Jurnal Representamen Vol. 12 No. 2 Oktober 2026
Hal. 291-306
DOI:10.30996/representamen.v12i2.133838

The Construction of Menstruation in "The Period of Her" Movie

Veiga Octa Dewi Asmara[1], Windri Saifudin[2]
[1,2] Department of Communication Science, Universitas Pembangunan Negeri "Veteran" Jawa Timur
[1]22043010186@student.upnjatim.ac.id, [2]windri.saifudin.ilkom@upnjatim.ac.id

Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the discourse of menstruation in the film The Period of Her (2025). Menstruation is a biological process naturally experienced by women. However, society has not always perceived menstruation in this way. Instead, it has often been constructed through various stigmas and social norms that have shaped the way women's bodies were perceived. As a form of mass media, film played a role in representing and constructing the meaning of menstruation through its narratives, dialogues, and visual elements. Therefore, this study examined how The Period of Her constructed the discourse of menstruation. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a critical paradigm and Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, which consisted of three dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. The data were collected through documentation by identifying dialogues, visual representations, and cinematographic elements related to menstruation. The findings showed that The Period of Her constructed menstruation as a taboo subject that should not be openly discussed and as a factor that restricted women's participation in their daily activities.

Keywords: *Menstruation, Critical Discourse Analysis, The Period of Her film*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis wacana menstruasi dalam film *The Period of Her (2025)*. Menstruasi merupakan proses biologis yang secara alami dialami perempuan. Namun, masyarakat tidak selalu memaknai menstruasi secara demikian. Masyarakat masih sering dikonstruksikan melalui berbagai stigma dan norma sosial yang membentuk cara masyarakat memandang tubuh perempuan. Film sebagai media massa turut berperan dalam merepresentasikan dan membangun makna mengenai menstruasi melalui narasi, dialog, serta visual yang ditampilkan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana film *The Period of Her* membangun wacana menstruasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan paradigma kritis dan metode Analisis Wacana Kritis Norman Fairclough yang meliputi tiga dimensi, yaitu analisis teks, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosiokultural. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik dokumentasi dengan mengidentifikasi dialog, visual, dan unsur sinematografi yang berkaitan dengan menstruasi. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa wacana menstruasi dalam film *The Period of Her* menjadi suatu hal yang tabu untuk dibicarakan, termasuk menjadi penghambat perempuan dalam melakukan aktivitas sehari-hari.

Kata kunci: Menstruasi, Analisis Wacana Kritis, Film The Period of Her

INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is one of the most common biological experiences among women of reproductive age. Despite its biological nature, menstruation has never been understood merely as a physiological process. Across different societies, menstruation is embedded within cultural values that shape how individuals understand and respond to this experience. The social construction of menstruation shapes how individuals perceive and respond to menstrual experiences (Baidhowi, 2018). Consequently, menstruation often becomes associated with impurity, shame, emotional instability, and physical weakness rather than being recognized as a normal reproductive function.

This perspective can be understood through Douglas's concept of pollution behavior. According to Douglas (2001), something is considered dirty not because of its inherent nature, but because it is perceived as being out of place within an established social order. Reinforcing this argument, Newton (2016) contends that dirt and pollution are not intrinsic qualities of an object or behavior, rather, they emerge when society perceives them as violating culturally defined boundaries. This cultural interpretation transforms menstruation from a normal physiological process into a symbolic marker of contamination, reinforcing social norms that regulate women's bodies.

These cultural constructions contribute to the emergence of menstrual stigma. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2020) argued that menstrual stigma is sustained through taboos, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices that portray menstruation as embarrassing, dirty, and socially inappropriate. Rather than encouraging open discussion about menstrual health, many societies normalize silence by expecting women to conceal menstruation from public view. As a result, menstruation becomes not only a biological experience but also a social condition governed by expectations regarding how women should behave, communicate, and manage their bodies.

Such expectations are reflected in everyday communication practices. Women frequently avoid using the word menstruation directly and instead employ euphemistic expressions such as *datang bulan*, *halangan*, and *sedang M*. Rubinsky et al. (2020) argued that these linguistic practices function as communication strategies that maintain menstrual silence by replacing direct references with socially acceptable alternatives. Likewise, Bobel (2018) observed that terms such as feminine hygiene and sanitary products reinforce the assumption that menstruation is inherently unclean and therefore requires concealment. Consequently, language does not merely describe menstruation but actively participates in reproducing menstrual stigma.

