

# BODIES THAT MENSTRUATE AT WORK: AN ANALYSIS OF REACTIVE DIGITAL COMMENTS ON MENSTRUAL LEAVE ON INSTAGRAM

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- **ABSTRACT:** From an intersectional and decolonial perspective (Maldonado-Torres, 2018; Akotirene, 2019; Collins, 2019, 2022; Rea, 2019; Sala, 2020; Cândido; Saliba, 2022; Vasquez, 2022), this article analyzes how users discursively respond to the operations of knowledge and power as they traverse the bodies of people who menstruate, within the comment space of the social media platform Instagram (Paveau, 2021; Gomes, 2022). The analysis focuses on two posts addressing menstrual leave, published by the profile @Universa\_uol. The first 20 comments were collected based on the category of non-transactional verbal sociodiscursive reactions (Gomes, 2022). The knowledge-power dispute surrounding menstrual leave – and, by extension, menstruation and people who menstruate – remains deeply embedded in colonialist meanings and practices, which frame menstrual issues through biomedical, patriarchal, sexist, and binary paradigms, ultimately reinforcing the naturalized and hierarchical belief that menstruation is a woman's thing – and specifically, a cis woman's thing.
- **KEYWORDS:** Verbal Sociodiscursive Reactions; ADCI; Menstrual Leave; Decolonial Menstruation; SDGs.

## Introduction

In this article, we present some of the findings from the theoretical project *From the Epistemological, Methodological, and Ontological Conditions for the Development of an Intersectional Discursive-Critical Approach [Das condições epistemológicas, metodológicas e ontológicas para a elaboração de uma abordagem discursivo-crítica interseccional]* (PQ/CNPq), which seeks to propose, through a dialectical-relational and intersectional method, an analytical framework for discursive studies that address the

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relationships among gender, the body, and discourse through the lens of intersectional and decolonial studies. Although theoretical research does not require empirical or practical application, this proposal also aims to understand the dialogues, articulations, and intersections of the concepts and categories outlined for the systematization of the analytical model. To that end, Maria Carmen Gomes conducts documentary research, collecting data from the digital technodiscursive environment (Paveau, 2021), specifically from websites and profiles associated with feminist socio-activist practices, in order to support the project by shedding light on a pressing social issue with a semiotic dimension: *menstrual precariousness*.

For the purposes of this article, we focus on discourses produced within feminist activist sites on the digital platform Instagram, presenting an intersectional discursive-critical analysis of user comments following their discursive reactions to the knowledge and power that traverse the bodies of people who menstruate. These reactions were analyzed within the comments section of two posts addressing menstrual leave, published on the @Universa\_uol profile, from an intersectional and decolonial perspective (Maldonado-Torres, 2018; Akotirene, 2019; Collins, 2019, 2022; Rea, 2019; Sala, 2020; Cândido; Saliba, 2022; Vasquez, 2022), and through the lens of verbal sociodiscursive reactions (Gomes, 2022).

According to the report *Menstrual Poverty: Inequalities and Violations of Rights*, published by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), menstrual precariousness (as termed in this text) refers to the lack of "access to resources, infrastructure, and knowledge" (p. 5), affecting menstruating bodies situated in vulnerabilities shaped by multiple and interconnected factors, including class, geopolitics, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. This perspective on the complex and multidisciplinary phenomenon of menstrual precariousness articulates knowledges and powers that operate across diverse social practices – including the labor market – given that many people who menstruate miss workdays due to both difficulties in accessing menstrual technologies and to the physiological effects of the menstrual cycle itself. It is within this context that the debate around menstrual leave has emerged in Brazil, both in political activism and in the legal sphere, as reflected in Bills 1.143/19 and 1.249/22, which are still under legislative review.

Our objective, therefore, is to analyze whether the modes of acting and interacting, representing and identifying, observed in these reactions contribute to a critical decolonization of the binary and hierarchical knowledge systems surrounding menstrual leave – as produced by the modern-colonial world system – or whether they ultimately serve to reinforce them (Maldonado-Torres, 2018; Gomes, 2022; Gomes and Carvalho, 2024; Carvalho, 2024).

## **Intersectionality and (de)coloniality: onto-epistemological perspectives on knowledge and power surrounding menstruation**

When we refer to perspectives as onto-epistemological, we are recognizing that the production of knowledge – epistemology – is inseparable from subjects' positions in the world – ontology. In this view, no scientific output can be considered neutral, as it is always embodied and emerges from a historically and geopolitically situated locus of enunciation (Baptista, 2019). This means that knowledge and power related to menstruation must be analyzed in connection with the people who produce them and their positionalities – both in terms of political and ideological practices and in relation to identities that either align with or resist those practices (Gomes, 2022; Gomes; Carvalho, 2024; Carvalho, 2024).

Maldonado-Torres (2018) contends that coloniality – the web of meanings and practices that has persisted since 16th-century colonization – is driven by a logic that orders power, knowledge, and being through classifications, essentialisms, and hierarchies grounded in binary oppositions. The paradigmatic split is Master versus Enslaved, sustained by what he calls a “metaphysical catastrophe.” In this article, we analyze how coloniality operates in users' discursive practices as they classify, evaluate, and construct representations related to the implementation of menstrual leave in the labor market – and how they identify themselves and others as menstruating bodies. In *Menstruación Decolonial*, Sala (2020) outlines three constitutive levels of coloniality's operation over menstruation: the levels of power, knowledge, and gender. At the level of power, coloniality denies the political and public value of menstruation. In the structural domain (Collins, 2022), this coloniality impedes the development of public policies supporting menstrual dignity; in the cultural domain (Collins, 2022), it obstructs the generation and public circulation of social meanings around the menstrual cycle by confining the topic to the private sphere – typically within the domains of family and church (pudor) – and transmitting it silently, and exclusively, to women (Sala, 2020).

Given the complexity of the topic – menstrual leave and its intended beneficiaries – we draw on intersectionality as both an analytical tool and a critical sensibility (Akotirene, 2019; Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2022; Collins, 2022), in dialogue with decolonial studies. In intersectional terms, individuals are multidimensionally shaped by distinct identity markers, as they are constituted through various intersecting identities. No analysis, therefore, should privilege a single axis of identity – such as gender – when explaining social phenomena (Akotirene, 2019). When we apply intersectionality to the logic of metaphysical catastrophe, we can argue that the Master embodies all the intersecting identity axes – race, class, gender, sexuality – that confer privilege, while the Enslaved embodies the resulting oppressions (Carvalho; Costa, 2020). This affirms the intersectional understanding that colonialist practices interlink multiple systems of oppression (Collins, 2019; Collins; Bilge, 2022; Collins, 2022), producing meanings and legitimizing actions (Maldonado-Torres, 2018) that privilege certain bodies over others.

According to Sala (2020), from the standpoint of coloniality, menstruation is treated as abjection – sustained through the operationalization of taboos, myths, and stigmas that reinforce the “social, political, and state abandonment” (Cândido; Saliba, 2022, p. 3, our translation) of people who menstruate. For Sala (2020) and Cândido and Saliba (2022), the family, biomedicine, the church, and even the state, through colonialist practices and actions, have relegated menstruation to the domestic, private sphere – “outside the visual, olfactory, and tactile scene of the other and of oneself” (Sala, 2020, p. 3, our translation). Knowledge about menstruation is traditionally passed from women to girls, producing not only a symbolic marker of gender but also situating menstruation within kinship structures and the private domain. Colonial-modern discourses devalue menstruation, shrouding it in secrecy – as if it were not a natural, cyclical biological process that, in fact, reminds the body of its capacity to generate life. The colonial exercise of power relegates menstrual knowledge to the private sphere, framing it as a domestic or even obscene matter (Sala, 2020), thereby rendering the topic invisible in educational, economic, and broader social contexts from an intersectional and decolonial perspective. In *Interseccionalidade e Dignidade Menstrual*, Cândido and Saliba (2022) emphasize the importance of engaging with public, social, educational, and fiscal domains, highlighting the political and public significance of menstruation through the intersecting lenses of race and class.

