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**UNDERSTANDING AS COPING:  
A GROUNDED THEORY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF  
PREMENSTRUAL CHANGES**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts in Psychology at Massey University.

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### Abstract

Previous psychological research into premenstrual changes has tended to operate from a biomedical perspective and employ a positivist (or scientific) approach. The present study utilises a qualitative approach, the grounded theory method, as a means of collecting and analysing data. Ten women were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide approach. These women were asked questions centred around four areas; (1) What sorts of premenstrual changes do you experience?, (2) In what ways do you think your life is influenced by these changes?, (3) How do you cope with and manage these changes?, and (4) What changes would you like to see that would help you and/or other women cope with these changes? The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using grounded theory techniques. A grounded theory of the women's premenstrual experiences - experiential learning and perceived control - is presented and the implications of this theory for future research and as a therapeutic tool are outlined.

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## Preface

The idea that women experience various physical, emotional and behaviour changes during their menstrual cycle has evolved over time. This evolution has been reflected by the upsurge in interest in the possible changes women experience just before menstruation. Terms used to describe these changes - premenstrual tension (PMT) (Frank, 1931), premenstrual syndrome (PMS) (Dalton, 1977) and, more recently, Late Luteal Phase Dysphoric Disorder (LLPDD) (American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, third edition revised, 1987) - reflect this interest and also point to the dominance of the biomedical model as a way of conceptualising and studying these changes. Only since the 1970's have other perspectives (such as sociological and feminist research) emerged to challenge this view. Ways in which menstrual related changes have been conceptualised and studied are gender specific and applicable to all women. It is therefore important that these ways are examined and understood as they have far reaching implications.

In the present study women's experiences of changes just before menstruation (premenstrual changes) are explored using a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Specifically, ten women were interviewed about their premenstrual experiences. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the grounded theory approach.

Ways in which premenstrual changes have been conceptualised and studied are presented in Chapter One. This chapter highlights the dominance of the biomedical perspective and the use of quantitative methods, and outlines various criticisms of this view. Ecological and social psychological perspectives are presented as more recent ways of conceptualising premenstrual changes.

The implications various trends in the literature have had on the present study are discussed in Chapter Two and Three. Chapter Two offers a rationale for studying premenstrual changes qualitatively. In Chapter Three the reasons for using the grounded theory approach to collect and analyze data are presented. The various data analysis

procedures associated with this approach and used in the present study, are outlined. The method of data collection is discussed in Chapter Four.

The findings of the study are presented in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five offers an outline of the various premenstrual changes the women talked about. A grounded theory of the women's premenstrual experiences is discussed in Chapter Six.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, conclusions about the present study are made and implications for this research suggested.