

The Discursive Construction of Menstruation within Puberty Education

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Abstract

Menstruation is a significant milestone in a woman's life, signifying the onset of puberty and the journey into womanhood. Yet research suggests that the construction of menstruation has many women feeling uncertain and negative about menstruation, and what it means for them. Within the research literature I found four dominant discourses that construct our understandings of menstruation; menstruation as a hygiene crisis that needs rigid management, menstruation as a shameful secret that must be concealed, menstruation as biological and medical where the purpose of menstruation is restricted to pregnancy or illness, and menstruation as constitutive of womanhood in terms of motherhood, and femininity.

My review of the research literature led me to design a project to examine the ways menstruation is currently constructed within puberty education, with a particular interest in the various discourses presented to young women. I look at how the girls take up and/or resist these discourses as well as look at the subjectivities made available from them. Finally I examine the ways a wider variety of discourses can be made available and in turn a greater range of subjectivities.

As a feminist poststructuralist, I am looking specifically at issues of gender and sexuality, and how meaning and knowledge is constructed through language and discourse. With this as my theoretical framework, I observed three lessons, each teacher's specific lesson on menstruation, and a concluding joint girl-only lesson, within a puberty unit of a New Zealand intermediate school, conducted individual interviews with the two teachers and focus group

interviews with two groups of five female students. The field notes I gathered and the transcripts of the interviews provide the data of this research.

Using a discourse analysis approach to examine my data I was able to show the four dominant discourses were still present in the teaching of menstruation at the study school. I also found three discourses that, although not new, appear to be under examined within the construction of menstruation. These discourses of dread, consumerism and celebration may contribute to the dominant constructions of menstruation and/or offer ways to challenge and subvert these constructions. By making visible these discourses and the ways they construct menstruation, I am not looking to locate the 'correct' way to teach or understand menstruation. However, I argue that by supporting young women and their teachers to critically analyse the various discourses that shape our understandings of menstruation, we may create opportunities to challenge and resist the dominant constructions as well as open up a wider range of subjectivities.

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Chapter One: Introduction.

In 2004 as part of a University of Otago paper, Gender Issues in Education, I completed an essay on how menstruation was presented within education settings inspired in great part by Diorio and Munro's (2000) article about the areas we focus on during menstruation instruction. In their article they suggest that the ways we teach menstruation, in particular the focus on reproduction and hygiene, work to regulate and limit young girls and women in general. This was my entry into puberty and sexuality education, and from which I developed the direction and questions of my Masters' thesis research.

What is my research

From the outset, my research has been informed from a feminist poststructuralist viewpoint, which I believed would be useful in addressing questions of social power and the construction of gender (Weedon, 1997)¹. It is, however, difficult to define poststructuralism because poststructuralist thought does not set out to define meaning, but rather in seeing meaning as multiple and constructed, looks at how these meanings get produced and regulated, and the ways they effect and construct the world around us (St. Pierre, 2000). Therefore, when I started to consider how we understood menstruation I was not looking for the right way to teach menstruation, or the one true meaning of menstruation, but instead the ways menstruation is constructed within the lessons on puberty, or the hows and whys of this constructed understanding.

¹The theoretical underpinnings of this project will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.

To examine how our understanding of menstruation is constructed, the poststructuralist concept of discourse becomes a useful tool. Poststructuralist discourse looks at how meaning is socially, historically and culturally constructed, the ways in which we speak and think, what we believe and recognise, and also who gets to speak and with what authority (Sandretto with Klenner, 2011; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). So to look at the ways we talk and teach menstruation I am examining the discourses used in association with menstruation, if there are certain themes more prevalent, and discourses that become dominant in the construction of menstruation. It is through an awareness of these discourses and an understanding of how they work to construct the meanings of our world that agency can be located (Barrett, 2005; Davies, 2000; Davies & Gannon, 2005). By understanding how the discourses work to construct meaning, to be able to recognise the various discourses, and the ways they are used to recreate dominant structures and beliefs in our lives, people can then make decisions on how they wish to take up or resist these discourses, recreating or challenging the dominant constructions (Barrett, 2005; Davies, 2000; Davies & Gannon, 2005). The concepts of discourse and agency will be further examined and expanded on in Chapter Two: Feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework.

