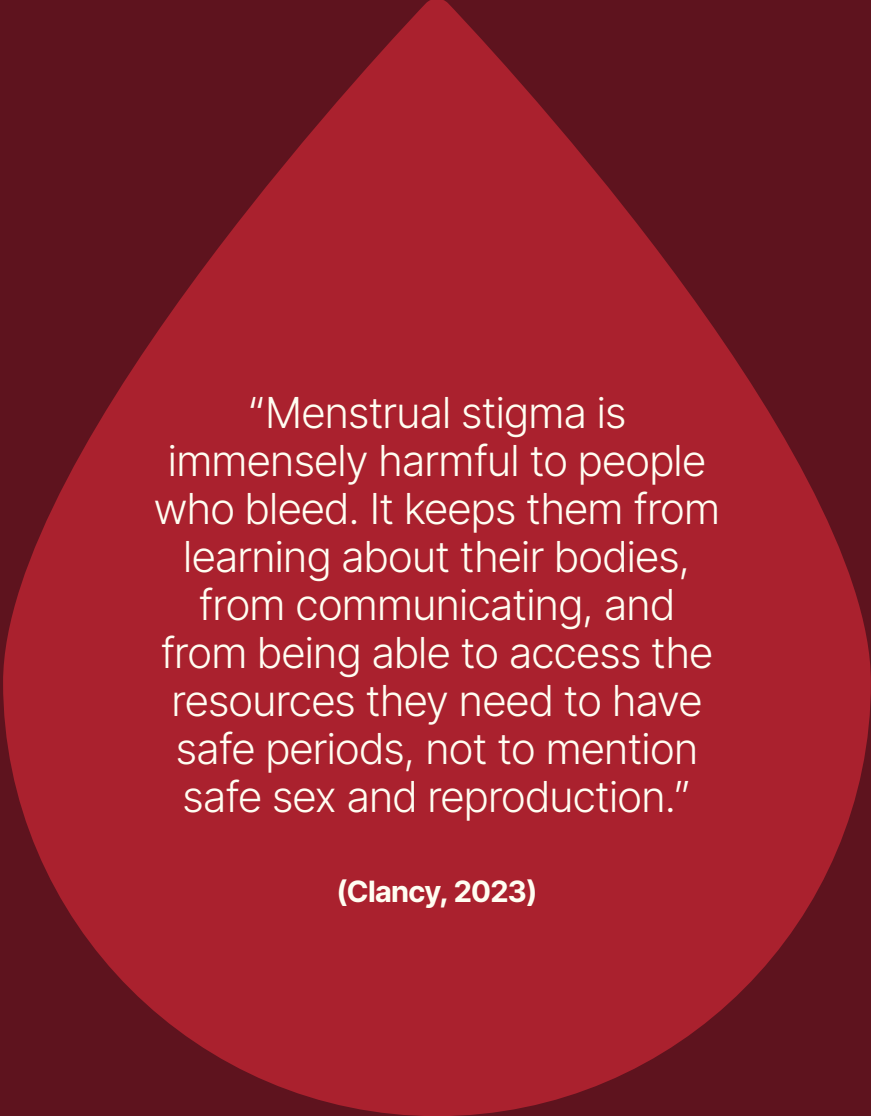
With social media becoming an important space for cultural discourse, traditionally taboo topics like menstruation are gaining traction in public forums like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok. Like Dr. Tanaya, there is a multitude of medical professionals and women’s health advocates working towards providing important health information and pertinent advice to young girls and women across the world. Global advocacy and educational communities such as [PERIOD](#), [Free Periods Canada](#), [Menstruation Matters](#), [The Pad Project](#), [Bloody Good Period](#), [Days For Girls](#), [Feminist](#), and more are doing incredible work towards combating **menstrual stigma**, tackling **period poverty**, and disseminating valuable information about menstruation beyond **menstruation management**. They do this in accessible

2. Introduction

ways, utilising engaging media like illustration and video, as well as community-focused initiatives like workshops and product distribution drives. As a designer, this inspired and excited me to explore the role of communication design to aid the messaging around menstruation and help normalise conversations about it in spaces outside of doctor's offices and hospitals.

Moving to Canada as a student, brought with it a whole new realm of possibilities. At Emily Carr University, I found a unique sense of safety, agency, and empowerment in being able to candidly share my menstrual experiences with new friends, colleagues, and instructors. Throughout my time in the graduate program, I have felt a sense of emotional freedom to address a taboo topic within a community devoid of judgement or ridicule. Engaging with a hugely diverse student body has given me significant insights into the multiplicity of lived experiences, social biases, religious and cultural customs, and practices related to menstruation. It has also shown me that open and honest conversations about menstruation are still quite nascent but gradually blossoming.

Through this research, I aim to bring conversations about menstruation to the fore and help bridge the gap between the social and medical conditions of menstruation. I hope that my designed interventions can ignite a sense of shared agency, advocacy, and allyship among **menstruators** and **non-menstruators** to rid menstruation of the stigma and ridicule it faces even today.



"Menstrual stigma is immensely harmful to people who bleed. It keeps them from learning about their bodies, from communicating, and from being able to access the resources they need to have safe periods, not to mention safe sex and reproduction."

(Clancy, 2023)

CONTEXT AND FRAMING

Born and raised in India, a predominantly patriarchal society and culture, I have been privy to the many socio-cultural **taboos**, **myths**, and misinformation about menstruation—often deemed as impure or unclean. In certain Indian cultures, menstruating women face prohibitions from entering places of worship, kitchens, and various home areas, often relegated to separate spaces or outhouses during their periods. Moreover, they are forbidden from using daily utensils and participating in religious ceremonies (Garg & Anand, 2015). Critically acclaimed films such as *Pad Man*, a 2018 Hindi-language biographical comedy-drama, and *The Great Indian Kitchen*, a 2021 Malayalam-language drama film, highlight the prevalence of harmful menstrual taboos across two different cultures in India. They shed light on the many cultural atrocities, lack of information, and discomfort in discussing menstruation with male figures. These films expose persistent practices ranging from reusing old cloth rags as hygiene products to oppressive cultural diktats like forced isolation, bathing in rivers, and eating separately during menstruation.

Likewise, the 2018 award-winning documentary short film *Period. End of Sentence.* underscored the detrimental effects of archaic cultural ideals on the health, education, social condition, and individual agency of women in the remote Indian interiors. Concurrently, it showcased the awareness-raising efforts of Arunachalam Muruganantham, a male social activist and entrepreneur, and the inspiration of many films including *Pad Man*. His grassroots efforts in building and supplying low-cost sanitary pad-making machines across rural India have created work and income opportunities for many women. Despite facing societal ridicule, he continues to champion the cause of hygienic menstrual practices through lectures and community outreach, demonstrating the far-reaching impact that progressive male attitudes can have on culturally taboo topics like menstruation.

Shifting from India to a North American context, this study expands its focus to examine the Western attitudinal frameworks that contribute not only to the taboo status of menstruation but also to the gradual effacing of women's reproductive health rights. Despite being a natural bodily function, menstruation remains entangled in a global web of social **stigma**, transcending geographical boundaries. Euphemisms like “That time of the month”, “Aunt Flow”, “Code Red”, “Shark Week”, “Lady Business” and multiple others (**fig. 1**) endure even in contemporary societies of the Global North, reflecting the persistent sociological taboo around menstruation (Gottlieb, 2020). Such language not only diminishes the significance of menstruation but also degrades the menstrual experience, treating it as shameful.

3. Context and Framing

menstruation	euphemisms			euphemisms
	menstruation	euphemisms	euphemisms	
	Chums	Seeing red	Red light	
	That time of the month	Dracula's brew	I have my things	
	Visit from aunt flo	Chums	Red balloon	
	On the rag	Weeping womb	I have a flood	
	Lady business	Regles	Lady days	
	Moon time	Leak week	Visitors from Rodby	
	Crimson tide	The British have landed	Painters in the stairway	
	The red badge of courage	I'm on my days	Beetroot vagina	
	Checking into the red	Big aunt is visiting	Communists in the	
	roof inn	Thinga-ma-jig	gazebo	
	Girl flu	I have my days	Eldest aunt	
	Shark Week	Andres has arrived	Bad luck	
	She's at the moon	Little red riding hood is coming	Good friend	
	Riding the cotton pony	Red army	The thing comes	
	The red visitor	Emma	Apple bread	
	Riding the crimson wave	Mens	The day of that	
	Is it your P	Code red alarm	Arrival of Matthew Perry	
	PM	Relative from Rotenburg	Defrosting the steak	
	Oh she's a woman today	Tomato juice	The red cousin	
	Bloody mary	Entering the red sea	Chapulín Colorado	
	Code red	Pant shield's up, Captain	Smells like fish	
	Kitty has a nosebleed	Miss Scarlet's come home	Red Zhigul	
	The little strawberry	to Tara	Female monster	
	Massacre at the Y	Ketchup week	It's raining in the farm	
	Arts and craft week at	Les Ragnagnas	Tus diablos (your devils)	
	panty camp	Le Beaujolais nouveau est arrive	La Colorada (the redhead)	
	The curse	VOO (Vaginally Out of Order)	Regular holiday	

fig. 1: Comprehensive list of euphemisms/code words for menstruation (from multiple sources on the internet).

These unempathetic attitudes stem from misinformation, limited research on women's health, limited funding for women's health research¹, and ultimately the oppressive cultures enforced by patriarchal structures that shame women's bodies and biological experiences. Social taboos surrounding menstruation contribute to the reluctance of women to openly discuss menstrual health problems, promoting a misunderstanding of menstruation, and perpetuating a lack of awareness about serious conditions like heavy bleeding, irregular menses, and endometriosis (Gottlieb, 2020).

Contrary to assumptions, women's reproductive health issues are pertinent in North America, notably with the resurgence of conservative values challenging women's agency. Recently in April 2023, a controversial legislative bill, HB 1069, was proposed by the Florida House of Representatives². The bill seeks to ban elementary school educators from teaching children below grade 6 about menstruation, reproduction, sex education, and sexually transmitted diseases. With the age of **menarche** in the U.S.

¹ Women's health research lacks funding – These Charts Show How. (n.d.). <https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-023-01475-2/index.html>

² HB 1069, Florida House of Representatives (2023). https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loadoc.aspx?FileName=h1069_.docx&DocumentType=Bill&BillNumber=1069&Session=2023

3. Context and Framing

significantly lower than ever at an average of 12.5 years³ compared to age 14 more than a century ago⁴, it is concerning that education about menstruation at the institutional level, is being suppressed. The same patriarchal forces were instrumental in the overturn of the landmark *Roe v. Wade*⁵ judgement, revoking the constitutional right to safe abortion care, and severely impacting women's reproductive rights in the United States. By reversing *Roe v. Wade*, American state and federal political powers allow some societal segments preference and authority, consequently impacting the autonomy of those groups in deciding matters related to their reproductive well-being (Coen-Sanchez et al., 2022). The politics of women's sexual and reproductive health rights, exert a deep influence on women beyond the borders of the United States (Collective & Norsigian, 2011). Such legislation exemplifies how conservative values affect reproductive health discourse, highlighting patriarchal influences shaping women's autonomy over their bodies.

Despite these setbacks, positive strides in gender equality, and reproductive and sexual health policies from Scandinavian countries⁶, such as Denmark^{7,8}, Sweden^{9,10}, and Norway^{11,12}, serve as beacons of informed and empowered societies, fostering a more comprehensive awareness of women's rights. Recognising these global dynamics is imperative for shaping progressive communication systems that counter unfavourable decision-making on women's reproductive health.

³ "The usual age range is from 10-15 with the average about 12.5 years. The age of menarche has dropped (called the "secular trend") during the past century but the age of menarche now appears to be stabilizing in developed countries in the 21st century." *Glossary*. (n.d.). The Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research. www.cemcor.ca/resources/glossary.

⁴ Sole-Smith, V. (2019, May 1). *Why Are Girls Getting Their Periods So Young?* Scientific American. www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-are-girls-getting-their-periods-so-young/

⁵ *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973). [supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/410/113/#:~:text=U.S.%20Supreme%20Court,-Roe%20v.&text=A%20pregnant%20single%20woman%20\(Roe,of%20saving%20the%20mother%27s%20life](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/410/113/#:~:text=U.S.%20Supreme%20Court,-Roe%20v.&text=A%20pregnant%20single%20woman%20(Roe,of%20saving%20the%20mother%27s%20life).

⁶ *Scandinavian view on gender equality*. (2020, March 8). Medi Carrera. www.medicarrera.com/blog/scandinavian-view-on-gender-equality/

⁷ The Promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. Strategy for Denmark's Support. (2006, January 24).

⁸ Agustin, L. R. (2015). *The Policy on Gender Equality in Denmark – Update. In-depth Analysis for the FEMM Committee*. European Union, Brussels, 2015. [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/510026/IPOL_IDA\(2015\)510026_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/510026/IPOL_IDA(2015)510026_EN.pdf).

⁹ *Gender equality in Sweden*. (n.d.). Swedish Gender Equality Agency. www.swedishgenderequalityagency.se/gender-equality-in-sweden/

¹⁰ Eriksson, L., Tibajev, A., Vartanova, I., Strimling, P., & Essén, B. (2022). The Liberal Social Values of Swedish Healthcare Providers in Women's Healthcare: Implications for Clinical Encounters in a Diversified Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare. *International Journal of Public Health*, 67, 1605000. www.doi.org/10.3389/ijph.2022.1605000

¹¹ Sundby, J. (2005). Reproductive Health Policy in Norway. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 13(26), 153–154. [www.doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(05\)26196-7](https://www.doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(05)26196-7)

¹² Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). Norwegian guidelines for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Theoretical Positioning

At its core, this study delves into the psychosocial dimensions of menstruation, emphasising the interplay of social factors influencing an individual's perceptions and behaviours. The term psychosocial encapsulates the intricate connection between societal influences and individual experiences (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). Building upon Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler's (2020) analysis of Goffman's stigma framework, this study aligns with the authors' assertion that menstruation falls into all of Goffman's stigma categories– “abominations of the body”, “blemishes of individual character”, and “tribal identities or social markers associated with marginalised groups”. (Goffman 1963, 4). Supporting their analysis in the evidence of various studies, reveals deeply ingrained societal beliefs, harmful media portrayals, and the use of euphemisms as culprits perpetuating this stigma. This research seeks to tackle the profound impact of such stigma on the physical, mental, and social well-being of menstruators by establishing a communication design practice rooted in the creation of material artefacts as tools to raise awareness and bolster advocacy.

Furthermore, a key underpinning of this study is Young's (2005) compelling proposition that menstruating women are rendered “queer” in a society defining male non-menstruators as “normal”, essentially assigning a marginalised status to menstruating individuals. The concept of menstruators being effectively “in the closet” about their menstrual status underscores the pervasive shame and concealment faced by this group in personal, professional, institutional, and social spaces (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2020). Addressing this marginalisation, the research grounds itself in the tenets of inclusivity, empathy, and allyship through the development of participatory group workshops. These workshops harness creative engagement to channel conversations about menstruation, in the process, emphasising the role of digital media and the emergence of a “menstrual counterculture” through art and self-expression (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2020). By integrating individual and collective agency, the research advocates for design as a transformative tool for community engagement, storytelling, and social activism. The goal is to shift the narrative from menstruation as a negative experience to being an essential indicator of women's overall health and well-being.

Lastly, this study acknowledges the dominance of medical perspectives in public health discourse about menstruation. It recognises the emphasis on biological information about menstruation in institutional spaces, policies focused on **menstrual hygiene management (MHM)**, period poverty eradication, and the prioritisation of menstrual management technologies by public and private menstrual health

organizations. Alternatively, it proposes an investigation into menstruation within the psychosocial realm of women's reproductive health, employing four lenses of inquiry—personal, cultural, political, and social (**fig. 2**). Each lens is explored through creative responses, designed to enable inquisitive attitudes and the sharing of lived experiences aided by communication tools while endeavouring to reform the medicalised messaging of menstruation.

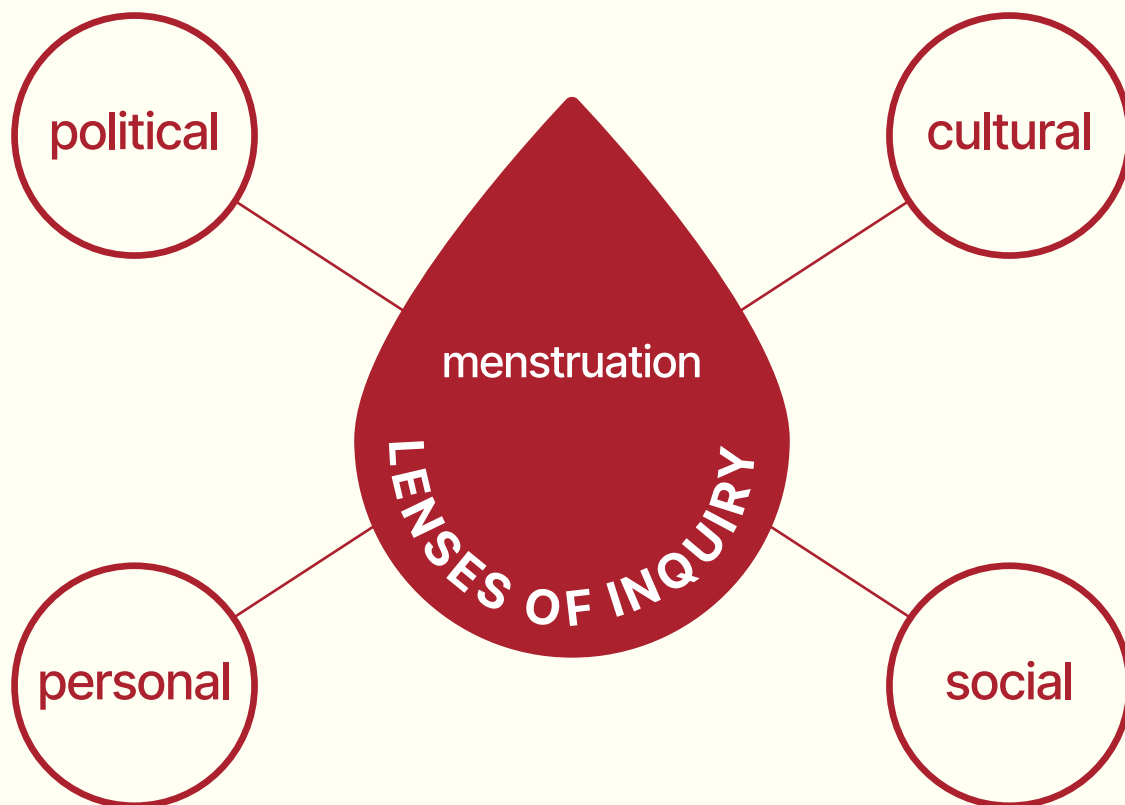


fig. 2: Lenses of inquiry.