The persistence of menstrual stigma has significant social consequences. Menstruating women are frequently perceived as physically weak, emotionally unstable, or incapable of participating fully in educational, occupational, religious, and sporting activities. These stereotypes often legitimize social restrictions imposed upon women during menstruation. Findings from Plan International's *Bloody Honest:* This is what boys say about menstruation (2022) demonstrates that menstrual stigma remains deeply rooted across different societies. The survey, which involved

4,127 boys and young men aged 15–24 from Brazil, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and Uganda, found that 37% believed menstruation should be kept secret. Furthermore, 55% associated menstruation with something "dirty," 38% described it as "disgusting," and 31% considered it "embarrassing." In Indonesia, the findings were particularly concerning: 58% of respondents believed that girls and women should not attend school or work while menstruating, and 73% believed they should not visit places of worship during their periods. These findings demonstrate that menstrual stigma extends beyond individual attitudes and is embedded in broader cultural beliefs that shape women's opportunities, participation, and everyday experiences.

As one of the most influential forms of mass communication, media play a crucial role in constructing and disseminating these meanings. Through narratives, language, characters, and visual symbols, media can reinforce dominant ideologies or challenge existing social norms. Previous studies have shown that menstruation is often represented through practices of concealment, euphemistic language, and the absence of visible menstrual blood, thereby reproducing the notion that menstruation should remain hidden from public view (Metreveli, 2023).

Film is one of the forms of mass communication that represents various social realities within society. As a medium of mass communication, film operates within social, economic, and political structures that enable the dissemination of information, entertainment, and cultural values to a broad audience (Habibie, 2018). Through its narratives, dialogues, characters, and visual elements, film constructs particular representations of social phenomena. Amalia et al., (2021) argue that film plays a significant role in shaping identity, fostering social understanding, and facilitating cultural transformation. Therefore, film functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium of communication through which values, ideologies, and particular perspectives are produced and disseminated to society.

In the Indonesian context, studies examining menstrual representation have primarily focused on sanitary pad advertisements rather than film. Indonesian sanitary pad advertisements frequently employ euphemistic expressions such as *datang bulan*, *lagi dapat*, or *sedang M*, while menstrual blood is commonly replaced with blue liquid to avoid explicit representation (Baidhowi, 2018). These representational strategies construct menstruation as something that should be managed discreetly and concealed from public view. Although these studies have contributed to understanding menstrual discourse in advertising, limited scholarly attention has been given to how Indonesian films represent menstruation and negotiate menstrual stigma. This gap is particularly important because film, as a narrative medium, offers greater opportunities to depict menstruation as a lived social experience situated within broader cultural and institutional contexts.

Against this background, The Period of Her (2025) provides a distinctive case for examining menstrual representation in Indonesian cinema. Directed collaboratively by Sarah Adilah, Yulinda Dwi Andriyani, Praditha Blifa, and Erlina Rakhmawati, the omnibus film presents four

interconnected stories exploring menstruation, reproductive health, gender relations, and the social regulation of women's bodies. Rather than portraying menstruation solely as a biological event, the film illustrates how cultural beliefs, institutional practices, and patriarchal norms shape women's everyday experiences. The narratives depict menstruation as a site of social negotiation, revealing both the persistence of menstrual stigma and the possibilities for resisting dominant gender ideologies.

By focusing on menstruation as a gendered discourse, this study contributes to gender communication scholarship in two ways. First, it extends the application of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to the study of menstrual representation in Indonesian cinema, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. Second, it demonstrates how film functions as a communicative space where menstrual stigma, reproductive expectations, and patriarchal values are simultaneously reproduced and challenged through language, visual representation, and narrative practices.

To examine how menstrual discourse operates in The Period of Her, this study employs Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its analytical framework. Unlike content analysis or semiotic analysis, which primarily focus on what is represented in a text, Fairclough's approach emphasizes how discourse functions through the interrelationship of three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, this study analyzes how the film constructs meanings of menstruation through dialogues, visual representations, and narrative structures. At the level of discursive practice, it examines how these meanings are produced and circulated by the filmmakers and how they are interpreted by audiences. Finally, at the level of social practice, the study relates the film's menstrual discourse to broader social realities, including menstrual stigma, cultural norms, and societal perceptions of women's bodies.

