

How is menstruation experienced and perceived by individuals who access the outdoors?

Introduction

Participation in outdoor environments has become increasingly associated with physical wellbeing, recreation, and professional practice (Thompson Coon et al., 2011; White et al., 2019). The term “*the outdoors*” can encompass a broad range of activities and contexts, including leisure pursuits such as hiking and camping, as well as professional and educational outdoor settings (Priest and Gass, 2018). While research within outdoor studies has explored themes such as wellbeing, access, and participation, significantly less attention has been paid to how embodied experiences may shape engagement with outdoor environments (Higgins, Loynes and Crowther, 2012; Humberstone, Prince and Henderson, 2016; Humberstone, 2013).

One such experience is menstruation. Despite menstruation affecting a large proportion of the population, it remains a relatively under-explored topic within outdoor research (Humberstone, 2013; Wheaton, 2013; Kissling, 2006). Practical considerations such as hygiene management, access to facilities, comfort, and social perceptions may influence how individuals who menstruate experience outdoor spaces. However, existing literature addressing menstruation in relation to outdoor participation remains limited (Humberstone, 2013; Kissling, 2006; Bobel, 2010).

This research therefore seeks to address the following research question:

How is menstruation experienced and perceived by individuals who access the outdoors?

Aim, Objective and Rationale

The aim of this study is to explore how menstruation influences experiences of participation within outdoor environments. Specifically, the research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how menstruation is perceived, managed, and discussed within the outdoor community, and whether it may act as a barrier to engagement in outdoor activities.

The research hopes to identify whether experiences and perceptions of menstruation differ between individuals who identify as women and those who menstruate but do not identify as women. In addition, the study will consider how menstrual products are perceived and utilised within outdoor settings, including whether certain products may be viewed as more suitable for outdoor environments due to factors such as practicality, accessibility, and ease of use.

Menstruation continues to be shaped by social stigma and cultural taboos. Discussions surrounding menstruation are often limited, particularly within environments that emphasise

resilience, physical capability, and endurance, such as the outdoors (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013; Roberts et al., 2020; Ortner, 1974).

Outdoor environments may also present practical challenges for menstruation management, including limited access to sanitation facilities, privacy, and appropriate disposal options. These factors may influence how individuals prepare for, experience, and participate in outdoor activities during menstruation.

This research therefore seeks to address an important gap within outdoor studies by exploring menstruation as an embodied experience that may shape engagement with outdoor environments. By increasing understanding of how menstruation affects participation, the study may contribute to ongoing discussions surrounding inclusivity, access, and wellbeing within outdoor communities. The findings may also inform future research and support more inclusive practices within outdoor education, recreation, and professional outdoor settings.

Literature Review

Research has highlighted how menstruation is frequently constructed as something private, shameful, or in need of concealment, which can influence how individuals experience their bodies in public spaces (Kissling, 2006).. Feminist scholars such as Chris Bobel argue that menstruation is not only a biological experience but is also socially and culturally constructed, with meanings shaped by societal expectations and gender norms (Bobel, 2010). Similarly, research on menstrual stigma suggests that cultural attitudes surrounding menstruation often encourage concealment and silence, reinforcing the perception that menstruation should remain private (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013). These constructions could affect how individuals who menstruate navigate participation in different environments.

Research exploring menstruation in relation to physical activity has primarily focused on sport and athletic performance (McNulty et al., 2020; Sims, 2016). For example, work by Stacy T. Sims highlights the physiological and experiential dimensions of menstruation for athletes (Sims, 2016). However, much of the literature focuses on elite sport contexts, with limited attention given to everyday participation in outdoor recreation (McNulty et al., 2020). Outdoor environments may present additional practical challenges for menstruation management, including limited access to sanitation facilities, privacy and appropriate disposal options, which may influence how individuals prepare for and participate in outdoor activities.

Some recent research has begun to discuss menstruation in the context of outdoor participation, highlighting both practical and social challenges. Prince and Annison (2022) report that menstruation and PMS can influence participation in adventurous activities due to hygiene concerns, disposal difficulties, and emotional responses. Their subsequent study (Prince and Annison, 2025) also identifies gaps in knowledge among outdoor leaders regarding menstrual

management, reflecting broader cultural and practical constraints on engagement for people who menstruate.

Supporting menstrual health has been identified as an important factor in promoting inclusive participation in outdoor education programmes, as a lack of awareness or support may discourage individuals who menstruate from fully engaging in outdoor activities (Prince and Annison, 2023). Similarly, research examining collegiate outdoor recreation programmes found that menstruation is rarely discussed in pre-trip communication and that outdoor leaders often lack knowledge or resources to support participants managing menstruation during activities (Campano et al., 2024). Practical considerations are also highlighted in literature on menstrual waste management in backcountry environments, which emphasises the need for appropriate preparation and disposal strategies when menstruating in remote outdoor settings (Lynch, 2023). More broadly, research on gender within outdoor education suggests that outdoor environments can reinforce cultural expectations surrounding resilience, risk and physical capability, which may shape how individuals experience participation (Humberstone, Prince and Henderson, 2016). Studies focusing specifically on girls' experiences in outdoor education also highlight how gendered expectations and social norms can influence confidence, engagement and access to outdoor opportunities (Lynch, 1992).