Rationale

This project integrates ideologies from both **second-wave feminist** and **third-wave feminist** movements, entrenched in socio-cultural and political activism, to illuminate the destructive narratives contributing to menstruation's stigmatisation. The slogan, "The personal is political", originating from the late 1960s Women's Liberation Movement in the West and popularized as the title of Carol Hanisch's 1969 essay, underpins the essence of this research practice. In her essay, Hanisch upholds the relevance of US-based feminist-activist groups engaged in "consciousness-raising", asserting that it is political to express personal beliefs authentically. Hanisch ascertains that "it is...political action to tell it like it is, to say what I really believe about my life instead of what I've always been told to say." By leveraging personal insights and intuitive knowledge gained from lived experience, this project underscores the potential for designers to enhance social understanding of complex health challenges through participatory design methods. Furthermore, it draws from the ideologies and practices of the **radical menstruation movement** rooted in the exploration of counterculture media, with an emphasis on humour and creative expression (Bobel, 2010) to disseminate menstruation communication.

The implications of this research study are extensive. It directs design efforts toward initiating a discourse on deep-rooted cultural messaging that deems menstruation impure and menstruating women as monstrous (Clancy, 2023). This approach challenges oppressive systems influencing societal attitudes, education, and legislation that shape and impact women's sexual and reproductive health. The research further validates the efficacy of the participatory design process in community building. By uniting menstruators and non-menstruators in collaborative efforts to counter menstrual oppression, the study envisions a future marked by increased male allyship in advocating for women's health issues.

Research Objectives and Questions

This research contextualises itself within the current socio-political landscape surrounding women's reproductive and sexual health rights, marked by escalating incidents of violence, sexism, and systemic oppression against women globally. Societies and cultures perpetuating menstrual stigma are integral components of this overarching oppression. Emphasising the urgency of advocating for women's agency in decisions that intimately impact their bodies and lives, this research designates menstruation—an intrinsic biological process—as the focal point for advocacy. Recognising the ongoing struggle for reproductive justice, it is imperative, as a first step, to acknowledge and confront the persistent stigmatisation of menstruation. This requires raising awareness about menstrual taboos and injustices across genders and establishing **communities of care** that amplify and support women's voices and lived experiences. The goal of this research is to contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and empathetic world led by intersectional feminist perspectives, embodying the principles of a “liberatory period future” (Clancy, 2023), where menstruation is embraced as a natural aspect of life. The ensuing research is guided by the following questions, addressing the psychosocial factors influencing unfavourable perceptions of menstruation:

- **How can we create meaningful, positive, and open communication about menstruation?**
- **What design strategies can be used to remove the socio-cultural stigmas around menstruation?**
- **How can we safeguard the physiological and psychosocial needs of menstruators?**
- **What contemporary rituals can be designed to empower menstruators?**

Within the context of this study, the term “meaningful communication” encapsulates messaging characterised by informativeness, sensitivity, accuracy, accessibility, and inclusivity. The notion of “positive communication” pertains to a discourse that avoids alarmist messaging, steers clear of gender-specific language, supports the spectrum of menstrual experiences (whether positive, challenging, or unfavourable), and acknowledges the emotional well-being of menstruators as integral to their physical health. Lastly, “open communication” in this context denotes forthright messaging that delves into the nuanced details of menstruation, is unencumbered by discomfort, uneasiness, or shame, remains uncensored, and extends openly into the public sphere. Ultimately this research seeks to build communities of resistance that can challenge oppressive systems, leading to lasting social change.

Research Methodology and Methods

More than a Period adopts a practice-based methodology led by an auto-ethnographic, reflective, and activism-driven approach to menstruation communication. Informed by 16 years of lived menstrual experience and a background in designing for menstrual healthcare, my research process (**fig. 3**) exemplifies a dynamic field of practice, utilising tacit knowledge to investigate the psychosocial condition of menstruation. Furthermore, it regards the various societal impediments obstructing effective menstruation communication through a combination of the following research methods in conjunction with a professional communication design practice.

Ethnographic interviews

This research innately straddles two distinct realms of cultural context—India and Canada. Addressing this dichotomy, ethnographic interviews were employed to collect data and insights from menstruating members of the Indian diaspora in Vancouver. These unstructured interviews aimed to gather cultural perspectives on menstruation, informing the development of projects tailored to address themes elucidated during these sessions.

Feminist action research

Endeavouring to establish a practice in social design, my research approach takes its cues from **feminist action research** by devising design projects that are prototyped, evaluated, verified, improved, and re-enacted in diverse ways (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Additionally, the research seeks to design with and for marginalised groups (menstruators), abandoning the inherent researcher hierarchy through equal participation as an insider with **tacit knowledge** of menstruation, establishing trust and empathetic connections within a community of menstruators (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

Discursive artefacts

Incorporating elements of **discursive design**, projects like *Vulva* and *Colour-a-Vulva* utilise **tactile exploration** in the creation and use of designed artefacts of female reproductive anatomy to provoke a deeper understanding of women's bodies and generate essential discussions on menstruation and women's reproductive health.

Participatory workshops

Community engagement and storytelling form essential components of the research's participatory approach. Focused on elevating menstrual experiences, the research advocates for social justice, health, and well-being of menstruators through group participatory projects like *Menstrual Stories* and *Red Alert* that seek to amplify individual voices in a collective. These projects extend beyond the traditional visual

medium of communication, incorporating aural and sensorial narratives that aim to forge allyship between menstruators and non-menstruators through creative and interactive ways. In doing so, the research positions the community as a key resource, establishing that the sharing of lived experience facilitates self-discovery (McKercher, 2020) and creates safety for others to do so (Colori, 2021), contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of menstruation.

Arts-based research

Recognising the value of collective agency, the research utilises co-design mindsets (McKercher, 2020) and methods involving the participation of people with lived experience of menstruation to engage in artistic self-expression. These engagements are facilitated by an exploration of arts-based design through *Menstrual Stories*, a community painting workshop which demonstrates a holistic engagement with materials that translate to “multisensory ways of knowing” (Astacio, 2021).

Graphic communication

Graphic communication underscores the design practice in this research, where the message and medium are equally fundamental aspects of the inquiry. This research employs a lighthearted approach using **playfully provocative messaging**, to render a serious subject matter to a broad audience in accessible and engaging ways. This approach is evidenced in the project *Patches Against Patriarchy*, which carries politically charged messaging about menstruation and women’s reproductive health. Combining digital and print media in the form of motion graphics, illustrations, quiz games, zines, and books, the practice of this research encompasses a broad range of graphic communication explorations. These projects serve as triggers for larger conversations surrounding policy, education, and legislation related to women’s health.

Ultimately, this study advocates for change-oriented research by way of disseminating the design processes and outcomes to a wider network through the publication of openly accessible information and resource toolkits (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

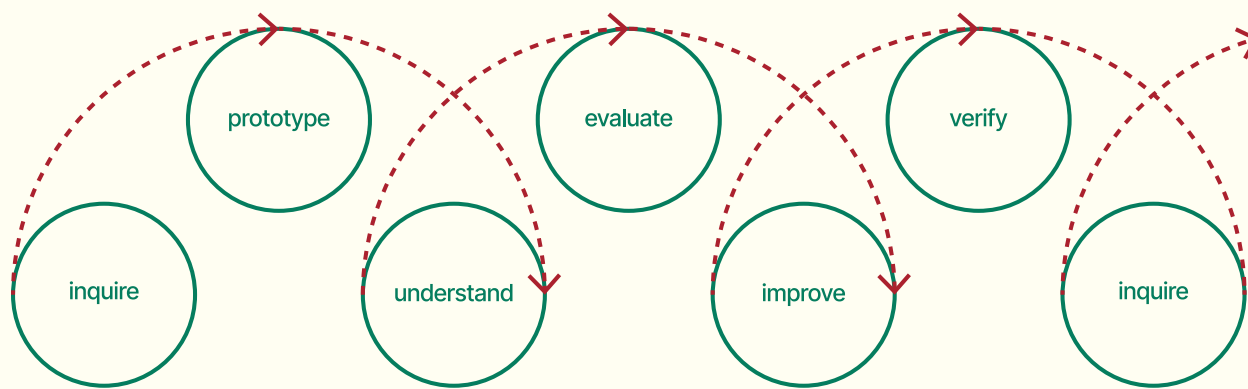


fig. 3: The research process.

Community of Practice

In conducting this research, I have been privileged to partake in interactions with individuals spanning a diverse spectrum of design and related disciplines. These engagements have significantly shaped the trajectory of this research, providing valuable insights and guidance. In cultivating this community of practice, I recognise the advantages afforded to me in learning, creating, and collaborating within spaces that transcend conventional boundaries of gender, culture, education, and profession. This collective is comprised of designers, educators, researchers, artists, and activists, whose activities intersect social and political activism, co-design, communication, art, and performance. Drawing inspiration from the shared knowledge of this community, my research aims to contribute meaningfully to altering the landscape of stigmatised menstruation communication.


Within the school, my engagement with a diverse cohort, particularly those from interdisciplinary backgrounds, has been invaluable. My colleagues have offered critical perspectives and holistic feedback, influencing, and refining my research at every stage. The broader university community, including students from other programs, instructors, staff, and studio technicians, has played a vital role in shaping my design and research practice. A notable example is Lucinda McGroarty's research, *Every 1 Welcome: Using Language and Story to Shift Perceptions Around Type 1 Diabetes Community*, which stands as a testament to the potential of design to challenge stereotypes and reduce stigma, serving as a precedent to this research.

Beyond academic and professional circles, my community of practice extends to influential figures from diverse disciplines. Noteworthy authors such as Chris Bobel, Kelly Ann McKercher, Kate Clancy, Bell Hooks, and Craig Martin have significantly informed my insights and inspired various design research projects. Moreover, I draw inspiration from interdisciplinary feminist artists, designers, performers, and activists. Gloria Steinem's essay, *If Men Could Menstruate*, serves as inspiration for an interactive zine project involving creative fiction writing ([see Appendix B](#)). Performers like *Pulsive Party*, a Vancouver-based duo teaching about sexually transmitted infections through musical performance, and *Roe v Bros*, the viral digital series by comedian Tiffany Springle, highlight the power of creativity, storytelling, and humour in addressing societal taboos. This community's work in design, art, activism, and advocacy has deeply influenced and enriched my research approach.

Area of Investigation

Through the projects conducted within this research, this study uncovers insights into the many issues faced by menstruating individuals in various daily interactions, including in homes, schools, workplaces, and healthcare spaces. An analysis of these challenges reveals systematic inadequacies in menstrual health policies, shortcomings within healthcare systems, and a pervasive lack of social empathy towards menstruators across these domains. This analysis underscores the existence of broader societal and interpersonal dimensions to the obstacles encountered by menstruating individuals, emphasising the multifaceted nature of the issues at hand.

The scope of this research does not involve the creation or development of new menstrual management technologies, nor does it concern itself with the design of solutions to address medical issues related to menstruation. Additionally, it does not directly contribute to the contemporary discourse on period poverty. Nevertheless, it aligns with these causes by advocating for a systemic transformation in societal perceptions of menstruation. This perspective posits a radical approach to fostering a more progressive and compassionate society. The research contends that a fundamental shift is imperative in the socio-cultural outlook on menstruation, transforming it from a perceived shameful, unclean process with a veil of silence around it, to a regular indicator of women's health and well-being, analogous to considerations of lung and heart health (Stubbs & Sterling, 2020). Addressing problematic narratives surrounding menstruation at their roots, this research envisions a positive influence on education, policy-making, and legislative initiatives concerning women's reproductive and sexual health.



"Using self-created 'things' to support and facilitate dialogue between people from different backgrounds enables them to use symbology, metaphors and visual representations meaningful to them"... "It is self-expression, enabling each individual to express their view in their way. Finally, it gives everyone's individual contribution a physical, visible, tangible presence, making it incredibly difficult for others in the group to dismiss or ignore."

(Langley et al., 2018)

THE EVIDENCING OF PRACTICE

The design practice underpinning this research comprises various interdisciplinary projects intersecting verbal, non-verbal, visual, and written communication serving as conduits for knowledge acquisition and information exchange. These projects are meticulously crafted to respond to an array of social, cultural, and political influences that have historically and contemporarily shaped the narrative on menstruation and the broader discourse on women's sexual and reproductive health. Each project has substantively influenced the research direction, yielding actionable insights that, in turn, have significantly impacted the principal design outcomes of the research. This structured approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of menstruation-related stigma, grounding the subsequent design interventions in a rich contextual understanding that incorporates individual and collective perspectives.

Personal Practice

Drawing upon a significant lived experience of menstruation, I leverage experiential knowledge and intimacy with the menstrual cycle. The approach I undertook at the onset of this research, prioritised and relied on this tacit knowledge. I began this research by exploring the psychosocial factors that have shaped my perception of menstruation within the socio-cultural context of my upbringing in India, and my subsequent move to North America (*fig. 4*). This approach serves as a foundation for the following two design projects, elucidating cultural and political responses to menstrual stigma.

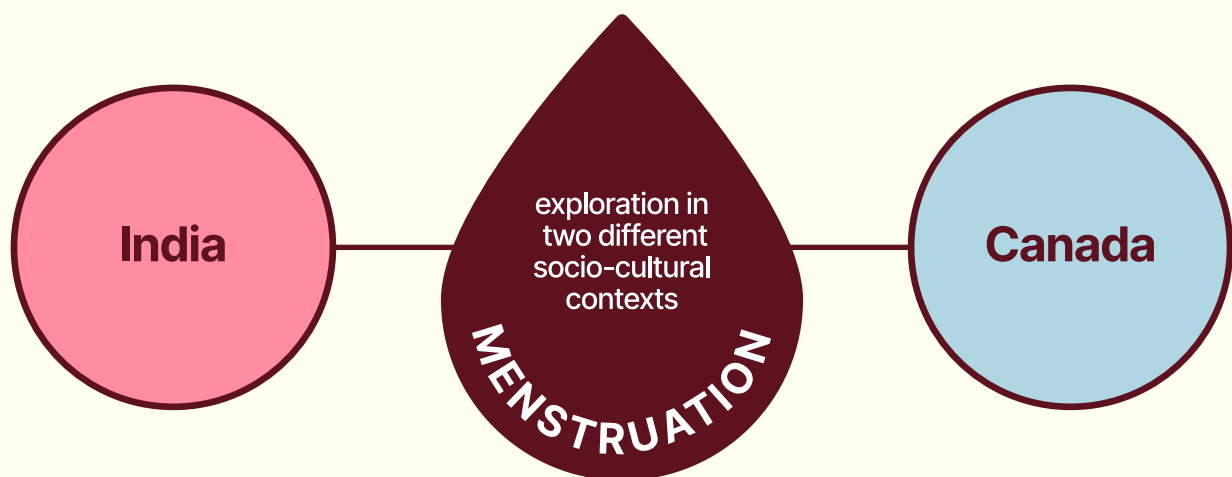


fig. 4: Exploring menstruation in distinct socio-cultural contexts—India & Canada.

Nanhi Chidiya

This project commenced with an engagement in discourse through the act of making, inspired by Craig Martin's observations on the implicit assumptions that arise from what is regarded as socially "normal" in his book, *Deviant Design: The Ad Hoc, the Illicit, the Controversial* (Martin, 2022). The reading served as a springboard for my design response, prompting a contemplation of the cultural implications of menstruation in a context as nuanced as India. Specifically, I reflected on the symbolism and significance of the deep red hue of menstrual blood within Indian culture.

In the cultural tapestry of India, red is a significant and auspicious colour, signifying sexuality, and fertility in marital life (Lamb, 2000). It adorns Hindu brides in wedding ceremonies and manifests in various customs, such as the application of a red dot (*bindi*) on the forehead, a symbolic marker of the third eye, symbolising energy and wisdom (**fig. 5**), and the use of vermilion (*sindoor*) by married women as a marker of marital status (**fig. 6**). These traditions celebrate fertility and prosperity, indicated by the bright red hue of dye (*alta*) and the ritual of a bride leaving red footprints in her new home as a symbol of the goddess Lakshmi, believed to be the bringer of wealth and good fortune (**fig. 7**). However, this positive symbolism sharply contrasts with the stigmatisation of menstrual blood in the same cultural context. This incongruity propelled my design response, which serves as a commentary on this paradox—the simultaneous celebration of women's fertility through menstrual blood and its tabooed physical state. The response takes the form of a micro-animation, juxtaposing cultural symbols like the bindi, sindoor, and alta with the physiology of menstrual blood.



fig. 5: Bindi—red symbolism in Indian culture (source: pexels.com).



fig. 6: Sindoor—red symbolism in Indian culture (source: pexels.com).



fig. 7: Alta—red symbolism in Indian culture (source: pexels.com).