With this theoretical framework influencing and directing me, I wanted to pursue a topic I had touched on previously in my studies. The idea was to look at how we teach puberty to young people, particularly the topic of menstruation, and in doing so what are young girls learning about themselves as menstruating women, the possible rules, restrictions, benefits and advantages that come with beginning menstruation. What is our focus within the

puberty lesson, and what, for young women, are the important aspects they pursue? And although as a poststructuralist, I am not looking for the best way to teach the topic, or the 'right' message to be giving young people, I do hope to make known a better understanding of the construction of menstruation, and provide ideas that will contribute to the construction of a broader variety of meaning and available subjectivities. With that in mind, I developed the following research questions:

- How is menstruation constructed during puberty education?
- Which discourses are made available to young women during puberty education on menstruation?
- Which discourses do young women take up, and which do they resist, and what are the ways, if any, they subvert/resist the dominant discourses?

While discourse remains the focus of this thesis, I will also examine the ways the discourses inform the constitution of subjectivity. In the scope of this thesis I was not able to fully examine individual subjectivities and how the discourses around menstruation contributed to their constructions. However in addressing the following research questions in general terms, it may provide a foundation for further understanding and research:

- What subjectivities are constructed by these discourses?
- How are these subjectivities created, and how do we open a wider range of available subjectivities?

Who am I

As indicated above, I consider myself to be a feminist poststructuralist. As with most theories, understanding and engaging in feminist poststructuralism is a journey, a life-long

process, and as a Masters' candidate I am only at the early stages of this journey. Although I have considered myself a feminist long before I was introduced to poststructural theory, my life journey and academic learning has constantly added to and developed my understanding of feminism and myself as a feminist. The fact I am a woman has undoubtedly impacted on my research. As a woman, like the majority of women, menstruation has been a constant in my life, something I have had to incorporate into the idea of myself as a woman, and negotiate on a regular basis. These are things I cannot simply set aside while completing this thesis research, but instead must be aware of and navigate during the process.

During my reflexive process of this research, I became aware of how much the dominant discursive construction of menstruation affects me personally and my approach to the research. From my stumbling over the word 'blood' when talking with my supervisor, to the added nervousness of the perceived extra-sensitivity of the subject matter when conducting interviews, to the almost regret at my choice of research topic when called upon to talk during seminars and lectures. These combined with the subject position of 'period woman' imposed on me by friends and fellow postgraduate students has informed and influenced my research. Menstruation is considered a taboo topic, talk is regulated, and aspects and signifiers of menstruation are concealed (Beausang & Razor, 2000; Kissling, 1996b; Simes & Berg, 2001), therefore by presenting menstruation as a research topic I am challenging and attempting to subvert these dominant discourses. The strength of the dominant discourses around menstruation is that even as I set out to challenge and disrupt them, I am in turn still shaped and constructed by them, they continually influence me as a researcher and a woman (Gavey, 1989; Scott, 1988).

What is in this thesis

In the next chapter, *Chapter Two: Feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework*, I will expand on the principles and concepts that surround feminist poststructuralism. I will explain the poststructuralist concepts of language, discourse, subjectivity, positioning and agency, and how they relate to the research into menstruation education I have undertaken. I will also look at the connection between feminism and poststructuralism, some of the benefits in their combination, as well as some challenges.

In the following chapter, *Chapter Three: Literature review*, I will give an overview into the recent and current research into the topic of menstruation. My focus will be on how we come to understand what menstruation means. For the purposes of this research I choose to exclude research that was primarily scientific or medical, focusing instead on the social and cultural construction of menstruation, within the formal education setting, as well as the personal social world. Within this overview of the literature I will discuss the four dominant discourses I have identified in the literature.

