Painting the World Red: Investigating the Framing of Canada's Menstrual Equity Movement as a Model for Localizing Menstrual Hygiene Management Development Programs

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Abstract

English

This paper examines grassroots menstrual equity advocacy in Canada and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) mobilizations in international development and humanitarian sectors using ecofeminism as a theoretical framework. It compares the approaches of Canadian advocates with narratives from UN agencies, such as UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, and OHCHR, focusing on framing and discourse. The research investigates how menstrual equity advocates conceptualize their work in relation to ecofeminist ideals and explores framing similarities and differences between Canadian and global menstrual advocacy. Through interviews and discourse analysis, the study reveals commonalities and disparities in framing and emphasizes the challenges of mobilizing support due to menstrual stigma.

The findings show that both grassroots advocates and MHM discourses recognize inadequate access to menstrual products and menstrual stigma as central issues. Canadian advocates highlight non-localized programming as a harm-causing occurrence, while MHM discourses emphasize the impact of menstruation on exclusion from public life. The prognostic framing of the two spheres is similar in terms of goals, but Canadian advocates emphasize community responsiveness, localization, and sustainability, which receive less attention in MHM discourses. The study also explores the relationship between grassroots activism and the UN system, noting the growing recognition of grassroots approaches but limited investment and participation. The tension between localization, decolonization, and ecofeminist thought is highlighted, with Canadian advocates emphasizing both localization and explicit decolonization. The study also notes the limited emphasis on the relationship between menstrual equity and climate justice within UN agencies.

The research underscores the complexity of proposing reusable menstrual products as a solution within an ecofeminist framework, with some organizations advocating for community-driven solutions while others promote corporation-produced products. Further research and practice are needed to understand menstrual health issues and develop sustainable, localized, and decolonized solutions. The study concludes that understanding grassroots organizations is crucial for successful menstrual care within MHM programming, offering insights into community-embedded, bottom-up menstrual activism and its potential for informing localized approaches in different contexts.

Français

Cet article examine la défense de l'équité menstruelle au niveau local au Canada et les mobilisations en faveur de la gestion de l'hygiène menstruelle dans les secteurs du développement international et de l'aide humanitaire en utilisant l'écoféminisme comme cadre théorique. Elle compare les approches des défenseurs canadiens avec les récits des agences de l'ONU, telles que l'UNICEF, ONU Femmes, le FNUAP, l'OMS et le HCDH, en se concentrant sur le cadrage et le discours. La recherche examine comment les défenseurs de l'équité menstruelle conceptualisent leur travail par rapport aux idéaux écoféministes et explore les similitudes et les différences de cadrage entre les défenseurs canadiens et mondiaux de l'équité menstruelle. Par le biais d'entrevues et d'analyses de discours, l'étude révèle des points communs et des disparités dans l'encadrement et met l'accent sur les défis que pose la mobilisation du soutien en raison de la stigmatisation des menstruations.

Les résultats montrent que les défenseurs locaux et les discours sur la gestion des menstruations reconnaissent que l'accès inadéquat aux produits menstruels et la stigmatisation des menstruations sont des problèmes centraux. Les défenseurs canadiens mettent l'accent sur la programmation non localisée en tant que facteur de préjudice, tandis que les discours MHM soulignent l'impact de la menstruation sur l'exclusion de la vie publique. Le cadrage pronostique des deux sphères est similaire en termes d'objectifs, mais les défenseurs canadiens mettent l'accent sur la réactivité de la communauté, la localisation et la durabilité, qui reçoivent moins d'attention dans les discours MHM. L'étude explore également la relation entre l'activisme de la base et le système des Nations Unies, notant la reconnaissance croissante des approches de la base mais l'investissement et la participation limités. La tension entre la localisation, la décolonisation et la pensée écoféministe est mise en évidence, les défenseurs canadiens mettant l'accent à la fois sur la localisation et la décolonisation explicite. L'étude note également le peu d'importance accordée à la relation entre l'équité menstruelle et la justice climatique au sein des agences de l'ONU.

La recherche souligne la complexité de proposer des produits menstruels réutilisables comme solution dans un cadre écoféministe, certaines organisations plaidant pour des solutions communautaires tandis que d'autres promeuvent des produits fabriqués par des entreprises. D'autres recherches et pratiques sont nécessaires pour comprendre les problèmes de santé menstruelle et développer des solutions durables, localisées et décolonisées. L'étude conclut que la compréhension des organisations de base est cruciale pour la réussite des soins menstruels dans le cadre de la programmation de la gestion de la santé maternelle et infantile, offrant un aperçu de l'activisme menstruel ascendant et ancré dans la communauté et de son potentiel pour informer les approches localisées dans différents contextes.

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Introduction

Menstrual equity sits squarely at the intersections of gender equity, health, poverty reduction and, increasingly, climate justice. This cross-cutting movement has seen immense growth in recent years thanks to the buildup of years of the relentless activism of young feminist activists, some pivotal cultural moments, and the increased sensitization about the importance of applying a gendered lens to all equity and justice issues. Mobilizations around menstrual health have been expanding in multiple spheres, but of particular interest are the menstrual equity activism in Canada and the menstrual hygiene management (MHM) mobilizations in the international development and humanitarian sectors. Each realm of work broadly seeks to improve the lives of people who menstruate and, while the more established field of MHM has been studied widely, menstrual equity activism in Canada has received little attention–there is a significant dearth of academic research on period poverty and menstrual equity in Canada and what is known has mostly been contribute to the grey literature by Canadians advocates–thus making the advocates a rich source to begin laying the groundwork for further study (Smith et al., 2023b). This study applies ecofeminism–a feminist ideology that understands a strong link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world– as a theoretical framework, drawing specifically on its understandings of decolonization, localization, anti-capitalism, and non-hierarchy and egalitarianism. Ecofeminism was leveraged for this project in order to account for the increasing climate justice considerations visible in gender justice movements like that which concerns menstruation and its simultaneous positioning as both a theory and a grassroots movement, rendering it dually applicable to the study of menstrual equity activism (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019; Smith at al., 2023a).

This study sought to understand how grassroots menstrual equity advocates and organizations in Canada conceptualize–or frame–and conduct their work, utilizing Snow et al.'s (1986) concept of social movement framing in order to break down how advocate frame the problem(s) (diagnostic framing), the solution(s) they are proposing (prognostic framing), and the strategies used to mobilize support for the movement (motivational framing). This study then worked to understand the diagnostic and prognostic framing of the MHM sector in order to conduct a comparative analysis of the approaches of Canadian advocates and international development agencies, with a specific focus on UN agencies. The research questions guiding this work were 1) What is the framework through which grassroots menstrual equity advocates

conceptualize and conduct their work? In what ways do menstrual equity activism and MHM programming align with and diverge from ecofeminist ideals to the extent that it influences their goals (diagnostic framing), strategies (prognostic framing), and messaging (motivational framing)? 2) In what ways is the framing and discourse leveraged by Canadian menstrual equity activism, global menstrual activism, and MHM programs similar, and where to they diverge? Together, these questions constructed a thorough understanding of the approaches and operations of grassroots advocates, and how these approaches and operations, as demonstrated through interviews with Canadian advocates, compare to the MHM narratives put forth by relevant United Nations–namely, UNICEF, UN Women, the UNFPA, the WHO, and the OHCHR.

The interviews and critical discourse analysis this study entailed provided a depth of information about both menstrual equity activism and MHM programming at the UN-level, including clear points of intersection and divergence. Both spheres of work highlight inadequate access to menstrual products and menstrual stigma as key issues in their diagnostic framing, although each identified a distinct and unshared third issue: Canadian advocates additionally stressed non-localized programming as a harm-causing occurrence, while the MHM discourse stressed the impact menstruation has on exclusion from public life. The prognostic framing was in some regards quite similar in terms of the *what*, but not the *how*. Canadian advocates and MHM discourses focused on the need to provide period products, improve menstrual health education, and focus on destigmatizing menstruation. However, Canadian advocates placed a lot of stress on community responsiveness and localization and a growing consciousness about sustainability–two things that were notably less present in the MHM discourse. A universal trend in terms of motivational framing was that garnering mass support is challenging due to the strong stigma around menstruation that manifests differently across cultures, making the word 'menstruation' itself a barrier to working towards mobilization.

Understanding the framing of these two realms of work provided insight into the complex relationship between grassroots activism and the UN system. On the one hand, earlier analysis by Bobel (2019) revealed that it was the MHM sector that originally began to place a large emphasis on expanded menstrual product access using a top-down mass provision approach, and that this strategy was later adopted in Global North, with Canada as a notable site of such work. By contrast, years later Canadian advocates have deconstructed the UN approach by focusing heavily on localization and community responsiveness and criticizing universalized

programming, while this continues to be the trend at the UN-level. However, various UN agencies have begun to feature the stories of grassroots and community-driven approaches to menstrual equity, potentially indicating a growing acknowledgement of the value of such strategies–although investments and participation in these programs does not appear to have progressed as notably.

This tension in localization and, further, decolonization presents an interesting challenge in ecofeminist thought. The modern iterations of socialist ecofeminism place great emphasis on decolonization and environmentalism and Canadian advocates taken together emphasized both these priorities, but in different ways. The localization of programming is universal, while explicit decolonization and sensitivity to the needs of Indigenous populations was widely noted, but most clearly by organizations serving Indigenous populations. This work of gender justice activism and localization was also complexly intertwined with environmentalism. Some organizations point to reusable products as the main solution to period poverty, some describe a growing sensitization towards environmentalism in their movement, and some–primarily those serving Indigenous populations–express frustration at the emphasis on reusable menstrual products people attempt to forcefully impose on remote communities. By contrast, the relationship between menstrual equity and climate justice was hardly emphasized by UN agencies, although more recent UNFPA documents have noted the environmental harm of disposable menstrual products.

The tension in terms of proposing reusable menstrual products as a solution through prognostic framing highlights a complicated manifestation of ecofeminist perspectives on anti-capitalism. Some organizations help communities learn how to make their own reusable pads, exemplifying a more community-driven and non-commercialized solution, but by-and-large proposed and enacted strategies entail buying and distributing corporation-produced products en masse. Taken together, these results highlight a contentious but analytically productive relationship between menstrual health sectors and ecofeminism in ways that provide means of analysis and potentially paths forward for both research and practice in terms of understanding the issues around menstrual health and what sustainable, localized, and decolonized solutions could or should look like going forward.

If the menstrual care aspect of MHM programming is to be successful, then there is a need to understand how grassroots organizations and women-led social enterprises work–both in

Canada and elsewhere–and the successful ways in which they have made progress in terms of improving menstrual equity in their communities. Amid calls to better contextualize MHM work in the development sector by improving localization, cultural awareness, and mitigating racial discrimination in these efforts, formulating a better understanding of community-embedded, bottom-up menstrual activism by examining the social movement in Canada presents an opportunity to understand how local activism compares to the MHM discourses put forth by multilateral organizations like the UN. In turn, this could offer an opportunity to shed light on how menstrual health initiatives are–or can be–localized across different contexts in order to respond directly to community needs.