Sala (2020), in an analysis of biomedical conceptions of menstruation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, identifies three key developments: (i) menstruation is medicalized as a scientific fact; (ii) it is feminized and pathologized; and (iii) anatomical and physiological knowledge about the body is produced. Scientific knowledge about menstruation – and, by extension, about people who menstruate – has historically been shaped by white male scientists from the Global North, who have promoted binary understandings of the female reproductive system as specific to cis women. In doing so, they have constructed a capitalist, patriarchal, racist, and transphobic narrative around the phenomenon (Cândido; Saliba, 2022). In this regard, Tarzibachi (2017) and Rea (2019) emphasize how the hygiene industry, through discourses of practicality, safety, and cost-effectiveness, democratizes and disseminates biomedical knowledge about the needs and desires of the menstruating body, grounded in a hegemonic neoliberal medical framework.

Coloniality, at the level of gender, upholds the notion that menstruation is inherently feminine – that is, it promotes a binary, universal, and hierarchical conception. This framework produces and reinforces “biologist and hygienicist menstrual narratives that generate oppression and subordination in women, girls, and menstruating people” (Vasquez, 2022, p. 11, our translation), by means of a capitalist-patriarchal-racist-transphobic logic that oppresses cis women’s bodies while excluding or invalidating menstruating bodies that deviate from the colonial gender binary – such as those of trans men and non-binary individuals.

Sala (2020) conceives menstruation as a metonym for patriarchy. While we agree with this assertion, we stress the need to complexify the menstruating body through an

intersectional lens, as also argued by Cândido and Saliba (2022), who emphasize the importance of examining the interplay among patriarchy, capitalism, racism, religion, and geopolitics in order to understand how power operates differently (Cândido; Saliba, 2022) on the ways bodies are situated and act within structures of domination (Sala, 2020).

Although we live in a society constrained by various forms of coloniality, resistance is possible. One such path, as Patricia Hill Collins (2019) argues, is to embrace intersectionality as a tool for analyzing the complex interconnections among systems of oppression that sustain social injustice – recognizing, as Rufino (2019) reminds us, that cracks and absences exist through which resistance and the reinvention of alternative ways of living can emerge, with the aim of decolonizing both knowledge and power. Menstruation, in this sense, is understood not merely as a biological fluid, but as a historical and social phenomenon. This shift in the meaning of menstrual knowledge-power re-signifies menstruation through a creative process of self-knowledge, self-exploration, and self-care – while also fostering environmental consciousness in alignment with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Such re-signification seeks to resist the universalizing narratives of biomedicine, including the essentialization of menstruation as female, the medicalization of abnormality, and the relegation of menstruation to the private sphere – thus challenging the racist, sexist, and transphobic conditions of existence imposed by neoliberalism (Sala, 2020). In place of these narratives, it embraces alternative forms of subjectivation, affect, and emotion – shifting meanings away from impurity, dirtiness, and shame toward an experience of embodied joy (Martins, 2021). To re-signify these narratives, we must also decolonize language itself – reimagining the ways we name, characterize, and value the menstruating body-territory (Santos; Ferreira, 2022; Gomes; Carvalho, 2025). Avoiding euphemisms such as “*estou de chico*” (a coded reference to menstruation using a male name), “*estou naqueles dias*” (“on those days”), “*estou de lua*” (suggesting moodiness or lunar cycles), “*tenda vermelha*” (“red tent”), or “*mar vermelho*” (“Red Sea”) may mark the beginning of a new narrative – one that is less silenced and less constrained by patriarchal norms.

Building on these discussions, the following sections present a discursive analysis of the knowledge and power structures surrounding menstrual leave as they manifest in digital comment texts. This analysis uses the framework of verbal sociodiscursive reactions (Gomes, 2022), a discursive-analytical category with a textual orientation.

### **Online comments: technodiscursive arenas for knowledge-power disputes**

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have become key arenas for the construction of knowledge and the circulation of alerts and information, given their easy accessibility via smartphones. Instagram, in particular, has stood out as a dynamic platform for news dissemination, due to its integration of images and

short-form videos (reels), its immediacy and mobility, its visual orientation, and its diverse interactive tools – which foster high levels of engagement, especially among younger users (in contrast to platforms like Facebook). Thanks to these technodiscursive features, Instagram has also become fertile ground for activism – particularly feminist, anti-racist, queer, and Indigenous movements. Activist profiles typically operate on two main fronts: (i) raising awareness and mobilizing around causes by disseminating information and publicizing events, effectively serving as alternative channels of communication; and (ii) engaging in direct action and reaction through mechanisms such as cancellations, petitions, whistleblowing platforms, and other strategic interventions (Queiroz, 2017). These political-digital practices have catalyzed both political and cultural transformations, reshaping modes of civic participation and influencing decision-making processes.

Instagram articulates three simultaneous practices – *photographing–sharing–consuming* – that foster and reinforce a sense of belonging between profile owners and their audiences. According to Soares et al. (2021) and D’Andrea (2020), technological artifacts and social practices on social media are mutually influential, prompting users to appropriate the technodiscursive affordances embedded in these environments (Paveau, 2021). Such affordances allow users to “capture, edit, and post photos, view other users’ photos, interact with them, explore additional posts through the search tool, and so on” (Soares et al., 2021, p. 91, our translation).

Marie-Anne Paveau (2021), in her work on digital discourse within linguistic-discursive studies, emphasizes that semiosis functions differently in the digital realm, giving rise to what she terms technodiscourses – discourses “produced under technical conditions: composition, de-linearization, amplification, relationality (material and automatic through links that circulate in unbounded multiplication), investigability, [and] unpredictability” (p. 22, our translation). Technodiscourses are shaped by the interweaving of body, machine, and language, and they account for the participation of non-human agents – such as trolls or algorithms – in the production of discourse. These dynamics suggest that discursive technologies “enable new ways of acting, interacting, navigating, and producing meaning” (Cavalcante, 2021, p. 17, our translation).

Online comments, as one modality of technodiscourse, constitute potential (inter) action spaces for negotiation, renegotiation, controversy, dissent, and consensus (Recuero, 2014; Gomes, 2017; Ribeiro, 2018; Gomes and Carvalho, 2020; Zem El-Dine, Carvalho, and Gomes, 2021; Paveau, 2021; Gomes, 2022). According to Recuero (2014), unlike the “Like” and “Share” functions, the comment section enables users to engage more actively: it is “an interactional space that is always open to a new text, which, when taken up and recontextualized, becomes unique and unrepeatable each time” (Cavalcante, 2021, p. 16, our translation).

Within these dialogic spaces, users discursively act and react in response to an initial text – be it a post, reel, or another comment – by expanding upon, endorsing, or challenging the original content, often expressing judgments, critiques, and value-laden positions. Paiva (2016), in examining the socio-discursive dynamics of reactive

(inter)action, asserts that users respond to a preexisting text by articulating their own stance on the reported subject matter. Paveau (2021) identifies several categories of online comments relevant for discourse analysis in technodiscursive environments: (i) relational and conversational comments, which may be discursive or metadiscursive in nature; (ii) troll comments, which aim to disrupt or derail the discussion through violent or inappropriate interventions; and (iii) shared comments, or pseudo-comments, which involve appropriating content for redistribution or forwarding purposes.

In this article, we draw on Gomes's (2022) analytical framework for online comments, which builds upon the work of Recuero (2013, 2014a, 2014b), Soares et al. (2021), and Paveau (2021). Gomes (2017, 2020) conceptualizes the comment space as a locus of action and interaction, where readers respond to topics, themes, and events by expressing opinions and judgments while also contributing to the circulation and dissemination of the issues at hand. Gomes proposes the term *Verbal Sociodiscursive Reactions* (VSRs) to designate these reactive textual constructions as an analytical category. Following Paveau (2021 [2017]), we also understand comments as a prescribed technogenre, insofar as users have limited freedom to discursively (inter)act due to techno-spatial constraints, and because relationality shapes how texts are read, produced, and interpreted.

According to Gomes (2022), Verbal Sociodiscursive Reactions (VSRs) are reactive sociocultural-discursive constructions whose thematic and ideological-discursive orientations may be directed toward someone's speech, the topic of the original post, or marginal and tangential issues. These reactions are primarily linked to textual aspects shaped by discourses and styles (Fairclough, 2003), although they are anchored in a specific spatial locus on Instagram – the comments section. This is because, when we represent aspects of the world – knowledge and lived experiences – we engage in representational meaning-making, whose discursive form is discourse. When we judge, evaluate, or construct identities – our own or others' – we engage in identificational meaning, whose discursive form is style (Fairclough, 2003).