Based on this perspective, this study investigates how The Period of Her constructs menstrual discourse through its narratives, dialogues, and visual representations. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following question: How is menstruation represented in The Period of Her (2025) through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the construction of menstrual discourse in the Indonesian omnibus film The Period of Her (2025). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research focused on interpreting meanings embedded in language, visual representations, and social contexts rather than measuring variables quantitatively. The study adopted a critical paradigm, which views media texts as products of power relations and ideological practices that shape public understanding of social reality.

The primary data consisted of dialogues, visual scenes, subtitles, cinematographic elements, and narrative sequences from the four segments of The Period of Her (2025): Romansa Kaparat, Swim

Swimming to the Shore, and Not Dead Enough. These segments were selected because each presents different experiences of menstruation and women's reproductive lives while collectively illustrating various forms of menstrual stigma in Indonesian society. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, reports published and relevant documents discussing menstrual stigma, gender, media representation, and Critical Discourse Analysis.

Data were collected through documentation techniques. The researcher repeatedly watched the film to identify scenes related to menstruation, reproductive health, gender relations, and social restrictions experienced by female characters. Dialogues and subtitles were transcribed, while visual elements, including camera angles, facial expressions, body movements, settings, and symbolic objects, were documented to support textual interpretation. Relevant literature was also reviewed to contextualize the findings within broader discussions of menstruation, media, and gender studies.

The data were analyzed using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which conceptualizes discourse as a relationship between text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough dalam Eriyanto, 2008). At the textual level, the analysis examined linguistic choices, dialogue, visual signs, symbols, metaphors, and narrative structures that represented menstruation. Particular attention was given to the use of euphemistic expressions, evaluative language, and visual symbolism that contributed to constructing meanings surrounding menstruation and women's bodies.

The second dimension, discursive practice, explored how the film produced and circulated meanings about menstruation. The social practice analysis related the film's representations to broader socio-cultural contexts in Indonesia, including menstrual stigma, patriarchal values, cultural norms, and institutional practices surrounding menstruation. The findings were interpreted alongside previous studies on menstrual stigma, feminist communication, menstrual health management, and gender inequality to explain how discourse operates within broader structures of power.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, data interpretation was supported through theoretical triangulation. The analysis integrated Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis with Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, Goffman's theory of stigma, and Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist perspective. These theoretical perspectives enabled a comprehensive analysis of how menstrual discourse is socially constructed, how stigma toward menstruation is reproduced, and how the film challenges dominant patriarchal understandings of women's bodies. The analysis identified three dominant constructions of menstruation in The Period of Her: menstruation as a taboo, menstruation as a barrier to women's participation in public life, and resistance to menstrual stigma.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constructing Menstruation as a Taboo

Biomedical literature generally views menstruation as a biological phenomenon associated with pathological conditions of the female body (Chrisler & Robledo, 2012). The biomedical perspective, which has long dominated menstruation studies, primarily focuses on biological and medical aspects, such as the role of hormones in reproduction, hormonal changes throughout the menstrual cycle, physical symptoms that occur, and medical conditions such as premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). In contrast to the biomedical perspective that positions menstruation as a biological process, the feminist social science perspective views menstruation as an experience shaped by social and cultural contexts (Kissling, 2006). Therefore, menstruation is not only a biological experience but also a social construction influenced by cultural meanings and power relations.

The social construction of menstruation as a taboo subject is not only present in everyday life but is also represented in the film The Period of Her. Rather than portraying menstruation only as a biological event, the film illustrates how menstrual experiences become shaped by social norms and stigma. The construction of menstruation as a negative experience first appears in the Romansa Kaparat segment through the character Wati's reaction when she realizes that she is menstruating. After experiencing physical discomfort and seeing menstrual blood, Wati states, *"Kesel rasane, kayak dihukum,"* translated as *"Tiap menstruasi rasanya seperti dihukum"* ("Every menstruation feels like being punished"). Although the original dialogue and translation differ linguistically, both construct menstruation as an unpleasant experience associated with hardship. The metaphor of "punishment" is significant because it shifts menstruation from a natural bodily process into an experience perceived as a burden.

