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PERIOD. A CARD GAME ON SOCIAL TABOOS AROUND MENSTRUATION

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ABSTRACT

PERIOD. is a co-operative card game designed to address prejudices related to menstruation and menstruating women. The game, encourages dialogue around the otherwise tabooed issue of menstruation and acts as a conversation starter, recognizing a woman's power to express their choice and voice their opinion. It is played by both men and women alike, sensitizing them regarding this integral issue, and creating a sense of empathy. The game play is such that one enters the places that stereotypes menstruating women or is inaccessible to them; such as a place of worship, sports field, workplace or school. Collective and cooperative actions can help break these prejudices and winning is possible, in the game as well as the real world.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted by the United Nations in 2015, as indicators of development by addressing key issues for holistic social development. This includes addressing issues of poverty, hunger, gender equality, education, clean energy, consumption and developing global partnerships, urbanization, environment and social justice. Women have a critical position in SDGs in present context. Goals like gender equality, clean health and sanitation, quality education, decent work and economic growth, sustainable consumption and economic pattern have objectives that specifically deal with equality, health, education and empowerment of women. There are several other issues that are not directly addressed by specific SDGs but are critical to the success of the SDGs. The cyclic monthly process of menstruation is a natural physiological process of the female body.

TABOOS IN INDIA

Even at the turn of 21st century myths and taboos prevail around menstruation in different cultures and traditions of the country. Considering women impure, considering menstruation un-holy, isolation of women, restraining from sexual intercourse are consistent across all cultures. (Guterman M 2007). (Manju Kaundal 2014) It is ironic as in the same country menarche is celebrated and festivals are celebrated when goddess are believed to be menstruating. Festival in *Kamakhya Devi* temple in Orissa or closing temples after *Navratri* (festival of Goddess) till full moon believing the goddess needs rest through her menses are few such examples (Chawla 1994). In south India Puberty functions are celebrated in pomp. Yet few temples restrict entry of women in their menstruating age considering them impure or cursed. After the unprecedented fight led by women and progressive groups, Supreme court has allowed entry of Women in the Sabrimala temple in Kerala, Shani Shingnapur and Haji Ali mosque in Maharashtra (BBC 2018).

NORMALIZING MENSTRUATION

As menstruation is considered a curse and deemed as impure, Women are not allowed to visit worship places. 77% women observe this restriction. (van Eijk, et al. 2016). Even in their homes restrictions are made so severe that women isolate themselves from the rest of the members and parts of the house. 26 % women sleep separately and 24% women are reported to sit separately. 30 % women observe various food restrictions imposed on them by themselves or society. (van Eijk, et al. 2016). When menstruation cannot be managed with dignity it impacts human rights, including right to education, right to work, right to health, and gender equality. It is thus important that with others things, women, girls and anybody menstruating should have right to improved health facilities and health related education. Hence the potential impacts of the game include normalizing discussions regarding menstruation, creating awareness about importance of menstrual hygiene management. This is important objective of SDG #3 Good health and Wellbeing at all ages.

Taboos propagate due to false or poor understanding about menstruation. Such myths and taboos create a culture of silence around this topic. Only 23% of girls are aware of uterus as source of bleeding (van Eijk, et al. 2016). For over 50% of girls mothers are source of information (van Eijk, et al. 2016). As much as 70 % of mothers believe menstruation to be dirty and polluting (van Eijk, et al. 2016). It causes adverse social and educational impacts on the adolescent school going girls. About 24 % girls miss school during their menstruation (van Eijk, et al. 2016). It is important to provide scientific information regarding menstrual hygiene management and curb taboos at right age. The game through its co-operative gameplay promotes discussions on the usually hushed up topics. This will help to strengthen cooperative effort towards ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education which is important objective of SDG #4 Quality education.

'Period' being a game which is not restricted to only females will help to achieve gender equality and empower those who menstruate by providing a chance to create dialogue across different genders. This will help in developing inclusive, equal and productive platforms in society. This addresses SDG #5 Gender Equality.

METHODOLOGY

The research is for the most part auto-ethnographic. Pulling out from our personal experiences as women, using self-reflective exercises such as collectively creating diagrams related to our Dreams, Choices and Obstacles, helped us map out the game. There were semi structured interviews carried out as well to gather qualitative data on the various obstacles adolescent girls/women face related to menstruation. The game play itself was an iterative process which was revised with every game test. There were three iterations made.