VSRs thus function as an analytical category that traverses both representation and identification: as reactive stances toward opinions, behaviors, and attitudes – whether in response to the original post or to other users – they entail not only power and control disputes but also ethical and moral dimensions (Gomes and Carvalho, 2020; Gomes, 2022; Duarte, Ribeiro, and Gomes, 2022). Linguistically, these reactions are realized through lexicogrammatical features within socially instantiated texts and materialize across the three dimensions of the order of discourse – discourses, styles, and genres – which interact dialectically. These are resources that constitute the semiotic dimension of discourse, meaning they are articulated with and internalized alongside non-discursive elements of social practices: mental phenomena, material activities, social relations, and embodied experience. Together, they produce causal effects in events (as texts) within broader social practices (Gomes, 2020; Gomes and Carvalho, 2021; Gomes, 2022).

Indeed, verbal sociocultural-discursive reactions may take three forms: (i) Transactional reactions, in which users engage with one another by commenting

on another participant's post and/or on related or unrelated issues, forming a socio-interactive exchange; (ii) Non-transactional reactions, in which users comment directly on the topic addressed in the original post without interacting with other participants; and (iii) Attitudinal transactional reactions, in which users incorporate quotations and reported speech from both the original post and from other participants' comments.

According to Gomes (2022), VSRs can be methodologically categorized into six types: (i) Engaged verbal sociocultural-discursive reactions, which reflect the degree of commitment with which participants refute, oppose, agree with, or endorse what has been said; (ii) Reactions of condemnation, which express moral judgments regarding conduct and behavior; (iii) Reactions of admiration, which offer positive evaluations of conduct and social attitudes; (iv) Reactions of criticism, which convey negative judgments of social behaviors and attitudes; (v) Reactions of approval, which express praise for moral behaviors and attitudes; and (vi) Reactions of appreciation, which evaluate the aesthetic qualities or values of things.

Having outlined the theoretical framework concerning the knowledge-power dynamics surrounding menstruation, as well as the conceptual and methodological foundations of verbal sociocultural-discursive reactions, we now turn to the methodological procedures adopted for analyzing the object of study in this paper.

## **Methodological procedures**

According to Paveau (2021 [2017]), a native digital corpus comprises technodiscursive and linguistic productions that are either generated directly within digital platforms or collected as data – whether or not preceded by explicit linguistic-discursive reflection. Regarding ethical considerations – particularly in studies that analyze users' sociodiscursive reactions in comment sections – Coletiva Ciborga (2022, p. 146, our translation) emphasizes the importance of safeguarding participant identities during both data collection and use of such material as illustrative examples. It is therefore crucial to respect “the privacy and sharing policies of the platform selected for data generation, in order to ensure greater protection for the participants.”

The discursive sample was selected based on thematic relevance (issues concerning menstrual dignity and precariousness – specifically, menstrual leave) and Instagram was used as a platform for building a corpus aimed at understanding how users engage with the comment space to construct knowledge and which discursive resources they mobilize to express opinions and position themselves on the topic.

The comments and verbal sociodiscursive reactions were collected from Instagram in March 2023. Two posts on menstrual leave published by the profile @Universa\_uol were selected for corpus construction. This Brazil-based, verified account, created in March 2018, describes itself in its bio as “the @uoloficial platform for women who change the world.” As of that date, it had 342,000 followers, followed 6,007 accounts, and had published 10,600 posts. For this study, the first 20 comments on each post



were collected, following the criteria of verbal sociodiscursive reactions (Gomes, 2022), specifically non-transactional reactions – that is, comments directed at the topic addressed in the post and caption, without engaging in dialogue with other users. The analysis does not follow a strictly chronological order, but instead prioritizes the ways in which commenters engage discursively with the post.

In processing the corpus, we considered the technodiscursive environment (Paveau, 2021), including the number of comments, the hashtags used in the caption, and the number of likes associated with each selected comment. We highlight the number of “likes” received by each comment, recognizing that liking is itself a discursive act with ideological effects. These effects imply tacit constructs such as: “I like what you’re posting,” “I’m present,” “I read it,” “I support your comment,” or simply “I identify with what you’re saying” (Paveau, 2021 [2017]).

The posts were captured and stored as .doc files using screenshots taken from Maria Carmen Gomes’s smartphone Instagram account (Paveau, 2021 [2017]; Coletiva Ciborga, 2022). Regarding the use of screenshots, we align with Costa and Baronas (2021, p. 36, our translation), who note that “screenshots result from the subjectivity of the internet-analyst”, as well as with Thaís Batista (2020, p. 297, our translation), who argues that “the ways in which data are generated and analyzed are choices – and therefore not neutral – since the generation and interpretation of data always stem from a particular position.”

From a preliminary analysis of the discursive sample – as researchers who also identify as users – we observed a recurring set of discourses opposing menstrual leave. These were characterized by menstrual narratives embedded in patriarchal, binary, biological, and reproductive logics, reflecting a lack of awareness or understanding of what occurs in the bodies of people who menstruate – particularly in cases of physiological or hormonal suffering. We also noted resistance discourses portraying menstruating individuals as unfit for the workplace, suggesting possible consequences such as salary penalties, career stagnation, and even moral harassment. We now proceed to the analyses.

## **Menstrual leave in dispute: knowledge and power surrounding menstruating bodies**

Menstrual leave differs from general medical leave in that it is specifically intended for menstruating individuals who suffer from dysmenorrhea. It is thus a gender-specific measure designed to guarantee the right to short-term work absences – typically two to three days per month – for those experiencing debilitating symptoms. In a legal article titled “Menstrual Leave: Promoting Equality or Increasing Stigma?” [Licença menstrual: promoção da igualdade ou aumento do estigma?], Fernanda Serra (2024) notes that two bills – No. 1.143/19 and No. 1.249/22 – are currently under review in Brazil’s labor law sphere. These proposals would allow menstruating individuals up

to three consecutive days of paid leave per month, contingent on a medical certificate, with the possibility of later compensating for the missed workdays.

Studies show that during menstrual cycles marked by dysmenorrhea, individuals may experience severe symptoms such as intense cramps, uterine contractions, and migraines, all of which can affect productivity and work attendance (Cheng, 2022; Gauna, 2023; Welle, 2022; Huet, 2022; Serra, 2024; Silva, 2023). Research by Cássia Eduarda da Silva (2023) and Fernanda Serra (2024) also indicates that menstrual health management has gained international recognition as a public health issue. Several countries already offer menstrual leave or equivalent benefits, including Spain, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Zambia, China (in some provinces), and France (Cheng, 2022; Gauna, 2023; Welle, 2022; Huet, 2022). In Spain, current legislation – Article 5 of Ley Orgánica 1/2023 – grants women the right to paid menstrual leave upon presentation of a medical certificate. In Zambia, the right to one day of menstrual leave per month is protected under the Employment Law, in effect since 2015, without the requirement of a medical certificate. In Japan, according to Silva (2023, p. 52, our translation), Article 68 of the Labor Standards Law – enacted in 1947 during the postwar period of infrastructural precarity – stipulates that “[...] when a woman, for whom it is extremely difficult to work during her menstrual period, requests leave, the employer shall not require her to work on that day.”