Methodology

The methodology for this research consisted of two parts. The first aspect entailed a thorough discourse analysis of the discourses by United Nations agencies that publish information about MHM and related programs. Namely, the research looked at 20 select web pages published between 2016 and 2022 from UN Women, UNICEF, the WHO, the OHCHR, and UNFPA. The discourse analysis of UN agencies' publications aimed to understand things like the goals, language, programming, and strategies of UN MHM programs and perspectives. The second part of the research leveraged interviews with grassroots menstrual equity advocates based in Canada to help better understand their work, with a particular focus on how they conceptualize menstrual equity and localize their work and whether or how environmental sustainability is incorporated in their work. The interviews were meant to help garner a deeper and more nuanced understanding of menstrual equity activism than what can be discerned from an organization's publications, websites, and social media pages. The interviews are also designed to mitigate the variance in the level of online presence among grassroots organizations.

The discourse analysis allowed for a close and detailed qualitative reading of the selected texts to analyze the discursive strategies that grassroots menstrual equity organizations employ to advance their cause. The discourse analysis specifically interrogated what objectives the organization is conveying, how they frame their work, the language and strategies they use to communicate their cause and the challenges they are trying to address in communities, and how–or if–they discuss localization and sustainability. According to Horbacauskiene (2020), a discursive strategy is "a deliberate plan regarding the linguistic practices and tactics employed in

discourses to persuade the audiences" (p. 77). This discourse analysis will build on the ways that discourse analysis is frequently leveraged in social movement studies to understand how grassroots menstrual equity organizations and MHM advocates work to communicate messages and meanings as a way to enhance the influence and efficacy of the movement (Lindekilde, 2014). For United Nations MHM programs, 20 selected web pages published between 2016 and 2022 were drawn on as the texts for further analysis. The inclusion criteria used to pick the UN bodies to analyze draws from that of Bobel (2019), who defines MHM organizations as 1) being NGOs or social enterprises, 2) working in the Global South, and 3) having MHM as a meaningful and ongoing aspect of their operations. For the latter to be true, Bobel (2019) asserts that organizations must either make, sell, give out, or provide instructional information on how to make menstrual care products, provide menstrual health education, work on creating proper WASH infrastructure for menstruators, or work to advance menstrual equity-related policies. Based on these criteria, five UN bodies were selected and a close qualitative reading of their online materials will be conducted. The web pages were analyzed using a codebook designed to discern program and discourse patterns, specifically as they related to diagnostic and prognostic framing, sustainability, and localization (see Appendix A).

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with an individual who holds leadership positions from each of six grassroots menstrual equity organizations based in Canada and whose operations (e.g., their policy advocacy and menstrual care product distribution) are Canada-focused. Organizations from Ontario, British Columbia, and the Yukon were included in order to expand representation of operations across provinces with different needs, resources, and policies. Regional considerations are important given the significance of perspectives on localization in this research. This research utilized an in-depth semi-structured, which is a beneficial approach in the context of this research as it allowed for an open approach to data collection that allowed study participants to direct conversations about their work in ways that were not tightly bound. This is important because the research aims to discern the framework with which advocates approach and construct their work and allow for a scoping interview in light of the fact that no research in the social movement framing literature exists yet on Canadian menstrual activism. The interviews sought to understand the core operations of the organizations' work, the particular needs in the community in which they operate, how the organizations gain an understanding of those needs and, in order to assess the potential

intersections of menstrual advocates' work with that of other social movements–particularly feminist and climate justice movements–organizations will be asked if or how they conceptualize the principles environmentalism and feminism in their work. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

Given that I am heavily involved with the menstrual equity community in Canada, I reached out to organizations I was aware of directly via email and that is how all the participants were recruited. Interviews took place during December of 2022 and January of 2023. I am in semi-regular, professional and formal contact with people representing multiple organizations, but am not related to and do not have any personal relationships with the individuals. Following the interviews, each interview was transcribed and the transcripts were analyzed for instances of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing and a manual qualitative thematic analysis was conducted as well in order to gauge broader themes and allow for patterns to emerge.

Literature Review

Menstruation and Menstrual Advocacy

Up until recently, there has been a significant absence of attention paid to menstruation in the literature–the first thorough handbook published on the topic was not released until 2020 (Bobel, 2020). However, menstrual advocacy has become more mainstream in recent years, with Cosmopolitan calling 2015 "the year the period went public" (p. 2), accompanied by more attention to menstruation in popular culture and the founding of numerous grassroots organizations and campaigns aimed at advancing menstrual equity (Bobel, 2020). However, these grassroots-level movements have gone vastly understudied, especially in the Canadian context. It was only in 2022 that the first paper was published on menstrual equity advocacy in Canada–the study focused on the work that went into repealing the so-called 'tampon tax' in 2015 (Scala, 2022). 'Tampon tax' has been the common catch-all term for any tax applied to menstrual products of all sorts–tampons, pads, and reusable products (such as menstrual cups) alike. However, given the growth of the movement pointed out by Bobel (2020) and the profound intersections of menstrual equity with issues of gender equality, poverty, public health, and reproductive justice, the reach of the movement stretches far beyond the provision of pads and tampons and thus deserves more fulsome attention in the social movement literature

(American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2019). Understanding menstrual advocacy as a social movement is thus important for its formal framing in the public sphere and the academic literature.

Most menstrual advocates proclaim to work in pursuit of menstrual equity (sometimes called 'period equity'), a term first coined in 2015 by Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, which aims to ensure that "menstruators have safe and affordable access to the menstrual hygiene products they need to be full participants in society" and aims to deconstruct the shame and stigma that surrounds menstruation (Crawford et al., 2020; Weiss-Wolf, 2020). Advocates often work in a legal capacity to try to repeal taxes on menstrual care products, secure the provision of free menstrual care products in places like schools and community centres, destigmatize menstruation and improve education around menstrual cycles and menstrual disorders (Bobel & Fahs, 2020). However, differences appear to exist between the Canadian and American contexts, although the comparison has received little attention. In Canada, the federal goods and services tax was removed from all menstrual care products in 2015 and the reasons for this success have recently been documented by Scala (2022). By contrast, the 'tampon tax'–consumer taxes on any type of disposable or reusable menstrual product–is a state-level pursuit in the United States against menstrual products being taxed as 'luxury goods' and has thus marked a longer, ongoing, state-by-state battle for advocates (ACLU, 2019). Studies have found that the stigma surrounding menstruation has been a notable barrier in efforts to repeal tampon taxes, thus highlighting the need for menstrual advocacy to engage as both a social and political movement to simultaneously destigmatize menstruation and accomplish legislative goals (Hunter, 2016). However, Canadian menstrual equity advocacy has not been studied beyond the 2015 tampon tax repeal despite its significant growth and notable changes in its goals as a movement since then.

Since the coining of the term, the menstrual equity space has grown significantly in Canada and around the world, with a proliferation of numerous grassroots organizations, growth in policy-oriented advocacy, corporate involvement, and a significant increase in media coverage (Hall, 2021). This research uses Canada as a case study for robust menstrual equity advocacy because the Canadian context has become a particularly notable site for this type of advocacy and has made significant strides for its cause. Canadian advocates have succeeded in repealing the tax on menstrual care products, distributing countless products to people experiencing period poverty, playing a pivotal role in the current government's promise of a $25 million menstrual equity pilot

program, and lobbying for free period product provision with numerous companies and school boards, among other gains (Ibrahim, 2022; Scala, 2022). Further, while much of the advocay in the United States and, until recently, the United Kingdom revolves around repealing so-called 'tampon taxes', the early abolition of the tax in Canada has left space for Canadian menstrual equity advocates to focus on other aspects of menstrual equity (Cotropia & Rozema, 2018; Period Purse, n.d.; UK Government, 2021). Despite this, the movement has gone largely understudied.

Approaches to addressing menstrual health also appear to differ greatly in local North American contexts when compared with international development or water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) contexts, although no thorough comparison has been done. In the latter contexts, the term menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is most often used–the terminological conjecture between MHM and menstrual equity alone indicates a divergence in terms of the priorities of each. While menstrual equity tends to encompass advocacy around poverty, gender, justice, and accessibility, MHM is largely concerned with more technical 'solutions' to menstruation in the Global South, largely because it has fallen under the realm of responsibility of the WASH sector, which itself is highly technical and male-dominated (Bobel, 2019; Thomson et al., 2019).

While MHM programming has increased significantly in recent years and has been incorporated into the development agenda, especially as increasing emphasis is placed on women and girls in development, significant research gaps remain in terms of understanding how menstrual health is linked to global development (Lahiri-Dutt, 2015; Tellier & Hytell, 2018). Further, even though MHM is being addressed by development organizations like the United Nations and related bodies, MHM is not addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in any explicit fashion (Tellier & Hytell, 2018). Recently, however, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) declared menstrual health a health and human rights issue as opposed to simply a hygiene issue, thus highlighting the growing acknowledgement of the significance of menstrual health in terms of development. This echoes an earlier introduction of rights-based discourse in the international arena by a group of UN human rights experts who asserted that menstrual stigma and shame greatly impact the human rights of those who menstruate (Winkler, 2020). While these rights declarations are fairly recent, MHM programming is also relatively recent, with the term not being used broadly until around 2010 and with WHO and UNICEF not pursuing MHM as a means of keeping girls in school until

2012 (Thomson et al., 2019). Unfortunately, even while menstrual health discourse proliferates in the development sphere, approaches to MHM have remained relatively stagnant and focused on making and distributing menstrual care products-–what Bobel (2019) considers to be a "commodified oversimplification of a complex sociocultural and economic problem" (p. 10). Moving beyond this simplified approach will require an examination of alternative solutions to menstrual inequity, but these conversations at the international level continue to be restricted to the WASH sector. Thus, the potential of grassroots solutions that are less technical and simplistic and more responsive to local communities is profound but scarcely explored.

Menstrual Equity as a Social Movement

While menstrual equity advocacy has yet to be comprehensively studied from the perspective of social movement studies, those working in the sphere tend to view it as such. The movement was catalyzed by a multitude of things, but the coining of the term 'menstrual equity' that gave the movement language to rally around and the release of menstrual equity advocate Nadya Okamoto's book *Period Power: A Manifesto for the Menstrual Movement* (2018). Scholars in the emerging field of critical menstruation studies are also swift to refer to menstrual equity as a growing social movement (Bobel et al., 2020). However, Conner (2020) emphasizes that, because experiences with menstruation vary greatly, it can be difficult to frame the movement in a way that is inclusive to the extent that it is conducive to the formation of a large and active social movement. Conner (2020) thus further elaborates that, for menstrual equity to grow as a cohesive social movement, "a cooperative discourse of menstruation must be able to form" (p. 888).