Figure 1. Wati Experiencing Menstrual Pain

From the perspective of Fairclough's discursive practice, the representation of menstruation as "punishment" is closely related to the filmmakers' intentions in constructing the narrative. In an interview, director Praditha Blifa explained that *Romansa Kaparat* was inspired by stories of women in her surrounding environment who were blamed for infertility because society, particularly men, often perceived a woman's success through her ability to bear children. As she stated,

"keberhasilan perempuan tuh harusnya jangan cuma dipandang dari apakah dia bisa melahirkan, punya anak atau tidak." (Praditha Blifa, 16 Juli 2026)

Blifa further explained that Wati perceives menstruation as a form of punishment not because of the biological process itself, but because she is under constant pressure from her husband, family, and community to become pregnant. She noted,

"Tapi karena dia mendapat tekanan, jadi setiap kali menstruasi datang, dia merasa seperti sedang dihukum karena belum bisa punya anak" (Praditha Blifa, 16 Juli 2026)

These statements demonstrate that the metaphor of menstruation as punishment is a deliberate narrative strategy employed to criticize patriarchal expectations that define women's value through their reproductive capacity.

The metaphor of menstruation as "punishment" reflects how negative meanings surrounding women's bodies become internalized through social discourse. According to Ussher (2006), menstruation is often constructed through cultural narratives that associate it with weakness, emotional instability, and bodily inconvenience. This process corresponds with Berger and Luckmann's (1991) concept of social construction, where meanings become normalized through repeated interactions and cultural representations. Thus, menstrual experiences are shaped not only by biological conditions but also by social frameworks that determine whether menstruation is perceived as acceptable or shameful.

Within the same segment, menstrual discourse is also connected to broader expectations regarding women's reproductive roles. The tendency to associate women's bodies with reproductive success contributes to the assumption that women bear primary responsibility for fertility. However, medical evidence indicates that infertility is not exclusively caused by female factors. The World Health Organization (WHO) explains that infertility may result from male factors, female factors, combined factors, or unexplained causes (2025). Studies also show that male factors contribute to approximately 40–50% of infertility cases, with 20–30% occurring as the sole cause (Agarwal et al., 2025). Therefore, blaming women for reproductive difficulties reflects not medical reality but a social construction that places disproportionate responsibility for reproduction on women.

The construction of menstruation as a taboo subject is also represented in the Swim Swimming to the Shore segment. Unlike Romansa Kaparat, which presents menstruation in relation to reproductive pressure, this segment illustrates how menstrual stigma is produced from adolescence through social interactions surrounding menarche. Nisa's first menstruation is represented not merely as a biological transition but as an experience shaped by shame, surveillance, and social expectations.

Figure 2. Nisa Experiencing Her First Menstruation

The statement "Lihat kakinya Nisa!" ("Look at Nisa's leg!") when menstrual blood becomes visible transforms menstruation into a public spectacle. Rather than being understood as a normal bodily process, menstrual blood becomes an object of attention and judgment. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2020) explain that visible menstrual stains often function as a source of social discredit because women are expected to maintain control over the visibility of their bodies. Therefore, the

shame experienced by Nisa emerges not from menstruation itself but from social meanings attached to menstrual visibility.

The visual representation of blood running down Nisa's leg reinforces this stigma by presenting menstruation as a loss of bodily privacy. Ussher (2006) argues that regulation of women's reproductive bodies begins from menarche, when menstrual blood is frequently constructed as something that must be concealed. Nisa's decision to return to the pool to hide the blood demonstrates the internalization of these expectations. Her response reflects Berger and Thomas's (1991) argument that social norms become internalized through repeated exposure until individuals reproduce them through their own actions.

The stigma reaches its strongest expression when Nisa's classmates label her as "dirty" after seeing her menstrual pad. This moment demonstrates that stigma extends beyond menstrual blood to objects associated with menstruation. According to Goffman (1963), stigma emerges when certain attributes are socially defined as undesirable and become a basis for exclusion. In this case, the label "dirty" transforms menstruation into a marker that distinguishes Nisa from her peers.