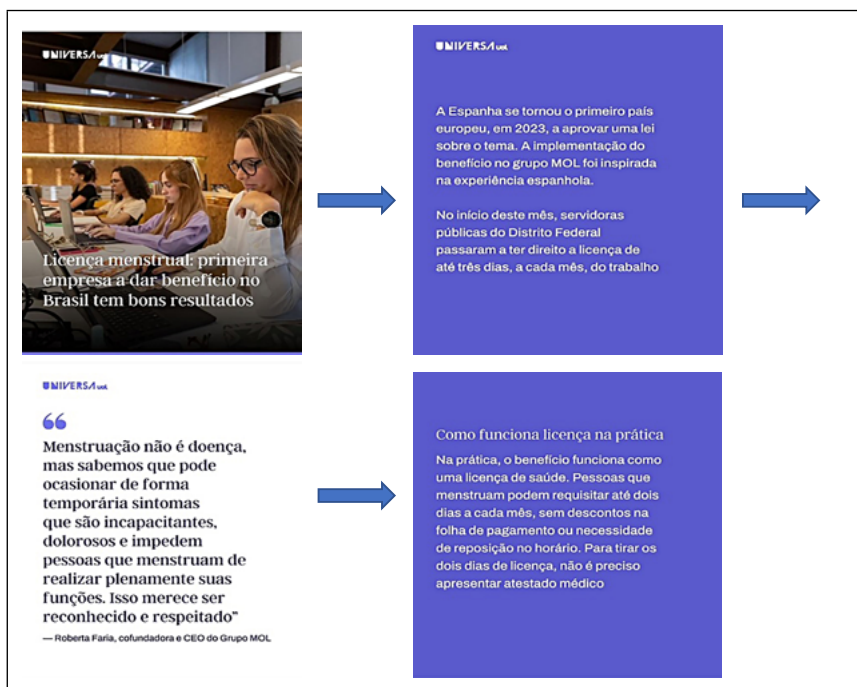
In all cases reported in the cited literature, menstrual leave has proven effective in maintaining or improving workplace productivity. Nonetheless, it remains a subject of considerable debate. While some argue that such policies protect menstruating individuals, uphold their right to health, and reinforce principles of equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity, others contend that this type of legislation may inadvertently perpetuate stigma, inequality, and prejudice in the workplace. The debate is paradoxical – at times even ironic. Cheng (2022, p. 14) observes that in culturally chauvinistic, sexist, and misogynistic contexts, men have publicly expressed outrage over menstrual leave, claiming it constitutes a form of “reverse sexism.” These controversies are also reflected in the discursive sample analyzed in this study, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Post 1, published on March 28, 2023, was produced in a carousel format and consists of four short informative posts announcing menstrual leave for Grupo MOL employees. The screenshot used for the analysis was captured on June 5, 2024. At the time, the post had 1,075 comments and the following hashtags in Portuguese: #UOL, #UniversaUOL, #UOLNews, #LicençaMenstrual [#MenstrualLeave], #Benefícios [#Benefits], #Mulheres [#Women], and #Cólica [#Cramps]. The caption, transcribed below, states:

At the meeting where the Grupo MOL announced menstrual leave for its female employees, business manager Carol Mucidda, 30, **was moved**. She has been with the company for two years and **recalled other professional experiences where she had to work despite the pain and**

**discomfort of menstruation. “It feels like being welcomed,” she said.** It was March 8, 2023 – International Women’s Day – **when the company began offering two days of paid leave during the menstrual period as a benefit for its female employees.** The organization was the first Brazilian company to introduce this policy. Nearly 90% of the company’s workforce is made up of women – 55 employees, 49 of whom are women. (@Universa\_uol, 2024, n.p., emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1 – Menstrual Leave, Grupo MOL**



**Source:** @Universa\_uol

The verbal sociodiscursive reactions posted in the comments section show an engaged, critical stance, positively evaluating the subject of the post: menstrual leave.

<sup>1</sup> In the original: *Na reunião em que o Grupo MOL anunciou a licença menstrual para as funcionárias, a gerente de negócios Carol Mucidda, 30, ficou emocionada. Ela é colaboradora da organização há dois anos e se lembrou de outras experiências profissionais, quando teve que trabalhar mesmo com dores e incômodos da menstruação. “É um acolhimento”, diz. Era 8 de março de 2023, Dia Internacional da Mulher, quando a empresa passou a conceder dois dias de afastamento remunerado durante o período menstrual como benefício para suas colaboradoras. A organização foi a primeira empresa brasileira a dar a licença. Quase 90% do quadro de funcionários do grupo é formado por mulheres – são 55 funcionários, 49 mulheres.*

The employee's experience, described in the caption and positively received, led many users to identify with the situations mentioned: *having to work despite menstrual pain and discomfort; feeling welcomed; being moved*. Menstrual leave is valued not only for its practical implications – as a consistent and relevant benefit – but also for its affective resonance. It is worth noting that the employee attributes to the leave (as carrier) – a bureaucratic and labor-related object – a humanized quality: “welcoming.” This lexical choice conveys ethical, affectionate, and respectful listening; a response to concrete demands and needs that fosters a relationship of solidarity between the company and its employees. After all, for those who menstruate, the benefit granted by the company evokes emotions. The sentiment conveyed by this informative approach is largely understood and endorsed by users, as evidenced by the sociodiscursive reactions below.

The themes addressed in the post revolve around validating or questioning the proposed policy, intersecting issues of gender, labor, and class. Let us examine how the policy is validated in Comments 1 and 2:

**Commenter 1: I'm a women's wisdom therapist and I know how important it is to welcome the menstrual cycle for women's cyclical productivity.** I'm also a **police chief**, and for the past five years I've been in charge of a precinct with @13 women. Since I took over, I held a dialogue circle with them and talked about cyclical productivity. I gave them one day off a month. They felt welcomed. And the amazing thing is: many of them don't even use that day anymore 'cause their cramps have eased. Cramps are also the body reacting to not being welcomed. Productivity and commitment went up. Props for the initiative. The world needs to welcome women. **It's not about privilege – this impacts their productivity.** 🍷<sup>2</sup> (171 likes and 20 replies)

**Commenter 2: Awesome initiative! Only someone who's cried from cramps knows what that feels like.**<sup>3</sup> (781 likes and 16 replies)

**Commenter 3: This benefit is something to be proud of** 💙. We believe the workplace should be welcoming, and menstrual leave is just one way to make that happen.<sup>4</sup> (756 likes)

<sup>2</sup> In the original: *Eu sou terapeuta dos saberes femininos e sei a importância do acolhimento no período menstrual para a produtividade cíclica das mulheres. Também sou delegada de polícia e há cinco anos sou titular de uma delegacia, com @13 mulheres. Desde que assumi, fiz uma roda com elas e contei sobre a produtividade cíclica. Liberei um dia no mês para elas. Elas se sentiram acolhidas. E, o incrível aconteceu: muitas já não usam esse dia pq não tem tido cólicas fortes mais. A cólica tb é uma reação do corpo não acolhido. A produtividade e o comprometimento aumentaram. Parabéns pela iniciativa. O mundo precisa acolher as mulheres. Não é sobre privilégios, isso influencia na produtividade delas.* 🍷

<sup>3</sup> In the original: *Iniciativa louável! Só quem já chorou de dor de cólica sabe o que é*

<sup>4</sup> In the original: *Esse benefício é nosso orgulho* 💙. *Acreditamos que o ambiente de trabalho deve ser acolhedor e a licença menstrual é apenas uma das maneiras de fazer isso*

In comment 1, the commenter reacts sociodiscursively to the subject of the post from her locus of enunciation, through identificational clauses – *I’m a women’s knowledge therapist, a police chief* – mental-cognitive – *I know the importance of welcoming the menstrual period for women’s cyclical productivity* – and material-creative – *I held a dialogue circle with them and shared the idea of cyclical productivity*. This comment received 171 likes and 20 replies. The themes selected by the commenter reinforce the discursive orientation of the hashtags: #LicençaMenstrual [#MenstrualLeave] #Benefício [#Benefits] #Mulheres [#Women] #Cólica [#Cramps]. The commenter engages critically with the post’s content and positively values menstrual leave, arguing in favor of the relationship: Leave ⇔ Welcoming ⇔ Cyclical Productivity, drawing on her own successful professional experiences. At the end, she preemptively refutes – based on an evaluative presumption – the idea that leave is merely a gender privilege: “It’s not about privilege – this impacts their productivity,” likely responding to underlying sexist or misogynistic discourse.