Social Movement Framing

Given the growth and gains of the menstrual movement and Conner's (2020) logic, the menstrual equity movement has a distinct discourse that has been successful in mobilizing people in Canada, although an analysis of this discourse has yet to be undertaken. Conner's (2020) perspective is consistent among social movement theorists who assert that discourse formation is inherently linked to the 'framing' of a movement (Hillhorst, 1997). Framing theory examines how social movements appeal to, garner, and mobilize supporters by presenting their cause in ways that appeal to common beliefs and attitudes (Little et al., 2014). According to

Little et al. (2014), three types of frames–the construction of which is referred to as 'core framing tasks' by Snow et al. (2019)–are utilized by social movements. The first is diagnostic framing or the way a movement states its problem of concern coherently, while the second is prognostic framing, which offers a clear and tangible solution. Finally, motivational framing refers to the action those rallying behind the movement are called to engage in (Little et al., 2014). Uncovering and interrogating how social movements fulfill the core framing tasks is thus essential to formulating a cohesive understanding of how a given social movement garners support and grows. As has been noted, however, a thorough study of menstrual equity advocacy as a social movement, in Canada but also elsewhere, has yet to be undertaken but could offer a more cohesive path forward for the movement nationally. Studying the menstrual equity movement in Canada from a social movement perspective is merited in the sense that it has become a popular avenue for advocacy that is simultaneously focused on a tangible, specific cause–the provision of menstrual care products–and on a variety of intersecting issues, such as decolonization and environmentalism.

Ecofeminism as a Theoretical Framework

The ecofeminist movement finds its contemporary roots in the work of French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, who coined the term 'écoféminisme' in 1974 and elaborated on the work of feminists like Simone de Beauvoir (Detraz, 2017; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). The term was shortly thereafter popularized as a result of protests against environmental degradation and destruction (Mies et al., 2014). At its core, ecofeminism is founded upon the notion that the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world are inextricably interrelated in the context of the capitalist-patriarchal system (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). As a theory, ecofeminism has been criticized for extending ideas of biological determinism–indeed, some people and cultures believe that women are instinctively and uniquely connected to nature, both biologically and spiritually (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). In line with this view that sees the woman-nature links as a product of the patriarchy rather than biology and to diverge from essentialist arguments, this research embraces social ecofeminism. Social ecofeminism is a non-biological determinist form of ecofeminism which sees the relationship between humans and nature as being one of egalitarianism and embraces advocacy rooted in Indigenous movements and which is rooted in democratic theory and transculturality (Allison, 2017).

Ecofeminism falls at the intersection of the feminist and environmental movements and, increasingly, it seems that the menstrual equity movement does as well (Gaybor & Harcourt, 2021). There has been a proliferation of companies selling sustainable menstrual care products, particularly in Canada, where numerous corporations and social enterprises have emerged selling reusable menstrual care products, such as menstrual cups and period underwear, as well as more environmentally sustainable disposable products. However, very little has been written about menstruation from an ecofeminist perspective and nothing has been written in the Canadian context. While some authors in the academic space, such as Norgaard (1999) and Vaughn (2020), have touched on menstruation briefly in broader papers about ecofeminism, the connections between ecofeminist theory and menstruation remain sparse and primarily situated in grey literature. However, given the increasing intersections of environmentalism and menstrual equity highlighted by Gaybor & Harcourt (2021), a more fulsome analysis is sensible, especially as the effects of climate change are exacerbated.

Ecofeminism as a theory is well-suited for studying social movements as it has long encompassed deeply political acts and beliefs, particularly as they relate to environmental and feminist politics. According to ecofeminists like Detraz (2017), "[g]ender is of fundamental importance for understanding global politics because gender is intimately connected to power relations within society through patriarchal systems" (p. 8). Ecofeminists work to improve both the political and socioeconomic opportunities available to women, arguing that these enhanced capacities are crucial for the well-being of women and the environment (Allison, 2017). The emergence of ecofeminism in the 1970s aligns perfectly with the era in which feminist and environmental movements grew simultaneously. According to social movement theorists, this thus marks a time in which the "focus of contemporary societies [shifted] from the production of material goods to the production of knowledge" (della Porta & Diani, 2015, p. 4) Further, ecofeminism has itself been examined as a social movement, although its intersections with menstrual equity as a social movement remain unexplored (Sturgeon, 2008). In an era with growing calls for climate justice alongside the ushering in of what some consider to be a fourth wave of feminism, the social movement landscape in the 21st century is unique and evolving rapidly in many ways, with increasing appreciation of the intersections that exist between the ideologies of gender and climate justice. Further, climate justice, feminist activism, and menstrual advocacy have all seen significant youth involvement, thus indicating the

intergenerational priorities and vision of young people today and foreshadowing the future of the social movement landscape (Silva, 2022; Skillington, 2019). With menstrual advocacy increasingly in the public eye, an exploration of where the movement fits within this contemporary and ever-changing landscape is a complex but important endeavour that can support the contextualization and understanding of how and why the movement has garnered so much support among an array of social groups

Ecofeminism and International Development

Broadly defined, while there is no universally agreed upon definition, development refers to efforts to better the standard of living of people by working to ensure that the basic needs of everyone, everywhere are met and so efforts thus include eliminating poverty and hunger and improving health and education (United Nations General Assembly, 1997; Walker et al., 2019). Development thus encapsulates a wide range of ideas about how to improve the state of the human condition globally, but the image of what a 'developed' nation looks like is often criticized for being highly westernized (Black, 2007). Originally focused almost exclusively on economic development, the field has begun to take on a more holistic approach by also prioritizing social development and environmental protection, as is signified by the increasingly popular use of the term 'sustainable development' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Increasingly, gender is being mainstreamed and environmental sustainability is being seriously considered in development work, with explicit links being drawn between gender and climate change in the context of development (UN Women, 2016). However, ecofeminism remains largely untouched by development actors.

Despite efforts to decolonize international development and mainstream gender in development, development continues to subvert women and nature and there has been virtually no incorporation of ecofeminist perspectives in international development initiatives, including in MHM work (Rutazibwa, 2018). However, while this is true in the broader realm of multilateral aid organizations, grassroots women's organizations in the Global South have advocated strongly for ecofeminist perspectives in development. For example, Kenyan ecofeminist Wangari Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement to create opportunities for women that gave to–rather than took from–the environment (Graness, 2018). Further, WoMin (2021), an African organization promoting ecofeminist alternatives to development, actively

fights against land grabbing by major corporations and asserts the 'Right to say No' to large-scale extractivist projects by Western corporations.

Development, in many of its current manifestations, is a system of dominance that goes against the highly egalitarian roots of ecofeminist thought (Nhanenge, 2011; Allison, 2017). The androcentric and anthropocentric nature of development can be seen in the prioritization of economic development and the undervaluation of the issues facing women, people of colour, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, and nature (Ranis, 2004; Nhanenge, 2011). This is encompassed by what Hayhurst (2011) terms the "girling of development," (p. 532) whereby the purpose of addressing gender in development is framed first and foremost as being the potential for women and girls to catalyze economic growth if given the right tools and opportunities (Bobel, 2019). As Bobel (2019) described it, investing in the health and education of girls in the Global South is framed as "smart economics" (p. 50) rather than an ethical imperative. Despite these challenges, ecofeminists see ecofeminism as having a lot to offer in terms of improving development. Some notable advantages of mainstreaming ecofeminism in development include shedding light on dominance-plagued and patriarchal development structures, assisting with crises facing the globe by providing a more holistic perspective, and working to free people of all genders and from all margins from the domination of the capitalist-patriarchy (Nhanenge, 2011; Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). By exploring both development and Canadian menstrual equity advocacy using an ecofeminist theoretical framework, this research thus seeks to understand the intersections and/or divergences between the two domains and to interrogate the local-global linkages of the movement–something Voss and Williams (2012) note the social movement literature–and even social movements themselves–have fallen short in doing.

Analysis

Diagnostic Framing

Among menstrual equity advocates and organizations in Canada, there is general agreement on what menstrual equity means in its essence. All the organizations interviewed self-identified as advocating specifically for 'menstrual equity'. Quite simply, 'menstrual equity' refers to the notion that everybody who menstruates has fair, affordable, and easy access to the menstrual products they need and are comfortable with in order to fully participate in society

(Weiss-Wolf, 2020). Thus, the basic diagnostic frame conveying the 'problem' being addressed by the movement is that there is currently a lack of widespread access to much-needed menstrual products in Canada and that this is a source of great inequity and thus must be rectified (Hall, 2021). However, while this message is a unified one within Canada, the fragmented and highly localized nature of the work of these organizations makes a more detailed understanding of national diagnostic framing more challenging. All the organizations identified specific issues that built on the basic, more universal idea of menstrual equity and common threads are clear among them. While the inadequate provision of products is framed as one baseline issue, the simple use of product provision to address menstrual inequity is also seen as a core problem. Adjacently, advocates point to universalized and non-localized programming as ineffective and harmful. Finally, stigma is framed as a major issue underpinning the prevalence of menstrual inequity overall.

'It's more than just pads and tampons'

Arguably, the most significant focus of the menstrual equity movement is working towards expanding access to menstrual products. As this has begun to come to fruition in some municipalities, school districts, and workplaces, advocates have turned towards reframing–or, rather, expanding the framing–of menstrual inequity. Addressing the inequities in access to products and making them free and accessible is still seen as a "good place to start" (Organization E), but the expansiveness and complexity of the issue is best captured advocates proclaiming that "it's more than just pads and tampons" (Organization F) and "more broad than just product-in and product-out" (Organization E). To many of these organizations, the absence of period products is only a fragment of what constitutes menstrual inequity. The problem, they argue, is also tied intimately to inequities in healthcare access, research on menstrual and women's reproductive health, and poverty, among other things.

In communicating the fact that product provision is insufficient and that "the solution is not to throw money at it" (Organization E), these organizations can at times seem to have their actions and operations counter the diagnostic framing they are conveying. The core operations of every one of these organizations entails providing free menstrual products to people experiencing period poverty in their communities while, at the same time, they argue that such an approach is both insufficient and, in some ways, perpetuates certain aspects of menstrual inequity.

Organization B, which mostly works to provide products and education, referenced provincial and federal government programs critically, saying that "[...] the way they're doing that is just by throwing menstrual products at people without a plan." With this, the provision of products itself is sometimes diagnostically framed as an issue in the sense that it offers a (seemingly) simple material solution to an issue that is actually complex and systemic.

While the need to consider individual manifestations and consequences holistically and systemically will be further discussed in the section on prognostic framing, the notion remains pertinent to understanding the multiple tiers social movements like the menstrual equity one operate on when framing their cause. At the hyper-local level, the issue is people–such as students at low-income schools or in university, people experiencing homelessness, and individuals in single-parents families–not being able to afford the specific period products that they need. At the provincial and national levels, the problem is a systemic de-prioritization and stigmatization of the needs of people who menstruate and, more broadly, inadequate healthcare access, research into menstrual health issues, access to clean water, and insufficient social welfare systems–this diversity of intersecting and compounding issues was frequently mentioned by the advocates interviewed.

Community Complexity and Localization Advocates actively highlighted the critical factor of considering localization in terms of accounting for the demographics and specific needs of different populations when attempting to understand and frame what the 'problem' is. When advocates discussed the need to move beyond thinking about inadequate product provision, they urge particular attention to being attuned to the unique needs of individual communities. Thus, while the overarching issue and main public message is an absence of products, those doing menstrual equity work on the ground grapple daily with the nuances of this and, in their diagnostic framing, have to balance needing a captivating and digestible message about what menstrual inequity is whilst attempting to honour that the issue is so much more than access for most people.