In crafting the animation, I drew inspiration from India's history of social messaging through storytelling, in particular, the animated short educational film *Ek Anek Aur Ekta* (**fig. 8**). Produced and released in 1974 by the Films Division of India, the film popularly known as *Ek Chidiya, Anek Chidiyan* after the title song accompanying the animation, uses the metaphor of a group of birds to convey the value of unity in diversity to Indian citizens. Adopting a minimalist illustration style reminiscent of this classic, I crafted the animation as a digitally hand-drawn frame-by-frame design. To extend its tangible impact, I transformed it into a flip book (**fig. 9**)—a versatile and interactive communicative medium, that can be collected and shared.

Nanhi Chidiya (Hindi for Little Bird), unfolds as an animated narrative where a young girl, noticing a red stain on her skirt, experiences worry as the red dot metaphorically encircles her face. This dot then transforms into traditional symbols like the bindi and sindoor, eventually flowing onto a sanitary napkin as a drop of blood. The full napkin then takes flight, symbolising liberation, before transforming back into red footsteps and completing a cyclical journey. The animation concludes with the red dot returning to the girl's forehead, now radiating relief, finally engulfing the screen in red (**fig. 10-fig. 11**).

This project serves as a visual and narrative tool to question entrenched norms and encourage conversations around menstruation, challenging oppressive structures in conservative societies. The animation, with its playful visual style and tactile manifestation as an artefact, aims to empower discussions on contradictory cultural diktats that regard the biology of menstruation as taboo but venerate its significance in symbolism.

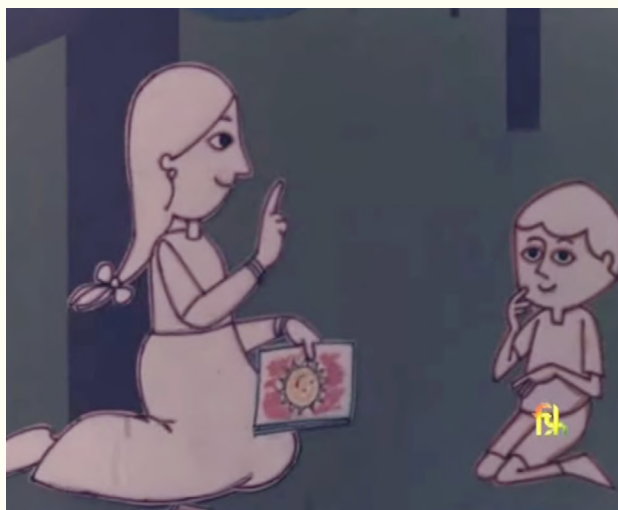


fig. 8: Screenshot. Bhimsain, V. M. (Director). (1974). *Ek Anek Aur Ekta*. Films Division of India.



fig. 9: 'Nanhi Chidiya' flipbook.

4. The Evidencing of Practice | 4.1.1 Nanhi Chidiya

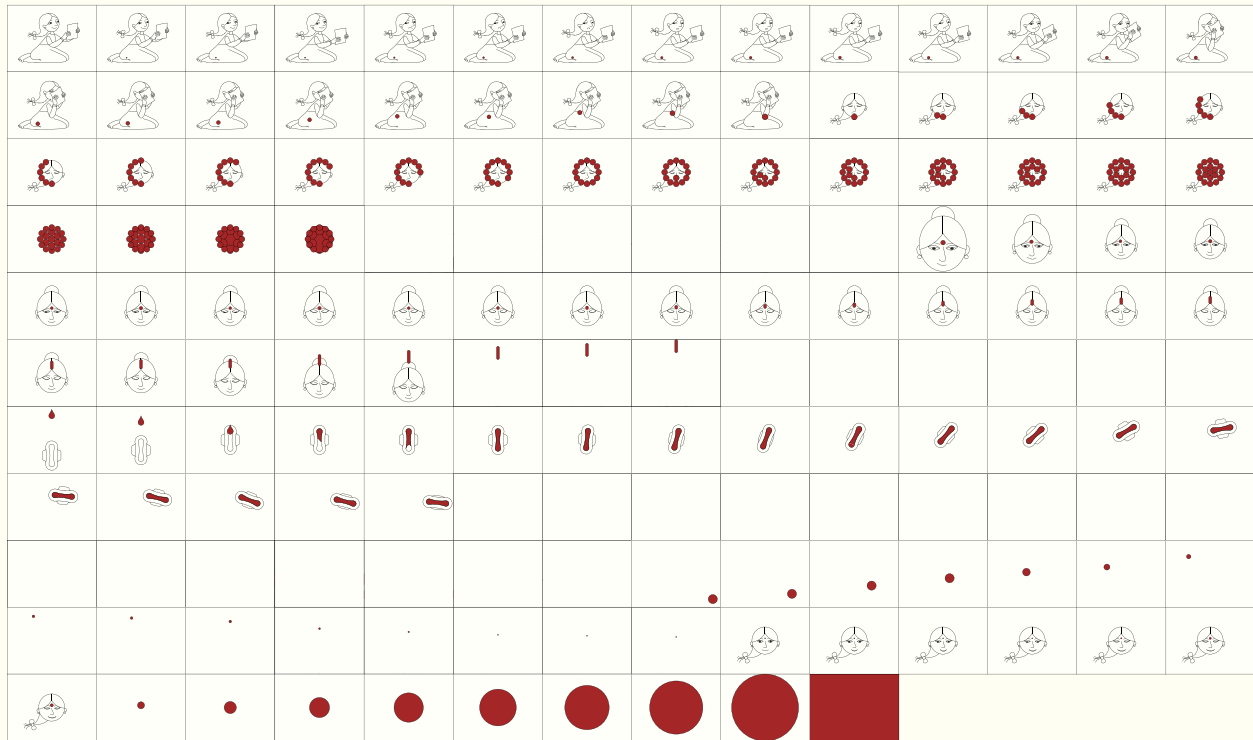


fig. 10: 'Nanhi Chidiya' micro-animation frames.

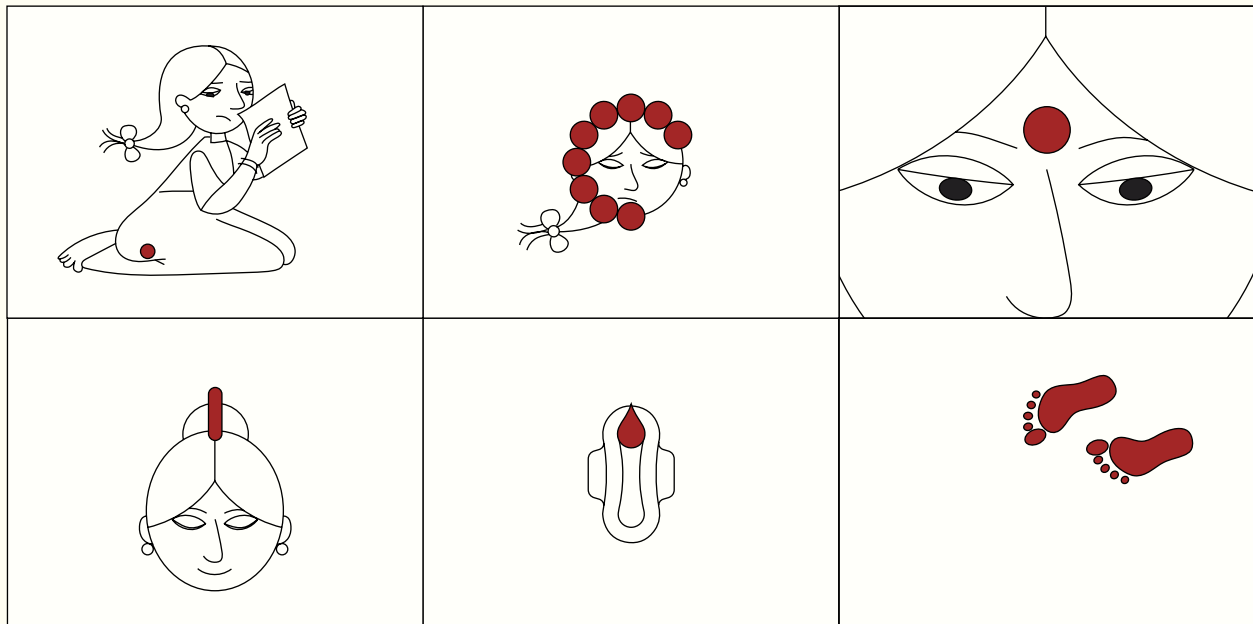


fig. 11: 'Nanhi Chidiya' micro-animation frames.

View the full animation: www.priyankapoulose.com/nanhi-chidiya

Patches Against Patriarchy

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a pivotal decision safeguarding the right to abortion under the U.S. Constitution. Known as *Roe v. Wade*, this decision marked a historic moment in U.S. history concerning women's reproductive rights. Almost five decades later, in June 2022, this landmark decision faced a shocking overturn¹³. Shortly thereafter, commencing my graduate design studies in Canada, I found discussions on *Roe v. Wade* to be resonant across various news portals, social media platforms, and online forums. Millions of women globally expressed disdain, anger, and fear concerning the erosion of their reproductive rights by patriarchal forces. As a designer and advocate for women's rights, I elected to contribute to these crucial socio-political conversations using my design skills. Grounding a design response in the post-*Roe v. Wade* landscape and connecting it to my research on menstrual advocacy, I conceived *Patches Against Patriarchy* as a creative expression in a space of political inquiry.



fig. 12: 'Patches Against Patriarchy' digital badge designs.

¹³ Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation, 597 U.S. 215 (2022). www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf

Originally imagined as digital badges (**fig. 12**), these patches materialised as machine-embroidered artefacts, translating digital visuals into tangible forms. The choice of the embroidered patch format was informed by the historical emergence of patches as symbols of protest towards the Vietnam War by the “flower-power” counterculture of 1960s America. Later, with the gradual emergence of the “punk” subculture in the 1970s, these patches transformed from representations of peace and love to anarchist symbols of spikes and razor blades, embodying the spirit of resistance to the establishment. For decades, embroidered patches have been used to demonstrate individual affiliation with a social justice group or political cause. The popularity of patches endures even today, with their usage extending to urban “hip-hop” culture and fashion.

Patches Against Patriarchy manifests as a collection of twelve typographic and graphical embroidered patches (**fig. 13-fig. 16**) crafted to facilitate commentary on the societal scrutiny of biological processes such as menstruation and the political policing of women’s reproductive rights. Drawing inspiration from the legacy of feminist political activism, the badges feature slogans that incorporate witty syntax from contemporary pop culture and internet memes. Examples include slogans such as “No Uterus, No Opinion”, “Menarche Against Patriarchy”, and “Don’t Be a Hater to A Menstruator”. Others present straightforward statements like “I Am Period Positive” and “Period Proud”, aiming to propagate menstrual positivity. Visual designs include representations of a sanitary pad with blood stains, a vulva with leaking blood, and a sanitary napkin with hearts floating in a river of red, designed to normalise visuals of menstrual blood. Another set adopts a self-deprecating approach with lines like “Hey Uterus Quit Cramping My Style” and “Another Egg Down the Drain”, serving as inside jokes about the pains and aches of menstruation. The final badge design, “Men 4 Menstruation”, seeks to invite male allyship to the cause of eradicating menstrual stigma. These patches serve as versatile forms of social activism, applicable to clothing items and accessories (**fig. 17-fig. 19**), becoming impactful communication and community-building tools for everyday engagement with socio-political causes.

Significant within the context of this research, these patches, when shared with my peers, prompted insightful discussions. Key points emerged, including concerns about decision-making regarding women’s bodies without considering women’s opinions and experiences, the importance of male allyship and empathy in advocating for women’s bodily autonomy, and the displeasure with the monitoring of women’s sexuality online. The positive reception and engagement indicate the efficacy of visual design in conveying powerful ideas and imparting new knowledge, for example, not many people had heard of the word “menarche”, meaning the first occurrence of menstruation.



fig. 13: Digitally embroidered patches (with support from soft shop technician Jen Hiebert).



fig. 14: Embroidered patches-digital printing process.

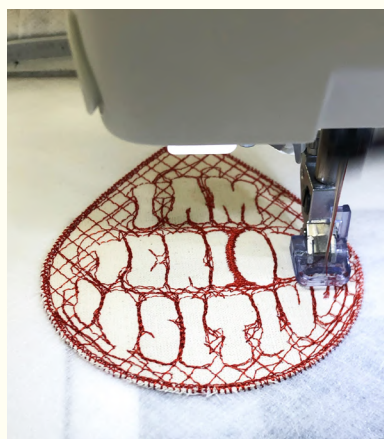


fig. 15: Embroidered patches-digital printing process.



fig. 16: Embroidered patches-digital printing process.



fig. 17: Mock-up of patches on a denim jacket.



fig. 18: Mock-up of patches on a tote bag.



fig. 19: Mock-up of patches on a baseball cap.

Vulva Plushie

Inspired by the *Material Anatomies* exercise within the *Making~Body* Studio developed by my supervisor, Dr. Sophie Gaur, I sought to explore a part of female anatomy through the making of a representative material artefact. The project *Vulva Plushie* (**fig. 20-fig. 23**) involved crafting a scaled-up, three-dimensional, tangible representation of a vulva as a mechanism to understand the menstruating body. Layers of fabrics in distinct colours representing the hymen, labia majora, and labia minora, were sewn onto a cloth base stuffed with soft fibres to form the plushie. To add to the sensory experience, I used a bell for the clitoris, while menstrual blood was represented by a piece of coarse maroon fabric. Presented to my peers, the vulva artefact was touched and played with, in the process sparking curiosity and inquisitive questions about menstruation and female sexual health through sensory engagement.



fig. 20: 'Vulva Plushie': Participant holding up the fabric vulva model.



fig. 21: 'Vulva Plushie': Fabric vulva model.



fig. 22: 'Vulva Plushie': Participant holding up the fabric vulva model.



fig. 23: 'Vulva Plushie': Making process.

Reflection

The above three personal practice projects have played a pivotal role in elucidating my stance on menstrual and reproductive health communication, reinforcing my commitment to challenging oppressive structures and advocating for open, positive, and inclusive dialogue. These projects serve as vital components of the graphic communication and material practice employed in this research, fostering meaningful discussions about the marginalisation of menstruating women, and contributing to the broader discourse on policies regarding women's sexual and reproductive health. As part of ongoing advocacy, I make the patch design templates available online¹⁴, to encourage interested individuals to produce and distribute additional copies and build a wider network of solidarity for women's reproductive rights (*fig. 24*).

Patches Against Patriarchy Toolkit:
www.priyankapoulose.com/patches-against-patriarchy

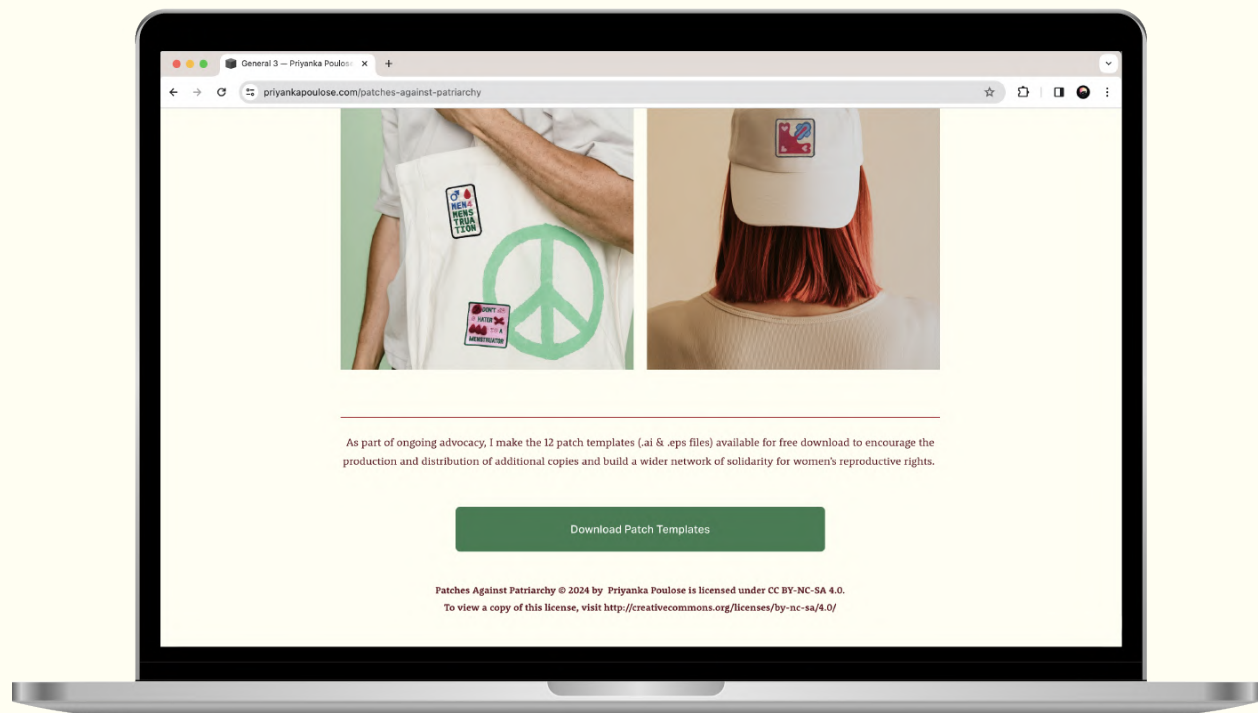


fig. 24: 'Patches Against Patriarchy' toolkit webpage.