Commenter 2 does not directly engage with Commenter 1 but positively appreciates the initiative – *awesome initiative!* – and reinforces the idea that the menstrual cycle involves pain and discomfort: “Only someone who’s cried from cramps knows what that feels like”, aligning with and identifying affectively, albeit implicitly, with shared experience. This comment received 781 likes and 16 replies. All of these verbal sociodiscursive reactions operate, at least partially, from a decolonial perspective on menstruation, as they displace misogynistic, sexist, and hierarchical assumptions. However, they also reflect an exercise of coloniality of power by essentializing menstruation as exclusive to cis women, thereby excluding the intersection with other identity axes (such as trans and non-binary individuals). Validation of the Menstrual Leave policy is expressed by Commenter 3, the company profile – @molimpacto – which also does not engage with commenters 1 and 2 but calls the leave a “benefit” and attributes to it a feeling of pride rooted in the recognition of a meaningful achievement: “something to be proud of.” Indeed, the comment endorses the post’s content, legitimizes the company’s action, and received 756 likes – generating positive engagement and, it seems, broader acceptance of the initiative.

The validation of the law is constructed discursively and repeatedly through personal accounts narrating the discomfort experienced during the menstrual cycle, thereby legitimizing the importance and necessity of menstrual leave. This is evident in comments 4 and 5:

**Commenter 4: I don’t feel any pain**, my period has always been fine, I go to work just fine! **But I think it’s fair for women who aren’t as lucky as me!**<sup>5</sup> (120 likes and 3 replies)

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<sup>5</sup> In the original: *Eu não tenho dor, minha menstruação sempre foi de boa vou trabalhar de boa! Mas acho muito justo as mulheres que não tem a mesma sorte que a minha!*

**Commenter 5: Only those who've fainted from the pain know how beneficial this can be.**<sup>6</sup> May it spread.

**Commenter 6:** It's **classy** to see people thinking about and putting benefits into practice for others. ❤️<sup>7</sup> (52 likes and no replies)

Commenters 4 and 5 align with Commenter #2 in reinforcing discourses from the medical/cultural system, which inscribe the female body as one that suffers – one marked by pain, discomfort, weakness, disadvantage, and illness: “*I don't feel any pain [...] but I think it's fair for women who aren't as lucky as me!; Only those who've fainted from the pain know how beneficial this can be.*” Commenter 4 reacts discursively not only by valuing the leave, but also by positively judging the ethical legitimacy of the benefit: “I think it's fair.” This comment received 120 likes and 3 replies, while comment 5 received 379 likes and 4 replies. This appreciative stance is also evident in Commenter 6's comment, which lexically frames the benefit as “classy”, thereby assigning it a positive social value.

Commenters 7, 8, and 9 do not comment directly on the benefit or on the pain and discomfort associated with the bodies of people who menstruate, but they engage critically and discursively by condemning the attitudes, behaviors, and comments – explicit or implicit – made by those who do not menstruate, in this case, men, as seen below:

**Commenter 7: To the men** who are outraged: do some reading and get informed so you don't embarrass yourselves.<sup>8</sup> (113 likes and 11 replies)

**Commenter 8: If you think it's whining**, you don't menstruate. Great initiative. 🍌🍌<sup>9</sup> (306 likes and 1 reply)

**Commenter 9: Men** throwing tantrums in 3, 2, 1...<sup>10</sup> (139 likes and 20 replies)

The thematization of men – whether implicit or explicit – in these comments, within this discursive context around menstrual health, carries political and cultural implications, marked by a high degree of ideological engagement. These are responses of condemnation, critique, and even ridicule, often conveyed through irony (“throwing

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<sup>6</sup> In the original: *Só quem chega a desmaiar de dores sabe o quanto isso pode ser benéfico. Que se expanda*

<sup>7</sup> In the original: *Que coisa chique é ver as pessoas pensando e colocando em prática benefícios para outras pessoas* ❤️

<sup>8</sup> In the original: *Para os homens que estão indignados: estudem e se informem para não passarem vergonhas em suas falas.*

<sup>9</sup> In the original: *Quem acha mi-mi-mi não menstrua. Ótima atitude* 🍌🍌

<sup>10</sup> In the original: *Homens dando chilique em 3, 2, 1...*

tantrums”, “whining”), rejecting the notion of so-called reverse sexism claimed by some men (and occasionally women). As Vasquez (2022, 28, our translation) aptly states: “To question the taboo, inform, and reframe. We question what we’ve been taught – the beliefs, narratives, and customs that uphold the idea of menstruation as a disease.” Reframing narratives around menstruation is a socio-political and cultural necessity – one that can lead to greater awareness and the advancement of menstrual dignity.

The only comment that questions menstrual leave appears in Comment 10, which is countered by Comment 11, as follows:

**Commenter 10: Divided opinions, fear this might lead to more discrimination in hiring and promotions.**<sup>11</sup> (21 likes and 7 replies)

**Commenter 11: The job market NEEDS us women. The problem is that the world of work wasn’t designed for people who menstruate, get pregnant, or breastfeed.** There should be at least two years of menstrual and maternity/paternity leave!<sup>12</sup> (238 likes and 42 replies)

Commenter 10 does not interact with others about menstrual leave – or even menstruation itself – but raises concerns about the implementation of the policy, framing it solely in terms of power dynamics and sexist, patriarchal gender relations: “Divided opinions, **fear this might lead to more discrimination** in hiring and promotions.” (21 likes and 7 replies.) Part of Commenter 11’s response reinforces the view that the labor market is inherently sexist: “**The job market NEEDS us women.** The problem is that the world of work wasn’t designed for people who menstruate, get pregnant, or breastfeed.” This comment received 238 likes and 42 replies, generating broad and positive engagement. These critically engaged reactions express support for the benefit while drawing attention to the controversy surrounding such policies in modern-colonial patriarchal societies: menstrual leave may reinforce stigma, discrimination, and the persistence of sexist beliefs and attitudes.

Menstruation is a physiological-social process that should ground rights ensuring dignity for people who menstruate – not only in their personal lives, but also in their professional lives. The relationship between the labor market, productivity, physical working time, and menstrual health must be reevaluated to avoid perpetuating modern-colonial discourses about menstruating bodies – discourses that associate them with fragility, unproductivity, unreliability, and pathology. As Rea (2019, 86, our translation) states: “Colonialism, patriarchy, and the economic system have conditioned women’s lives and silenced their physiological processes” to align with capitalist demands for reproduction and care.

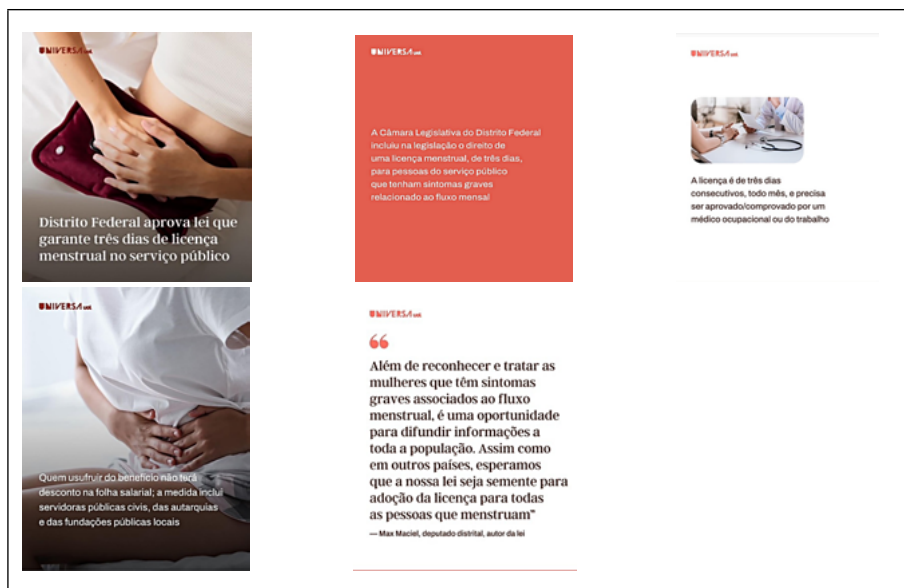
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<sup>11</sup> In the original: *Opinião dividida, medo de gerar mais um preconceito quanto as contratações e promoções.*

<sup>12</sup> In the original: *O mercado de trabalho PRECISA de nós mulheres. O problema é que o mundo do trabalho não foi pra quem menstrua, engravida ou amamenta. Tem que ter licença menstruação e maternidade/paternidade de 2 anos, pelo menos!*

The second post, also a five-slide carousel format, was published by @universa-uol on March 7, 2023, and reports on the introduction of a bill in the Legislative Chamber of the Federal District addressing Menstrual Leave – up to three consecutive days – for public servants experiencing severe symptoms related to menstrual health (Figure 2).