A primary focus of unique community needs that act as barriers to menstrual equity in Canada specifically was often noted by the advocates as being those of remote, northern Indigenous communities. However, it should be emphasized that three of the organizations under study primarily served Indigenous communities and so this likely influenced the focus. This disproportionate emphasis and relatively high number of advocates serving these communities is

reasoned by the extraordinary levels of period poverty–exacerbated by abnormally high menstrual product prices–and compounding absences of clean water and proper healthcare in these communities (Vieira, 2019). Beyond cost, mere product availability can be a struggle–early on during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, an advocate from Organization F noted that the truck deliveries of goods to their northern community virtually stopped, with trucks coming seldomly and only carrying what were considered absolute necessities. For the most part, menstrual products were never included in these deliveries–in part because they are often not understood to be the necessities they truly are and, additionally, because under the reality of absolute poverty and limited cargo space, necessities often have to be ranked in terms of priority, and things like food and medicine often take precedent (Food Banks Canada, 2020).

This choice between food and tampons is one people facing period poverty frequently face on a personal scale but, during the pandemic, communities faced on a systemic, collective scale, as it was described by Organization F. However, this balancing act is not restricted to these communities–in explaining why she began doing the work they did, an advocate from Organization B described being a low-income student at a high school with a large population of low-income students. They stated that "there was a program at school that helped low-income students get meals, right? I could get meals no problem. But there was no program for menstrual products." In part because of the stigma surrounding menstruation, highlighted extensively by the advocates and especially by Organization C, menstrual inequity often lurks in the shadows and, because it is not spoken about openly, it is not regarded as a fundamental issue facing those experiencing poverty who have the intersecting need of menstrual products. As such, programs that seemingly are non-gendered, such as those providing meals to low-income students, actually highlight the need to consider intersecting forms of marginalization in interrogating how we address poverty reduction.

In addition to the issue of product access, people in remote northern communities are additionally faced with limited access to clean water and hygiene facilities (Latchmore et al., 2018). This makes managing periods unjustifiably challenging–it restricts people's ability to feel clean, comfortable, and dignified, and lack of regular access to safe and properly equipped hygiene facilities impedes individuals' opportunities to change their products when they need to, with the privacy they deserve. This was reiterated numerous times by those interviewed who were running organizations serving Indigenous communities, and particularly with reference to

people experiencing homelessness within these communities. Further, people who menstruate in these communities face highly restricted access to adequate healthcare–for example, one young advocate in a northern community highlighted that her community does not have regular access to a gynecologist, meaning that most people experiencing reproductive health challenges that affect their period are unable to get the care they need (Organization F).

Similarly, Organization B, which primarily serves racialized and low-resource communities in southern Ontario, notes that menstrual inequity greatly encompasses the lack of adequate healthcare to treat menstruation-related ailments such as endometriosis. In their diagnostic framing of menstrual equity, menstrual inequity equally encompasses the lack of menstrual products *and* the lack of adequate medical care. As the advocate from Organization B stated, women experiencing things like endometriosis often have to go to great lengths "just to be believed" by physicians. This is further exacerbated by the chronic underfunding of research into women's reproductive health concerns in terms of both causes and treatments, thus meaning that even when the concerns presented by patients are taken seriously, the options available to help are extremely limited (BC Women's Health Foundation, 2020; Mirin, 2021). These aspects formulate a pivotal part of the detailed diagnostic framing of menstrual equity as it is conceptualized by advocates.

'The real problem is changing peoples' minds'

While the core, catchy framing of menstrual inequity is that the issue is a lack of access to menstrual products, most advocates assert that the stigma surrounding menstruation is an overarching issue that exacerbates period poverty by preventing people from discussing the issue openly or asking for what they need on a personal level. This proclamation by the advocates interviewed is consistent with what Crawford et al. (2020) describe as a primary aim of the movement. According to one advocate primarily serving economically disadvantaged and racialized communities in Ontario, stigma is the primary barrier to progress–according to them, "the real problem is changing peoples' minds" (Organization B). For one BC-based organization, when people are not willing to talk about menstruation in general, they are also not talking about issues surrounding menstruation, such as menstrual products access.

Since people don't talk about menstrual product access, people in turn do not see the lack of access as an issue–in part because it just is not something that crosses peoples' minds–as such,

the topic is further pushed out. According to an advocate from organization C, if there is stigma around menstruation, people do not talk about it, so deducing that it is something that is hidden, young people (e.g., middle school students) begin doing things like hiding tampons up their sleeve when going to the washroom, thus further perpetuating a culture that shrouds menstruation in a veil of secrecy, particularly from non-menstruators. For people who do not menstruate, then, the topic is often beyond the realm of thought and consideration. Taking this further, that we live in such a society wherein people who do not menstruate tend to also be those who hold the most leadership positions and decision-making power, that they are not sensitized to the issue of menstrual inequity leaves the topic off the table in perpetuity (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2021; Cook & Glass, 2014).

About whom? Considering gender is particularly important to menstrual equity advocates when discussing gender diversity and inclusion because most advocate to raise awareness about the fact that 'not all women menstruate and not all those who menstruate identify as women'–a phrase heard often in the menstrual equity space (Rydström, 2020). This was confirmed by a recent report by the United Way (2021) in British Columbia, which found that nearly all the organizations they examined that worked to provide menstrual products explicitly highlighted that they serve transgender individuals While the destigmatization of menstruation is important for everyone in some way, the compounding nature of menstrual stigma and transphobia raises an additional layer to the movement. Organization A supports the push to put free menstrual products in all washrooms in public spaces (women's, men's, and all-gender washrooms), but says that putting products in men's gendered washrooms without accompanying education could create more harm for both transgender and non-binary individuals and for the menstrual equity movement overall. If there are adverse reactions from people who do not understand why–or who do not agree with why (for reasons that are generally considered transphobic in nature)–there are menstrual products in men's washrooms, the risk of transphobic attacks and vandalism is non-negligible. Further, the mere reality of some cisgender men being more blatantly exposed to menstrual products in public spaces risks triggering reactions that perpetuate menstrual stigma (e.g., reactions of disgust), as outlined by Organization A.

Prognostic Framing

Step One: Saying the Word

Considering the extent to which many of the organizations considered the stigma and shame around menstruation to be a significant contributor to the issue of menstrual equity, it is no surprise that it was equally framed as a pivotal part of the solution. Research has frequently highlighted the extent to which harmful social norms and stigma around menstruation specifically and gender justice more broadly have strong negative consequences on public policy progress and outcomes (Gothreau et al., 2022; Olson et al., 2022). This exemplifies the advocates' general observation that "the biggest challenge is changing peoples' minds" (Organization C) because, until people are willing and able to talk about menstruation openly, the potential for addressing menstrual inequity is extremely limited.

In order to force the topic of menstrual equity into the mainstream, Canadian advocates have adopted a variety of strategies that focus specifically on breaking the silence and destigmatizing. For example, one organization that works primarily with racialized and newcomer populations runs annual campaigns focused on different aspects of menstrual stigma, with themes such as "No More Bloody Secrets" and "Call It What It Is," with the latter aiming to encourage proper terminology around menstruation instead of so-called 'code words'. A recent international survey of 90,000 people in 190 countries found more than 5,000 euphemisms (saying things like it is their "time of the month," "Aunt Flow is visiting," or "it's shark week") for menstruation–emblematic of the extent to which people go to avoid saying they are "menstruating" or "on their period" (International Women's Health Coalition & Clue, 2016). As creative and amusing as these sayings are, they perpetuate silence and shying away from more in-depth discussions and research about the needs of people who menstruate–the consequences of these fun euphemisms have been acknowledged for decades (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2020). When Organization B first started its work, they were mostly using 'code names' for menstruation in order to reflect the language being used by the populations they were serving: "We were still using code names a lot to make people feel comfortable, and then we realized that we're not really doing much. We're not really doing what we said we should do." Thus, they began strictly using the language of "menstruation" and "periods" despite its disjunction with community discourse and, overall, it has been well-received, according to volunteers.

Whose Problem Is It, Anyway?

As it stands and as it is understood by the organizations interviewed, the primary actors working towards menstrual equity in Canada are grassroots organizations like the ones examined in this study. All of the advocates exuded immense levels of passion for what they do–indeed, nearly all of them are doing this work unpaid, while they themselves also are grappling with personal economic insecurity and time constraints as a result of doing this work on top of being full-time students, holding other full-time jobs, and having families (Smith et al., 2023a). This reliance on unpaid work and grassroots community advocacy was framed in two ways by the advocates: 1) as insufficient to address the level of community needs and complex nature of period poverty as it intersects with things like food insecurity, social welfare, and health education and 2) as necessary in order to push the menstrual equity agenda forward and ensure that communities are having their needs responded to in ways they fear large government programs would be unable to fulfill.

The above may on the surface appear to present a tension between the work of these organizations and the perceived role of government and policy, but the interviews revealed a desire for strong partnerships: menstrual inequity encompasses community problems that necessitate community-oriented solutions, but for this to work capacity support is needed from the government. In essence, these organizations are calling for support that is aligned with the types of support increasingly emphasized by the non-profit sector (and specifically by feminist-aligned organizations) as a whole in Canada and elsewhere: unrestricted, capacity-building funding that would allow their respective organizations to create programs that are tailored to their communities' needs and not directed by rigid funding criteria (Ayer & Anderson, 2022; Equality Fund, n.d.; Shaker & Wiepking, 2021). This type of government partnership is also aligned with ecofeminist ideals surrounding non-hierarchy. The menstrual equity organizations in Canada are largely volunteer-run and relatively non-hierarchical and community-driven and, while wanting more support 'from the top', do not want this structure to be altered (Smith et al., 2023). At the heart of ecofeminist political activism is the push to break down constructions of domination and inequality in all forms with the ultimate aim of constructing non-hierarchical societies in which men do not dominate women and humans do not dominate nature, and in which non-statist solutions are given priority (Carlassare, 2000; Estévez-Saá & Lorenzo-Modia, 2018; Plumwood, 1993). Canadian advocates believe they have strongly demonstrated a decisive

ability to solve period poverty if given the necessary support to increase their capacities and conveyed a lack of trust that the government, left to its own devices, could design and implement a strategy to address period poverty that would adequately address the issue in a way that is localized and decolonized.

The Boots on the Ground As noted above, the primary actors alleviating period poverty and working on product provision and destigmatization in Canada right now are the grassroots organizations and individuals in the community who have found themselves possessing a deep level of care and compassion for the cause–for reasons ranging from having experiencing period poverty themselves, seeing inspiring stories about other advocates on the local news, or simply having daughters and imagining what a better world might look like for them. These deeply personal reasons for doing this work of distributing products to communities appears to have shaped who people see as pivotal in solving menstrual inequity. While these organizations call loudly and openly for more systemic change and formal government action, they place great emphasis on the need for the continued work and attentiveness of the people on the ground.