¹⁴ *Patches Against Patriarchy* © 2024 by Priyanka Abraham Poullose is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

Participatory Practice

As this research progressed, an awareness arose regarding the imperative to transcend a personal perspective and embrace a more universal understanding of menstruation. This shift was motivated by the aspiration for the research to possess broader relevance and, consequently, yield more influential outcomes, shaping my future engagement in social design. As articulated in *Beyond Sticky Notes: Doing Codesign for Real* the concept of small circles of trust influencing larger circles of trust and positive social impact (McKercher 2020) prompted a connection with fellow menstruators and non-menstruators to understand their perspectives on menstrual communication and stigma. I am fortunate to have encountered these global perspectives within the culturally and ethnically diverse city of Vancouver, comprising individuals within and outside the school.

Ethnographic Interviews

Concurrent with developing personal projects to explore my cultural and political perspectives on menstruation, my curiosity extended to the menstrual experiences of other immigrant Indian women residing in Vancouver. Seeking to understand whether they had undergone a similar sense of menstrual liberation as I had in a more progressive Canadian culture, I opted for ethnographic interviews as a research method. I selected Indian women whom I had befriended and lived with during my initial months in Vancouver. The rationale behind this choice rested on the intuition that it might be challenging to elicit sharing about a culturally taboo subject from individuals who did not know me well. The four women I interviewed, despite our relatively brief acquaintance, shared a level of comfort and familiarity with me, fostering trust in divulging intimate narratives of their bodies. The interviews occurred in their homes, in private settings, with no males present, ensuring an atmosphere of comfort, safety, and uninhibited sharing.

Questions were crafted to elicit open-ended responses in a free-form, narrative style (*see Appendix A*). The interviews commenced with participants describing the details of their first period, then progressed to recounting their relationships with immediate family members, friends, and relatives as they navigated their menstrual cycles. Subsequent questions delved into the participants' educational experiences about menstruation, encompassing informal settings through interpersonal relationships and formal settings via academic institutions and medical centres. The final set of questions focused on their current knowledge about menstrual hygiene practices, awareness of new products, and menstrual health conditions. The interviews concluded with discussions of their aspirations and expectations for the future of menstrual awareness.

Key themes emerged from participants' responses:

While the participants experienced varying levels of menstrual health education in school, they collectively asserted that early and ongoing education about menstruation would better prepare young girls both physically and mentally. They suggested employing informal, visual tools such as books, games, cartoons, and films to introduce these topics to young children, fostering engagement and reducing discomfort around peers and teachers.

Interestingly, none of the participants received their initial menstrual health education from their mothers. They learned from friends or cousins who had already experienced menstruation and later from external sources like visiting medical professionals and teachers. Three of the women hesitated to discuss menstruation with their mothers and felt uncomfortable admitting that they had learned about it from other sources.

Another prominent theme highlighted the absence of adequate emotional care for menstruators. Participants expressed challenges in managing mood swings, anxiety, irritability, and depressive episodes due to limited information and resources. They reported encountering apathetic attitudes from family members, friends, co-workers, and teachers when attempting to communicate these conditions. Conversely, those with romantic partners found comfort in discussing emotional and physical needs, but this openness was not extended to fathers or brothers. They appreciated the extra care and support provided by their partners during menstruation, including assistance with household chores, emotional support, cooking, and fulfilling specific cravings.

Colour-a-Vulva

Having explored the vulva through making, the *Colour-a-Vulva* project sought to collaboratively explore this anatomical part to creatively communicate the individuality of women's bodies. Utilizing line drawings of real vulvas from the *Cunt Coloring Book* by Tee Corinne¹⁵, I organised a group workshop where my peers engaged in conversation about the female body while colouring in these drawings (**fig. 25**). The ten pages of coloured vulvas were then scanned, re-sized, reprinted, and crafted into an accordion-style book artefact (**fig. 26**), highlighting notions of revelation and intimacy in the viewing action. My cohort's animated engagement in this workshop fostered spirited conversations that extended beyond the classroom, indicating a keen interest in the subject matter, leading to the development of the following two participatory design projects.

¹⁵ "First published in 1975 by lesbian activist and artist Tee Corinne, the *Cunt Coloring Book* was created as a resource for sex education". *Cunt Coloring Book*. (n.d.). Last Gasp. www.lastgasp.com/products/cunt-coloring-book.



fig. 25: 'Colour-a-Vulva' workshop.



fig. 26: 'Colour-a-Vulva' accordion book.

Menstrual Stories

Drawing on arts-based research methods, I conceived the *Menstrual Stories* workshop to establish a deeper connection with menstruators within my immediate peer network. The purpose was to delve into their experiences with menstruation, necessitating the creation of an environment imbued with trust and comfort, hence excluding non-menstruators at this stage.

Open exclusively to menstruators, this workshop sought communal participation in sharing personal menstrual stories while contributing to the creation of an evocative visual art piece. Participants gathered around a large muslin cloth laid onto a table in the centre of the room and were equipped with paintbrushes and bottles of red paint. By symbolically staining the canvas with red ink, the workshop intended for participants to reclaim the socially shameful experience of stained clothing during menstruation (**fig. 27-fig. 29**). Attended by six women aged 22 to 31, including international students from Brazil, France, and Japan, as well as domestic students from different Canadian provinces, the workshop witnessed a diverse representation.

Commencing with a simple prompt – “Tell me about your first period” – the session embraced an unstructured conversation, allowing participants equal agency in directing the discourse, a key element of participatory research. Participants swiftly delved into narratives of their first menstrual experiences,



fig. 27: 'Menstrual Stories' workshop.



fig. 28: 'Menstrual Stories' workshop.

recounting specific details of environments, people, emotions, and attitudes, with the storytelling moving organically around the room. Four participants shared similar experiences of being around supportive male family members during their first period. The conversation progressed from personal stories to current coping mechanisms for the diverse physical and psychological facets of menstruation. Discontent was expressed regarding the lack of sensitivity toward menstruators in institutional and professional spaces, leading to discussions about the necessity for mandatory monthly period leave to address painful menstrual conditions such as severe cramps, heavy bleeding, PCOS, and PMS. A post-session assessment revealed a sense of catharsis among participants, with a shared desire for regular sessions where they could openly discuss struggles, frustrations, and health conditions with fellow menstruating individuals.

The workshop provided nuanced insights into the lived experiences of menstruating women from diverse cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and age groups, presented in an unstructured narrative format. Witnessing candid sharing and absorbing the diversity of menstrual stories and experiences provided a comprehensive understanding of how culture shapes the perception of menstruation across different contexts.



fig. 29: 'Menstrual Stories' workshop-community art piece.

Insights

The discernible themes gleaned from the *Colour-a-Vulva* and *Menstrual Stories* workshops along with the ethnographic interviews underscore three key issues within the menstruating community:

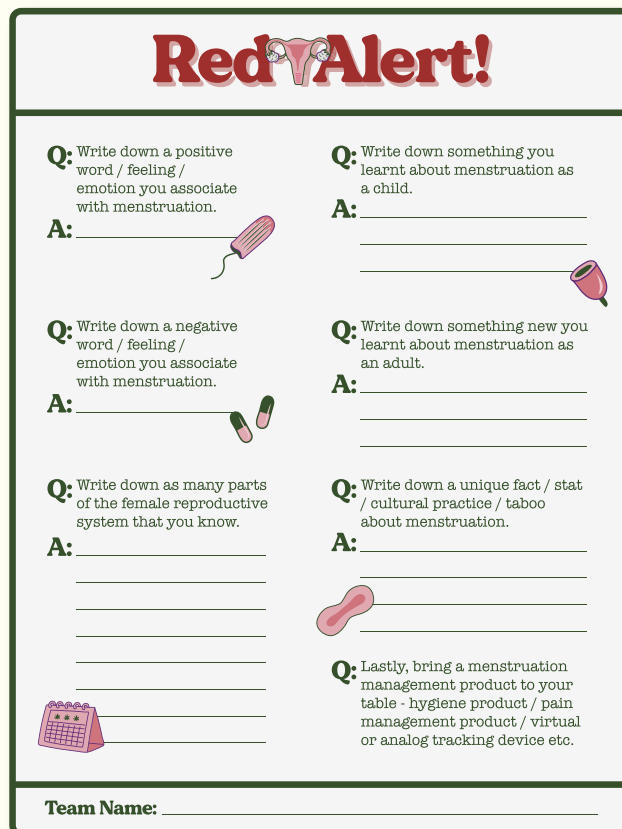
- Firstly, a notable frustration arising from the perceived lack of empathy and sensitivity exhibited by non-menstruators.
- Secondly, a collective aspiration for a socio-cultural milieu that encourages open discussions about menstruation with individuals of the opposite sex without the burden of shame or discomfort.
- Lastly, a recognised need for comprehensive and continuous menstrual education starting from an early age, to provide young girls with better physical and mental preparedness for their menstruating years.

These revelations spurred a reflective process, leading to the conceptualisation of the following project aimed at involving non-menstruators. The intention would be to unravel their awareness and comprehension of menstrual health issues and explore ways in which they could extend more informed and compassionate care and support to menstruators.

Red Alert

In the pursuit of cultivating an inclusive understanding of menstruation characterised by empathy, awareness, playfulness, and sensitivity and determined to bridge the dialogue between menstruators and non-menstruators, *Red Alert*, a quiz-style game show project was conceptualised. Guided by the principles articulated by McKercher (2020) on participatory approaches in co-design, the project acts as a medium to transform non-menstruators from passive members to active contributors in understanding menstruation. This initiative aimed to engage in collaborative discussions on traditionally uncomfortable subjects in an engaging and uplifting manner by employing creative and playful strategies.

The game involved 14 participants, strategically divided into seven teams of two. Participants were encouraged to select their partners with the sole information that the quiz would revolve around menstruation knowledge, which resulted in six teams comprising one man and a woman each, and one team of two women. Each team was equipped with a quiz card (*fig. 30*) featuring seven open-ended prompts, designed as introspective questions probing participants' existing knowledge of menstruation and women's bodies.



Red Alert!






<p>Q: Write down a positive word / feeling / emotion you associate with menstruation.</p> <p>A: _____</p> 	<p>Q: Write down something you learnt about menstruation as a child.</p> <p>A: _____</p> <p>_____</p> 
<p>Q: Write down a negative word / feeling / emotion you associate with menstruation.</p> <p>A: _____</p> 	<p>Q: Write down something new you learnt about menstruation as an adult.</p> <p>A: _____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Q: Write down as many parts of the female reproductive system that you know.</p> <p>A: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> 	<p>Q: Write down a unique fact / stat / cultural practice / taboo about menstruation.</p> <p>A: _____</p> <p>_____</p> 
<p>Q: Lastly, bring a menstruation management product to your table - hygiene product / pain management product / virtual or analog tracking device etc.</p>	
<p>Team Name: _____</p>	

fig. 30: 'Red Alert' game card.

Within a 15-minute timeframe, teams were encouraged to generate responses distinct from their counterparts, fostering a free exchange of knowledge, feelings, and observations without judgment. The questions encompassed diverse aspects, ranging from emotional associations with menstruation to knowledge about the female reproductive system, and unique cultural practices or taboos.

Q1: Write down a positive word/feeling/emotion you associate with menstruation.

Q2: Write down a negative word/feeling/emotion you associate with menstruation.

Q3: Write down something you learned about menstruation as a child.

Q4: Write down something you learned about menstruation as an adult.

Q5: Write down as many parts of the female reproductive system as you know.

Q6: Write down a unique fact/stat/cultural practice/taboo about menstruation.

Q7: Lastly, bring a menstruation management product to your table—a hygiene product/pain management product/virtual or analogue tracking device etc.

	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5	Team 6	Team 7
Q1	care	relief	red, new beginning, cleansing	getting to eat what you want	magma (explained as feeling strength)	ice cream	respite
Q2	aging	melancholy	yuck, no white pants, monster, embarrassment, am i dying?	devastating	hermetic	guilt	sluggish
Q3	something happened in the bathroom	adults thing, puberty, sexually mature, pads, menopause, clean it, don't eat cold stuff	only for women, special underwear, bloody, shedding of the wall of uterus	being aware of odour	you can have a 1-day bleeding/ shedding phase	don't ask questions	periods varied in terms of length and time
Q4	after birth control you can get your periods for months after stopping	you feel happy about it, it's influenced by stress, people treat it differently, cultural differences	can be excessive, tampons (teens), synchronicity with your friends, irregularity	the option of Diva cups, the emotions people who menstruate go through	bleeding does not mean you are not pregnant	that there are some cultures that allow women to rest during menstruation	severe degree of variance between countries and cultures of how education on menstruation is treated
Q5	womb, ovaries, tubes (fallopian), vagina, clitoris, breast	amniotic fluid	uterus, vagina, eggs, tubes, ovaries, cervix	g-spot, ovaries/ eggs, clitoris, fallopian tubes, cervix, vulva	labia, vulva, clitoris, ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, egg, vagina, cervix, hymen	ovaries, uterus, clitoris, vagina, labia, cervix, mystery gland	hymen, labia, inner labia, clitoris, ovaries, fallopian tubes, eggs, dentils?
Q6	you can die from the use of hygiene product sold in general grocery stores	don't talk about menstrual cycle to guys, guys ask govt. to ban the selling of menstrual products on trains	don't take a bath, not having sex during	new (recent) "trend" of celebration ("period parties"), some cultures associate with lack of cleanliness	bears are NOT attracted to menstruation/ bleeding - myth	menstruating women are not allowed to cook food	post birth menstruation, sewing of the hymen
Q7		expired pads	tylenol, calendar to be prepared				

fig. 31: 'Red Alert' team responses.

At the end of the 15-minute timer, the quiz master (myself), assumed the role of orchestrating the ensuing proceedings. Each group shared their recorded answers in an anti-clockwise sequence, addressing each question on the card across seven rounds of sharing (*fig. 31*). Points were awarded to teams providing unique responses to prompts, fostering an element of friendly competition. In cases where multiple teams submitted similar responses to a given prompt, no points were allocated. The team amassing the highest point tally at the culmination of the final question emerged victorious, securing a small incentive to stimulate friendly competition.

The ambience throughout the game exuded enthusiasm, with teams immersed in spirited discussions and exchanges. Navigating the diverse cultural group of participants, I observed deep discussions and distinctive responses, particularly surrounding menstrual taboos. During the final sharing round, teams delved into personal narratives, revealing how lived experiences and incidents informed their knowledge, thereby enriching the sharing process (*fig. 32-fig. 34*).

An analysis of responses to the set of questions reveals several prominent themes:

Regarding emotions linked to menstruation, positive sentiments include feelings of care, relief, and strength, while negative associations encapsulate themes of ageing, embarrassment, and melancholy. Childhood knowledge is centred on basic biological aspects, associating periods with secrecy and lack of cleanliness. In adulthood, respondents present diverse insights, encompassing cultural and emotional dimensions of menstruation, the influence of stress, and the variation in menstrual education across cultures. Knowledge about the female reproductive system varies, with commonalities such as ovaries, uterus, and vagina among distinctive interpretations like the mystery gland and amniotic fluid. Unique facts highlight cultural practices and taboos, ranging from the celebration of “period parties” to restrictions on certain activities during menstruation, epitomising the diversity and intricacy of perceptions surrounding this natural bodily process.

The game’s culmination harboured the hope that participants had acquired fresh insights into menstruation and garnered a renewed perspective on the intricacies of the female body. A departure from prior research projects exclusive to menstruators, the inclusion of non-menstruators highlights the potential of unified community engagement in eliciting meaningful knowledge. The utilisation of playful methodologies to broach serious subjects facilitated an environment of comfort and enjoyment, enabling candid self-expression and knowledge-sharing devoid of judgment. Furthermore, the project substantiates how information and education about menstruation can be disseminated in institutional spaces through engaging and creative ways. Lastly, it underscores the significance of including non-menstruators in the design process, elucidating valuable insights into the challenges impeding effective menstruation communication.



fig. 32: 'Red Alert' workshop.



fig. 33: 'Red Alert' workshop.

