

Emotional Reactions to Menarche Among Mexican Women of Different Generations

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Abstract This study explored the information received about menstruation by Mexican women as well as their reactions to menarche. The most important topics that teenagers, young women, and middle-aged women were informed about were menstrual hygiene and physiology. In contrast, senior citizens were more informed about hygiene and activity restrictions. Regarding their reactions to menarche, teenagers and young women reported being confused. Positive reactions were reported only by older women who had knowledge about menstruation prior to menarche. Finally, younger women were more likely to present ambivalent reactions to menarche, probably because they are exposed to mixed messages which are often contradictory, resulting in more confusion and ambivalence.

Keywords Menarche · Menstruation · Menstrual education

Puberty is a time of rapid changes and psychological adjustment. Menarche (the onset of menstruation) is probably the most important event of puberty for girls. Unlike other gradual pubertal changes, menarche dramatically signals the transition from girl to woman, and is recognized as an important transition point in women's lives. Studies of women's responses to menarche have shown that it is a highly salient and intensely experienced event, and a turning point in female development. Adult women readily recall their menarcheal experiences, and many of them are able to give detailed

descriptions of what was going on in their lives at the time, even when those experiences occurred years earlier (Golub & Catalano, 1983; Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996; Must, Phillips, & Naumova, 2002; Uskul, 2004).

The experience of menarche varies widely across cultures, and in some societies it is celebrated with rituals and ceremonies. In a recent study, 53 women from 34 different countries participated in a focus group discussion about their menarche experiences, and they were asked to share the patterns of formal recognition of menarche in their cultures (Uskul, 2004). Although most women did not report any celebrations or rituals for girls who start to menstruate, women from the Republic of Benin and Cameroon reported that with menarche, girls get towels, perfume, and undergarments as a kind of preparation. In Zambia, girls also get new pajamas, dresses, and towels and are kept home until their first period is over; they are not supposed to do any work and are treated like queens. In Southern India, a big celebration is organized for the menstruating girl; a lot of people are invited to the feast and the girl is given jewelry. However, not all the rituals mentioned by women were positive; in Turkey, a girl would get a slap from her mother or any other woman who is present at the time she starts menstruating. This ritual is more common in rural Turkey, and it is a symbolic act in order to remind the daughter that she is entering a new stage in her life, so she has to be careful and prudent. In urban Turkey, it has been replaced by verbal expressions with the same intent (Yücel & Polat, 2003). Chrisler and Zittel (1998) analyzed the menarche stories of women from Lithuania, United States, Malaysia, and Sudan, and they found some differences between these women. For example, most participants from Sudan, United States, and Malaysia mentioned that they were prepared for menstruation, while only half the Lithuanian women mentioned being prepared. Furthermore, the American and Malaysian women

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were more likely to express mixed feelings about their menarche than the other participants.

Menarcheal experience depends on several factors, such as a girl's age at that time, the kind of preparation received, her knowledge and expectations, her family support system, and her own personality characteristics (Blank Greif, & Ulman, 1982; Koff, Rierdan, & Sheingold, 1982; Rierdan & Koff, 1990). Thus, menarche can be a positive or a negative experience for a woman, depending partly on the preparation received. Studies conducted in the United States (Rierdan, 1983) and in Italy (Amann-Gainotti, 1986) have demonstrated that adequate preparation for menarche correlates with more positive experiences. However, the girl's lack of preparation for menarche may make her perceive it as a negative event.

In Western societies, girls are exposed to contradictory messages about menstruation; girls are congratulated on their entry into womanhood, while at the same time it is suggested that "it" should be kept secret (Beausang, 2000). As a result, menarche is associated with a series of contradictory beliefs and feelings, and girls experience a mixture of positive and negative feelings at the same time such as: happiness and fear; excitement and anger; excitement and nervousness; anxiety and pleasure; acceptance and rejection; support and loneliness; self-control and loss of control (Andrews, 1985; Golub & Catalano, 1983; Morse & McKinnon, 1987; Petersen, 1983; Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1982).