Iteration 1:

In the first iteration we decided the game to be a cooperative card game where the players will help one another to win. There would be three sets of cards: Dream card, Obstacle card and Choice card. Content would be written on each of these cards.

- 1). The dream card contained a) I want to become a pilot, b) I want to pursue higher education, c) I want to stay single, my entire life. etc.

- 2). The Obstacle card contained a) You can't be out late at night, b) Wear decent clothes, why is your cleavage showing? c) Don't enter the kitchen or the temple, you're impure. Period.etc
- 3). The choice card contained a) I chose to not get married now. I want to focus on my career, b) I chose to enter the kitchen, and do my daily prayer. I am on my period, c) I chose to not have children. I am not ready.

Game Play: a) Each player will get 5 dream cards. b) The player has to pick up 1 card from the stack of shuffled obstacle and choice cards. If a player gets an obstacle card then he/she has to give away the dream card. c) If a player gets a choice card then he /she can collect one dream card from the stack. d) If a person is losing a dream card then another player can help that person by giving his/her choice card. For this, the content on the choice card and obstacle card should complement each other. f) If a player loses all his dream cards then the game ends.

Challenges we faced while playing: a) For some of the cards the content did not match, b) Winning situation could not be achieved.

Iteration 2:

In the first iteration we had considered larger problems like gender inequality, domestic violence etc. In the second iteration we narrowed down our topic to 'Menstruation'.

In India there are many taboos about menstruation like women should not enter the kitchen while on period; women should not enter the temple while menstruating and so on. So the aim of the game was to collectively achieve any place card like temple, kitchen, work, etc. by overcoming all the taboos with the aid of 'Helping cards'. Here we came up with the idea of a board game which could be navigated using play cards. The layout of the game was a spiral path with blocks on it. Each block had some obstacles that would create a setback for the player. There were helping cards to aid the player move forward on the board. It will act as a dice. If everyone reaches the end point i.e. a certain place then you win the game. The obstacles are written on the board which will have certain tasks like 'skip a turn', 'take 3 steps forward', etc.

Iteration 3:

After many iterations and play tests we decided the final format of the game to be a card game.

The aim of the game is similar to the previous iteration i.e. to collectively win a place card. Players will be dealing with Place Cards, Power Cards (Empowering Card), Prejudice cards (Obstacle Card) and Pioneer Cards (Master or Helping Card). There will be 6 cards each of power card and prejudice card. There will be total 6 Pioneer cards. When all the 6 power cards of a particular place are achieved cooperatively then the group is successful in entering that place. Prejudice cards are obstructing the player from collecting more power cards. While Pioneer cards are used to aid the player.

PROTOTYPE

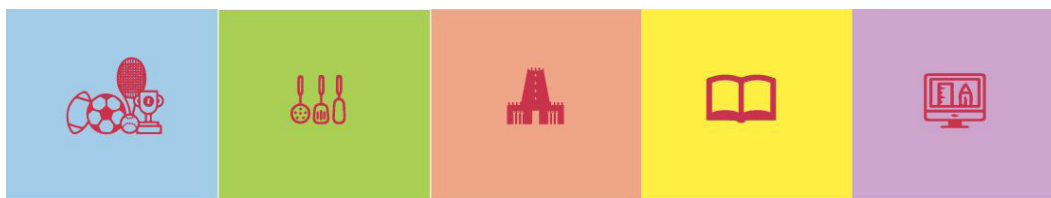
In the next stage we created a final prototype of the third iteration. The following is the set of rules defined for the game.

The game has four types of cards: Place, Power, Prejudice and Pioneer

1. Place Cards: These are the places which the players have to collectively enter. There are 5 such place cards viz Sports, Kitchen, Temple, School and Workplace. Each place is associated with a color. Example:

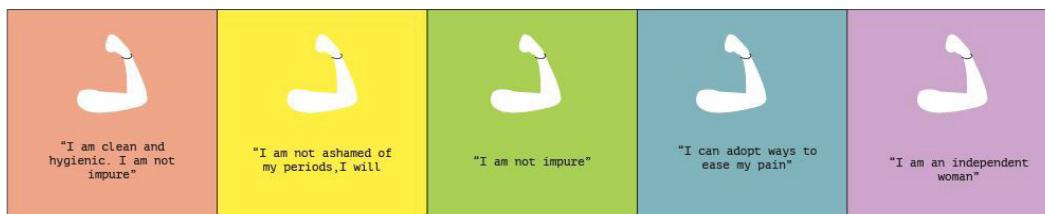


[Figure 1] Game Play and Instructions



[Figure 2] Place Cards

2. Power Cards: Each place card has six power cards associated with it. The players need to collect all six power cards to enter a certain place. Each power cards has some content written on it. Example:



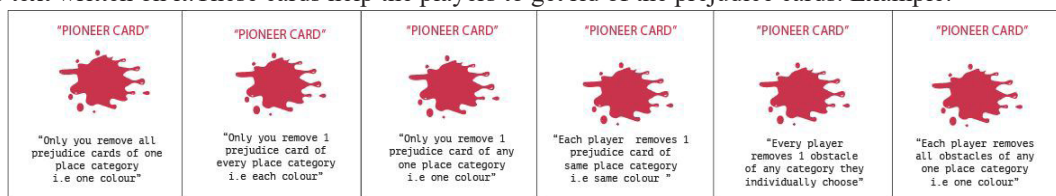
[Figure 3] Power Cards

3. Prejudice cards: Each place has six prejudice cards associated with it. These cards are like setbacks in the game. When any player gets a prejudice card of a particular place then he/she cannot collect any more power cards of that place. Each prejudice cards has some content written on it. Example:



[Figure 4] Prejudice Cards

4. Pioneer cards: There are six pioneer cards. These cards are like master cards which aid the player. Each pioneer card has some text written on it. These cards help the players to get rid of the prejudice cards. Example:



[Figure 5] Pioneer Cards

USABILITY TESTING

The game was tested among 4 groups.

Group No.	No. of Members	Age Group in Years	Gender	Insight from Testing
1.	5	28- 40	Male – 2 nos. Female – 3 nos.	Some members were uncomfortable while reading the content. Also they were unaware about certain taboos existing in India.
2.	4	16-24	Female - 4 nos.	While reading the content members were able to relate it to their own personal experience. The members were discussing about the taboos.

3.	4	20-30	Male - 2 nos. Female - 2 nos.	In the beginning the players were confused about the game play but later understood it. The men found few taboos to be funny since they were learning about it for the first time.
4.	4	30-40	Male - 1 nos. Female - 3 nos.	The players were discussing about their personal experiences. They enjoyed the game till 7-8 rounds but later felt it to be less interactive.

Table 1: User Testing and Insights



[Figure 6] User Testing

We also got an opportunity to present our game at ‘We the Women 2018’ conference in Bangalore which was conducted by Barkha Dutt. The game idea received tremendous response and also we got a chance to conduct user testing with different people from different backgrounds.



[Figure 7] User Testing at ‘We the Women, 2018’ Conference

People found the game to be very innovative and interactive. The content written on the cards is effective and it makes the player realize the intensity of the issue. The game can be a conversation starter while in a group. It can be used as a learning toolkit for school children to educate them about menstruation and the prevailing taboos in India. The content written on the cards can vary according to place, language and audience.

CONCLUSION

The game can be used as Interactive, educative tool to create inclusive work and social spaces through change at various levels (institutional, individual and societal levels). It has potential to promote positive sustainable development through change in behaviors, policies and practices by achieving the above mentioned objectives related to SDGs.

The ‘Period’ game is designed with the same motive of bringing about the sustainable development in society by creating positive social norms around menstruation by breaking down taboos and myths through collective action. In a context in which puberty, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health are not discussed fully and openly in families, communities, or schools, a tool like this needs to be initiated to minimize stigma around menstruation and encourage a healthy menstrual attitude. What the game does in its play is that it compels the players to read out aloud and address taboos related to menstruation, which otherwise is a topic spoken about only in whispers, or

strictly female groups. Identifying and then accepting a problem is the first step to solving it, and by encouraging dialogue during play, the period game aims to do that. It acts as a conversation starter, not only among women but also between diverse groups of both men and women. It is essential that this topic does not remain confined to being a female problem only, but is addressed as a societal issue, which strongly impacts the mental and physical well-being of women.

As a result of various gameplays we have concluded that the game enables both, men and women to empathize with the latter facing and overcoming obstacles related to menstruation. Among adolescent girls (12-15 yrs.), on the onset of puberty, it brings a certain level of awareness about this issue.

FUTURE PLANS AND DEVELOPMENT

The “Period” game has undergone the first phase of developing into a finished product. The game is currently in English only. However, with India being a multilingual country, and in order to have a far reaching base, it is essential to translate the game into regional languages. It is only with this translation that percolation of the message will be possible to all layers of society. The other step to take would be to adequately present the game as the learning and awareness tool it primarily is and to be able to use it in educative and health purposes.

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