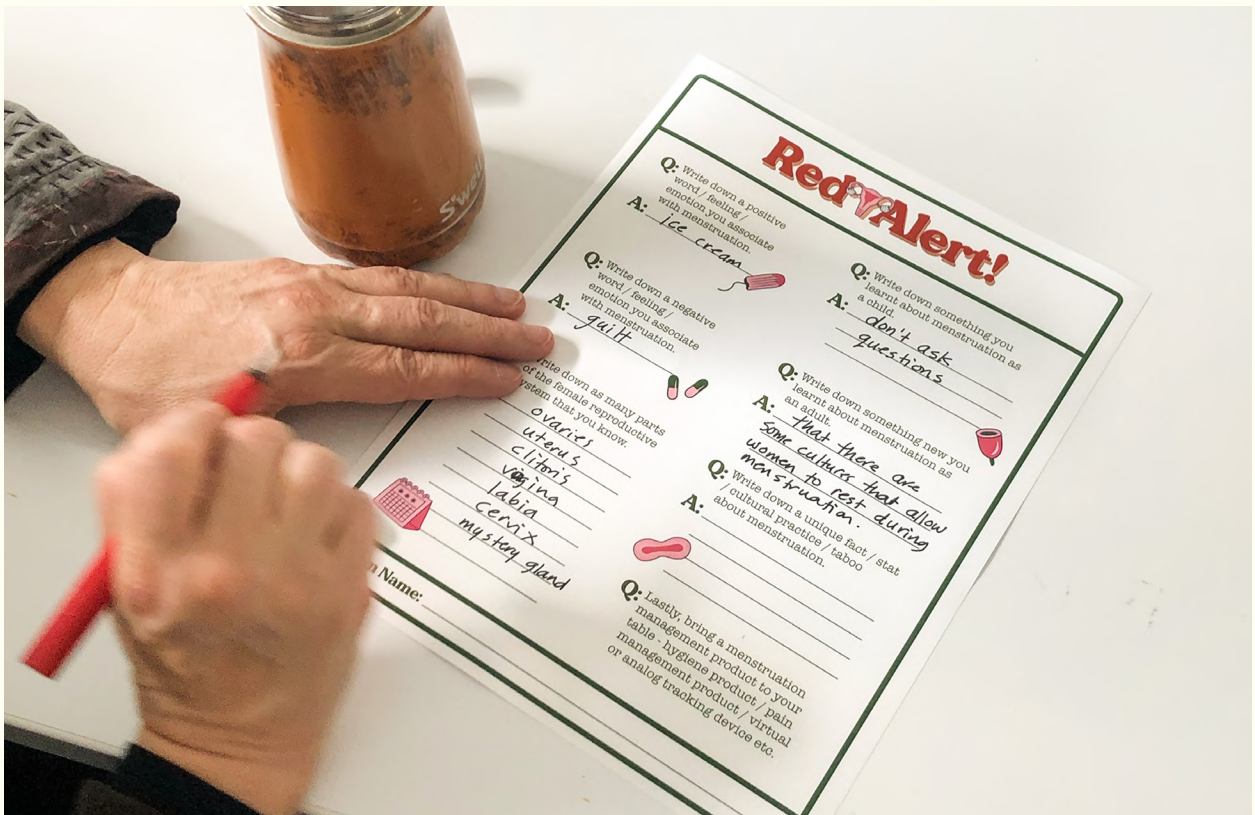


fig. 34: 'Red Alert' workshop.

Reflection

The projects in this section evidence the value of collective creative engagement in uncovering diverse perspectives on menstrual communication. Employing participatory research methods has proven instrumental in unveiling nuanced insights into the challenges faced by menstruators, exemplifying the substantial role of this approach in health research. These projects facilitate open dialogue and enable the community to actively contribute to the discourse by transforming into partners in the understanding of menstrual narratives. The creative methodologies employed, ranging from graphical narratives to hands-on activities like crafting and colouring, play a pivotal role in creating an atmosphere conducive to shame-free discussions.

In the broader context, these endeavours have generated valuable projects, notably *Red Alert*, and *Menstrual Stories* that serve as case studies of participatory and arts-based research. In essence, the projects in this section serve as exemplary instances of how community involvement, feminist action research, and arts-based practices can collectively contribute to a more informed, empathetic, and inclusive approach to the discourse on menstruation.

Professional Practice

Throughout the research study, I have been professionally immersed in healthcare organisations and women's health research centres in Vancouver. These engagements involve using participatory approaches to collaborate with medical professionals, researchers, and a community of women, to bridge the gap between scientific research, medical information, and public knowledge. In the process, the research uncovers design and knowledge translation strategies to help close this gap.

The Emily Carr University Health Design Lab (HDL)¹⁶ has been a profound influence, providing a comprehensive understanding of co-design practices, inclusive space creation, and strategies for community engagement in addressing complex health challenges. Collaborations with women's healthcare organisations including BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre (BCW)¹⁷ and the UBC-Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research (UBC-CeMCOR)¹⁸ have broadened my perspective on applying design principles to communicate critical scientific research. These experiences have not only enriched my comprehension of women's health but have also equipped me with the skills to communicate intricate medical information in an accessible and engaging manner.

However, it is important to understand that the primary objective of this research is not to impart medical information on menstruation. Instead, it is to empower menstruators with the agency to seek the appropriate resources and medical attention required to properly safeguard their physical and emotional well-being. Gleaning distinctive insights from multiple stakeholders, the research gains a comprehensive understanding of menstrual health challenges, which has aided the key design outcomes of this study.

¹⁶ I worked with the HDL from September 2022 to November 2023, contributing to various projects including digital communication strategy development, presentation design, and event planning. This involved tasks such as designing the [2023 HDL Showcase Publication](#) and producing exhibit materials for the [Lheidli: Where the Two Rivers Meet](#) Exhibit in August 2023. Currently, I serve as a research assistant for a collaborative project between the HDL and BC Children's Hospital social paediatrics clinic, aimed at enhancing early childcare and education services for marginalised families.

¹⁷ From August to October 2023, I collaborated with the [BCW Hummingbird Project](#) team on the visual design for a poster and presentation deck introducing the [Stillbirth Happens-let's talk podcast](#) that was presented at the 2023 PAIL Connected in Care Conference in Toronto by the BCW team.

¹⁸ Since June 2023, I have contributed my graphic design skills to a dynamic team of research professionals at UBC-CeMCOR, spearheading creative knowledge translation efforts, a branding refresh and website re-design, and developing a digital communication strategy. I also formulated the design of a public participatory workshop titled [Stride to Wellness: A Community Movement and Knowledge Exchange](#).



"...we have to think through
and collectively change the
structures that continue to
stigmatize periods through
activism in our local, state, and
federal governments; in our
workplaces; and in our schools
and public spaces."

(Clancy, 2023)

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The practice of this research illuminates the multifaceted exploration of cultural, political, and social dimensions shaping menstruation communication through a practice-based methodology. The pivotal insights derived from the various participatory projects, interviews, and professional engagements in women's healthcare have culminated in the creation of two interwoven design outcomes, under the name *Bloom* (**fig. 35**)—a menstrual club, *Bloom Club* and a menstrual podcast, *Bloom Talk*. This section delves into the genesis of these projects, elucidating their overarching vision, specific objectives, and nuanced responses to the core inquiries that have been central to this research.

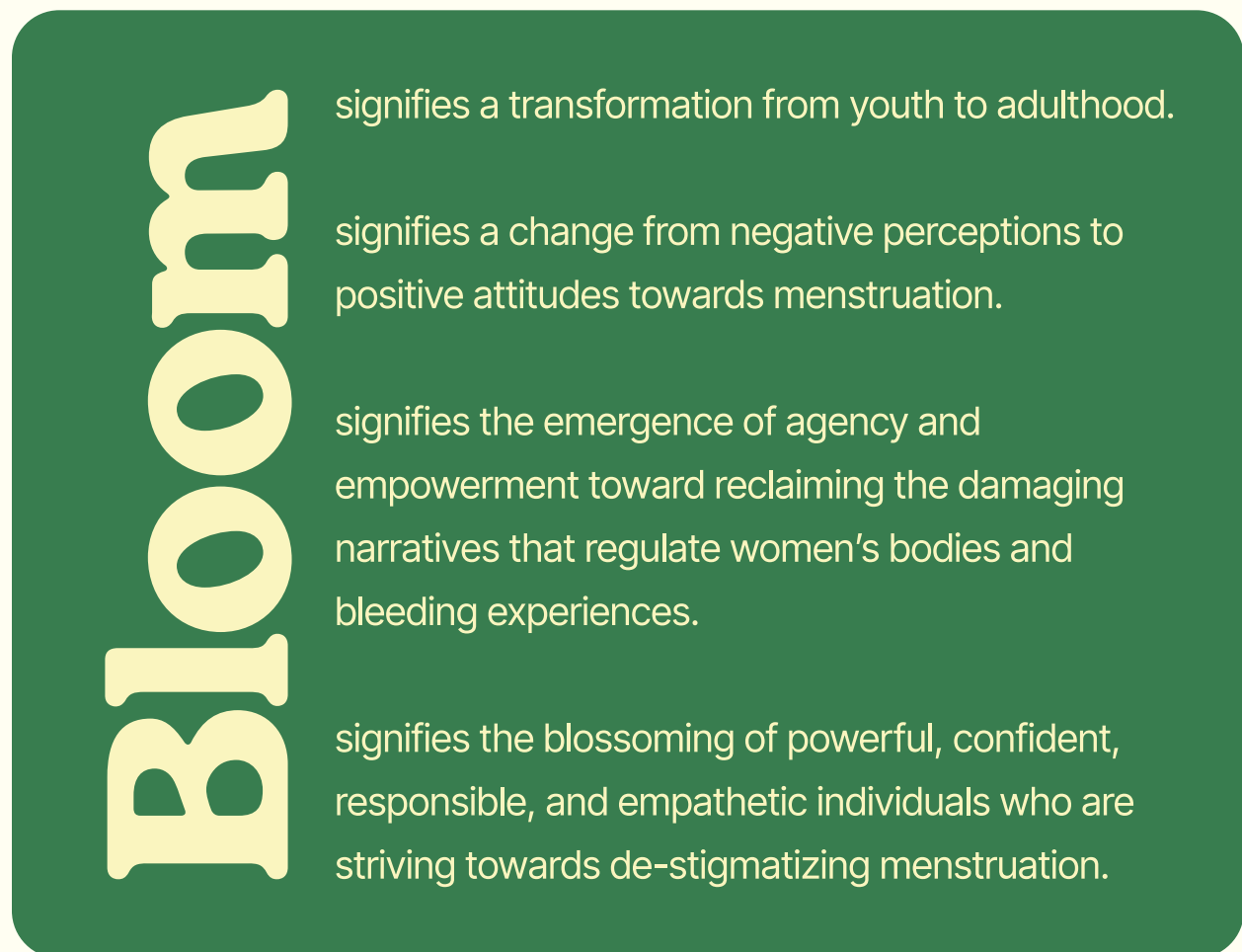


fig. 35: 'Bloom' name significance.

Bloom Club

Bloom Club embodies the culmination of the participatory projects undertaken throughout this research, converging on the collective liberation experienced by menstruators sharing their challenges, experiences, and knowledge in a communal space. Originating from workshops where participants expressed a desire for regular, open conversations about menstruation-related struggles and health conditions, the club was founded under the Emily Carr University Students' Union (ECSU) to extend these conversations to the larger student body. Operating as an inclusive student community, *Bloom Club* aims to eradicate stigma by challenging prejudicial attitudes and dismantling implicit social systems that perpetuate menstrual taboos.

Welcoming individuals of all genders, the club provides a secure space for menstruators and non-menstruators to come together, share experiences, and learn from each other. In a commitment to fostering allyship, *Bloom Club* encourages non-menstruators to deepen their understanding of menstruation and develop empathetic support and sensitivity towards menstruators. Membership entails a dedication to the menstrual equity movement, signifying individual ownership within a social collective, and establishing a sense of ritual through regular attendance and contribution to the club's activities. Recruitment of *Bloom Club* members occurred during the ECSU-facilitated event, 'Club's Day', where the club's goals and objectives were presented through a table set-up and distribution of information cards (**fig. 36-fig. 37**). Prospective members, both menstruators and non-menstruators, were encouraged to sign up at the event, recognising the inclusive nature of the club. A successful turnout of 27 members exceeded expectations, signifying a keen interest in the club's objectives.

Bloom Club engages members in various creative workshops, including pin-badge creation, zine development, and designing embroidered patches, and stickers. These activities serve as avenues for members to share lived menstrual experiences and knowledge, creating a platform for self-expression and open discussion. Additionally, the club hosts film screenings, seminars by medical experts, quiz-style games, and storytelling circles, exploring diverse sensorial aspects of menstruation. Crucial to establishing the club's identity is its branding and visual design (**fig. 38**). The flower symbol, incorporating symbolic blood drops as petals, visually communicates the essence of blooming and the diversity in menstrual experiences through eight shades of red petals. The brand palette, utilising pastels as the base for stronger colours, contributes to a light, fresh, and inviting visual language. Advertising materials maintain a neutral, inclusive tone, avoiding shocking imagery and alarmist messaging in alignment with the research's playful approach (**fig. 39-fig. 43**).



fig. 36: 'Bloom Club' recruitment at Club's Day.



fig. 37: 'Bloom Club' recruitment at Club's Day.


**Bloom
Club** 

fig. 38: 'Bloom Club' logo.



fig. 39: 'Bloom Club' posters.



fig. 40: 'Bloom Club' information cards.



fig. 41: 'Bloom Club' pin buttons.



fig. 42: 'Bloom Club' stickers.

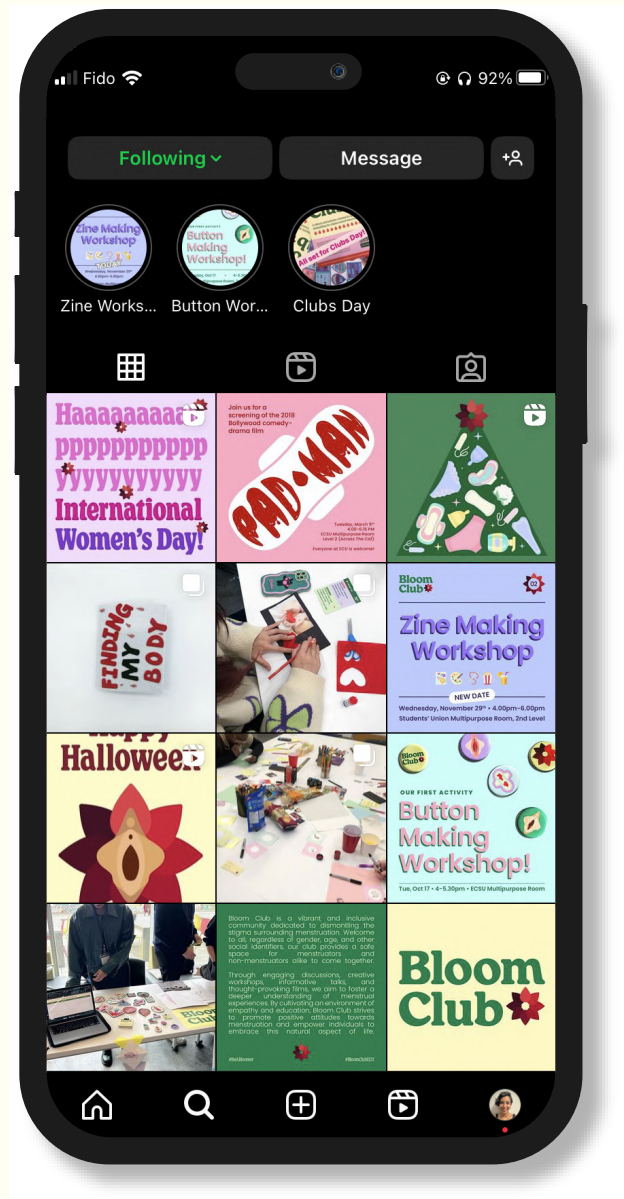
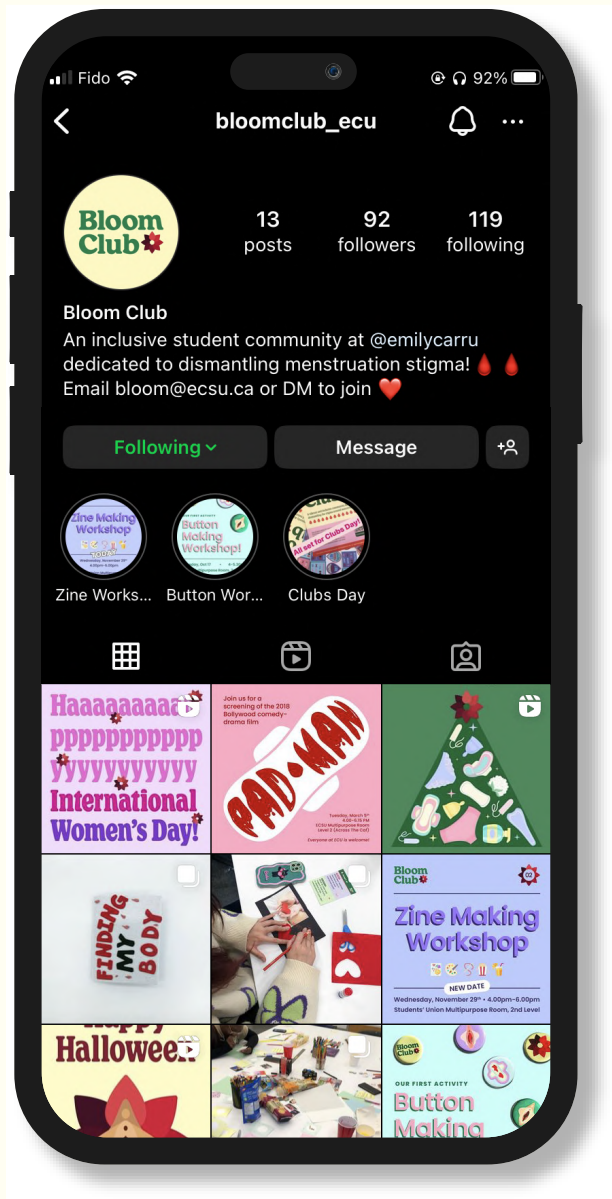


fig. 43: 'Bloom Club' social media posts (@bloomclub_ecu on Instagram).

Button-making Workshop

The club's inaugural event, a button-making workshop (*fig. 44-fig. 45*), involved eight members, including menstruators and non-menstruators from both graduate and undergraduate programs. The workshop aimed to provide a low-fidelity engagement activity for members to express their thoughts and feelings about menstruation through designing pin buttons. Leveraging my prior experiences in crafting embroidered menstrual badges, the pin-badge technique was chosen for its simplicity and hands-on nature, utilising less complex machinery for quicker learning and production. To foster camaraderie among the members, name and pronoun tags were distributed (*fig. 46*), facilitating ice-breaking activities due to the unfamiliarity among most attendees. The meeting commenced with a concise welcome address, emphasising the club as a safe and respectful space. Members were discouraged from sharing others' stories and experiences externally, underscoring the club's commitment to privacy.