In *Chapter Four: Research design*, I will outline the process I followed during the research. In this chapter I will look at gaining ethics approval from the University of Otago ethics committee, the observation of the relevant lessons within the positive puberty unit, and the issues to consider during both the individual teacher interviews, and the group interviews with the students. I will then outline the process of discourse analysis as a way to analyse the data. I will also address the need to be reflexive as a researcher throughout the whole

process of this thesis. I conclude the chapter with a brief overview of the school setting and the structure of the lesson, therefore locating the rest of the research.

Chapters five and six focus on the reporting and analysing of data gathered from the field research. In *Chapter Five: The established discourses*, I will discuss how the already identified discourses from Chapter Three are used within the lessons of menstruation and how these are either taken up and/or resisted by the students. In *Chapter Six: Unexamined and underutilised discourses*, I will present discourses that I believe have not been extensively discussed in previous research, or simply perhaps overlooked in their contribution to the construction of menstruation.

Finally in *Chapter Seven: Implications*, I will present what I believe the implications of this research are for further research into the subject of menstruation education, including the gaps I was unable to address within the scope of this research, and also the questions this research has raised. I will also discuss some suggestions to inform our teaching of menstruation, and create lessons and learning environments that may aid in providing a greater access to a wider range of discourses and the subjectivities they constitute.

Chapter Two: Feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework

In this chapter I outline the key concepts associated with poststructuralism, in particular, language, discourse, subjectivity, positioning and agency. As these concepts are used extensively throughout this research, I will discuss them in detail, conveying the ideas they represent, and the ways I employ them. One criticism of poststructuralism is that it is conceptually complicated, discussed using unfamiliar and therefore difficult language that can render it inaccessible to many people (e.g. Gavey, 1989). I thereby, hope that by expanding on the concepts involved in poststructuralism I will give the reader an access point into the theory I have used throughout this research. Poststructuralism is not inherently feminist, so I will also explain the ways I have incorporated feminism into this theoretical framework.

Language

It is through language that we make sense of our social and cultural experiences, and how we provide informative explanations of those experiences (Baxter, 2002; Wetherell, 1999). Language, when viewed as more than vocabulary and grammatical rules, becomes how we construct meaning and understanding of our world. This view of language is at the centre of poststructuralist theory (Scott, 1988).

Within poststructuralism, language is not transparent (Weedon, 1997). Language has no intrinsic meaning. It does not simply label the real world, but rather constructs meaning from its use (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). As St. Pierre (2000) claims, “we word the

world” (p. 483). In this way the world we know and the meanings we place on that knowledge is constructed through language. Language is everywhere, in everything we say and do. Goffman (1981, cited in Wetherell, 1999) uses the metaphor of language as jam. Instead of being neutral and transparent, language as jam gets everywhere, sticks to everything and imparts its own distinctive flavour and texture. Language is therefore, not seen as a reflector of processes located elsewhere, but rather intrusive, embedded in our experiences, and at the same time constructing those experiences. In this way, we can see that language does more than simply signify objects (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Our language shifts depending on social contexts, and therefore the meaning it constructs is transient. This shifting of language means we can never truly know something (St. Pierre, 2000). The idea of true meaning is illusionary, as language and the meaning it constructs shift within society and societal practices (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1994)

One way language is used to construct meaning is by creating binaries (Davies, 1997a; Kenway, et.al., 1994; Scott, 1988; St. Pierre, 2000). The use of binaries constructs and structures meaning in terms of difference and dominance. One side of the binary becomes defined in a lower or negative relationship to the others. Straight and gay, us and them, male and female create a binary logic that is inherently repressive (Kenway, et al., 1994). However, those in the positive or ascendant position may find it difficult to see the problem with creating binaries. The ascendant position is often seen as normal and normative. Being part of the ascendant position guarantees membership to the right and normal category, while those in the descendent position are somehow less or deficient. Because the ascendant is seen as the normative position, those within the category may not understand why the use of the binary is challenged. They do not understand why white,

male or middle-class is relevant or has any affect on who they are. For them, this is simply what people are and therefore the norm. For those on the other side, the binary is defined in terms of how they relate to the ascendant. Therefore being female is defined in relation to being male. Instead of being female as a separate category, it becomes constructed by the differences and opposition to being male. It becomes impossible to discuss being female without overtly, or covertly comparing and contrasting with being male (Davies, 1997a).