Figure 3. Ridicule from Nisa's Peers

The representation in Swim Swimming to the Shore reflects broader social conditions in Indonesia, where menstrual stigma and limited knowledge continue to affect adolescent girls' experiences. UNICEF Indonesia and Burnet Institute (2015) reported that many girls experience shame, fear of leakage, and anxiety about being mocked during menstruation, which may affect their participation in school activities. These findings demonstrate that menstrual restrictions are not solely caused by physical symptoms but are also produced through social expectations surrounding menstrual visibility and female bodies

A similar pattern of concealment appears in Not Dead Enough, where menstruation is represented through indirect language. After experiencing a gender swap, Kempes encounters menstruation, but the experience is not explicitly named. When Pak Karso notices the blood stain on Kempes's sarong, he says, *"Pak Kempes, sampean tembus!"* ("Pak Kempes, you leaked"), before clarifying, *"Sampean M"* ("You men"). The Indonesian subtitle maintains this indirect expression as "Kamu men."

Figure 4. The Use of Euphemism in Referring to Menstruation

The use of "M" illustrates how menstruation remains a sensitive topic that is often avoided through euphemism. Allan dan Burridge (2006), explain that euphemisms function as

alternative expressions for concepts considered uncomfortable or inappropriate to mention directly. In this scene, the avoidance of the word menstruation reinforces the perception that menstrual experiences require linguistic concealment.

Beyond language, the segment also represents menstruation through physical discomfort. Kempes describes pain in his back, stomach, and head, illustrating that menstruation involves bodily experiences that may affect daily activities. Research on dysmenorrhea shows that menstrual pain can influence women's quality of life, including educational, occupational, and social activities (Chen et al., 2018). However, Pak Karso's response that menstruation is *"takdir"* and *"kodrat"* ("destiny" and "nature") frames menstrual pain as an unavoidable characteristic of femininity.

The gender-swap narrative becomes significant because it shifts menstruation from being understood as an exclusively female biological experience to an experience through which femininity is socially constructed. Beauvoir (2011) argues that *"one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,"* emphasizing that womanhood is shaped through social norms and cultural expectations rather than biology alone. Although Kempes remains biologically male, once he menstruates he is immediately subjected to the same expectations commonly imposed on women, including concealing menstruation, enduring pain without complaint, and accepting it as *kodrat*. This suggests that what defines the social experience of menstruation is not merely the body itself but the cultural meanings attached to that body.

This representation reflects Young's (2005) concept of menstrual etiquette, which describes how women are socialized to manage menstruation privately and accept discomfort as part of feminine embodiment. Through Kempes's experience, the film reveals that menstruation is simultaneously recognized as a biological reality and controlled through social expectations regarding how it should be discussed and experienced.

Overall, The Period of Her constructs menstruation as a taboo through interconnected representations of suffering, shame, concealment, and restricted communication. The film demonstrates that menstrual stigma does not originate from the biological process itself but from social meanings attached to women's bodies. Through language, visual representation, and interpersonal interactions, menstruation is transformed into an experience that must be hidden, managed, and normalized within particular social boundaries.

Constructing Menstruation as a Barrier to Women's Participation

Menstruation is often associated with limitations on women's physical abilities due to symptoms such as pain, fatigue, and discomfort. However, menstrual experiences vary between individuals, and menstruation does not automatically reduce women's capacity to perform daily activities. McNulty et al., (2020) explain that the relationship between the menstrual cycle and physical performance differs considerably among individuals, indicating that menstruation cannot be generalized as a condition that inevitably restricts women's activities. Nevertheless, social perceptions frequently construct menstruation as a

limitation by associating it with weakness, vulnerability, and reduced capability. As a result, menstruation becomes not only a biological experience but also a social category that influences women's participation in public and private spaces.

This construction is represented in The Period of Her, particularly in the Swim Swimming to the Shore segment. Through Nisa's experience after her first menstruation, the film illustrates how menstrual stigma develops into restrictions on women's participation in sports. When the coach tells Nisa, *"Justru, karena itu darah menstruasi kotor, kamu sementara jangan berenang"* ("Precisely because menstrual blood is dirty, you should not swim for now"), menstruation is framed as a condition that makes women unsuitable for physical activity. The statement does not refer to Nisa's actual physical condition but relies on the assumption that menstruation naturally decreases women's ability to participate in sports.