**Figure 2** – Introduction of the Bill on Menstrual Leave



Source: @universa-uol

The post had 727 comments and the following hashtags at the time of the screenshot and comment collection (June 5, 2024): #UniversaUOL [@UniversaUOL] #Uol [@Uol] #LicencaMenstrual [#MenstrualLeave] #ServicoPublico [#PublicService] The caption, transcribed below, states:

@universa-uol The Legislative Chamber of the Federal District has added to its legislation **the right** to “menstrual leave” – **up to three consecutive days** – **for public service employees** experiencing severe symptoms related to menstruation. To access the **benefit**, approval from an occupational or workplace physician is required. The days of leave **will not be deducted from the employee’s salary**. Where are the other Brazilian states to follow suit? Read more at Universa.<sup>13</sup> (@Universa\_uol, 2024, n.p., emphasis added)

<sup>13</sup> In the original: @universa-uol A Câmara Legislativa do Distrito Federal incluiu na legislação o **direito** de uma “licença menstrual”, **de até 3 dias consecutivos**, **a pessoas do serviço público** que tenham sintomas graves relacionados ao



Both the caption and the verbal text on the banners serve as key pieces of information that should be shared with online users. These texts present both familiar content – such as menstruation – and new information: the announcement of menstrual leave as a right for public servants who menstruate and suffer from dysmenorrhea. The accompanying images, in photographic format, show the metonymic female body, focused on the abdomen, depicted in two scenarios: (i) hands signaling pain and (ii) a thermal bag – both suggesting the presence of cramps and physical discomfort. One of the posts also shows a doctor’s office setting, with the bodies of the presumed doctor and patient represented metonymically. Unlike Post 1, this post includes a hashtag explicitly referencing the public sector (#PublicService).

Our thesis is that the information selected by content creators and organized into technodiscourses plays a central role in shaping the production of comments and verbal sociodiscursive reactions. We therefore highlight certain keywords and themes that likely informed the commenters’ responses: *rights, menstrual leave, public service, benefit, not deducted from payroll, dissemination of information, and people who menstruate*. The reactions target topics – or marginal themes related to the main subject – facts, and statements discursively represented in the texts, such as the quote from district representative Max Maciel in the post.

The general themes circulating in the comments on this Menstrual Leave post center on (i) the advantages and disadvantages of the law and (ii) its relationship to labor. In doing so – through actions, interactions, representations, and identifications – the commenters intersect two identity axes: gender and class. As with Post 1 (Figure 1), we observe two recurring colonialist exercises of power in all the comments: the essentialization of menstruation as something that only affects cis women – reflected in gender marking and the naming of women – and the absence of any discussion on race (the bodies depicted in the images are white), a crucial topic for any decolonial discursive practice (Maldonado-Torres, 2018). Consider the following socio-interactive exchange between two women:

**Commenter 1:** So many new things. **I’m 70 today. I’ve worked since I was 19 and not once did I miss work because of my period.** I even had an IUD, which made the flow and cramps worse, but a few drops of Atroveran – which any company clinic or on-site pharmacy always had – would do the trick, and in no time we were **ready for responsible and competent work!!!! Nowadays everything’s too easy... A whole lot of whining on our dime, don’t you agree?** 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄<sup>14</sup> (74 replies and 64 likes)

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período da menstruação. Para ter acesso ao **benefício**, é preciso uma aprovação de médico ocupacional ou do trabalho. Os dias de licença não vão ser descontados na folha de pagamento. Cadê os outros estados do Brasil pra copiar? Leia mais em *Universa*

<sup>14</sup> In the original: *Qtas.novidades. hj eu 70 anos. Trabalhi [sic] desde os 19 e nunquinha tive um dia de falta por estar menstruada. Eu ainda usava DIU que aumentava o fluxo e tb as cólicas mas era só tomar umas gotinhas de Atroveram*

**Commenter 2 (in response to Commenter 1): Have you ever had endometriosis or a related condition?** Because this policy **applies to women who do**. I, for example, don't have any of those issues, and I'm fine working. **But I'm informed, and I know it's not the same for everyone. You should try getting informed** before making claims about what you don't know.<sup>15</sup> (264 likes)

Commenter 1, in a non-transactional move, critiques the Menstrual Leave Law through an engaged stance, refuting it by means of a personal narrative built on a temporal contrast: "I'm 70 years old," "I've worked since I was 19," emphasizing her past as a worker, while "nowadays" is used to represent and identify contemporary working women. The past is framed as morally commendable, materialized through praise for behavior and conduct – "ready for *responsible and competent work!!!*" – highlighting the fact that she never missed work due to her menstrual cycle. This comment clearly reflects a discourse of bodily mechanization and submission to labor discipline. The evaluations "responsible and competent" implicitly construct the judgment that today's women are irresponsible and incompetent, reinforcing a moral condemnation of female workers. This condemnation is intensified through expressions such as "too easy" and "whining," culminating in the economic judgment "on our dime", which suggests that the law imposes financial burdens on taxpayers. Here, we observe an intersection of gender- and class-based oppression—of women in the workforce—establishing a neoliberal hierarchy in which the value of labor is measured by productivity, morality, and uninterrupted presence in the workplace.

Commenter 2, in a transactional move, responds by condemning Commenter 1 using an epistemic modality that, following Fairclough (2003), constitutes a knowledge exchange. She poses the question: "Have you had endometriosis or a related condition?" – challenging the notion that menstrual pain can be universally resolved by medication. She points out that women with such conditions cannot be reduced to the general category of "cramps." By paraphrasing the information in the post – "this applies to those women" – she reinforces this perspective empathetically, asserting through personal experience that "I know it's not like that for everyone." Commenter 2 draws on the gender axis to validate the policy, using informational awareness as a discursive criterion, expressed both in "I'm informed" and, via a deontic modality (Fairclough, 2003), through the injunctive "Get informed" – which, while advising, also implicitly condemns Commenter 1 as uninformed. In doing so, she reclaims bodily knowledge and sovereignty (Sala, 2020), rewriting the menstrual narrative from a decolonial perspective.

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*q qualquer ambulatório ou farmacinha da empresa sempre nos oferecia e instantes edtavamos [sic] prontas para o trabalho responsável e competente!!!! Hj em dia é essa moleza.....muito mi-mi-mi para nossos bolsos, não acham?*

<sup>15</sup> In the original: *você teve endomrtriose [sic] ou doenças relacionadas? Porque essa ação se aplica a essas mulheres. Eu por exemplo não tenho e por mim tudo bem trabalhar. Mas eu tenho informação e sei que não é assim para todas. Procure se informar, é importante antes de falar o que não sabe*

In terms of user interaction on the platform, Commenter 2 received more likes than Comment 1, which suggests broader support for the decolonial stance on menstruation over the colonial one. This empathetic validation of the policy is echoed in the next comment:

**Commenter 3:** For Christ's sake, **ladies, let's cut this out and support each other.** I don't get cramps and it barely feels like I'm on my period, **but some women really suffer – especially those with endometriosis or uterine cysts. It's the kind of pain that makes you scream.**<sup>16</sup> (2 likes and no replies)

In the call “ladies, let's cut this out and support each other,” the commenter initiates a transactional exchange with those opposing the policy, adopting an injunctive epistemic modality – “cut this out” and “support” – and articulating a discourse of sorority. As with Commenter 2, she draws on a personal account, contrasting her own mild menstrual experience – “I don't get cramps and it barely feels like I'm on my period” – with that of others. Through an existential clause, she foregrounds the existence of menstruating people with “endometriosis or uterine cysts” who experience “the kind of pain that makes you scream.” The Menstrual Leave Law is shown to benefit those whose physical symptoms genuinely prevent them from working. This same argument reappears in the following comments:

**Commenter 4:** PMS symptoms are awful. I'd never gone through it before – probably because I was on the pill. I stopped taking it 8 months ago and **now there are days I can't even get out of bed, and the pain is unbearable.**<sup>17</sup> (15 likes and no replies)