Language associated with menstruation may seem neutral, but hygiene and reproductive cycles are not simply signifiers of concepts, but create meaning around menstruation. One example of this meaning constructed by language is our use of the term menstrual blood. It may appear as a neutral signifier of the blood secreted during menstruation, but as Fingerson (2006) points out, when we discuss menstrual blood we treat it differently from other forms of blood. Blood from other sources, such as cuts and abrasions, does not carry the same stigma that we attach to menstrual blood. In this way, menstrual blood becomes part of a subtle binary. There is blood, and then there is menstrual blood. Its meaning is created in relation to its difference to blood, and placed in the descendant half of that binary, those differences create meaning associated with beliefs of negativity and inferiority (St. Pierre, 2000). In this way we begin to understand language as more than labelling objects. Instead language and the discourses created with them construct meaning.

Discourse

Central to poststructuralist theory is the concept of discourse (Kenway, et al., 1994; Scott, 1988; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). And yet, as St. Pierre (2000) explains, it is impossible to define the meaning of discourse from a poststructuralist viewpoint because within the poststructuralist framework, meaning cannot be described by language, but rather is constructed socially and historically. We cannot define discourse because there is not one essential meaning to be located and assigned, rather we must focus on how discourse works, the ways it produces and regulates meaning and its social effects. In terms of poststructuralism we do not look for the meaning of discourse, but rather ask questions about how discourses function, where they are found and how they get produced or regulated (St. Pierre, 2000). However, while acknowledging the belief that there is not one essential definition, or one truth to be known, we need to understand this concept of discourse.

Discourses are an interrelated system of statements, produced by social factors, or powers and practices where meaning is constituted by specific groups, cultures and historical periods (Gavey, 1989). Discourses are not the objects, or labels and categories we place on them, but rather the meanings and practices we build about the objects we speak about (Kenway, et al., 1994). Foucault (1972) claims discourses “are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words...but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 48). While discourses are made up of signifiers, of words that point to objects, discourse is more than these objects and the grammatical rules of language. Therefore the meaning we place on those objects is created within the discourse, but this

construction is often concealed in the process of creation. We use discourse to create meaning, but this process, of giving meaning, or creating 'truth' is often hidden from our awareness (Parlee, 1974). It is the discourses that produce our understanding and knowledge, and the dominance they gain in institutions of culture that makes them unquestionable truths, but at the same time we construct and reconstruct these discourses to produce the meaning we wish to be dominant (Kenway, et al., 1994).

This idea of 'true' meaning, or an unquestionable common sense truth, develops when discourses become an accepted part of society and societal practices. The dominance and power relations inherent in their meanings are maintained and embedded in our institutions and cultural practices and are seen as commonsense truths (Kenway, et al., 1994). Poststructuralism challenges the humanist theory that there are some things that can be labelled truths, outside of human invention. Instead of having one true meaning that is immutable, meanings are created and constructed through social and institutional discourses. These meanings are then prescribed value and worth. The value and 'truth' of these discourses are often historically situated, changing over time (Scott, 1988).

For example, the 'meaning' of menstruation is not simply a natural occurrence in a woman's life, but a social and historical construction of beliefs, terms and power (Scott, 1988). How menstruation is viewed has changed historically and culturally. Each of these meanings was once seen as the truth, unchallengeable. Whelan (1975) shows these changing attitudes towards menstruation. She discusses how there was a time when the menstruating woman was seen as dangerous and kept separate from men, but also in the nineteenth century it was said that menstruation did not have any purpose, and was a pathological event that was

non-existent in pre-Biblical events (Whelan, 1975). These beliefs are now considered foolish myths, but historically each of them was considered to be the truth at that time. These truths were given the same importance as the truths now stated around menstruation. The discourses associated with menstruation currently are no more true and correct, than any of the discourses that held dominance during different historical periods.