Following the introductions, the meeting transitioned into full swing with members engaging in both casual conversations and active participation in the workshop. Each participant was equipped with a prompt card (*fig. 47*), designed to guide them in adopting a persona with a distinct menstrual identity. The cards provided options for choosing the tone of voice and messaging style, facilitating focused creation and the development of a clear and distinctive message in their designs. This deliberate approach also encouraged non-menstruating members to consider and express themselves from the point of view of menstruators. The workshop further incorporated visual cue cards related to menstruation to inspire ideas. On the reverse side of the prompt cards, feedback cards (*fig. 48*) were provided for participants to fill out at the end of the workshop. The event was equipped with two button machines of small and medium size. Printed button templates (*fig. 49*), for both machines along with blank sheets of paper and multiple art supplies, were supplied to participants, allowing them to record and test their ideas before translating them onto the button templates by hand. The session witnessed an assortment of creative expressions, from curiosity about menstruation to menstrual activism and personal frustrations with the healthcare system.



fig. 44: Button workshop poster.

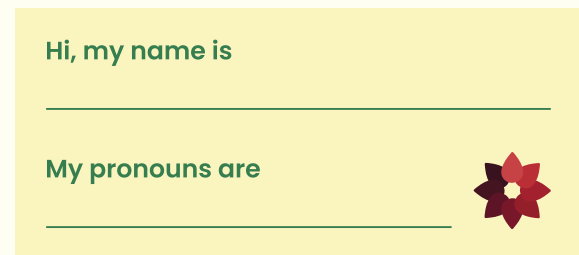


fig. 45: 'Bloom Club' name tag.



fig. 46: Button workshop social media posts.

01

Button-making Workshop: Prompts

Bloom Club

STEP 1: THE CHARACTER

Choose a character you wish to embody in your design.
(activist/educator/journalist/artist/student/...)

STEP 2: MENSTRUAL IDENTITY

What is your chosen character's menstrual state/identity?
(currently menstruates/used to menstruate/has never menstruated/will experience menstruation...)

STEP 3: THE MESSAGE

What does your character wish to express about your menstrual identity to the world/a friend/co-worker/ parent...?
(joy/anxiety/freedom/confidence/dread/anger/hope...)

STEP 4: TONE OF VOICE

How do you want to convey this message? What is your tone?
(inspiring/aggressive/emotional/humorous/elegant/absurd...)

STEP 5: TIME TO CREATE!

fig. 47: Button workshop prompt card.

01

Button-making Workshop: Feedback

Bloom Club

I word for how you feel after completing the workshop.

Which of these club activities interest you?

☐ Zine-making

☐ Talking/Sharing Circle

☐ Informative Seminar with a Medical Expert

☐ Fabric Patch-making

☐ Film screening

☐ Sticker-making

☐ Quiz/Game Show

☐ Collage Art

I have a suggestion for a club activity:

My preferred day for Bloom Club meetings is:

☐ MON

☐ TUES

☐ WED

☐ THUR

☐ FRI

My preferred time for Bloom Club meetings is:

☐ 3.00-4.00pm

☐ 3.30-4.30pm

☐ 4.00-5.00pm

☐ 4.30-5.30pm

☐ 5.00-6.00pm

☐ 5.30-6.30pm

fig. 48: Button workshop feedback card.

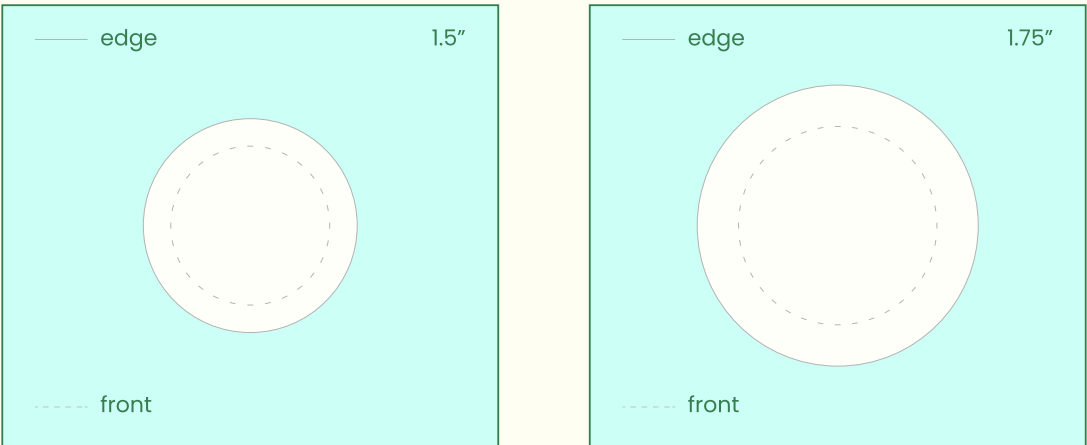


fig. 49: Button-making templates.



fig. 50: 'Bloom Club' button workshop.



fig. 51: 'Bloom Club' button workshop.



fig. 52: 'Bloom Club' button workshop.



fig. 53: Button designs created by workshop participants.



fig. 54: Button designs created by workshop participants.



fig. 55: Button designs created by workshop participants.



fig. 56: Button designs created by workshop participants.

Insights from the workshop highlighted diverse motivations among participants:

- **Person 1 (NM)**, hailing from a culture that avoided discussing menstruation, sought to learn more and satiate their curiosity through the club.
- **Person 2 (NM)**, a vocal ally since high school, aimed to support menstruators and challenge the lack of comprehensive education on menstruation.
- **Person 3 (M)**, joining to seek support for their experiences, shared frustrations with inadequate medical attention and workplace insensitivity.
- **Person 4 (M)**, an activist, intended to spotlight the emotional aspects of menstruation and cultural taboos.
- **Person 5 (M)**, joined briefly, creating buttons to convey that menstruation is not shameful.
- **Person 6 (NS)**, also briefly involved, crafted a button from a janitor's perspective, addressing disposal issues in bathrooms, also promoting gender inclusivity.
- **Person 7 (M)**, unable to physically attend due to a conflicting class, virtually submitted a design titled "My vagina is a garden, where tampons bloom."

(M – Menstruator, NM – Non-menstruator, NS – Not Shared)

The overall success of the event was underscored by the positive atmosphere, where all participants freely shared their lived experiences. The non-menstruators demonstrated support, curiosity, and a desire to be allies, fostering an environment that made menstruators more comfortable in sharing their personal histories. The session touched upon topics like endometriosis, prompting participants to express interest in having a medical expert provide relevant information about other menstruation-related health conditions. **Feedback collected post-event indicated positive emotions such as happiness, empowerment, excitement, feeling supported, and expressiveness among participants.** This workshop not only succeeded in creative self-expression but also served as a platform for meaningful dialogue and understanding within the *Bloom Club* community. Through generous funding from the ECSU, the provision of snacks and refreshments was made possible at this meeting and future *Bloom Club* events to acknowledge and appreciate member participation. Members were also handed out branded club merchandise such as stickers, buttons, and bookmarks to build loyalty and enlarge the club's visibility across campus.

Zine-making Workshop

The club's second activity, a zine-making workshop, provided a platform for participants to visually explore menstruation-related practices, challenges, and support strategies (**fig. 57-fig. 58**). Structured similarly to the button-making workshop, participants received activity cards with dual prompts catering to both menstruators and non-menstruators. The prompts encouraged menstruators to visualise “wellness” in the context of their menstrual cycles and prompted non-menstruators to imagine what “care” and “support” should be for menstruators in their lives (**fig. 59**). The reverse side of the card invited menstruators to visualise their significant challenges in achieving menstrual wellness, while non-menstruators were prompted to envision their primary hurdles in providing better care and support to menstruators (**fig. 60**).

This workshop was designed to unearth various menstruation-related challenges by way of a tangible artefact as a means of bringing attention to these issues without the barrier of language and complex medical terminology. The workshop's main activity involved zine-making through collaging, using magazines, embroidery, drawing, and writing in response to the provided prompts (**fig. 61-fig. 65**). The prompts aimed to elicit participants' visualisations of their responses to the questions, utilising visuals as a medium to capture nuanced experiences that might not be as effectively conveyed through words alone. The workshop encouraged participants to utilise their hands as intuitive tools of expression in creating a more permanent record of their thoughts and experiences. The overarching purpose of this workshop extended beyond the creative process. It aimed to identify community concerns, paving the way for potential interventions such as inviting a medical expert or revealing internal resources and support strategies to address these issues collectively. Through its artistic approach, it sought to amplify the voices and experiences within the *Bloom Club* community, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment for dialogue and action on menstrual health and wellness.

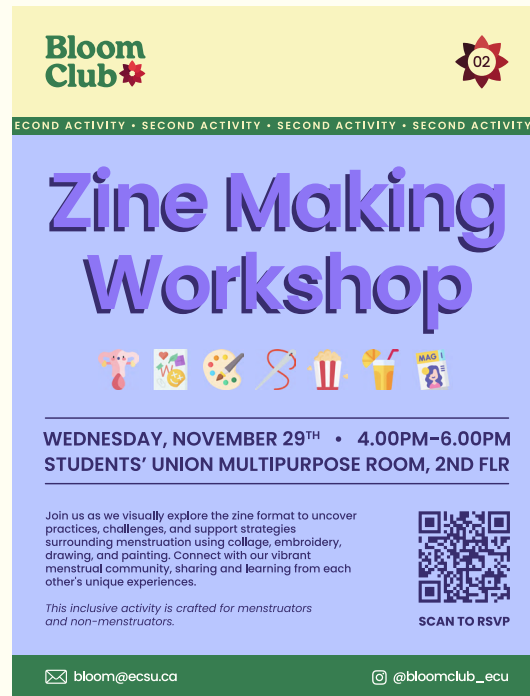


fig. 57: Zine workshop poster.



fig. 58: Zine workshop social media posts.



fig. 59: Zine workshop prompt card (front).



fig. 60: Zine workshop prompt card (back).

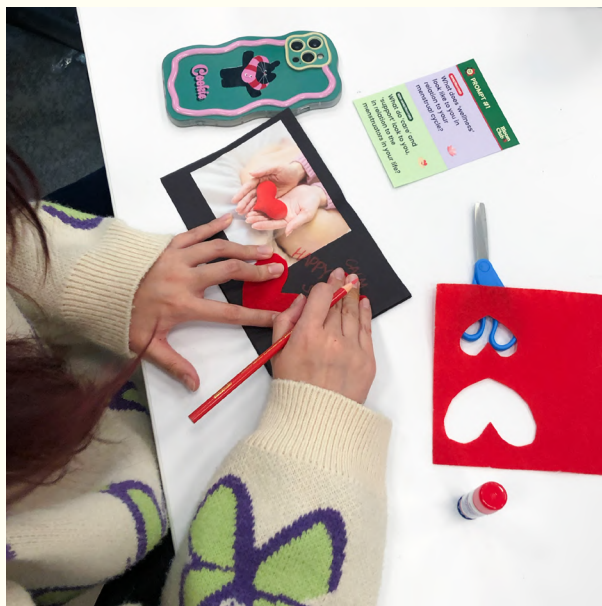


fig. 61: 'Bloom Club' zine workshop.



fig. 62: 'Bloom Club' zine workshop.



fig. 63: 'Bloom Club' zine workshop.



fig. 64: 'Bloom Club' zine workshop.

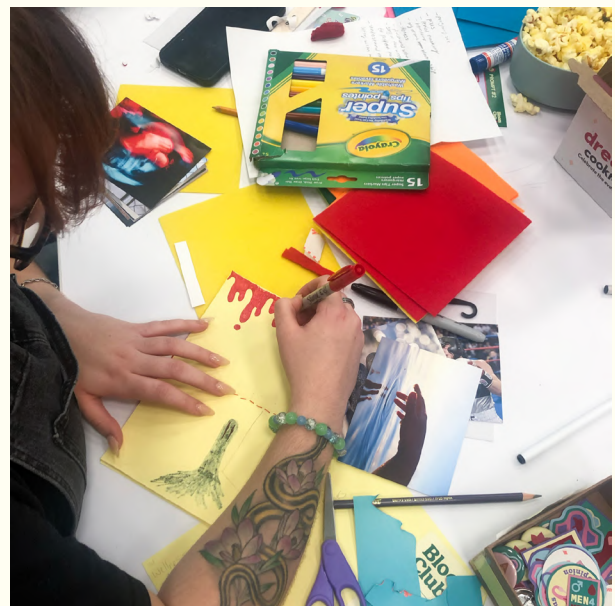


fig. 65: 'Bloom Club' zine workshop.

Responses from participants in their zines (*fig. 66-fig. 71*) and subsequent conversations provided poignant insights into their distinct experiences with menstrual health and wellness:

Menstruator #1 reflected on the cultural advice received from her father, using oregano tea to alleviate menstrual pain while grappling with challenges like sleep disturbances and limited access to clean toilets in her home country.

Menstruator #2, identifying as non-binary, depicted menstruation as a monstrous force affecting their mind and body. They emphasised the importance of self-love and comfort from others.

Menstruator #3's zine titled 'This is Me When I Bleed' conveyed desires for food and love during menstruation through vibrant visuals.

Menstruator #4 explored a unique theme, 'It's All About the Moon', linking menstruation to emotional expression, self-love, and connecting with nature.

Lastly, **Menstruator #5's** zine, 'Finding My Body', probed into self-discovery, pain management, and the intricate relationships with family members, touching on mental health, parental care, and personal identity.

This workshop also brought to light shared experiences around food monitoring, pain medication, and stress management during menstruation that have a significant effect on the body image, physical capability, and mental wellness of menstruators.

The participant responses illuminate the contrasting experiences of menstrual wellness within the community. These narratives delve beyond mere physiological aspects, encapsulating cultural influences, familial dynamics, and personal struggles. The self-expressive quality of zines as communication tools vividly captures the emotional and physical landscapes traversed by menstruators of varied gender identities, sexual orientations, and cultures. **Themes of self-love, familial relationships, cultural practices, and the quest for understanding one's body emerge as recurrent motifs.** The workshop not only serves as a creative outlet but also as a platform for communal introspection, fostering a deeper understanding of different menstrual challenges and triumphs interwoven with physical and mental health, identity, and well-being within the *Bloom Club* community.



fig. 66: Zines created by workshop participants.



fig. 67: Zines created by workshop participants.



fig. 68: Zines created by workshop participants.




fig. 69: Zines created by workshop participants.



fig. 70: Zines created by workshop participants.



fig. 71: Zines created by workshop participants.



"If menstruation were discussed more openly, it might be easier for girls and women to acknowledge the positive aspects of menstruation and to challenge others when they make assumptions that all women hate and want to eliminate their periods."

(Johnston-Robledo and Chrysler, 2020)

Bloom Talk

Throughout the progression of this research, each *Bloom Club* meeting and participatory workshop provided a platform for the sharing of personal narratives aurally. These encompassed a range of experiences, from formative encounters with periods to distressing incidents related to menstrual health as well as affirming tales depicting the crucial support of understanding family members during painful cramps. Additionally, stories of allies confronting period shaming emerged, alongside heartfelt tales of the complexities of gender identities, positive stories exuding a sense of period love, and a myriad of other tales. Intrigued by these unique histories and inspired to explore beyond the *Bloom Club* community, the concept of a menstrual podcast took root. Departing from conventional design methodologies, the podcast format embraces the unstructured nature of storytelling, recognising its potency in unveiling personal histories and varied perspectives.

An offshoot of *Bloom Club*, *Bloom Talk* (**fig. 72-fig. 74**) is a podcast show seeking to unravel the multitude of menstrual experiences through authentic storytelling. It is a digital platform that invites individuals to share personal menstrual accounts, fostering information exchange, awareness building, and amplification of lived menstrual experiences. An experimental form of practice-based research, this project intersects digital communication, broadcasting, and healthcare. By breaking the silence around menstruation, *Bloom Talk* constructs a collective narrative that empowers menstruation and promotes understanding among its listeners. The podcast, by connecting with a diverse collective, aspires to challenge normative perceptions and effect a shift in the societal discourse surrounding menstruation.

For the pilot season of *Bloom Talk*, contributors were sourced from within the Emily Carr University community. Interested participants were asked to submit personal stories encapsulating real and honest experiences related to menstruation. Drawing inspiration from well-received podcasts like *My Unsung Hero* by Hidden Brain¹⁹ and *Stillbirth Happens-let's talk* by BC Women's Hospital's Hummingbird Project²⁰, *Bloom Talk* aims to inspire individuals to creatively recount their lived menstrual experiences and contribute to destigmatising menstruation. Sharing these narratives on a public platform serves the purpose of bursting menstrual myths and taboos, normalising the uniqueness of menstrual experiences, in addition to offering a sense of comfort for those who seek it through listening to another's story.

¹⁹ "The daily news can fill us with despair. My Unsung Hero is an antidote to that despair. Each episode reveals what the news ignores: everyday acts of kindness and courage that transformed someone's life. Listen — and renew your faith in humanity." *My Unsung Hero* / Hidden Brain Media. (2021, April 22). www.hiddenbrain.org/myunsunghero/

²⁰ This podcast aims to normalize conversations about stillbirth, providing a space for learning, grieving, and fostering connection for those affected by it. *Podcast: Stillbirth Happens*. (n.d.). from www.bcwomens.ca/health-info/pregnancy-parenting/stillbirth-newborn-loss/podcast-stillbirth-happens#Hummingbird--Project.