Thurén (1994) interviewed a group of Spanish women about their menarcheal experiences, but in order to generalize the results about the experiences reported, the women had to be divided into two groups according to age. Women born before 1960 were more likely to claim they had not received enough information about the issue, and they felt that their mothers had communicated too much shame and offered too little practical information and emotional support. However, the younger women, although they claimed they were better informed about menstruation, still reported certain ambivalences and feelings of shame. In non-Western societies like Zimbabwe, there has also been a dramatic change concerning the education of girls about menstruation, especially in the more educated women. Traditionally, when a girl began to menstruate, she told her grandmother, who then informed the girl's mother. Her grandmother would show her how to take care of her pads and keep them ready for the next cycle. Traditionally, mothers would never talk to their daughters about sexual matters; this was something that was dealt with by the grandmother or an aunt. However, this kind of education has changed in modern Zimbabwean society, and information is now being obtained from peers, school, and the media. Although these changes have taken place, women are still taught to hide the fact they are menstruating, and some women of lower

socioeconomic class are told not to play with boys or they might get pregnant (McMaster, Cormie, & Pitts, 1997).

Menarcheal experience is shaped by the historical time and sociocultural context in which it occurs, and therefore, is framed by the discourses indicative of that particular time and place (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996). In Mexico, the beliefs about menstruation have changed over the last years. The menstrual cycle has been a compulsory topic in Natural Sciences since 1972, and although the issue focuses exclusively on the biological perspective, currently, most girls receive a certain menstrual education at school before they reach their menarche. Before 1972, the media neither mentioned menstrual cycle issues nor were there advertisements of menstrual products. Moreover, at that time it was less common that mothers talked with young daughters about sexual topics. Therefore, we assume that menarcheal experiences have changed in Mexican women in the recent past, an assumption that has never been studied. The objective of this study was to explore and compare the emotional reactions to menarche experienced by women of different generations, as well as the information they received about menstruation.

Method

Participants

The sample included 200 middle- to upper-class Mexican women living in the city of Puebla, an industrial city with a population of approximately 1.2 million (the fifth largest city in Mexico); it is 123 km southeast of Mexico City. There were four groups of 50 women divided according to their ages: (a) Teenagers who were attending a private high school (aged 14–16); (b) Young women who were undergraduates from a private university (aged 20–25); (c) Middle-aged women (aged 40–50) who had a college degree; 33 of them were employed outside the home and the rest were housewives; (d) Senior Citizens (over 65-years-old); 25 of them had either a technical or a college degree and the others had studied high school; 45 were housewives and the others were employed outside the home. According to the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information (INEGI), between 49 and 50% of the people in Puebla who attend high school or study a major in university, go to private institutions (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática-INEGI, 2000).

Teenagers were recruited in their school as explained below; young women were recruited by direct solicitation in the snack bar or in other places of congregation in the university. The other women were recruited by direct solicitation in their workplaces or in their homes. Those who were recruited in their homes were contacted through personal networking.

Instrument

Data were collected using a number of written questions concerning the participants' preparation for menstruation and reactions to their menarche. In the first section of this survey, participants were asked to give their current age, menarcheal age, occupation and their schooling. Next, the women were asked to answer "yes" or "no" to the following statement: "I knew about the period before I experienced it for the first time."

The following section was composed of three checklists that were created by the authors, in a pilot study with 40 women who were asked to answer some open questions about menses. Responses were analyzed in order to know (a) main sources of information about menstruation, (b) topics discussed when they were informed about menstruation, and (c) emotional reactions to menarche. In order to generate the list of items comprised in each checklist, we selected those responses that were mentioned by at least two different women. But in the case of the positive emotional reactions, we selected those that were mentioned by at least one woman because there were very few responses that implied positive emotional reactions to menarche. In this way, the survey consisted of the following three checklists:

1. First source of information checklist consisted of a list of possible sources of information, but women had to choose only the source by which they received information about menstruation the first time.
2. Topics about menstruation checklist consisted of some possible topics that the women could be informed about. Women were asked to indicate if they were informed, or not, about each one of the topics listed, which were: hygiene, body function, pads management (or rags in the case of the seniors), how women feel during their periods, and restrictions which women usually have during their periods. The last topic was the only one of this checklist that involved a follow-up question; meaning that if a woman acknowledged that she was told about any restrictions, then she had to list them. The rest of the listed topics had no follow-up questions because in the pilot study mentioned above, women did not give any extended answers about these topics.
3. Emotional reactions to menarche checklist consisted of some possible emotional reactions that women could have experienced when they had their first menstrual period. Participants were asked to indicate if they experienced, or not, each one of the reactions listed, which were excited, ashamed, mature, scared, happy, sad, nervous, worried, confused, and calm. These items had no follow-up questions.