**Commenter 5:** Everyone, did you even read it? It's for women **with INTENSE symptoms**, and it has to be **certified by an occupational doctor.**<sup>18</sup> (132 likes and 9 replies)

Commenter 4 expresses support for the law by validating its necessity through a personal account. She describes the disabling effects of her PMS – “there are days I can't even get out of bed” – and the “unbearable pain” she experiences. These symptoms are framed through relational processes that associate menstrual suffering with obstacles to

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<sup>16</sup> In the original: *Meu Deus, mulheres, vamos parar com isso e apoiar uma as outras, eu não sinto cólica nem parece que tou [sic] menstruada mas tem mulheres que sofrem com isso, principalmente quem tem endometriose e cistos no útero é uma dor terrível de gritar*

<sup>17</sup> In the original: *Os sintomas de TPM são horríveis. Eu nunca tinha passado por isso, até pq tomava pílula. A [sic] 8 meses parei de tomar e tem dias que n tenho vontade de levantar, e dores horríveis (15 curtidas e nenhuma resposta)*

<sup>18</sup> In the original: *Gente, vocês leram? Mulheres que tenham sintomas INTENSOS e que devem ser comprovados por médico do trabalho*

labor. Her mention of having previously taken the pill situates her comment within the discourse of the medicalization of menstruation: hormonal contraception is framed not only as a cycle regulator, but also as a tool for pain management. Commenter 5, in a transactional and corrective move – “Everyone, did you even read it?” – engages directly with others in the thread, reiterating a key stipulation of the policy: it applies only to individuals with “INTENSE symptoms,” which must be “certified by an occupational doctor.” By capitalizing the adjective “INTENSE,” the commenter specifies and delimits the bodies eligible for the benefit, thus arguing in favor of the law while also aligning with the forces of labor production – since neither the market nor women would be legally harmed. This comment had high engagement: the 132 likes suggest agreement with the argument that intense pain, when medically documented, justifies leave.

Another dispute of knowledge-power surrounding the Menstrual Leave Law centers on the participation of these bodies in the public and private sectors, expressed through arguments that serve to partially or fully invalidate the policy. Consider the following:

**Commenter 6:** Let the private sector cry.<sup>19</sup> (32 likes)

**Commenter 7:** Let the private sector cry.<sup>20</sup> (32 likes and 8 replies)

**Commenter 8:** Funny how only public servants menstruate.<sup>21</sup> (143 likes and 5 replies)

**Commenter 9:** Yeah, because civil servants already work so hard.<sup>22</sup> (4 likes and 1 reply)

**Commenter 10:** Good thing this only applies to public workers – **if it extended to the private sector, imagine the female unemployment rate. Honestly, it’d be one step forward, two steps back.**<sup>23</sup> (31 likes and 5 replies)

**Commenter 11:** They just won’t hire women anymore, I’m tellin’ you.<sup>24</sup> (20 likes and 15 replies)

All these comments represent non-transactional reactions, as they address information presented in the post and reinforced in the hashtag: the law currently benefits only public sector workers. Two main thematic axes organize this knowledge-

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<sup>19</sup> In the original: *O serviço privado que chore*

<sup>20</sup> In the original: *O serviço privado que chore*

<sup>21</sup> In the original: *Legal que só servidora pública tem menstruação*

<sup>22</sup> In the original: *Perfeito funcionário público já trabalha muito*

<sup>23</sup> In the original: *Ainda bem que é pra servidor público, imagina a taxa de desemprego de mulheres se fosse aprovado para o privado. Sinceramente, seria um passamos [1] frente e dois pra trás*

<sup>24</sup> In the original: *Já não vão contratar mulheres, so [sic] aviso*

power dispute: (i) the exclusion of the private sector and (ii) critical projections about what would happen if the law were extended to the private sector. In the first theme, Commenters 6 and 7, each with 32 likes, raise a critical perspective using the metaphorical behavioral expression “Let the private sector cry.” The irony here serves to invalidate the law by framing it as exclusionary. This critique is reinforced by Commenter 8, who opens with the attitudinal appraisal “Funny”, and follows with the assertion “only public servants menstruate.” This affirmative epistemic modality signals a perception of the law’s inefficiency and underscores the exclusion of private sector workers.

In the second theme, critical reactions emerge through suppositions about the law’s potential expansion to the private sector. These critiques intersect gender and class, focusing on hiring practices and suggesting the law could serve as a justification for not employing women. Commenter 11 asserts, in a cautionary tone, “They just won’t hire women anymore, I’m tellin’ you”, while Commenter 10 warns, “Good thing this only applies to public workers – if it extended to the private sector, imagine the female unemployment rate. Honestly, it’d be one step forward, two steps back.” In this case, the strength of the hypothetical argument is heightened by the modal marker “Honestly,” which lends credibility to the assumed “female unemployment rate.” From this perspective, rather than benefiting women, the law risks further excluding them from the labor market. One additional comment shifts the focus of critique away from gender and toward public sector labor itself. Commenter 9 writes, “Yeah, because civil servants already work so hard,” employing irony to critique prevailing perceptions of public workers and reinforcing a stereotype – frequently reproduced in neoliberal discourse – of civil servants as unproductive. All comments in this set show relatively modest engagement, with none receiving more than 32 likes. It is worth noting that although the law aims to ensure dignity for people who menstruate, the debate remains shaped by the logic of labor productivity and the subjugation of the suffering body to a rationalized, mechanical work regime. These discourses degrade the menstruating body, subjecting it to alienated endurance under the demands of production.

Let us examine how Commenter 12 engages in a knowledge-power dispute regarding menstruation and the Menstrual Leave Law:

**Commenter 12: “It should be for the private sector” WAKE UP. If this law passes, no one will hire women anymore. In fact, they already barely want to hire us because we have maternity leave, we’re the ones who care for the children and so on. Imagine with this law too?! There’s no point in passing palliative laws – address the root of the problem! Pass a law requiring 30%–40% of women in every company, and then we can think of something for women who suffer from cramps and the like...<sup>25</sup> (0 likes, 3 replies. Emphasis added.)**

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<sup>25</sup> In the original: “*Deveria ter pro serviço privado*” *ACORDEM, se essa lei for aprovada, ninguém mais contrata mulher, aliás já quase não querem nos contratar pq temos licença maternidade, somos nós que cuidados [sic] do*

In an attitudinal transactional move, Commenter 12 reuses – framed in quotation marks – a phrase from prior comments favoring expansion of the law (“It should be for the private sector”), reinforcing her critique through a deontic modality of injunction and, notably, capitalized emphasis: “WAKE UP.” This imperative is supported by two argumentative strategies: first, a comparison with maternity leave; second, an identificational construction of women rooted in the gendered division of labor, in which women are expected to assume caregiving responsibilities – “we’re the ones who care for the children and so on.” These evaluative claims lead to the conclusion that “no one will hire women anymore”, thus reiterating the law’s potential to reinforce labor market exclusion. The absence of likes on this comment suggests a lack of agreement from other users.

In the final segment – “There’s no point in passing palliative laws... address the root of the problem! Pass a law requiring 30%–40% women in every company...” – the commenter reframes the issue as primarily structural, aligning with neoliberal critiques of gender inequality in the labor market, including pay gaps. However, several comments take a different stance, validating the law and calling for its extension to the private sector:

**Commenter 13:** ❤️ Hoping it applies to everyone one day<sup>26</sup> (3 likes)

**Commenter 14: A step forward for all of society!** May we extend this benefit to all institutions, public and private. We need to **shed light** and share **more and more information**. Only then can we begin to **dismantle the taboo** surrounding *this very natural and important topic*.<sup>27</sup> (65 likes and 6 replies)

**Commenter 15:** And what about the rest of us? The women working under CLT contracts? The law **should cover all women, in all states**<sup>28</sup> (56 likes, 19 replies)

**Commenter 16: Every woman needs this leave – public servant or not**<sup>29</sup> (2 likes)

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*filho e etc, imagina com mais essa lei?! Não adianta fazer leis paliativas, mexam na origem do problema! Coloque uma lei que é obrigatório 30%40% de mulheres na empresa, aí sim podemos pensar algo para mulheres que sofrem de cólicas e afins...*

<sup>26</sup> In the original: ❤️ *torcendo pra valer pra todas um dia*

<sup>27</sup> In the original: *Avanço de toda sociedade! Que a gente consiga ampliar esse benefício para todas as instituições, públicas e privadas! Precisamos trazer luz e cada vez mais informações. Só assim, conseguiremos reduzir o tabu em torno desse tema tão natural e importante.*

<sup>28</sup> In the original: *E as outras mulheres? As que trabalham CLT? A lei deveria abranger todas as mulheres, em todos os estados*

<sup>29</sup> In the original: *Qualquer mulher precisa dessa licença, servidor publico ou não*

**Commenter 17: This should apply to ALL of BRAZIL<sup>30</sup> (16 likes)**

These non-transactional and admiring reactions validate the law's significance while emphasizing the need for it to include private sector workers. Commenter 13 uses both a multimodal element (heart emoji) and a mental process – “hoping” – to express optimism: “Hoping it applies to everyone one day.” Similar endorsements appear in comments 14 through 17, which highlight the importance of expansion: “extend this benefit to all institutions,” “should cover all women, in all states,” “public servant or not,” “all of BRAZIL.” While critical of the law's current scope, these comments legitimize its intent and advocate broader implementation.