As Organization A emphasized, the solution needs to simultaneously be top-down and bottom-up: local governments, school boards, and other companies and organizations need to be implementing programs that provide free menstrual products, and advocates need to be pushing them to do that. Such a split between top-down and bottom-up prognostic framing is not uncommon–many contemporary social movements that are youth-driven and led, such as the climate justice movement, combine calls for top-down and bottom-up action (Svensson & Wahlström, 2021). Organization B also articulated a need for bottom-up and lateral approaches and called for more robust community action–they emphasized that despite being a full-time student who also exists in a state of financial insecurity, they find the space and time to do this work and that unless people like her are willing to do this work, progress will not happen. To be sure, this can place great pressure on people in already difficult circumstances to solve large, systemic problems–but the idea is that mutual aid must remain a fundamental part of the solution. Along these lines, Organization A emphasized that the solution is multifaceted in terms of actors: ""[E]verybody should be moving menstrual equity forward from where they are. So if you're directly in the movement, work through there, if you're in government, push policies, if you're in the trades–push wherever you are." The solution, then, is the responsibility of a lots of organizations, governments, and individuals. If you write building code, according to

Organization A, then you can write into regulation the provision of products–similarly, if you're an employer, you can implement a program supplying menstrual products to your employees. As such, many of the solutions to menstrual inequity stretch beyond government.

Government Many of the organizations interviewed saw sweeping and robust government policies and programs as a fundamental aspect of the solution to menstrual inequity, although government policies and programs were seldom the focus. An advocate from Organization D voiced that the current landscape of government programming with regards to menstrual equity–characterized mainly by the $25 million pilot program that is currently in development–menstrual equity needs to become a core, permanent operation "on all three levels of government." Organization D highlighted that menstrual equity should become a core operation at least to the extent that a permanent branch of federal and provincial government exists to address menstrual equity specifically.

The need for government involvement is particularly necessary given the logistical challenges of providing products to communities in remote northern areas. According to Organization D, it would be significantly easier for the government to use its infrastructure and resources to ensure a stable supply of menstrual products in these communities. Currently, Organization D has strong operations and committed volunteers, but managing the logistics of delivering products to northern Ontario and other remote Indigenous communities is immensely challenging. The organization has had to coordinate multiple planes for single deliveries, rely on volunteers willing to drive long distances, and even pay for bus cargo space just to meet the basic needs of community residents. Further, the use of a logistics company to facilitate the transportation is simply cost-prohibitive for grassroots organizations functioning heavily on in-kind donations. This, they argue, is an issue that only the government has the capacity to fully address.

For many, government serves simply as a means of funding the localized work being done by advocates and community organizers and not more. The perception by these organizations is that, as noted above, the government's prognostic framing appears to entail simply buying and distributing products through their own channels. This differs greatly from the prognostic framing of the organizations themselves who have become greatly attuned to community needs to such an extent that the true complexity of the issue–and therefore the

solution–has emerged. As such, some advocates see the government as categorically unequipped to solely address menstrual inequity and to coordinate product distribution.

As Organization B stated in reflecting on a stakeholder interview they did in consultation with the Government of Canada (2022) for the Menstrual Equity Fund announced in the 2022 federal budget, "'Listen', I told them in the stakeholder interview. I told them if you wanna do this right, give me the money, [...] share it with the organizations that are doing the work. [...] Open the doors we need open. That's it. You watch period poverty dissolve in Canada." This sentiment that organizations know their communities best was a common thread–nobody called for total government takeover of the issue of menstrual product provision, but most called for some capacity support and robust policy changes. The only organization who never mentioned government or policy in this regard was Organization F. The organization functions as a mutual aid project in a small, close-knit community and the fundamental belief of the advocate interviewed was that, so long as capacities in terms of products were ensured, the community is best suited to serve the community, without interference by regulations.

Just Listen: The Importance of Localization and Community Responsiveness

The most significant observation documented during this study was the extent to which menstrual equity advocates in Canada localize their work and respond directly to community needs. The measures these organizations take in order to be attuned to what individuals in their communities are asking for–or need but are not outright asking for–are extensive. To ensure these organizations are providing people with the products they actually need and want, many of them have somewhat formal product request mechanisms that allow them to ensure they are not giving communities things they will not use. These organizations insist that this sort of localization is immensely important to their work and to the solution to menstrual equity overall–as noted earlier, the advocates frequently reiterated that throwing menstrual products at the issue is not the solution. With this, in instances where material provisions are the appropriate, palliative response to period poverty, it is at-minimum expected that the products given are adequately customized. Organizations B, C, and D all used online, detailed requests forms in order to accept product requests from the communities and individuals they work with. In many cases, these forms are sent to individuals at community partner organizations, such as health clinics–people situated in the communities who have a better understanding of the needs of the

population they serve than would individuals from the menstrual equity organizations delivering products to them.

The forms these organizations send ask detailed questions about the demographics of the community, product preferences, and even information about culture and religion that may influence the types of products that are appropriate to send. However, even the means of requesting are personalized and localized–for some communities, based on the types of relationship an organization has developed with a given community or organization, the more appropriate way to reach out about needs is to call and have a conversation. With this, while forms and surveys are a critical tool for tracking requests, the nuances of complex community needs are not always adequately captured in this way and organizations frequently brought up the significance of personal relationships in the work that they do. This relates strongly to their calls for menstrual equity programs that go beyond product provision and concerns about sweeping, generalized government programs. While needs and wants in a given small remote community might be (relatively) uniform as a result of similar socioeconomic status, culture, beliefs, and water and hygiene facility access, more diverse communities often have similarly diverse needs. Organization B serves a highly diverse population in Ontario made up of people from numerous countries with numerous religions, cultures, countries, and belief systems. As such, they have a period product program that allows individuals to request product kits regularly and they "curate the kits to match their cycles." This level of localization and personalization is something the advocates across the board see as pivotal to solving menstrual inequity and makes up a significant aspect of their prognostic framing. This staunch prioritization of localization also highlights a certain level of alignment with ecofeminist conceptions of decolonization in gender and climate justice work, wherein post-colonial thought significantly influences the ways that ecofeminists understand and apply intersectionality (Kings, 2017; MacGregor, 2004; Salleh, 1997). In pursuing anti-statist solutions to period poverty that centre community and mutual aid, Organization B and the many Canadian menstrual equity organizations serving primarily Indigenous communities constantly reassert a commitment to decolonization and anti-paternalism through their trust in the reality that people and communities know their bodies and their needs best, and that these needs and desires exist distinctly from state policies, public pressure, and corporate influence.

In order to ensure they reach individuals in the community who need them the most, Organization B has adopted some creative ways of getting around institutional barriers. Organization B serves a large newcomer population in Ontario and some of the organizations where newcomers are first referred to for support either do not have the capacity to or will not allow for the distribution of menstrual products to the people they serve. In response to the 'no' from organizations, they simply created posters to hang up around and near the organizations referring people to them with their contact information and reference to their product request form. Organization F also takes a particularly personal approach to needs assessment. In running a small menstrual product 'pantry' in their small, remote northern community, Organization F has taken the closeness of their community as the primary tool for understanding and responding to the needs and wants of those who menstruate in the community, and there are multiple ways through which this is pursued. The primary mechanism that allows people to voice their needs is a notebook that is always left in the pantry–those who access the pantry are able to write whatever they want or need, or say anything they feel they need to, in this notebook that is checked almost daily by volunteers. The notebook even contains the personal cell phone number of the advocate interviewed for this study that community members and users of the pantry regularly use to reach out and express their needs.

To take the approach to mutual aid and community responsiveness even further, the advocate from Organization F frequently sits beside the pantry in their free time so that individuals can speak with them face-to-face. Finally, the advocate and their family host regular community dinners that are open to everyone, where people can come and have a safe space and meal and be given time to talk about their lives and their needs. This multifaceted approach to localization represents an exceptional model of localization and decolonization–the extent to which a multi-pronged process like this can be scaled without compromising the personalization and community-like feeling it evokes is something that still needs to be explored. However, according to the Organization F's framing, this sort of community embeddedness, mutual respect, and ongoing responsiveness, wherein the advocate "decentres" themself, is unquestionably the only way to ensure those affected by period poverty are helped in the most ethical and dignified way possible.

An adjacently informal approach is also taken by Organization B–while they rely heavily on detailed, individualized forms in order to directly fulfill product requests, a lot of what they

do is just listen to people in order to understand their needs–the advocate said, “I’m eclectic–I collect stories so that I can better serve that person.” From the standpoint of prognostic framing, it is clear to the advocates based on their numerous years of collective experience that community embedding, trust, and listening to what communities need in informal, meaningful, respectful ways is a quintessential part of addressing menstrual inequity. These stories that Organization B bases their work on and the trust that Organization F gains from hosting community dinners cannot be emulated by online surveys and large, bulk shipments of products. This mode of understanding and evaluating need and collecting feedback through storytelling and interpersonal relationships built on trust and shared community can additionally be viewed as a decolonized and Indigenized approach to research that unglorifies the demand for quantitative measures and formal, objective, and anonymous data collection (Christensen, 2012; Drawson et al., 2017). In Indigenizing approaches to research, Canadian menstrual equity advocates continue to reify their commitment to decolonization in ways that are presented both as a statement of principle and as a unquestioned and naturally arising aspect of their work.

Observations and Implicit Needs While formal product request and feedback mechanisms form an important pillar of how these menstrual equity organizations remain responsive and attuned to community and individual needs, many instances wherein these organizations have become sensitized to particular needs have arisen from implicit trends and observations. In addition to its multitude of ways for people to actively voice their needs, Organization F has also informally assessed and tracked product usage and rate of replacement in order to gauge need, and this has also shed light on needs that go beyond regular menstrual cycles. For example, Organization F noticed that panty liners were the most popular item despite not generally being used exclusively to manage periods–based on this observation, they said they are trying to get more liners and “to get underwear as well–we're worried that's maybe something that's needed.” Upon elaboration about the community context of homelessness and restricted clean water access, Organization F conveyed that they used liner use to deduce that people who menstruate were using liners in the absence of the ability or opportunity to have clean underwear due to not being able to afford enough pairs or not having access to facilities for laundering.

Organization F similarly observed that products designed for managing postpartum bleeding, which they only began offering due to an ad hoc donation, were taken up quickly. Now, they are actively trying to acquire more in order to address this perceived need that has not

been explicitly conveyed. Similarly, Organizations C and D observed that a certain brand of pads was going unused by the communities they donated to–for reasons these organizations did not pry about, it seemed community members were extremely averse to the products from the popular brand. Taking this as truly valid and important feedback, and having confirmed this preference with community midwives, these organizations now never ship pads from that brand to these communities.