The questionnaire was piloted with 10 women of each age group who were asked to answer it, and invited to discuss

with the interviewer anything they considered difficult to understand, or if they believed there were any missing items in the checklists. A subsequent revision was made of the questionnaire, and its resultant form was then used.

Procedure

A female interviewer collected all data. In order to apply the survey to the teenager group, the principal obtained permission from the school board to conduct the study. Upon agreement, a schedule was established, as were the conditions under which the interviewer could conduct the study. To assure privacy, teenagers were seated so they were unable to see each other's responses.

The women belonging to the other three groups were surveyed individually. First, they were asked if they wanted to be part of a study about menses; upon agreement, they set up a time and place with the interviewer in order to be surveyed. Participants belonging to the young group answered the survey in different locations throughout their university, whereas the middle-aged and senior women were surveyed either at home or in their work places. All participants answered the questionnaire in a quiet place without interruptions. Each survey took 10–25 min; the interviewer was present to clarify any doubt that could emerge to participants. Once each woman finished answering the questionnaire, she gave it to the interviewer who mixed it with other questionnaires and thanked her for participating.

All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their information. To assure anonymity, women were instructed not to put identifying marks on the survey forms. The interviewer stressed the fact that there were no wrong or right answers to the questions.

Data analyses

Information about menstruation given to participants, as well as their reactions to menarche, was compared across groups using chi square tests. In addition to these statistical analyses some content analyses were conducted to compare participants' responses. To do this, the items comprised in both checklists were rank ordered according to the percentage of women who checked them.

Results

There were no significant differences between groups regarding the sources of information from which they received information about menstruation the first time. The main sources of information were mothers (64%), and the other sources mentioned were sisters (10%), teachers (9%), friends (9%), and others (8%).

Table 1 Kinds of information on menstruation given to participants

	Groups				Total (<i>n</i> = 200)
	Teenagers (<i>n</i> = 50)	Young women (<i>n</i> = 50)	Middle-aged women (<i>n</i> = 50)	Senior women ^a (<i>n</i> = 50)	
Body function [$\chi^2 = 29.06(3), p < .0001$]					
Yes	88 (44)	72 (36)	60 (30)	38 (19)	129
No	12 (6)	28 (14)	40 (20)	62 (31)	71
Hygiene [$\chi^2 = 14.21(3), p < .003$]					
Yes	92 (46)	68 (34)	64 (32)	62 (31)	143
No	8 (4)	32 (16)	36 (18)	38 (19)	57
How women feel (n.s.)					
Yes	42 (21)	40 (20)	40 (20)	20 (10)	71
No	58 (39)	60 (30)	60 (30)	80 (40)	139
Pads or rags management [$\chi^2 = 11.35(3), p < .01$]					
Yes	74 (37)	52 (26)	50 (25)	42 (21)	109
No	26 (13)	48 (24)	50 (25)	58 (29)	91
Restrictions [$\chi^2 = 27.77(3), p < .0001$]					
Yes	28 (14)	10 (5)	28 (14)	58 (29)	62
No	72 (36)	90 (45)	72 (36)	42 (21)	138

Note. The percentage (and number) of women who checked each item is presented.

^aOr rags.

Information about menstruation given to participants

According to the content analysis carried out, “hygiene” and “body function” were the two most common kinds of information checked by teenagers, young women, and the middle-aged groups. In contrast, for the senior citizens, “restrictions which women usually have during their periods” were mentioned almost as frequently as “hygiene.” The restrictions mentioned by them were as follows *do not swim, do not make physical effort, do not drink cold water, do not eat spicy food, and do not have sexual intercourse*. It is important to notice that in all groups there were fewer participants who received information about “how women usually feel during their periods” than about “hygiene,” “body function,” and “pads/rags management.”

Following these analyses, the different kinds of information about menstruation given to participants were compared across groups using 4×2 chi square tests. As can be seen in Table 1, there were more women who checked “restrictions” within the senior citizen group than in any of the other groups. In addition, there were fewer senior citizens who checked “body function” than women belonging to the other groups. Finally, there were more adolescents who checked “hygiene” and “pads management” than women belonging to the other groups.