Figure 5. Nisa Receiving a Restriction from Swimming During Menstruation

The statement *"dampaknya limitmu menurun"* ("its impact will reduce your limit") further constructs menstruation as a biological weakness that automatically affects performance. However, scientific evidence does not support a universal decline in physical ability during menstruation. Instead, menstrual symptoms and their effects vary among individuals (McNulty et al., 2020). The film therefore reveals how social beliefs about menstruation can transform an individual biological experience into a generalized limitation imposed on women's bodies.

These findings are supported by the study of Witkos et al., (2022) which demonstrated that swimming does not directly have a negative effect on the menstrual cycle. Menstrual disturbances among athletes are more closely associated with changes in training intensity, frequency, and duration, whereas swimming itself has been reported to help alleviate several symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Therefore, the scene generalizes reduced physical performance as an inevitable experience shared by all women, thereby constructing menstruation as an obstacle to participation in sports.

The restriction experienced by Nisa is further reinforced when menstruation becomes connected to institutional regulations. Nisa faces a dilemma between sports requirements and social expectations regarding women's bodies. Her statement, *"Terbuka salah, tertutup juga salah"* ("Being uncovered is wrong, being covered is also wrong"), reflects the conflicting demands placed on women. On one side, competitive swimming requires specific clothing standards, while on the other side, social and religious expectations require women who have reached puberty to cover their bodies. Thus, the obstacle faced by Nisa does not originate from menstruation itself but from social meanings attached to female bodies after menstruation.

Figure 6. Nisa Expresses Her Dilemma

Through Berger and Luckmann's (1991) perspective, this process demonstrates how social reality is constructed through repeated interactions and institutional practices. Menstruation first becomes associated with restrictions through social discourse, then becomes normalized through institutional rules, and eventually influences how women understand and manage their own bodies. In this context, menstruation functions as a social marker that changes the way women's participation in public spaces is regulated.

The representation is connected to broader social conditions, in which women in various fields continue to negotiate between self-expression, institutional regulations, and prevailing social norms. In sports, for example, women's participation is influenced not only by their physical abilities but also by how their bodies are assessed through certain rules and expectations. This condition can be seen in the case of Indonesian judo athlete Miftahul Jannah, who was disqualified from the 2018 Asian Para Games for maintaining the use of a hijab during competition, while the International Judo Federation (IJF) prohibited head coverings on safety grounds (Antara News, 2018). Although the context differs from the menstrual experience represented in the film, the case reflects a similar pattern in which women's bodies become a site where various rules and social norms intersect, affecting their opportunities to participate in public spaces.

A similar construction appears in the Not Dead Enough segment, when interaction between Kempes and Watik shows that menstruation can become a basis for social expectations placed on women in fulfilling their roles as wives.

Figure 7. Watik Refusing Sexual Activity Due to Menstruation

The segment also illustrates how menstruation becomes connected to expectations regarding women's roles within marriage. When Watik refuses sexual activity because she is menstruating, Kempes responds by stating that women should serve their husbands. This dialogue reflects patriarchal assumptions that position women's bodies as instruments for fulfilling marital and domestic responsibilities. In this context, menstruation is constructed as an obstacle not because of its biological effects alone, but because it disrupts social expectations regarding women's availability and obligations within marital relationships.

The gender role enforcement represented through Kempes reflects broader social conditions in which women's bodily autonomy remains contested, particularly within intimate relationships. Such representations are connected to

persistent gender-based violence and unequal power relations within households. Catatan Tahunan (CATAHU) Komnas Perempuan tahun 2025 indicates that violence against wives remains one of the most frequently reported forms of gender-based violence in the personal sphere, demonstrating that women's bodies continue to be vulnerable to control and restriction within unequal relationships.

Within patriarchal societies, women's refusal of sexual relations due to certain conditions, including menstruation, is often viewed not as an expression of bodily autonomy but as a failure to fulfill their roles as wives. Sulistyawan et al., (2023) explain that marital sexuality is still frequently perceived as an obligation of wives toward husbands, which reinforces unequal power relations and limits women's ability to determine boundaries over their own bodies.