Resource Constraints and Responsiveness While the menstrual equity organizations included in this study constantly reiterated the importance of being as responsive as possible to community needs and wants, the 'as possible' aspect is a significant one. Most of these organizations do their work almost exclusively on the basis of in-kind donations of menstrual products. As such, their ability to fulfill the requests of the people they serve are heavily constrained by what individuals or companies are able to donate at any given time. For example, Organization E has developed strong skills in running large product donation drives but, at the time of being interviewed, had a lot of pads and no tampons. In describing how they manage this, Organization E described thinking "OK, this is how many agencies have reached out, this is the product they've indicated they could use versus this is the product that we have. So how do we distribute that evenly and fairly?". Similarly, Organization F has worked on responding to the observed need for liners, underwear, and postpartum products, but those are not generally commonly donated items and so ensuring their stock in the menstrual product 'pantry' is difficult, especially when an organization receives products rather than monetary donations.

Culture & Identity Though mentioned throughout this section on localization, it is important to explicitly point out the ways the organizations cater to the communities and individuals they serve based specifically on things like their culture, background, sexuality, gender identity, and religion. According to the organizations–especially those who explicitly discussed serving racialized communities–such attention to identity is critical for the ethical and inclusive pursuit of menstrual equity. For example, in order to best serve Indigenous communities, Organization D draws on the indigenous medicine wheel and builds their framework of operations based on that in order to ensure their approach is consistent with the approaches to life taken by the communities they work with.

Organization B serves a culturally and racially diverse community and so they have numerous avenues to ensure their operations are inclusive along these lines. The organization

holds a variety of workshops aimed at destigmatizing menstruation and educating communities about the use of reusable menstrual products. Many of their workshops are designed specifically for a certain group. For example, their Muslim volunteers run workshops catered specifically to Muslim individuals because people deserve to be supported by someone that can "understand the lived experience" of menstruating as a person of their own religious identity. The advocate interviewed from Organization B also explained how they encourage volunteers to get in touch with their communities about menstruation and collect their stories so that they can create the appropriate avenues of support for them.

It is additionally clear that the solution to menstrual inequity is a gender-inclusive one that also centers disability inclusion. Organization A explicitly stated:

> And then and then there's the gender binary issue that is very problematic. It's very important too that all bodies who menstruate, which specifically includes trans boys, trans men, nonbinary, gender non-conforming, gender fluid people you know, people with uteruses who menstruate should have the same care.

In elaborating on this, the advocate from Organization A described educating everybody–not just those who menstruate–about menstruation and making sure that menstrual equity programs transcend the gender binary are pivotal aspects of the solution. To add an additional layer, Organization E highlighted the importance of considering the specific needs of people with disabilities when designing programming. According to Adamé (2020), menstrual products often are not designed for disabled bodies because "it somehow slips society's mind that disabled people can menstruate, be considered sexually attractive, have sex, and even reproduce. Of course, some of these are not true of all disabled people, but neither are they true of all able-bodied individuals" (p. 340). As such, Organization E emphasized, the only proper solution to menstrual equity is one that is additionally and explicitly sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities.

Feminism and Sustainability: The Complex Emergence of Ecofeminism

To Reuse or Not to Reuse The significant rise in popularity of reusable menstrual products and eco-friendly disposable products has been both encouraged and leveraged by menstrual equity advocates who see them as a solution to both period poverty and the waste produced by standard disposable menstrual products (Beksinska et al., 2015; Harrison & Tyson,

2022). To many, environmental considerations are always a consideration when planning and running menstrual product distribution programs, highlighting a strong intersection of gender and climate justice within the movement. This is what Snow et al. (1986) would consider 'frame alignment', wherein the menstrual equity movement has aligned itself with larger, better-known, and longer-standing social movements in order to frame its own movement and come up with solutions to menstrual inequity that address intersecting forms of injustice. These intersections are also exactly what characterize ecofeminism–the inextricability of gender and climate justice to such an extent that one cannot be realized without the other (Ruder & Sanity, 2019). To examine this further in a tangible manner, it is worth exploring how menstrual equity advocates approach sustainability in their pursuit of gender justice, climate justice, and poverty alleviation with reusable products.

Of all the ways the advocates interviewed independently united around a variety of prognostic frames for the menstrual equity movement, that the solution is and will continue to be a complex and necessarily localized one is best exemplified by the advocates' take on the use and distribution of reusable menstrual products, such as reusable pads and menstrual cups. Most explicitly stated by Organization B, "The most effective way to end period poverty is to go use reusables 100%, 150%, a million percent. It's the solution to all of our needs." Organization B has already begun fulfilling this prognostic frame by running regular reusable pad-making workshops for the community and helping to set up similar programs in other countries in order to empower communities to drive their own economically and financially sustainable menstrual equity programs. Organization A similarly believes in the importance of reusable products, but frames them more so as something that needs to be offered in order to ensure the options available to people who menstruate are as extensive as possible in order to meet the needs of everybody's body. Their approach is tailored towards raising awareness about reusables, trying to make them more accessible, and additionally ensuring that the disposable products they provide are compostable and/or recyclable.

The approach of Organization B presents an interesting comparative case with the other organizations in terms of ecofeminist thought. Ecofeminism is inherently anti-capitalist, asserting that extractivist capitalism–and the capitalist-patriarchy specifically–is the root cause of the domination of nature, women, and other marginalized groups (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). In calling for the dismantling of the capitalist system, ecofeminists urge a move towards 'commons', or

"the new and already existing social relations ("ancient futures") that defend and build shared control over the means of life, while prioritizing those who are most exploited and undermined by capitalism" (Giacomini et al., 2018). Organization B's approach to ending period poverty in part by empowering marginalized communities with the education and resources needed to create self-sustaining means of ensuring a secure supply of menstrual products is representative to this end. Such an approach embraces the ecofeminist push for a circular economy and the autonomy of and community-building for women through breaking cycles of dependency on products from companies that both harm the environment and exacerbate gendered poverty (Harrison & Tyson, 2023).

For organizations serving remote, northern Indigenous communities, sustainability looks a lot different in important ways. Since many of these communities–and especially those experiencing houselessness within these communities–do not have consistent access to clean water, and some additionally lack regular access to hygiene facilities, reusable periods products pose a significant challenge (Latchmore et al., 2018). Reusable period products require access to WASH resources and facilities in order to be used safely–most menstrual cups need to regularly be boiled in clean water after each cycle and reusable pads and period underwear require frequent laundering with safe soap and clean water. For these reasons, and also simply because they are not preferred products by people in communities most of the time, these organizations do not prioritize their distribution, nor do they work towards changing community attitudes in order to increase the uptake of reusables.

Two of the organizations serving Indigenous communities noted that they are frequently criticized for their approach to product choice–many reported receiving phone calls, emails, and messages on social media asking why they do not provide more reusables or, in some cases, going as far as denouncing them for their choice to provide more reusables and accusing them of "promoting the use of single-use products too much." To be sure, these organizations are not actively promoting disposable products–they are simply providing people with the products they already use, are comfortable with, and are asking for. These organizations similarly express frustration at the hypocrisy these criticisms–often from people in urban centres–entail. Organization D expressed that:

> We do get a lot of like 'why don't you just send cups?'–it kind of gets a little bit paternalistic at times where people don't really understand this kind of settler mentality of like, 'I know what's best for the community'.

Organization D also highlighted that Indigenous peoples protect 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity and that their remote communities are so small that their relative contribution to menstrual product waste is essentially negligible (Recio & Hestad, 2022).

Context-Appropriate Sustainability As is exemplified by the stark contrast in the framing of reusable menstrual products as a solution to menstrual inequity, most of these organizations are constantly considering sustainability but do so in ways that are appropriate for the communities they serve. This is a central aspect of their prognostic framing that draws on the needs elucidated by period poverty and the strong sensitization about climate and gender justice. For example, while Organization D noted that reusable products are seldom requested by the northern communities they ship products to, they also highlighted that they exercise great care in minimizing the waste in the packages they send up north. In order to coordinate this, they get in touch with communities to understand what their waste disposal and recycling operations and capacities are–if they do not have adequate recycling programs, for example, volunteers will unpackage most of the products from their large boxes and smaller packages in order to recycle them locally before shipping them out. While not all organizations prioritized reusables, most of them at-minimum highlighted that they always prioritize the acquisition and distribution of eco-friendly disposable menstrual products where possible (e.g., biodegradable pads and tampons, applicator-free tampons, etc.). In all, offering as wide a variety of products as possible is seen as absolutely necessary for the equitable solution to period poverty–empowering people of all genders who menstruate with the products they know and feel are best for their bodies and lifestyles is pivotal to empowering those who menstruate and removing any paternalism from the conversation.

Motivational Framing

Constraints on Motivational Framing

Prior to the beginning of these interviews, it was hypothesized that because Canada was able to abolish the 'tampon tax' eight years ago–much sooner than most other countries and

regions–that menstrual equity advocates would have more space and time to focus their advocacy on more advanced policies and programs (Scala, 2022). As it appears, these organizations are so focused on addressing immediate menstrual product needs palliatively that little time or space remains for more system- and policy-focused advocacy. When asked about their core operations, most organizations focused almost exclusively on the acquisition, storing, and distribution of menstrual products. And this was more than an implicit observation–Organization E, who has done more policy advocacy and political organizing than all the other organizations interviewed, still expressed the constraints preventing them from dedicating the amount of advocacy work needed to grow the menstrual equity movement and the support for it in order to help advance policy change. “I'm still doing distribution of products half the time. [...] I'd like to maybe do more outreach, but I don't feel like I have the capacity to do that.” This is a sentiment that was expressed by most of the advocates–this reality of being stretched thin and having their capacities maxed out.

Nearly all the advocates interviewed were unpaid volunteers who also had full-time jobs, were full-time students, had families to take care of, and some were in financially precarious situations themselves. As such, constraints simply demand that advocates make choices about allocating their time. While the prognostic framing of the movement emphasized a clear need for policy change and government intervention, in practice the advocates had very little time to work towards this. Ironically, this is in part because there is so little government support for the alleviation of period poverty that community organizers instead spend their time filling in the gaps created by inadequate policies and funding. Recent findings by Smith et al. (2023a) from a study that entailed extensive interviews with menstrual equity advocates found more support for the idea that advocates prioritize advocacy at local and national levels, but also highlighted constraints. The movement almost exclusively relies on the unpaid labour of volunteers–of the 31 advocates Smith et al (2023) interviewed, only 8 were in paid positions–and the vast majority of volunteers were women-identifying. This reliance on people who have the time and resources to volunteer is a major constraint and additionally risks building the movement with people who are not representative of marginalized communities and groups. Relatedly, calling for people to volunteer their time composed a significant portion of the motivational framing put forth by Organization B–most of their volunteers are part of the racialized and marginalized communities they serve.

Meeting People Where They Are When the advocates were asked how they motivate people to care about and advocate for menstrual equity, most people emphasized the work that they do on an individual and social level. Due to the ongoing stigma and silence surrounding menstruation that was explored earlier and is well-documented in the literature, being able to motivate people to push for things like policy change is completely contingent on people being willing to talk about menstruation openly (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2020). For example, the advocate from Organization C said that most of what they do to garner support is just talk to the people in their lives–particularly those who do not menstruate. They will say to people that "whether it be your mom, whether it be your sister–you know a menstruator in your life. They don't need to be woman-identifying. […] once you bring it back to 'you know someone that menstruates, you care about this person that menstruates'" people become more willing and open to listening and talking about menstruation, and that itself is often considered an indicator of successful motivation to expand the movement.