To explore these experiences, this study draws on concepts of lived experience, which emphasise how bodily functions shape interactions with physical environments. As discussed by Chris Shilling, embodiment theory recognises the body as central to how individuals experience social and physical spaces (Shilling, 2012). Within outdoor studies, scholars have also highlighted the importance of understanding outdoor experiences as embodied and socially situated (Humberstone, Prince and Henderson, 2016). Applying this perspective allows menstruation to be understood as a lived bodily experience that may influence participation in outdoor environments. By examining menstruation from this perspective, the research could address the limited literature connecting menstruation and outdoor participation.

Methodology

To explore how menstruation is experienced and perceived within outdoor environments, a qualitative approach will be employed. Qualitative research is particularly suited to understanding personal experiences, meanings, and perceptions, allowing participants to describe in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). This approach is especially appropriate for sensitive topics such as menstruation, where subjective narratives provide rich insight into lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Participants will include individuals aged 18 and over who menstruate and are engaged in outdoor environments. This may encompass people involved in adventure sports, outdoor recreation, outdoor education programmes, or university-based outdoor activities. A small,

purposive sample of approximately ten participants will be recruited. Purposive sampling is appropriate for exploratory qualitative research as it ensures participants have direct experience of the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015), allowing for in-depth exploration of perspectives.

Data will be collected via a qualitative questionnaire consisting mainly of open-ended questions, enabling participants to provide detailed, nuanced responses while allowing the researcher to gather multiple perspectives in a structured format. The questionnaire also supports anonymity, which can facilitate more open discussion of potentially sensitive issues such as menstruation (Longhurst, 2003). Questions will address participants' experiences of menstruation in outdoor settings, comfort discussing menstruation, practical challenges in managing menstruation during activities, perceived barriers to participation, and views on menstrual products and their suitability for outdoor environments. These questions are designed to directly address the study's aims of understanding how menstruation shapes engagement with outdoor activities.

Data will be analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, facilitated by NVivo software. This involves familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, and developing themes that capture recurring ideas across participants' responses. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative health and social research for its flexibility and suitability for exploring experiences, perceptions, and social meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an important aspect of this research due to the potentially sensitive nature of discussing menstruation. Participants may experience discomfort or embarrassment when sharing personal experiences related to menstruation. Participants will be informed that they may skip any questions they do not feel comfortable answering. Participation in the study will be entirely voluntary, and informed consent will be obtained prior to data collection.

Participants will also be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage before data analysis without penalty. To protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, no identifying information such as names or specific locations will be collected. Instead, participants will only be asked to provide general demographic information, such as age and their involvement in outdoor activities. All responses will be anonymised to ensure that individuals cannot be identified in the final research report.

As the research will be conducted using an online questionnaire, participants will be able to complete the survey in a private and comfortable environment, which may help reduce feelings of embarrassment when discussing menstruation. All data collected will be stored securely in accordance with data protection regulations, including password-protected digital storage. The study will also comply with institutional ethical guidelines and relevant data protection

legislation. The research will adopt a respectful and non-judgmental approach in order to create a safe and supportive environment for participants.

Timeline

Recruitment of participants	Can start after ethical approval
Data collection	03/04/2026-11/04/2026
Analysis	11/04/2026-17/04/2026
Interpretation	17/04/2026-24/04/2026
Create poster and write-up reflection	24/04/2026-10/05/2026

Word Count: 1586 (Including Titles)

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Appendix

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications”. As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the “principal researcher”.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Morgan Evans
2	Student Number:	2005007
3	Email address:	2005007@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
4	Programme of Study:	MA Outdoor Education
5	Supervisor:	Nalda Wainwright

SECTION B: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3		☐
4		☐

SECTION C: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	How is menstruation experienced and perceived by individuals who access the outdoors?		
2	Proposed start date:	03/04/2026	Proposed end date:	11/05/2026
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words in each section)			

	Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the three points below: • <i>Purpose of Research Activity</i> • <i>Proposed Research Question</i> • <i>Aims of Research Activity</i> • <i>Objectives of Research Activity</i> Demonstrate, briefly, how <u>Existing Research</u> has informed the proposed activity and explain • <i>What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge</i> • <i>How it addresses an area of importance.</i>
3	Purpose of Research Activity To explore the experience and perception of menstruation within the context of the outdoors (this box should expand as you type)
4	Research Question How is menstruation experienced and perceived by individuals who access the outdoors? (this box should expand as you type)
5	Aims of Research Activity 1. The aim of this study is to explore how menstruation influences experiences of participation within outdoor environments. Specifically, the research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how menstruation is perceived, managed, and discussed within the outdoor community, and whether it may act as a barrier to engagement in outdoor activities.