The representation of restrictions on women's activities in *The Period of Her* demonstrates the film's critique of how society regulates and interprets women's bodies. The film presents menstruation not merely as a biological process but as a social experience shaped by stigma, norms, and institutional expectations. Through these representations, the film shows that limitations experienced by women during menstruation are not solely caused by biological conditions, but also by social constructions that restrict women's participation in both public and private spaces

Overall, The Period of Her constructs menstruation as a barrier to women's activities through different social contexts. The Swim Swimming to the Shore segment represents menstruation as a limitation on women's participation in sports through institutional rules and assumptions about physical weakness. Meanwhile, Not Dead Enough presents menstruation as a challenge to women's domestic roles within patriarchal relationships. These representations demonstrate that the restrictions experienced by women during menstruation are not solely produced by biological processes but by social constructions that regulate women's bodies, behaviors, and participation in both public and private spaces.

Negotiating Menstrual Stigma through Resistance

Representations of menstruation in media have often been dominated by narratives that associate menstruation with shame, discomfort, and restrictions on women. These representations contribute to maintaining menstrual stigma by positioning menstruation as a private experience that should be concealed from public spaces. However, alongside increasing awareness of women's health and rights, alternative discourses have emerged to challenge these perceptions by presenting menstruation as a normal biological experience that deserves open discussion. This effort is reflected in menstrual activism, a movement that challenges menstrual stigma by bringing previously hidden menstrual experiences into public discourse. Bobel dan Fahs (2020) explain that menstrual activism seeks to expose and question the social meanings attached to menstruation, including the aspects of the female body that have traditionally been considered inappropriate to display.

Figure 8. Nisa's Resistance Against Menstrual Stigma

This form of resistance is represented in the *Swim Swimming to the Shore* segment when Nisa loses her opportunity to compete in a swimming competition because she is menstruating. After being removed from the school's swimming team, Nisa stands in front of a display board containing her achievements and wipes menstrual blood from a used pad onto the board. Without dialogue, the scene constructs meaning through visual action, body movement, and symbolism. The act transforms menstrual blood, which was previously represented as something shameful and hidden, into a visible form of protest against the social rules that restricted her participation.

The action also demonstrates a reversal of the stigma construction shown throughout the segment. Previously, menstruation was associated with secrecy, embarrassment, and limitations on women's activities. However, Nisa's decision to publicly display menstrual blood challenges these meanings by reclaiming control over the representation of her body. The blood no longer functions as a symbol of shame but becomes a medium for expressing resistance against the norms that define menstruation as unacceptable in public spaces.

Nisa's resistance can be understood through Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist perspective, particularly the concept of women as *The Other*. Beauvoir (2011) argues that women are often positioned as the Other because their identities are constructed through social standards established by dominant groups. This position is reflected when Nisa is excluded from the swimming competition not because of her ability as an athlete, but because her menstruating body is considered incompatible with the expectations attached to female bodies. Her identity is therefore reduced from an athlete with achievements to a body regulated by social norms.

However, Beauvoir also emphasizes that individuals possess the freedom to define themselves and respond to limiting conditions. Freedom does not mean the absence of oppression, but the ability to act and create meaning within existing circumstances. In this context, Nisa's action represents an attempt to reclaim agency over her body and challenge the expectation that women should passively accept menstrual stigma. By displaying menstrual blood publicly, she rejects the idea that menstruation should remain hidden and redefines her body as a subject capable of resistance.

This act also reflects Beauvoir's concept of transcendence, which refers to the effort to move beyond identities and limitations imposed by social structures (Rohmah et al., 2021). Through her action, Nisa attempts to move beyond the position of the stigmatized female body and construct a new meaning of menstruation. The blood that was previously associated with shame is transformed into a symbol of resistance against social norms

that restrict women's participation. Thus, Nisa's resistance represents an effort to move from the position of The Other toward becoming an autonomous subject who determines the meaning of her own body.

The representation of Nisa's resistance reflects the broader transformation of menstrual discourse in society. For a long time, menstruation has been treated as a private and sensitive issue that should not be openly discussed. Such perceptions have contributed to various forms of discrimination, including restrictions on women's participation in education, sports, and public activities. Through the character of Nisa, The Period of Her challenges this dominant discourse by presenting menstruation as an experience that should not become a basis for limiting women's opportunities.

