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presence or absence of men's houses is tied with a number of other aspects of female interaction. Where a culture promotes a kind of house for the more or less use of men, there tends not to be a special period for newweds. Societies where men's houses also tend to treat extramarital affairs on the part of men more leniently does the same behavior on the part of women. Where no men's house exists, the honor and single standard of extramarital activity are more likely to prevail.

**MENSTRUAL TABOOS**

Some kind of restriction on the behavior of a menstruating woman is common across cultures. However, societies differ regarding the nature and severity of these constraints. In Tanzania, when a Nyakyusa woman is menstruating, her husband keeps his distance. If a man flouts this taboo, his legs may begin to hurt and become swollen. Or he may become very tired and unable to run with any speed. His body may also become red and his stomach painful. The Nyakyusa insist on the isolation of women during menstruation because they believe that menstruating women are filthy. In New Mexico, menstruating Zuni women isolate themselves in specially built menstrual houses, where they cook for themselves, eating on dishes reserved for menstruating women. Andamanese women are prohibited from having sexual relations or else their arms and legs will swell. And in New Guinea, a menstruating Wogeo woman should not have contact with another person. She should not touch her own skin with her fingernails, and she must also cut with a fork instead of her fingers for a few days. These are examples of menstrual taboos, that is, culturally patterned constraints on the activities of menstruating women.

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as bows or fishing equipment that are employed in subsistence, war, or ritual activities. Even more extreme are taboos prohibiting menstruating women from cooking for men. Finally, in some societies women are required to live in special huts while they are menstruating. Given the patterning of menstrual taboos across cultures, then, if women remain in menstrual huts during menstruation, they are also constrained by all of the remaining menstrual taboos. Similarly, where the most severe taboo in a culture prevents a woman from cooking for men while she is menstruating, other taboos also forbid her touching male property, engaging in certain personal behaviors, or having sexual intercourse, but she is not required to live in a menstrual hut. If the most restrictive taboo is upon touching male possessions, then a woman is prohibited from

exhibiting certain personal behaviors or engaging in sexual intercourse, but she can cook for men and does not retire to a hut when menstruating. Finally, in societies where the behavior of menstruating women is circumscribed, they are nevertheless permitted to use men's possessions and cook for men and live in a separate hut. For example, a Miao woman of China is considered impure while menstruating and is, therefore, dangerous to men and offensive to the spirits. A menstruating woman, as a result, must avoid walking in a man's clothes or a man himself while menstruating. Nor can she place her shoes in a place that has religious significance. She must burn incense around any person, place, or object that she has polluted and wash herself and her garments when her menstrual period is

Variations in menstrual taboos follow a predictable pattern. Thus, if particular taboos are viewed as ranging from more to less trivial, then any culture that imposes a taboo of a particular level of severity also imposes all the less severe taboos besides. In societies that explicitly restrict the activities of menstruating women, the least severe taboo is against sexual intercourse. Other taboos of the less trivial taboos are against certain personal behaviors on the part of a woman. For instance, a female who is menstruating may be prohibited from eating certain foods, scratching herself, laughing loudly, and the like. Still more severe are rules prohibiting contact with anything belonging to males, especially implements such



Love girls in Zaire at celebration of first menstruation.

Nor should a menstruating woman engage in sexual relations for fear of causing a variety of illnesses. Thus, the most severe taboo imposed upon the Manchu female has to do with the prohibition against touching male possessions. She is also required to observe all of the less severe taboos.

Some social scientists believe that menstrual taboos are a manifestation of male fear of castration. In this view, where castration anxiety is intense, menstrual taboos will be severe. Menstrual taboos have also been explained as a male strategy to control women. Both of these interpretations of menstrual taboos depend upon assumptions about the psychological makeup of males that are not universally accepted. A related interpretation of menstrual taboos proposes that males are jealous of female reproductive functions and impose menstrual restrictions as a way of compensating for their envy by disparaging women. Since menstrual taboos are not universal, an explanation is required for why men in some cultures are more envious of a woman's ability to have a baby than are men in other societies. A final explanation for menstrual taboos suggests that these restrictions are more likely to occur in societies that emphasize male-female differences. In this view, the taboos serve to highlight and intensify these distinctions.

In Western societies, where women tend to have few children and do not nurse their babies, menstruation is a regular and familiar monthly occurrence. But where women have babies at regular intervals and then nurse their children, sometimes for years, menstruation is a much less usual event. This is because menstruation stops both during pregnancy and during nursing as a result of the influence of female hormones. It is also the case that bleeding, which is generally a sign of illness or injury, evokes anxiety on the part of human beings. It is possible, therefore, that taboos on menstruation simply reflect a response to the unusual circumstance of female bleeding. The fact that a number of cultures re-

gard menstrual blood as dangerous is consistent with this view of menstrual taboos.

Some cultures place no explicit prohibition on a menstruating woman. Among the Mbuti pygmies of central Africa, there are no formal prohibitions against having sexual relations while a woman is menstruating. A woman is obliged to inform her partner if she is having her period, however, so that he will be able to decide whether or not he wishes to sleep with her. In some societies, menstruation causes some embarrassment, but is not surrounded by explicit taboos. Sinal females of Oceania are embarrassed by menstrual blood and never refer directly to menstruation. Men also believe that the term *menstruation* is too strong a word to be used conversationally. If a man talks about menstruation in front of other males, they are ashamed and say that he must spend too much time with women since he knows as much as he does about such things. Women stay in their houses while they are menstruating and attempt to check the bleeding by applying heated leaves to the abdomen. Nevertheless, people are not hesitant about using euphemistic references to refer to menstruation, saying that a woman has "gone to the moon," for instance. A Manus girl of Oceania taught to hide the fact that she is menstruating and men are unaware that women do menstruate every month, claiming that, if that is the case in other societies, then Manus females are different.

In one human culture, menstruation is indicated by adult males. Thus, a Wogeo man will occasionally cut and draw blood from the penis when he is engaging in any potentially dangerous activity. He is then said to be "menstruating" and is also required to observe the customs associated with menstruation.

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MODESTY

Across the animal kingdom, physical appearance provides many cues to a creature's status, intentions, approachability, and so on. Human beings are no exception, and an important feature of self-presentation for members of our own species entails the desire to maintain a modest demeanor in the presence of