The format of an audio podcast, giving participants agency in recording and submitting their stories without the presence of a host/interviewer or a video camera, allows for a level of privacy that empowers uncensored and shame-free sharing of personal menstrual encounters.

The pilot season of *Bloom Talk* comprises ten (+1 bonus) short-format episodes under 15 minutes each, and is accessible for streaming on the audio platforms: [Spotify](#), [SoundCloud](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [Google Podcasts](#) (fig. 75-fig. 76). These stories bring forth a rich tapestry of menstrual experiences, encapsulating raw and unscripted narratives from its contributors. Key themes emerge, reflecting poignant moments in individuals' lives related to menstruation. These narratives encompass:

- **A painful encounter of a first period in a public setting among a group of male-only family members.**
- **An embarrassing tale of feigning a menstrual cycle around peers.**
- **Two awkward experiences of navigating the first period within a conservative cultural context, and countering menstrual myths.**
- **Contrasting these, a positive story depicts menstruation as a loyal friend.**
- **Another, recounts the unique perspective of denouncing euphemisms and embracing the use of the word 'menstruation' with peers.**
- **The podcast also delves into the realm of emotions tied to the use of tampons for the first time, weaving in contrasting elements of anxiety and a celebration of sisterhood.**
- **On the contrary, one story speaks to years of trials and tribulations with different menstrual management technologies culminating in the freedom experienced from a liberating flow.**

The diverse themes unveiled in these narratives underscore the depth and complexity of individual experiences, highlighting the importance of embracing a multiplicity of perspectives in discussions surrounding menstruation.

Listen to all episodes of *Bloom Talk* Season 1:
<https://priyankapoulose.com/bloom-talk>



fig. 72: 'Bloom Talk' logo.



fig. 73: 'Bloom Talk' poster.

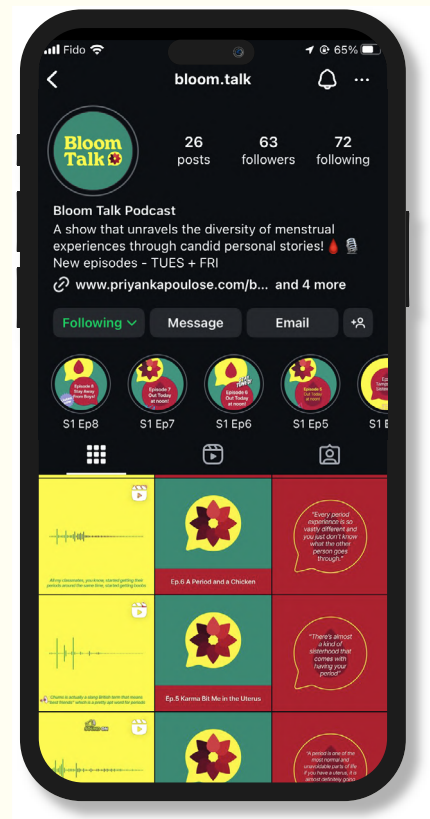


fig. 74: 'Bloom Talk' Instagram page (@bloom.talk).

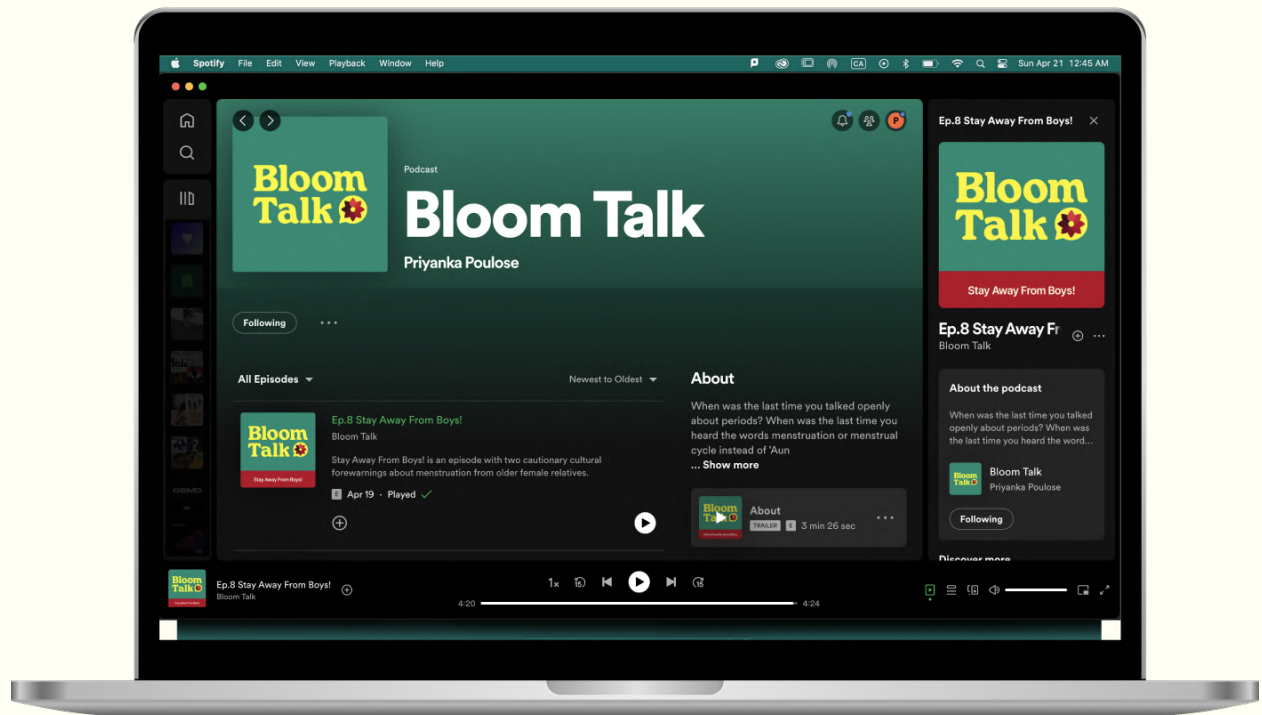


fig. 75: 'Bloom Talk' Spotify profile.



fig. 76: 'Bloom Talk' podcast cover art.

CONCLUSION

In the span of a few months, *Bloom Club* has emerged as a platform for active engagement not only within the Emily Carr University student community but also attracting interest from students and researchers across academic institutions in British Columbia. The overwhelmingly positive response and encouragement received underscore the potential for the *Bloom Club* to persist and expand its role in dismantling menstrual stigma. This momentum led to the online publication of the club's button and zine-making workshop templates, transforming them into open-source downloadable toolkits for broader accessibility. These resources, along with other noteworthy projects in this research like *Patches Against Patriarchy*, *Menstrual Stories*, and *Red Alert* now stand as practical examples for designing menstrual activism, targeting children and young adults to instigate grassroots advocacy in institutional spaces (*fig. 77-fig. 78*).

The *Bloom Talk* podcast has become a transformative platform, amplifying the voices of menstruators, and contributing significantly to breaking societal taboos and building awareness. The poignant and diverse stories shared on the podcast serve as a testament to its ability to empower agency, fostering a sense of community around the misunderstood and stigmatised biological process of menstruation. Acknowledging the impactful role of branding and visual design for *Bloom* (both the club and podcast) in lending authenticity and gravitas to the research outcomes, enables this research to transcend the bounds of academia and contribute to the broader design community.

Examining the practice of this research affirms the potential of design in reclaiming agency over the medicalisation of the menstruating body. It has showcased the impact of shifting the narrative of menstruation from a problematised condition to an everyday facet of life. Through a design practice led by material explorations and participatory projects, the research has demonstrated the ability to create non-medical literacies around the body, derived from lived experiences, cultural directives, social interactions, and political perspectives.

Addressing the objectives and questions guiding this investigation, this research has situated itself within the wider socio-political landscape of women's reproductive health. By underscoring the urgency of confronting menstrual stigma, this research significantly contributes to the ongoing activism in menstrual equity and reproductive justice by formulating a design methodology that adeptly explores meaningful, positive, and open communication about menstruation. Furthermore, the establishment of a menstrual club and the creation of a podcast within this research propose contemporary menstrual rituals grounded in community-building, fostering engagement and empowerment among a physical and virtual network of menstruators.

6. Conclusion

The overarching aim of this project remains resolute—to forge a pathway towards a positive menstrual future characterised by inclusivity, accessibility, and allyship. It seeks not only to cultivate but also to sustain advocacy and activism for the cause of menstruation, envisioning the evolution of a more empathetic society in which menstruators can flourish.

Bloom Club Workshop Toolkits:
www.priyankapoulose.com/bloom-club

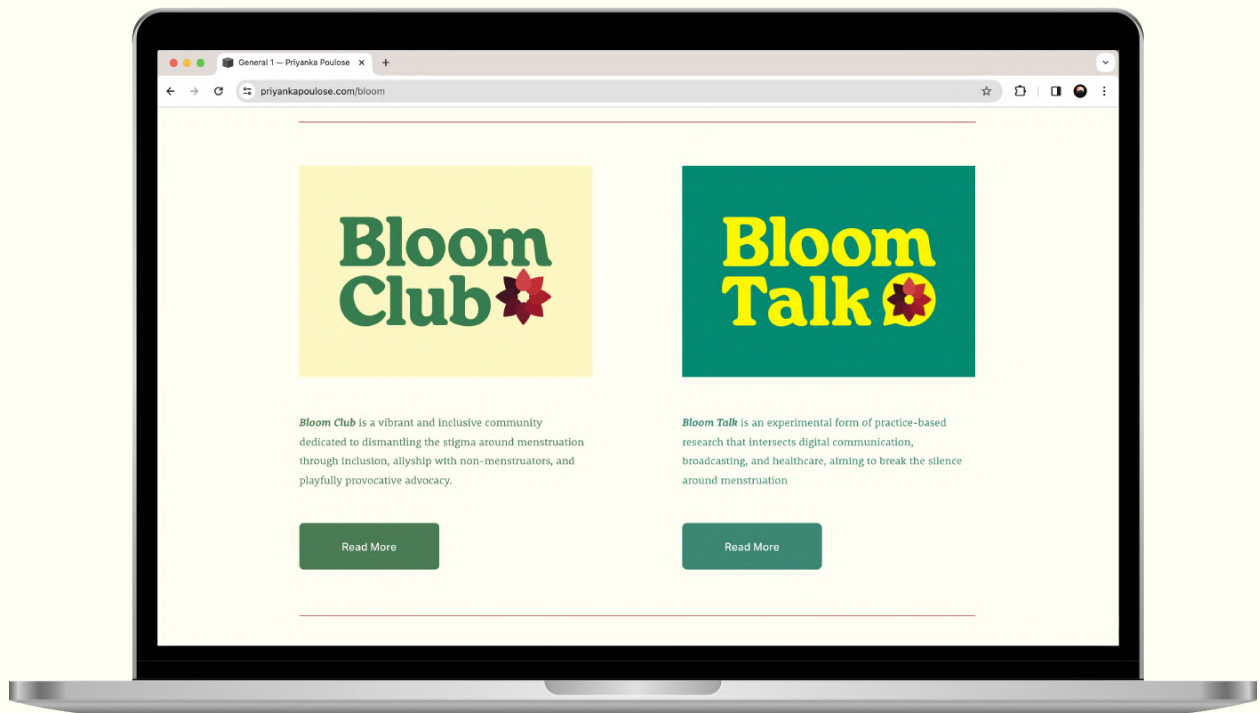


fig. 77: 'Bloom' webpage.

6. Conclusion



fig. 78: 'Bloom Club' button-making workshop toolkit webpage.

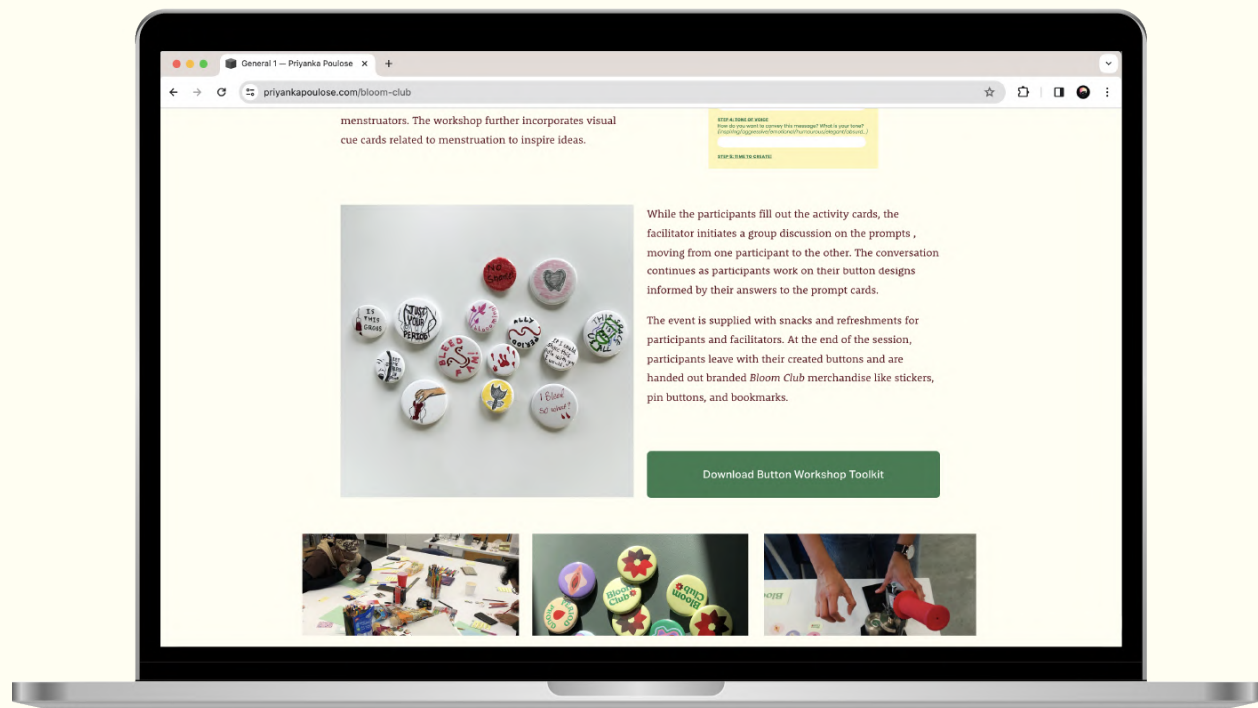


fig. 79: 'Bloom Club' button-making workshop toolkit webpage.

6. Conclusion



fig. 80: 'Bloom Club' zine-making workshop toolkit webpage.

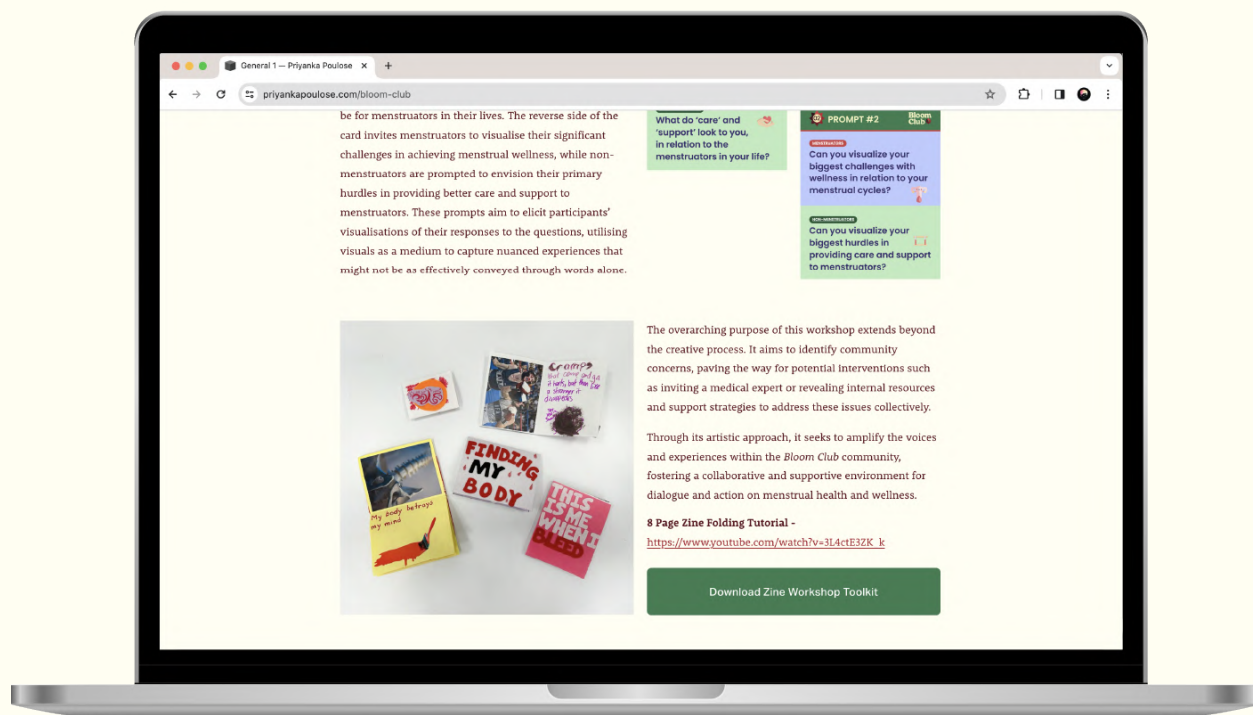


fig. 81: 'Bloom Club' zine-making workshop toolkit webpage.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Moving forward, I plan to continue running *Bloom Club* beyond the Emily Carr community by introducing the concept to interested schools and youth community centres in and around Vancouver. The intention is to establish collaborations with institutions, not-for-profit organisations, and independent sexual health educators for co-designing creative engagements centred on menstrual, sexual, and reproductive health education. Some initial connections have already been forged, and through these collaborations, the aim is to enrich this research by leveraging the creative capacity of design to intersect with healthcare education and awareness.