This sentiment of opening up conversations about menstruation was common among most organizations and was seen as a precursor to motivating people to advocate from wherever they are and in whatever position(s) they hold. Organization A, for example, stated that "everybody should be moving menstrual equity forward from where they are. If you're directly in the movement, work through there, if you're in government, push policies, if you're in the trades–push wherever you are." With this, it is clear that the localized and grassroots way that these organizations function is seen as an important part of the solution to menstrual equity and that empowering people to work from where they are is the most effective way to recruit support. Finally, raising awareness about period poverty in Canada and in specific communities was also viewed as an important way to motivate people–all of the advocates interviewed either had experienced period poverty themselves or read or watched something about period poverty, and these were noted as the most significant experiences that impassioned these individuals to get involved. As such, many organizations leverage things like social media and educational workshops to raise awareness about period poverty and to motivate people to donate products and lobby local politicians. Organization C specifically mentioned that the majority of their volunteers are recruited from their social media accounts which post a lot of content about period poverty. As such, simple awareness-raising and encouraging people to get involved locally

appears to be the primary motivational framing that works best for recruiting volunteers and growing the menstrual equity movement as a whole.

Comparing MHM and Canadian Advocacy

Diagnostic framing

The analysis of various UN agencies' publications on MHM reveals a variety of interesting points of intersections and divergences with Canadian menstrual equity advocacy. In terms of diagnostic framing, the most common thread between the two spheres is the strong focus on inadequate access to menstrual products as being a primary issue in terms of menstrual inequity. Three-quarters of the time each, stigma and exclusion from public life (e.g., school absenteeism, exclusion from family and social life) were highlighted as significant reasons why MHM remains a significant challenge in Global Majority contexts. Exclusion from public life was seldom mentioned by the Canadian advocates interviewed, although it should be noted that this remains a challenge for many people who menstruate in the country (Plan International Canada, 2018). However, this differential in diagnostic framing can likely be ascribed to the degree to which this exclusion and absenteeism occurs and the related consequences. The case of Malawi can exemplify this–in Malawi, 97 per cent of girls are enrolled in primary school but only 30 per cent are enrolled in secondary school (UNFPA, 2016). By contrast, 97 per cent of young women and girls in Canada are enrolled in secondary school (Statistics Canada, 2023). This is not to say that absenteeism among menstruators is not an issue that needs to be addressed–nor an issue that Canadians advocates do not rally around–but rather that menstrual inequity manifests in different ways in different places and to different extents, and absenteeism is much more consequential for young menstruators in certain Global Majority countries.

Related to the diagnostic framing of absenteeism in the MHM literature is the issue of stigma–something that is also a heavy focus of menstrual equity advocates in Canada. Across cultures and contexts, "menstruation is shrouded in mystery" a lot of the time, as the UNFPA (2021) noted. Similarly, the advocate from Organization C mentioned the all-too-common trend of menstruators hiding tampons up their sleeves so as to not indicate to others that they are menstruating–something that 63 per cent of women in Canada (and 81 per cent of women under 25) feel they have to do (Plan International Canada, 2018). A small survey administered by the

UNFPA (2021) found that the majority of menstruators in Arab states, for example, recalled menarche elicited feelings of embarrassment, shame, anxiety, and fear. Stigma as being strongly characteristic of the diagnostic framing of MHM work is often exemplified by frequent mentions of things like menstruators being physically confined and isolated during their period. The UN agencies frequently used the example of the practice of *chhaupadi* in Nepal, wherein menstruators are confined to isolated huts for the duration of their periods and, in addition to the isolation, exclusion, and shame inherently associated with this practice, menstruators are put at a greater risk of sexual violence, animal attacks (UN Women, 2017). This practice is representative of wider, cross-country beliefs about menstruators as being impure and unclean during their periods (Ranabhat et al., 2015).

Given that MHM in the development context emerged from the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector, it is no surprise that access to WASH facilities and resources was frequently tied to MHM in the publications examined for this study (Bobel, 2019). More than half the time, a main challenge facing menstruators in Global Majority states was framed as a lack of access to private washrooms, clean water, and soap both at home and in places like schools. This concern about privacy was not found to be a pillar of the diagnostic framing of Canadian advocates, but access to WASH facilities–and clean water specifically–was. While the terminology of 'WASH' was not used, Canadian advocates made frequent mention of inadequate access to clean water for cleaning clothing and oneself and, for people experiencing houselessness, a lack of access to hygiene facilities for changing and for laundering underwear.

An additional point of convergence in the diagnostic framing of the MHM movement and that of Canadian menstrual equity advocates is a focus on the need to improve and expand education about menstruation for both people who menstruate and those who do not. Nearly half the cases of MHM publications examined addressed this–the lack of education is tied to people having negative experiences and relationship with their bodies and families at menarche and being more vulnerable to abuse, sexual assault, child marriage, and teen pregnancy (OHCHR, 2019; UNFPA, 2022b). This need to re-focus on the issue of inadequate menstrual health education and decentre helping people 'manage' their periods is a fundamental critique that Bobel (2019) has put forth about the MHM sector. For Canadian advocates, the consequences of inadequate menstrual health education are mostly framed as being related to the perpetuation of stigma and silence. Nonetheless, the lack of education and awareness across the globe is

sweepingly framed as a tremendous barrier to the advancement of menstrual equity and gender equality.

Language An important dissimilarity between the MHM discourse in the development sector and the menstrual equity discourse in Canada arises when language is interrogated. The language and terminology used by the respective sectors are significant in that they contribute significantly to the understanding of the diagnostic frames. While the UN agencies spoke about menstrual health as being complex and entailing considerations of things like stigma and education, it is still largely framed as a 'hygiene' issue. The word 'hygiene' appeared in 19 of the 20 webpages analyzed (see Appendix C)–and did not appear in any of the interviews with Canadian advocates. As Bobel (2019) notes, the terminology of 'hygiene' and 'management' in MHM has a tendency of reiterating notions of uncleanliness and impurity and putting forth the message that we need to 'manage' menstruating bodies by providing people with absorbent products, often from large corporations. However, there is some more recent integration of the term 'health' in addition to–but not in place of–the word 'hygiene', with agencies now occasionally referring to 'menstrual health and hygiene' (OHCHR, 2022).

An additional difference in the linguistic approaches of the respective sectors is that surrounding 'rights'. Increasingly, menstrual hygiene is framed as a human right by UN bodies–in June of 2022, the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights declared menstrual health to be a human right and called on member states to adopt rights related to addressing menstrual stigma and accessing menstrual products. 9 of the 20 web pages analyzed referred to human rights in discussing menstrual health and hygiene. By contrast, menstrual equity advocates never used rights-based language to refer to their work surrounding menstruation. A likely explanation for this differential is that the UN must appeal to member states who have uniformly adopted the rights-based frameworks of international governance, while the grassroots advocates were conducting work locally and working to support people experiencing period poverty, not governments' foreign affairs ministries.

Prognostic Framing

In all, the prognostic framing of the UN agencies in terms of menstrual health and hygiene were immensely similar to that of the Canadian menstrual equity advocates. For each, the most common proposed solutions to menstrual inequity and shortcomings in MHM were

distributing menstrual products; improving education about menstrual health; and destigmatizing menstruation. According to Bobel (2019), in the early 2000s western activism in the early 2000s primarily focused on "cultivating menstrual literacy, promoting the use of alternative products to break free from corporate menstrual care and reclaiming menstruation as a source of pride and power" (p. 104), but that recent years have seen a shift and narrowing of focus on access to menstrual products, begin in the early 2010s when MHM first emerged (Thomson et al., 2019). The interviews conducted for this study, as well as the recent report published by Smith et al. (2023a), confirm this shift. However, as many of the Canadian advocates highlighted and as Bobel (2019) and Thomson et al. (2019) assert, distribution of products is merely a palliative solution to a complex problem embedded in cultures of shame and secrecy and insufficient social welfare systems.

In slight contrast with the Canadian advocates, nearly half of the MHM-focused web pages described improved access to WASH facilities–and specifically private facilities–as a primary solution to shortcomings in menstrual health. On Menstrual Hygiene Day in 2019 (May 28th), the OHCHR (2019) emphasized that "in order for all women and girls to enjoy their rights, we must focus on safeguarding the normative content of the human rights to water and sanitation." As such, there is heavy focus on the ties between menstrual health and access to clean water and toilets, as well as facilities (including washrooms) where people who menstruate can have the privacy they need to feel safe and dignified (UNICEF, 2022). By contrast, access to WASH facilities and resources was much less a focus of the Canadian advocates. While the interviews uncovered meaningful consideration of the lack of access to clean water in northern Indigenous communities, it was not central to the discussion of solution. The majority of the time, it was brought up in discussions of how the advocates determined which menstrual products were appropriate to send, as opposed to a description of work related to advocating for clean water. This is emblematic of the stark separation between WASH and menstrual equity in Canada when compared to the development sector and its prognostic framing.

Localization

The interviews with Canadian advocates illuminated a clear prioritization of the need for localization and contextualization in menstrual equity work and, in a few ways, the MHM web pages revealed a similar pattern but to a lesser extent. The notion of localization and

contextualization, as indicated by things like menstrual product choice and the co-designing of community programs, appeared in half the web pages. The most common form of localization entailed programs designed by and for communities themselves across various contexts. The UN agencies shed light on a variety of such programs, such as a pad-making club for girls in Malawi that was started by two 13-year-olds, a team of female *rani mistris* (toilet builders) in India, and a plan for a 'buddy system' in South Sudan that was planned by young teenagers wanting to pair older teenagers with younger girls in order to help them learn about menstruation from peers (UNFPA, 2016; UNFPAa, 2022). Another common program trend surrounded small teams of young women and girls making reusable pads for their communities–a popular model adopted by Organization B in Canada. Additionally discussed in the following section on sustainability, it is worth highlighting that this spectrum of localized programs and strategies to address period poverty embody the essence of ecofeminist ideals around localization and, more specifically, decolonization.

While the UN agencies' clearly featured these programs in a way that was approving and encouraging of them, and some of them are now funded by UN agencies, they did not help start most of these programs. As in Canada, these programs were designed and run by primarily young women–often teen and pre-teen girls–who also have experience with period poverty and stigma and decided to design a program that was responsive to the particular needs of their own community. While the UN agencies did not help with the initiation of these projects, they did highlight that they now help fund a few of them, honouring the value these programs bring to menstrual health advancement in specific contexts. The UN agencies' own programs that they designed internally were much less localized and grassroots–as is documented already in the literature, the UN agencies focused primarily on distributing pads, often as part of a "hygiene kit" with other items (Bobel, 2019).