Emotional reactions to menarche

It is important to highlight that not all participants had knowledge of menstruation prior to menarche. Although

Table 2 Emotional reactions to menarche

	Teenagers	Young women	Did know about menstruation		Did not know about menstruation	
			Middle-aged	Seniors	Middle-aged	Seniors
Ashamed	24 (6th)	22 (7th)	9 (9.5th)	8 (9.5th)	29 (5th)	21 (5th)
Calm	42 (4th)	30 (4.5th)	45 (2.5th)	54 (1st)	17 (7th)	12 (6.5th)
Confused	66 (1st)	66 (1st)	33 (4.5th)	15 (4.5th)	70 (2nd)	71 (2nd)
Excited	12 (9th)	20 (8th)	33 (4.5th)	11 (7th)	0 (9th)	0 (9th)
Happy	6 (10th)	8 (10th)	45 (2.5th)	11 (7th)	0 (9th)	0 (9th)
Mature	22 (7.5th)	14 (9th)	18 (7.5th)	11 (7th)	0 (9th)	0 (9th)
Nervous	50 (3rd)	30 (4.5th)	52 (1st)	27 (3rd)	35 (4th)	42 (3.5th)
Sad	22 (7.5th)	32 (2.5th)	9 (9.5th)	8 (9.5th)	23 (6th)	12 (6.5th)
Scared	38 (5th)	26 (6th)	18 (7.5th)	15 (4.5th)	88 (1st)	83 (1st)
Worried	62 (2nd)	32 (2.5th)	27 (6th)	42 (2nd)	41 (3rd)	42 (3.5th)

Note. The percentage of women (and rank) who checked each item is presented.

all teenagers and 98% of the young women did have prior knowledge, there were a significant number of women from the middle-aged and senior women who did not (34 and 48%, respectively). Consequently, both the middle-aged and senior women were divided into two subgroups: those who *did* have knowledge of menstruation prior to menarche, and those who *did not*.

When the content analysis was conducted, it was found that “scared” and “confused” were the two most common reactions checked by both middle-aged and senior women who *did not know* about menstruation before their menarche. Although “scared” ranked lower in the other four groups, “confused” was also the most frequently checked reaction by both teenagers and young women. Another reaction worth mentioning is “sad” which ranked second in the group of young women, but ranked among the last in the rest of the groups. “Calm,” which is considered a positive reaction, ranked in first or second place in both groups of older women who *did know* about menstruation prior to menarche. In contrast, “calm” ranked in fourth place in the teenagers and young groups, and in the penultimate place in both groups of older women who *did not know* about menstruation prior to menarche. The rest of the positive reactions were the least checked by teenagers, young women, and older women who *did not know* about menstruation before their menarche (see Table 2).

In order to compare the percentage of women who checked each emotional reaction to menarche across groups, 6×2 chi square tests were used. There were significant differences in the following reactions: “scared” ($\chi^2 = 53.06$ (5) $p < .0001$), “confused” ($\chi^2 = 30.85$ (5) $p < .0001$), and “calm” (14.74(5), $p < .01$). In order to compare the percentage of women in each group who checked these reactions, 2×2 chi square tests with Yates correction were conducted. As presented in Table 3, women who *did not know* about menstruation prior to menarche checked the reaction “scared” more frequently than women in the other groups. “Confused” was more frequently checked by both teenagers and young women than by older women who *did know* about menstruation prior to menarche. Finally, “calm” was less frequently checked by both middle-aged and seniors who *did not know* about menstruation prior to menarche than by older women who *did know* about menstruation prior to menarche. We were not able to conduct any statistical analysis of “excited,” “mature,” and “happy” because there were some cases in which no women of a particular group checked these reactions.

Finally, there were 63 participants who checked both negative and positive emotional reactions, that is to say, they had an ambivalent menarcheal experience. Of these women, 43% were teenagers, 30% young women, 16% middle-aged, and only 11% were seniors ($\chi^2 = 22.87$ (3) $p < .0001$) (see Table 4).

Table 3 Cross group results from 2×2 chi square tests of the percentage (and number) of women who acknowledged having been “scared”, “confused”, or “calm” at the moment of their menarche