	(this box should expand as you type)
6	Objectives of Research Activity 1. The research hopes to identify whether experiences and perceptions of menstruation differ between individuals who identify as women and those who menstruate but do not identify as women 2. The study will consider how menstrual products are perceived and utilised within outdoor settings, including whether certain products may be viewed as more suitable for outdoor environments due to factors such as practicality, accessibility, and ease of use. 3. The study will explore cultural taboos and social stigma surrounding discussing menstruation (this box should expand as you type)
	Proposed data collection methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity to collect data, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	Data will be collected via a qualitative questionnaire consisting mainly of open-ended questions, enabling participants to provide detailed, nuanced responses while allowing the researcher to gather multiple perspectives in a structured format (this box should expand as you type)

SECTION D: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
2	Use of interviews?	☐	☐
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☐

4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☐
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☐	☐
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☐
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☐
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☐
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☐
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☐
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☐
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☐
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☐
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☐
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☐
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☐
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.	☐	☐
	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)		

If you have ticked NO to every question then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and you may skip section E and continue to section F.

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION E: Intended Participants

	Who are the intended participants:	YES	NO
1	Students or staff at the University?	☒	☐
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☐

4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☐
5	Prisoners?	☐	☐
6	Young offenders?	☐	☐
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☐
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☐
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.	☐	☐
	Details of any other participant groups: (this box should expand as you type)		

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	Aiming to recruit 10 participants utilising existing peers, colleagues and people in the local area. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
11	Who will the participants be?	People over the age of 18 who experience menstruation. They may or may not identify as women <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
12	How will you identify the participants?	Participants identity will remain anonymous. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐

19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	(this box should expand as you type)			

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☒	☐
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
	(this box should expand as you type)			

SECTION F: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.	
1	Risks to participants For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information. If you have identified in section D that there are no participants then enter N/A and go skip to question 3.	
	Risks to participants: Discussing a topic that might cause emotional upset.	<i>How you will mitigate the risk to participants:</i> Participants will be able to skip questions as well as withdraw at any point.

	(this box should expand as you type)	(this box should expand as you type)
2	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities	
	Samaritans are free to contact on 116 123. 24/7 judgement free support (this box should expand as you type)	
3	Risks to the investigator For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to the investigator: May cause me emotional upset when interpreting the data. (this box should expand as you type)	How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator: I am aware of helplines available and will take sufficient breaks from the work if need be. (this box should expand as you type)
4	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to the University: In extreme cases a participant may express publicly that their voluntary participation caused emotional distress	How you will mitigate the risk to the University: All participants will be fully informed before beginning any research. (this box should expand as you type)

	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
5	Environmental risks For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	<i>How you will mitigate the risk to environment:</i> N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION G: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

If you have identified in section D that there are no participants then enter skip this section and continue to section H.

1	Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when? I will set up an email address that they will be able to contact for further details or results. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
2	Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.

	At the beginning of my online questionnaire, I will have a screen before the questions start that acts as a consent form, informing participants that by clicking on the NEXT button they are providing consent. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
3	Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	I will not name participants or organisations in any research reflection or the electronic poster. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION H: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 “GDPR” and the Data Protection Act 2018 “DPA”)?	YES	NO
1	“Personal data” means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.	☐	☒
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO

	(this box should expand as you type)
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Data Protection			
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and/or any international equivalent): All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All data transfers will be encrypted and password protected. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the DPA2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them, and this data will be deleted immediately if the participant requests this, in which case the data will not be used in the project. (this box should expand as you type)		
20	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity: Normally the principal researcher, possibly also the supervisor and, Possibly also external examiner or second marker? (this box should expand as you type)		
21	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity: The principal researcher. (this box should expand as you type)		
22	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected and will be reformatted at the end of the project in order to destroy the data. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted.		

	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
22	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	☒
23	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	☒

SECTION I: Use of AI tools

Use of generative AI and other AI-based tools		YES	NO	N/A
There are a number of ethical issues relating to the use of generative AI and other AI-based tools, including data security, output bias, and output errors. In general you should assume that any generative AI or other AI-based tool that you pay to use is more secure and accurate than one which is free to use. Will the research use AI tools to do any of the following:				
1	Capture data?	☒	☒	☐
2	Generate and/or edit text?	☐	☒	☐
3	Generate graphics?	☐	☒	☐
4	Generate video?	☐	☒	☐
5	Generate sound/music?	☐	☒	☐
6	Generate code?	☐	☒	☐
7	Generate synthetic data?	☐	☒	☐
8	Analyse data?	☐	☒	☐
9	Analyse personal or sensitive data?	☐	☒	☐
10	Classify data?	☐	☒	☐
11	Do you intend to use the free version of any AI tools?	☐	☒	☐
If you have answered YES to any of questions O1-O11, please provide justification detailing why this is necessary for the research.				
12	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

SECTION J: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	Signature of applicant:		Date: 12/03/2026
2	Supervisor:	Nalda Wainwright	Date:
3	Signature:		

ETHICS FORM – Taught Masters