The UN agencies' program highlights contained no indication of plans or opportunities for individuals and communities to voice their specific product needs and preferences–the kits are uniform. By contrast, Canadian organizations place meaningful emphasis on product choice and community responsiveness. For example, Organization B highlighted that each individual they provide products to is asked about their product needs and preferences, such as whether they prefer pads or tampons, reusables or disposables, how long their periods last, and how heavy their periods are. For the most part, the UN agencies' approach to distribution does not allow for

this type of localization and personalization that Canadian advocates argue is essential. Only very recently has there been mention of product localization–determined less by individual needs and preferences and more so by communities' culture and resources. For example, the UNFPA (2022b) has stated that "in some communities, women are not comfortable with insertable products such as tampons or menstrual cups. In humid or rainy conditions, reusable menstrual pads may be difficult to thoroughly dry, possibly contributing to infection risks." While this is indicative of some progress, highlighting a cultural sensitivity to the stigma surrounding menstruation and notions and norms around women's sexuality (with insertable products being tied to notions of impurity), this responsiveness is still minor when compared to not only the localization and responsiveness called for by Canadian advocates, but also indicated by communities themselves–and especially young girls–as is exemplified by the types of programs they run (UNFPA, 2016; UNFPAa, 2022). This is further reified by the fact that, while the UNFPA (2022b) has recently stated that they consider product choice (mentioned in only 1 of the 20 web pages), most program descriptions still simply describe the distribution of uniform hygiene kits that only contain pads (UNICEF, 2019; UN Women, 2020). While it is clear that there is greater need for tailoring menstrual product distribution programs, it is promising that there is at least a gleam of hope for a shift in discourse and program design as it relates to product choice.

Sustainability Sustainability was only mentioned in two of the 20 web pages analyzed–however, in only one instance was there an explicit statement that standard disposable menstrual care products are harmful to the environment due to the chemicals in them and the tangible waste they produce, especially in regions without proper waste disposal (UNFPAb, 2022). In the second instance, the UNFPA (2016) simply spotlighted a program noted above that was started by young teenage girls in Malawi, wherein they teach other girls how to make reusable pads using local materials. By contrast, reusables were frequently cited as an integral part of localization and product choice by Canadian menstrual equity advocates, with Organization B–which also sends products to certain Latin American and African countries–insisting that reusable products are the key to achieving menstrual equity. With this, creating localized, circular economies within communities has emerged as a keystone of addressing period poverty in the absence of adequate support from governments or international organizations both in racialized communities in urban parts of Canada in the Global Majority states. Along these lines,

ecofeminism aspires for the "end of capitalism and commodity culture, the beginning of non-statist forms of socialism, [and] the preferential consumption of local goods" (Carlassare, 2000). Thus, these programs driven by young women that entail making reusable pads from locally sourced materials that are then distributed free-of-charge to community members help encompass precisely the type of anti-capitalist mutual aid that ecofeminists call for.

These local reusable pad programs break cycles of dependency on corporate suppliers of menstrual products whilst simultaneously contributing to sustainable livelihoods and gender justice, rendering these projects in strong, though usually implicit, alignment with ecofeminist notions of both resistance to the system that oppresses women and nature and its understandings of anti-capitalism (Brownhill & Turner, 2020; Giacomini et al., 2018). Community-driven and often youth-led reusable pad-making programs featured by the UN agencies as they appear in African communities in states across the continent, that African women have long engaged in ecofeminist resistance against corporate globalization aligns with these contemporary menstrual health developments. In addition to resisting solutions to period poverty that rely on disposable products from large multinational corporations, these programs additionally help build community, destigmatize menstruation by creating safe spaces for discussion and storytelling, and contribute to align with ecofeminist ecosocialism and its notions of building systems that are "horizontal, subsistence-oriented" (p. 5) and decolonized (Brownhill & Turner, 2019). By virtue of these programs being community-driven, not being profit-oriented, and centering around community needs and mutual aid, they thus also pursue grassroots development priorities of localization and decolonization, as they are conceptualized by ecofeminists across the globe, and particularly African ecofeminists and ecowomanists who push for 'alternatives to development' that directly rail against encroachment by westernized international organizations seen as being built on a foundation of capitalist oppression that is insensitive to unique African contexts (WoMin, 2021).

Beyond reusables, Canadian advocates also prioritized the acquisition and distribution of biodegradable disposable products when reusables are not an appropriate or accessible option. However, one important reason reusable products were not prognostically framed as a catch-all solution to menstrual health and hygiene was that there can be issues with drying reusable pads in humid regions or offering reusables to people belonging to communities where insertable products such as menstrual cups are not accepted (UNFPA, 2022b). It is for similar reasons that

Canadian organizations servicing remote northern communities do not prioritize the distribution of reusables–although two still emphasized desiring biodegradable products and the need to ensure all packaging is properly recycled beforehand when northern communities do not have the necessary recycling infrastructure. In this sense, the prognostic framing around reusable products and localization were parallel between the Canadian advocates and those in the MHM space.

Conclusion

Young feminist advocates across the globe have been working tirelessly to address menstrual inequity and improve menstrual health in their communities. From a young Canadian woman setting up a small pantry of period products in her community and another delivering personalized period care packages in the Toronto area to girls making pads after school in Malawi and a 'buddy program' for older teenage girls in South Sudan to teach younger ones about menstruation, the movement is highly global but, similarly, meaningfully localized. Increasingly, climate justice and gender justice ideals have intersected in the menstrual health space and has led young advocates to creating more space for reusable and biodegradable menstrual products. Beyond this, Canadian advocates diagnostically frame the issue of menstrual inequity as being 1) a lack of access to menstrual products; 2) stigma and silence around menstruation; and 3) inadequate consideration of things that exacerbate menstrual inequity, such as food insecurity and irregular access to clean water. The complex presentation of menstrual equity by the Canadian advocates representing diverse contexts points to a need for further research on period poverty and its related advocacy in Canada. This movement can in fact can be interpreted as representing a more ideologically driven movement at the intersections of various other social movements and causes, such as gender justice, environmentalism, food security, and poverty reduction, as these were all issues noted by the advocates. An exploration of what Snow (1986) defines as 'frame bridging'–whereby one social movement will create an ideological and practical linkage with another in order to garner support and invigorate and expand its mandate–is thus a rich avenue of exploration for future research in menstrual equity advocacy for which this study can provide a more solid foundation (Snow et al., 2019). Additionally, ecofeminist understandings of anti-capitalism, non-hierarchy, and decolonization demonstrated by the study participants, despite the contrasting messages around sustainability in the movement, present a

further avenue for the movement and for research on menstrual equity in an era of increasing climate justice discourse and a productively complex sphere for challenging and developing contemporary iterations of decolonized ecofeminist thought.

The UN agencies and the literature on MHM reveal that the development sector as diagnostic framing that is notably similar to that of Canadian advocates, but MHM tends to place a lot more emphasis on access to WASH facilities as being the primary issue at-hand. Further, in terms of prognostic framing, Canadian advocates unanimously asserted that solutions to menstrual inequity need to be highly localized and driven by communities, while the same sort of localization and personalization of care has been much less emphasized in MHM programming. However, across all contexts, working towards destigmatizing menstruation through education and awareness is seen as key–unless we can say the word, we cannot solve the problem. In the shadows is where suffering happens and advocates across continents are working to let the light to illuminate the needs of those disadvantaged by inadequate menstrual health support. While this support necessarily looks different for each community, centering community, for all its complexity and diversity and beauty, is the only way to fully address menstrual inequity everywhere. Communities know their communities, people know their bodies, and young feminist activists have demonstrated a deep commitment to centering this in their work to achieve period justice.

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Appendix A

UN Web Page Codebook

1. Diagnostic framing: What does the discourse identify as the primary issue of concern that arises in terms of menstrual equity/MHM?
    a. Inadequate access to WASH facilities
    b. Stigma
    c. Exclusion from public life (e.g., school absenteeism, capacity to work, socialize)
    d. Inadequate access to products
    e. Lack of education about menstrual health
    f. Lack of proper MHM violates rights
    g. Lack of access to healthcare and facilities for menstrual/reproductive health
    h. Absence of private facilities for changing
    i. Other:_____
2. Prognostic framing: What is framed as the solution to menstrual inequity/menstrual health?
    a. Distributing menstrual products
    b. Empowering people to make and sell menstrual products in their own communities
    c. Improving/increasing education about menstrual health
    d. Working towards destigmatizing menstruation
    e. Enabling/empowering local community members to make and distribute menstrual products
    f. Improve access to WASH facilities
    g. More development funding and strategizing needs to focus on menstrual health
    h. Other:_____
3. Does the discourse reference sustainability/environmentalism? (Yes or No). If yes then…
    a. Use of reusable menstrual products
    b. Issue of the waste of disposable menstrual products
    c. Issues surrounding access to clean water
    d. Other:_____

4. Does the discourse reference localization/responsiveness to the needs of specific contexts/communities? (Yes or No). If yes then…
    a. Consulting community members about their needs and wants regarding menstrual health
    b. Programs co-designed and run by community members themselves
    c. Use of specific products due to resource (constraints) in a specific community
    d. Assurance of product choice
    e. Other:_____
5. Does the discourse reference intersectionality? If yes, how?
    a. Gender (e.g., trans inclusion)
    b. Disability
    c. Race/ethnicity
    d. Socioeconomic status
    e. Cultural/religious diversity
    f. Rurality
    g. Displaced people/refugees
    h. Incarcerated

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Introduction

1. Can you please describe what you organization does? What are your core operations?
2. What is your organization's origin story/how did it get started?
3. What inspired you to get into this work?
4. Who are the people and what are the organizations that support your work?

Diagnostic framing

1. What is menstrual equity?
2. What do you see as the main cause(s) of menstrual inequity?
3. What is your organization's main mission/what is the main problem(s) you are trying to solve? What is the gap that your organization is trying to fill?

Prognostic framing

1. What does your organization do to address menstrual inequity?
2. What do you think would be the most effective way to address menstrual inequity in Canada?
3. What is/are the greatest barrier(s) to this proposed solution? Do these barriers have a direct impact on your organization?

Motivational framing

1. How do you motivate other people to care about menstrual equity/your work?
2. In what ways does your organization engage in advocacy? (e.g., protests, letters, etc.)
3. What resources would your organization benefit from most?

Sustainability & Localization

1. Are there any ways in which environmental sustainability is incorporated into your work?
2. What are the opportunities and barriers in terms of environmental sustainability in your organization's work?
3. How does your organization gain an understanding of what the needs are in your community? How do you engage with the community to uncover those needs?

Appendix C

UN Agency Nvivo Analysis: 'Hygiene'

The collection of 20 web pages from various UN agencies was searched for the word 'hygiene' with NVivo using the 'Text Search' function. Stem words such as 'hygienic' and 'unhygienic' were also included.

Sample	**References to 'Hygiene'**	**Coverage**
Sample #1	7	0.08%
Sample #2	4	0.27%
Sample #3	8	0.36%
Sample #4	3	0.21%
Sample #5	4	0.35%
Sample #6	13	0.72%
Sample #7	10	0.75%
Sample #8	5	0.26%
Sample #9	9	0.53%
Sample #10	19	1.00%
Sample #11	9	0.53%
Sample #12	8	0.51%
Sample #14	1	0.09%
Sample #15	1	0.10%
Sample #16	3	0.26%
Sample #17	8	0.34%
Sample #18	16	1.27%

Sample #19	21	0.93%
Sample #20	5	0.35%