Group	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total n
<i>Scared</i>			
$\chi^2 = 10.88(1), p < .001$			
1	38 (19)	62 (31)	50
5	88 (15)	12 (2)	17
Total n	34	33	67
$\chi^2 = 19.32(1), p < .0001$			
2	26 (13)	74 (37)	50
6	83 (20)	17 (4)	24
Total n	33	41	74
$\chi^2 = 19.26(1), p < .0001$			
4	15 (4)	85 (22)	26
5	88 (15)	12 (2)	17
Total n	19	24	43
$\chi^2 = 11.61(1), p < .001$			
1	38 (19)	62 (31)	50
6	83 (20)	17 (4)	24
Total n	39	35	74
$\chi^2 = 19.82(1), p < .0001$			
3	18 (6)	82 (27)	33
5	88 (15)	12 (2)	17
Total n	21	29	50
$\chi^2 = 20.44(1), p < .0001$			
4	15 (4)	85 (22)	26
6	83 (20)	17 (4)	24
Total n	24	26	50
$\chi^2 = 17.72(1), p < .0001$			
2	26 (13)	74 (37)	50
5	88 (15)	12 (2)	17
Total n	28	39	67
$\chi^2 = 21.22(1), p < .0001$			
3	18 (6)	82 (27)	33
6	83 (20)	17 (4)	24
Total n	26	31	57
<i>Confused</i>			
$\chi^2 = 7.25(1), p < .007$			
1	66 (33)	34 (17)	50
3	33 (11)	67 (22)	33
Total n	44	39	83
$\chi^2 = 15.57(1), p < .0001$			
2	66 (33)	34 (17)	50
4	15 (4)	85 (22)	26
Total n	37	39	76
$\chi^2 = 15.57(1), p < .0001$			
1	66 (33)	34 (17)	50
4	15 (4)	85 (22)	26
Total n	37	39	76
$\chi^2 = 7.25(1), p < .007$			
2	66 (33)	34 (17)	50
3	33 (11)	67 (22)	33
Total n	44	39	83

Table 3 Continued

Group	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total <i>n</i>
<i>Calm</i>			
	$\chi^2 = 5.16(1), p < .02$		
1	42 (21)	58 (29)	50
6	12 (3)	88 (21)	24
Total <i>n</i>	24	50	74
	$\chi^2 = 5.54(1), p < .02$		
3	45 (15)	55 (18)	33
6	12 (3)	88 (21)	24
Total <i>n</i>	18	39	57
	$\chi^2 = 7.55(1), p < .0005$		
4	54 (14)	46 (12)	26
6	12 (3)	88 (21)	24
Total <i>n</i>	17	33	50

Note. 1—Teenagers; 2—young women. 3—middle-aged women who did know about menstruation; 4—senior women who did know about menstruation; 5—middle-aged women who did not know about menstruation; 6—senior women who did not know about menstruation.

Discussion

In all groups, menstrual hygiene was acknowledged as an important topic when participants were informed about menstruation. Logan (1980) interviewed 95 women from 23 nations and she found that hygienic routine was the most common message received at the time of menarche, except in Iran where the girls were assured of the normality of menses.

Although physiology was another important topic for the teenagers, young women and middle-aged women, it was not for the senior citizens. Instead, these older women were told more about restrictions which women usually have during their periods. These findings are consistent with a previous report conducted in Spain (Thurén, 1994), in which older women reported that they were told more about prohibitions and limiting activities, in comparison with younger women who claimed prohibitions were “old taboos” associated with irrational beliefs.

However, in all groups there were fewer participants who received information about how women usually feel during their periods than the other aspects of menstruation (hygiene, physiology, and pads/rags management). Since the early 1980s, women have stressed that aside from the in-

formation about physiology and hygiene, they need to be more informed about the concrete experience of menstruating; claiming that abstract information about menses as a biological event is an insufficient preparation (Rierdan, Koff, & Flaherty, 1983). However, it seems that not much has changed since then; young women would be better prepared than they currently are if they were told about the experiential and emotional aspects of menstruation, which is what adolescent girls are most eager to learn (Kissling, 1996). As mothers have had a fundamental role in educating their daughters about menstruation, they should be emotionally supportive and well informed on the issue. However, for reasons that include embarrassment, a lack of knowledge, or a poor mother–daughter relationship, mothers have not necessarily been comfortable or competent when they teach their daughters about menstruation, and the information may not be properly provided (Brumberg, 1997; Costos, Ackerman, & Paradis, 2002; Janes & Morse, 1990). Contemporary Western mothers are more likely to advise their daughters about how to be prepared for and cope with the practical aspects of menstruation, but they do not necessarily talk to their daughters about how to deal with their feelings. Thus, menarche has become a hygienic crisis, rather than a maturational event (Whisnant & Zegans, 1975).