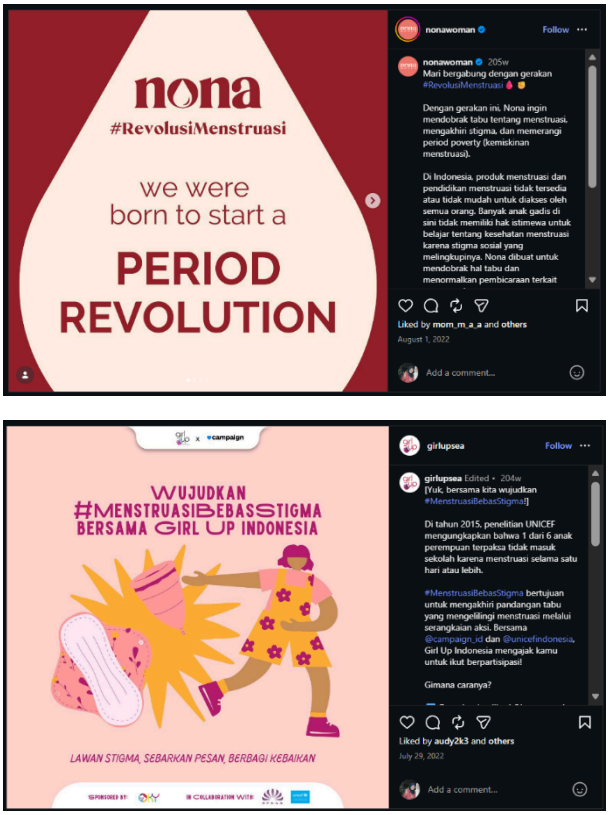
The counter-discourse presented in *The Period of Her* is also related to the filmmakers' intention to represent diverse experiences of women and challenge dominant perceptions surrounding women's bodies. Sarah Adilah, one of the directors of the film, stated that "

"pilihan itu ada dan perempuan berhak untuk memilih, dan tidak ada yang salah dengan pilihan itu"

She further explained that the four stories in *The Period of Her* are not only about women but also about how society views and treats women in different situations. This statement indicates that the film was produced as a discursive space to question social judgments and norms imposed on women's experiences. Through various narratives of menstruation, the film attempts to shift the understanding of women's bodies from objects regulated by social expectations into subjects who possess agency and the ability to define their own experiences.

This transformation is also visible in contemporary menstrual activism in Indonesia. Various campaigns have attempted to challenge menstrual stigma by promoting education and open discussions about menstrual health. Initiatives such as #RevolusiMenstruasi by Nona Woman and #MenstruasiBebasStigma by Girl Up SEA demonstrate how menstruation is increasingly discussed as an issue related to reproductive rights, gender equality, and women's participation in society. These movements show a shift from viewing menstruation as a private matter toward understanding it as a social issue shaped by cultural values and gender relations.

Figure 10. Menstrual Activism Campaigns in Indonesia



The resistance represented by Nisa in The Period of Her aligns with this changing discourse

surrounding menstruation. Through the act of publicly displaying menstrual blood, the film does not merely portray individual resistance but also produces an alternative understanding of menstruation. The film challenges the idea that menstruation is something that must be hidden, controlled, or used as a reason to restrict women. Instead, it presents menstruation as a bodily experience that can become a source of awareness, agency, and resistance against social stigma.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the discourse of menstruation representation in *The Period of Her* using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The findings demonstrate that menstruation in the film is represented not merely as a biological process but as a social experience shaped by cultural norms, gender relations, and institutional practices. The film reveals that menstrual stigma is constructed through narratives of shame, concealment, social control, and gendered expectations, which position menstruation as a limitation on women's participation in social spaces.

Furthermore, the study shows that *The Period of Her* does not only reproduce dominant discourses surrounding menstrual stigma but also presents a counter-discourse through representations of resistance. Nisa's actions demonstrate how women can challenge socially imposed meanings of menstruation and reclaim agency over their own bodies. These findings highlight that menstrual experiences are not determined solely by biological conditions but are influenced by broader social, cultural, and power relations.

Theoretically, this study contributes to communication studies by expanding the application of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis in examining how media construct and negotiate meanings related to women's bodily experiences. The findings emphasize that film functions not only as a representation of reality but also as a discursive space where ideologies, social norms, and power relations are reproduced and contested.

Practically, this study highlights the role of media in shaping public understanding of menstruation. Film representations can contribute to reducing menstrual stigma by presenting menstruation as a normal bodily experience rather than a source of shame or exclusion. Therefore, this research provides insights for media practitioners and filmmakers to develop more inclusive narratives that support gender equality, reproductive health awareness, and women's bodily autonomy.

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