The creative engagement workshops developed under *Bloom Club* also serve as case studies for diverse stakeholders, including designers, artists, educators, healthcare providers, researchers, and community leaders. These strategies demonstrate the efficacy of participatory design methods in addressing complex menstruation-related challenges, spearheading advocacy initiatives, understanding community perspectives and needs, and potentially even contributing to the formulation of laws safeguarding menstrual rights with the primary goal of eradicating menstrual stigma.

Beyond the confines of academic institutions, the adaptability of the research outcome extends to professional and community spaces. An illustrative example is a participatory workshop designed in collaboration with researchers from the UBC-Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research (UBC-CeMCOR) in November 2023. Titled *Stride to Wellness: A Community Movement and Knowledge Exchange* (see [Appendix C](#)), this workshop engaged women in Vancouver, UBC-CeMCOR researchers, and facilitators in collaborative exercises addressing challenges, strategies, and practices related to diet, exercise, and nutrition in the context of menstrual health and wellness. The event underscored the significance of integrating physical activity, expert knowledge, and community spirit to promote holistic well-being, using participatory design processes to arrive at valuable insights and resources.

7. Future Research Direction

While *Bloom Talk* is currently available on audio streaming platforms, its physical presentation will take the form of an exhibit at the annual Emily Carr University Grad Show in May 2024. The exhibit will feature a listening booth playing episodes from the pilot season accompanied by print brochures providing additional information and access to the podcast website. Plans for the podcast include expanding contributor diversity to encompass individuals who have never menstruated, those whose menstruation status has changed, and older participants (peri-menopausal, menopausal, and post-menopausal). This multifaceted portrayal aims to contribute to the inclusivity objective of the research. Furthermore, the podcast seeks a global reach, inviting contributions in native languages with English-language transcripts to break language barriers and enhance inclusivity. The prospect of developing additional podcast seasons, altering the format and structure, and potentially featuring interviews with grassroots menstrual rights activists, researchers, and medical professionals is anticipated to further contribute to education on menstruation and awareness-raising towards menstrual stigma reduction.

REFLECTION

Conducting this research has constituted one of the most immersive, intellectually stimulating, and personally fulfilling experiences in my academic and professional journey. Exploring a subject so deeply intertwined with my personal convictions has posed some challenges, yet the rewards have been abundant. While my intentions for this research were clear upon entering the graduate program, the ensuing two years have continually surprised me, unveiling unforeseen conceptual and creative capacities. Beyond strengthening my design and technical skills, this research has prompted a heightened sensitivity, empathy, and playfulness in my approach. As a visual designer, this project has served to reconnect me with materials, revitalising my interest in the tactile aspects of design that initially marked my career as an architect. My practice now embraces a truly interdisciplinary realm, encompassing material explorations, visual design, and digital broadcasting.

Prior to pursuing graduate design studies, I spent several years in relative isolation behind a computer screen, disconnected from the end-users of my designs. Today, I take pride in the connections cultivated with peers, mentors, technicians, colleagues, and community members who have significantly informed and enriched this research. The knowledge garnered from this community will endure, influencing both my personal and professional trajectory. This research has also fostered connections within the intricate and evolving domain of health design, particularly women's sexual and reproductive health. As I conclude my academic journey, I will continue my collaboration with the Emily Carr University Health Design Lab and the UBC-Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research on impactful health-related projects serving the community. These enduring relationships, coupled with my substantial growth as a design researcher, will be instrumental as I navigate the field of social design.

Lastly, this research has evolved me into a better activist and advocate for women's rights. This project has rekindled my feminist motivations, countering past disillusionment and hopelessness with newfound optimism and shared purpose. The attitudinal shift in the perception of my own menstrual cycle has made me gentler to my body and unapologetic about affording it the necessary time and rest during menstruation. Connecting with a diverse community of inspiring women and hearing their vulnerable stories has not only humbled me but also intensified my commitment to advocating for women's equality. In publishing this research, I hope to inspire other designers to employ and improve the tools and methods I have developed, contributing to the evolution of this work.

As articulated at the outset of this document, the ultimate goal of this research is rooted in a personal intent to effect meaningful change in the world. Looking ahead to a decade, I hope to reflect upon this work with certainty that it has been successful in instigating positive social change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Ethnographic Interviews–List of Questions

- Do you remember when you got your first period? How did you feel?
- Do you remember who was with you when you got it?
- Were the people with you helpful/supportive? How did you feel in their presence?
- Did your mother/grandmother or any other female family member talk to you about periods? What did they tell you?
- Did you receive any information about periods from male family members?
- How did they behave when they knew you got your first menstrual cycle?
- Are there any taboos/superstitions about periods you learnt as a child?
- Do you feel differently about these taboos as an adult?
- Were there any areas of your house you weren't allowed to visit during your cycle? Any period superstitions you faced?
- Were you comfortable around the male members of your family when you had your period? Were you able to take a pad to the bathroom without hiding it?
- Did you receive menstrual health education in school? At what age/grade did you receive this information?
- What kind of information were you given and by whom?
- Were there boys included in this session?
- Do you remember if the information given to you was useful?
- On average how long is your cycle? How do you track it? E.g.: calendar/app or your memory?
- If using the app, do you log your moods/feelings etc?

- How has your menstrual cycle changed over the years?
- Do you experience menstrual pain/cramping/mood swings/depression/cravings etc? How do you cope with them?
- What kind of support does your husband/partner offer you when you are menstruating?
- Do you wish your partner offered more/different support?
- How will you teach your children about menstruation? Would you want to talk to them about it or would you prefer if they were taught in schools?
- If you had to change the way you received menstrual health education in school, how would you have liked it to be taught to you?
- At what age do you think children should be taught about menstruation? Should boys be included in the classes?
- Is there anything new about menstruation you have discovered as an adult? New products? New symptoms or related conditions?
- How has your menstrual cycle impacted your professional life–in India and Canada?
- How do you feel when you have to work on your period?
- What are your views on menstrual leave policies at workplaces? Do you think all menstruators should get mandatory menstrual leave or it should be on a case-by-case basis with the provision of a doctor's certificate?
- Do you follow any social media healthcare influencers? Do you think healthcare information on social media is accurate?
- Do you regularly discuss periods/menstrual health with family/friends/colleagues etc.?
- Do you think you would benefit from a support group of menstruators where you got together every month and discussed your sexual and menstrual health issues in a safe space?
- Would you prefer to do it informally over snacks or more formally in a workshop setting?
- How do you feel talking about your periods with me?

Appendix B

If Men Could Menstruate Community Zine

This community zine (**fig. B1-fig. B4**), inspired by Gloria Steinem's seminal essay *If Men Could Menstruate*, provided a platform for participants to engage deeply with the hypothetical scenario that forms the essay's central theme— "So what would happen if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate, and women could not?". Participants were invited to engage in dialogue with this question and build on each other's contributions. Some copies of this zine were interspersed with opposing images that showcased the contradictions between the societal acceptance of male bodies versus those of their female counterparts, as an additional reflection (**fig. B5-fig. B9**).

Participants offered a vivid spectrum of responses on the societal shifts that might occur if men experienced menstruation, transcending the physical implications to delve into broader cultural, economic, and gender dynamics. Anticipations varied from practical considerations, like paid menstrual leave and free menstrual products, to broader societal shifts, such as altered gender dynamics and enhanced empathy. Some expressed concerns about reinforcing stereotypes, while others saw potential positive outcomes like improved menstrual product designs and increased funding for research on menstruation. Visual cues prompted critical reflections, with reactions ranging from annoyance at perceived insensitivity in advertisements to questioning the irony in certain visuals.

The diverse and sometimes contrasting responses unveiled through this zine activity underscore the complexity of societal perceptions of menstruation against established gender roles. While participants envisioned positive transformations, concerns about reinforcing stereotypes and the interpretation of visual cues added layers to the discussion. This exploration highlights the importance of ongoing conversations to navigate the intricacies of societal expectations, emphasising the need for sensitivity and critical thinking when engaging with topics that challenge established norms. Overall, this zine project served as a thought-provoking exploration, unravelling nuanced viewpoints on gender roles, power dynamics, and societal attitudes toward menstruation.



fig. B1: 'If Men Could Menstruate Zine' opened-front.



fig. B2: 'If Men Could Menstruate Zine' opened-back.

9. Appendices | Appendix B: If Men Could Menstruate Community Zine



fig. B3: 'If Men Could Menstruate Zine' participant responses.

9. Appendices | Appendix B: If Men Could Menstruate Community Zine



fig. B4: 'If Men Could Menstruate Zine' participant responses.

Appendix C

Stride to Wellness-A Community Movement and Knowledge Exchange

Summary:

This event, a collaboration between the UBC-Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research and UBC-Okanagan, took place at the Mountain Equipment Company (MEC) Vancouver on November 8, 2023. The event included a run/walk led by Filsan Abdiaman, founder of Project Love Run, followed by a participatory design workshop involving community members, researchers, and facilitators. This workshop, a unique initiative by UBC-CeMCOR to strengthen community outreach saw the attendance of 18 community members across a wide age group. Participants engaged in collaborative exercises designed to foster conversations and knowledge exchange addressing the challenges, strategies, and practices on topics like diet, exercise, and nutrition in relation to menstrual health and wellness. The event emphasised the significance of combining physical activity, expert knowledge, and community spirit to promote holistic well-being, with participants leaving the workshop feeling informed and supported (*fig. C3-fig. C11*).

Event Details:

Participants – 18

Lead Facilitator – Filsan Abdiaman

Co-facilitators – Kaitlin Nelson, Priyanka Poullose, Dhani Kalidasan

Experts – Dr. Jerilynn C. Prior (UBC-Vancouver), Dr. Sarah Purcell & Dr. Phil Ainslie (UBC-Okanagan)

Event Agenda:

6:00 pm: Start of Run/Walk (*fig. C1*).

6:30 pm: Return from the Run/Walk

6:30-6:45 pm: Break - Refreshments

6:45 pm: Introductions

7:00 pm: Workshop (facilitated by Filsan) Begins

Workshop Structure:

Step 1: Gathering

- Participants, experts, and co-facilitators gather in a large circle around the room.
- Facilitators hand out ‘Feelings Assessment Cards’ (*fig. C2*).

- Participants are asked to write down 1 word for how they feel at the start of the workshop on the corresponding side of the card and keep it aside for the end of the workshop (*fig. C12*).

Step 2: Pair-up

- Filsan asks participants to pair up with the person closest to them.
- Filsan kicks off with a question to the group – “Let’s start by sharing what wellness means to each of us in relation to menstrual cycles.”
- Co-facilitators hand out sheets of paper to each pair to note down discussion points.
- 5 minutes are assigned for this ice-breaker activity.

Step 3: Challenges

- Filsan verbally presents the ‘Challenges’ prompt to participants – “What is your biggest challenge/hurdle with respect to menstrual cycles, exercise, and nutrition?”
- Co-facilitators hand out red sticky notes to each pair to discuss and write down key points.
- After 10 minutes, co-facilitators collect the sticky notes from all pairs and group them thematically on the Challenges easel board.
- Filsan begins the group discussion by reading out key themes from the board.
- Experts then address the challenges and answer additional questions that come up from participants.

Step 4: Practices & Strategies

- Filsan presents the ‘Practices’ & ‘Strategies’ prompts to participants – “What are some strategies or practices you use to maintain physical and emotional well-being during your menstrual cycle?”
- Co-facilitators hand out yellow sticky notes for Practices and pink sticky notes for Strategies.
- After 10 minutes, co-facilitators collect the sticky notes from all pairs and group them thematically on the Practices and Strategies easel boards separately.
- Filsan begins the group discussion by reading out key themes from each board.
- Experts then address the strategies and practices that come up, providing accurate information and resources to participants.

Step 5: Questions

- Filsan opens the floor for final questions to the experts.
- Participants are informed that they will receive a digital resource document with helpful tips from the community and expert insights on diet, nutrition, menstrual cycles, and ovulation that were uncovered during the workshop.

Closing Notes:

- Filsan thanks the community for their contribution and participation.
- Participants are asked to fill the back of the ‘Feelings Assessment Cards’ with 1 word for how they feel at the end of the workshop and submit them in an acrylic collection box as they leave (*fig. C13*).

As gratitude for their participation in the workshop, 8 participants were awarded gifts (4 toques and 4 water bottles courtesy of MEC) through a random selector application. All participants were handed out bookmarks with links to the CeMCOR website. A digital resource document summarising important information and discussion points was shared with participants after the workshop.



fig. C1: Running bibs.

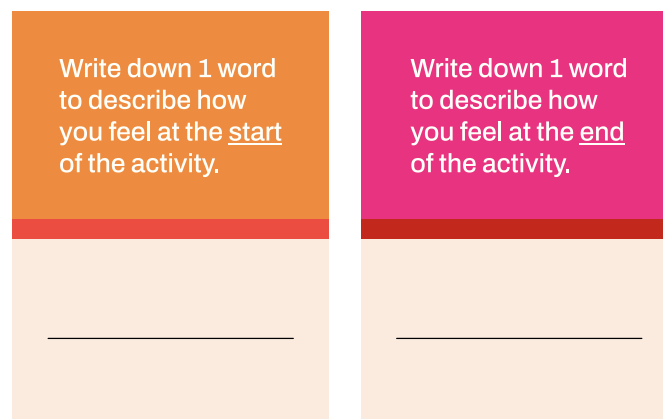


fig. C2: Feelings assessment cards.



fig. C3: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C4: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C5: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C6: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C7: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C8: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C9: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C10: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C11: 'Stride to Wellness' workshop.



fig. C12: Feelings assessment cards: word cloud of participant responses before the workshop.



fig. C13: Feelings assessment cards: word cloud of participant responses after the workshop.

Appendix D

TCPS Core 2 Certificate



fig. D1: Research Ethics Board approval certificate.

Appendix E

Bloom – REB Approval

Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board (ECU-REB)

Research + Industry Office
520 East 1st Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5T0H2

+1 604 844 3800 ext 2848
ethics@ecuad.ca



CERTIFICATE OF RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

The Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board approves the following project:

File #	Title	Principle Investigator:	Other Investigators
100574	Bloom	Sophie Gaur	Priyanka Abraham Poulouse

The current approval dates are:

Approval Date	Expiration Date
January 29, 2024	April 30, 2024

The nature of the approval is as follows:

Type of Event	Type of Review	Approved Documents
New Approval Process	Delegated Review	Consent form – community meetings; Consent form – bloom talk; Application form

It is the researchers' responsibility to meet all research ethics requirements in the jurisdictions in which the research takes place. The procedures and protocols described in this certification must be followed closely. Note the following conditions associated with this approval:

- For multi-site or partnered research, researchers are required to comply with all research ethics requirements that apply. Researchers are expected to share notice of this approval with partners, sites of research, or other research ethics review boards, as applicable.
- If changes to the approved application and documents are required by new partners, sites of research or other research ethics boards, researchers are required to inform the ECU-REB of these changes.

Researchers are required to report anticipated changes, adverse incidents, and project completion for further research ethics review. All reporting is managed through the research portal on the Research Management System Process Pathways Romeo - <https://ecuad.researchservicesoffice.com/>. Login and complete "event" reports for changes, adverse conditions, renewals, and the completion of this research ethics file.

This research ethics approval is in compliance with Tri-Council guidelines (TCSP2 2022) and Emily Carr University policies and procedures.

Dr. Alla Gadassik
Chair, Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board
Emily Carr University of Art + Design

fig. E1: Research Ethics Board approval certificate.

Bloom – REB Closure

2024-03-13, 11:38 AM

ECU-REB Review Results: Approved Final Report // "Bloom, File No: 100574"

do-not-reply-ecuad@researchservicesoffice.com <do-not-reply-ecuad@researchservicesoffice.com>

Wed 2024-03-13 9:36 AM

To: Priyanka Abraham Poulose <ppoulose@ecuad.ca>; Sophie Gaur <sgaur@ecuad.ca>
Cc: Research Ethics Board <ethics@ecuad.ca>; Professor Alla Gadassik <gadassik@ecuad.ca>; Research <research@ecuad.ca>

CAUTION: This email comes from outside ECU. Verify the sender and use caution with any requests, links or attachments.

March 13, 2024

Dr. Sophie Gaur
Faculty of Design + Dynamic Media
Emily Carr University of Art and Design

Dear Miss Poulose and Dr. Gaur,

Re: Bloom, File No: 100574
Researchers: Dr. Sophie Gaur (Principal Investigator)
Miss Priyanka Abraham Poulose (Co-Investigator)

Thank you for completing and submitting the final report for this project to the Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board (ECU-REB). The completion form has been reviewed and approved. This file is now closed.

Thank you for participating in the research ethics review process at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Best wishes for future projects.

Sincerely,

Lois Klassen
Coordinator, Emily Carr University Research Ethics Board
Emily Carr University of Art + Design

Cc. Dr. Alla Gadassik, Chair, ECU-REB

This email and attachments are intended solely for the use of the individual or organization to which it is addressed and may contain information that is confidential. If you have received this email in error please notify the sender immediately by return email to ethics@ecuad.ca.

fig. E2: Research Ethics Board closure email.



More Than a Period

Creative Engagement and Storytelling to Transform
the Menstrual Communication Landscape

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