Although women from different cultural backgrounds experience menarche differently, as was mentioned in the beginning of the paper, most of them report having had negative and sometimes mixed emotions at the time of menarche. In Uskul’s study (2004) conducted with women from 34 different countries, most participants mentioned having experienced negative emotions, and a few mentioned having either positive emotions or negative and positive emotions simultaneously. In Zimbabwe, fear and worry were the most common reactions to menarche mentioned by both professional women and domestic workers (McMaster, Cormie, & Pitts, 1997). A recent study conducted in China showed that adolescents’ emotional reactions to menarche were also largely negative (Tang, Yeung, & Lee, 2003).

Our content analyses show that varying emotional reactions to menarche depended on females’ age and prior knowledge. Older women who *did* know about menstruation prior to menarche checked some positive reactions as the most common. However, older women who had not been informed about menstruation before it was experienced for

Table 4 Ambivalent menarcheal experience

Ambivalence	Teenagers	Young women	Middle-aged women	Senior women	Total (<i>n</i>)
Yes	27	19	10	7	63
No	23	31	40	43	137
Total (<i>n</i>)	50	50	50	50	200

Note. The number of participants who checked both negative and positive reactions is presented. $\chi^2 = 22.87(3), p < .0001$.

the first time checked positive reactions least. One might expect current young women to react in a more positive way to menarche, as they reach it with more knowledge. However, as in the groups of older women who *did not* know about menses prior their menarche, teens and younger women checked positive reactions least as well.

In sum, these data suggest that although menstruation is more openly discussed nowadays, it still has a negative impact in both Western and non-Western societies. While there may be more discourse about menstruation, it has not been redefined as something positive (Thurén, 1994); indeed, discourse about menstruation is full of contradictions, e.g., it is normal, but also problematic.

Not surprisingly then, becoming a menstruating woman creates confusion in girls because they often receive mixed messages: menarche is traumatic and upsetting, but girls should act normally; menarche is an overt symbol of maturity, but is also a mysterious and secret event (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1980; Kissling, 1996); menstruation is inconvenient and some researchers are trying to create a way to eliminate menstrual periods (Stubbs & Costos, 2004). Given this context, it is not surprising that the most frequently checked reaction by teenagers and young women was “confused,” and that these two groups of younger women were more likely to present ambivalent feelings to menarche than the two groups of older women.

There are at least two studies (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996; Thurén, 1994) conducted in the last decade in which menarcheal experiences were collected from women whose ages are comparable to the middle-aged and senior women featured in the current report. Most participants of the aforementioned studies reported that they felt ashamed and embarrassed at some point in their experience of menarche. Unlike these findings, in our study, “ashamed” was the reaction least checked by both the senior and middle-aged women who *did* know about menstruation prior to menarche. In contrast, middle-aged and senior women who *did not* know about menstruation prior to menarche ordered “ashamed” higher. Reactions implying that these respondents were scared when they realized they were bleeding, not knowing what was happening, ranked higher than “ashamed.” In fact, the most frequently checked reaction by these women was “scared.” These findings are consistent with a previous study conducted with women from India, which demonstrated that compared to women who had received information about menstruation prior to menarche, those who had not been prepared for menarche referred to it as a horrifying experience (Skandhan, Pandya, Skandhan, & Mehta, 1988).

In conclusion, teenagers and young women reflect different patterns of menarcheal experiences than older women but these experiences are still mainly negative. Our findings stress the necessity of intensifying efforts in order to provide a different menstrual education in which the positive aspects

of menstruation are also covered, and more emphasis is put on the discussion of the emotional changes associated with the menstrual cycle.

Some limitations of the present study should be taken into consideration. A possible bias is that the participants were middle- to upper-class women. It can be claimed, therefore, that these women represent a particular segment of Mexican society. However, this study barely represents a first step to explore menarcheal experiences in Mexico, which have not been studied previously. The study may reveal different results when conducted with women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Another possible bias is that the participants were self-selected, representing only women who felt open to and comfortable with sharing information of a personal nature. Another limitation is that the data could be affected by errors in memory and distortions of events, mainly when the memories come from people of advanced age. However, retrospective studies have shown that the memory of their first period is clear in the minds of most of the women; almost none of the women has said they could not remember when they first menstruated or how they felt at the time (Blank Greif & Ulman, 1982). Memories of menarche persist in adult women because they provide important information about a critical life transition (Pillemer, Koff, Rhinehart, & Rierdan, 1987). As a reminiscence can be seen as a process of reframing the past, in the context of the present, what women remember about their experiences surrounding and including menarche provides insight into what was most salient about the event not only when it occurred but as it is reconsidered over time (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996).

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