In Commenter 14's post, the positive evaluative statement “A step forward for all of society” functions thematically, guiding the discussion toward broader social transformation: “shed light,” “share more information,” “dismantle the taboo,” “a natural and important topic.” By focusing on sociocultural change, the commenter discursively rewrites menstrual narratives (Sala, 2020) and uses information to challenge myths, taboos, and stigmas. With 65 likes, this post generated substantial engagement. Yet another socially oriented reaction is found in the widely circulated:

**Commenter 18: If men menstruated, this law would already be in place nationwide<sup>31</sup> (609 likes, 14 replies)**

Commenter 18 validates the law through a non-transactional reaction that critiques societal moral norms and patriarchal hierarchies. Using the hypothetical argument “If men menstruated,” the commenter suggests that such a law would already be universally implemented, ensuring dignity across sectors. While seemingly a decolonial perspective, the argument also reproduces a form of coloniality by privileging a binary view focused exclusively on gender, omitting an intersectional analysis. This is the most liked comment in the dataset, which underscores the urgency of developing intersectional approaches to the menstruation debate. Finally, Commenter 19 offers a wholly affirmative and emotive assessment of the law:

**Commenter 19: Wow. This is great. When I was 18, I worked as a civil servant at the Department of Agriculture and suffered terribly from menstrual cramps. If I'd had those days back then, I'd have been so grateful. 🍷<sup>32</sup> (8 likes and 1 reply)**

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<sup>30</sup> In the original: *Tinha que ser no BRASIL td*

<sup>31</sup> In the original: *Se homem menstruassem [sic] a Lei já era para o país todo*

<sup>32</sup> In the original: *Nossa. Que coisa boa. Aos 18 anos eu era funcionária pública, trabalhava na secretaria da Agricultura e sofria muito com cólicas menstruais. Se tivesse esses dias naquele tempo, eu teria agradecido muito 🍷*

Through a non-transactional response of admiration and praise, Commenter 19 evaluates the law positively – “This is great” – and reaffirms its importance with a hypothetical personal narrative: “If I’d had those days back then, I’d have been so grateful.” This affective appreciation associates menstrual leave with what Sala (2020) calls “bodily joy,” reinforcing its ethical and practical values for menstruating individuals.

## Concluding Remarks

Our aim in this text was to adopt a scientifically grounded, discursive-critical approach in support of an action-transformation project that challenges taboos, myths, and cultural stigmas surrounding menstruation. We sought to rewrite menstrual narratives through an informative-scientific lens, with the goal of promoting the dignity of people who menstruate. To that end, it is essential to consider the menstruating body through an intersectional perspective, recognizing that each body experiences and lives through the menstrual cycle in distinct ways. Consequently, there is no single body, no absolute truth, and no universal knowledge about menstruation.

In the analyzed comments, we observed narratives rooted in colonialist perspectives that silence, censor, and pathologize menstruation through religious, biomedical, and patriarchal discursive-ideological operations. These comments engage in disputes over knowledge-power concerning the Menstrual Leave Law – at times reaffirming colonial menstrual narratives, at others attempting to disrupt the notion that menstruation belongs exclusively to the private sphere. Menstrual taboos are entangled with feelings of shame and modesty, (re)produced and regulated by religious practices that associate menstruation with notions of decency. Proposing and implementing a menstrual leave policy brings visibility to a body that is not “meant” to be visible – one deemed private, censored, and invisible. These taboos, myths, and stigmas generate distorted understandings of menstruating bodies, operating primarily through emotions, perceptions, and affect. Discourses that position menstruation as a disease that disables, as something dirty, or as something that must remain hidden, are capitalist in nature – promoted largely by hygiene industries aiming to create consumer “needs” and desires.

The ongoing dispute over knowledge-power regarding menstrual leave – and, by extension, menstruation itself and the people who menstruate – remains laden with patriarchal, sexist, and colonialist meanings and practices. Its central effect is the perpetuation of a direct, hierarchical association between menstruation and women. This discursive operation is so pervasive that even efforts framed as decolonial often instrumentalize gender in ways that essentialize menstruation as “a women’s issue.” We observe this not only in user comments but more explicitly in the post captions (e.g., use of the pronoun they [feminine plural in Portuguese]), in hashtags (#women), and in the imagery accompanying the posts – depicting white, cisgender female bodies –



thus erasing both racial diversity and gender identity diversity (trans and non-binary individuals).

De-essentializing the menstruating body is a key component of the critical action and transformation project. The expression “people who menstruate” has increasingly become a focal point of debate – particularly in digital and social media spaces and within forums that approach menstrual health through critical, decolonial, and intersectional lenses (Gomes & Carvalho, 2025). This designation – “people who menstruate” – is primarily advocated by trans men and non-binary individuals who call for this language in public policy texts and legislative proposals that concern not only access to menstrual resources but also broader aspects of menstrual health (Gomes, 2023b). While no comments in our dataset addressed the diversity of menstruating bodies in the workplace, this absence is unsurprising: if the cisgender female menstruating body is (and must remain) invisible, the trans and non-binary menstruating body is not merely invisible – it is rendered nonexistent within the framework of the modern-colonial heteropatriarchal system.

## Acknowledgements

To the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), for funding this research.

GOMES, Maria Carmen Aires; CARVALHO, Alexandra Bittencourt de. *Corpos que menstruam no trabalho: análise de comentários reativos digitais sobre licença menstrual no Instagram*. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v. 69, 2025.

- *RESUMO: Partindo da perspectiva interseccional e decolonial (Maldonado-Torres, 2018, Akotirene, 2019; Collins, 2019, 2022; Rea, 2019; Sala, 2020; Cândido; Saliba, 2022; Vasquez, 2022), temos como objetivo analisar a maneira como os/as/es usuários/as/es reagem discursivamente aos saberes e poderes que atravessam os corpos das pessoas que menstruam, no espaço comentários do Instagram (Paveau, 2021; Gomes, 2022), em dois posts que tematizam a questão da Licença Menstrual, divulgados no perfil @Universa\_uol. Foram coletados os 20 primeiros comentários, usando como critérios a categoria das reações sociodiscursivas verbais não transacionais (Gomes, 2022). A disputa dos saberes-poderes sobre a Licença Menstrual, e por extensão, sobre a menstruação e as pessoas que menstruam, ainda é carregada de significações e práticas colonialistas, que inserem as questões menstruais em paradigmas biomédicos, patriarcais, sexistas, binários, tendo como principal efeito a relação direta e hierárquica que menstruar é coisa de mulher, e de mulher cis.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Reações Sociodiscursivas Verbais; ADCI; Licença Menstrual; Menstruação Decolonial; ODS.*

## Author Contributions (according to CRediT taxonomy)

**Maria Carmen Aires Gomes:** Conceptualization, Data Curation, Methodology, Project Administration, Supervision, Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing.

**Alexandra Bittencourt de Carvalho:** Visualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

## Data Availability Statement

All datasets supporting the findings of this study have been published within the article itself.

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Received on August 14, 2024

Approved on October 18, 2024