The idea of 'one true' meaning changes historically, but is also subject to change as the power shifts from one discourse to another. As different social, cultural or political groups gain power and acceptance, the discourses favoured and associated with a specific group grow in use and acceptance until the discourses are in the position of being the dominant discourse (Kenway, et al., 1994). Dominant discourses are then presented as commonsense, indisputable truths. The power of a dominant discourse is it appears to be natural (Kenway, et al., 1994). The power of dominant discourses comes from their ability to appear to make sense. The control and power and their use in constructing subjectivity is kept hidden behind a facade of normalcy and truth. It is difficult to challenge dominant discourses because other discourses are often seen as fanciful and unintelligent (St. Pierre, 2000). For example, one of the dominant discourses around menstruation is that it is an unwelcome annoyance in a woman's life (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Kissling, 1996a). Trying to present discourses that speak of menstruation as a joyful positive experience may be met with derision or negation. People know the 'truth' about menstruation, anything else is either a lie or a joke.

Dominant discourses are not immutable. Over time the dominant discourses have changed. These changes were affected by the movement of power within areas of society. As the era

of Enlightenment grew in importance in society, the power of religion and religious philosophies was transferred to humanist theory (St. Pierre, 2000). The dominant discourses of religion were replaced by ones of science. Dominant discourses are always about specific groups gaining and maintaining power. Various groups, gendered, ethnic, religious, political groups use dominant discourses to justify the status quo, and ensuring the maintenance of their power (Weedon, 1997). The dominant discourse assumes a position of being outside of human intervention. In current times this assumption comes from the humanistic view that truth can be discovered from scientific inquiry, but in other times the word of God held the same indisputable truth. The discourse becomes a fact rather than a belief and is therefore placed beyond dispute and therefore has a powerful legitimating function (Scott, 1988).

Dominant discourses control what is spoken and how people speak (St. Pierre, 2000). Societal and institutional power construct and maintain dominant discourse and therefore prescribe the acceptable discourse to gain entry to these realms (St. Pierre, 2000). The price of admission for this entry is to work within the dominant discourses and when conflict arises the dominant discourse is frequently followed rather than questioned (Scott, 1988). The power of a dominant discourse comes not by bluntly forcing a belief on people, but rather creating discourses that people then recreate until the power relation is established and perpetuated. This invasive power of dominant discourses means it becomes impossible to step completely outside of it, even when in conflict the dominant discourse still shapes the arguments (Gavey, 1989; Scott, 1988).

This is not to say there are no other discourses. There are multiple discourses, offering completing, and often conflicting ways of giving meaning to the world and organising social institutions and processes (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1997). Not all discourses carry the same weight or power. Some work within the dominant discourse, contributing and/or maintaining its power, while others work to challenge and disrupt the existing practices (Weedon, 1997). There are multiple discourses around the subject of menstruation. Discourses of shame, secrecy, and hygiene all contribute to the dominant discourse that menstruation is a negative experience (e.g. Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006; Kissling, 1996a). Even discourses of maturity and sexuality are often influenced by this dominant discourse and the discourses dominant in female sexuality. The strength of discourses around being female and sexuality do not often allow space for alternative discourses to be expressed and valued (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Gavey, 1989).

For some discourses to remain dominant, groups in power must protect the status of the discourse as being the truth. Resistant or alternative discourses may be used to try to attack that position of authority, but they have to compete with the power of the dominant discourses to be taken up by the majority of the population. Resistant discourses in the area of feminism can be presented, but their power is limited when the dominant discourses work to marginalise or simply make them unavailable to many women (Gavey, 1989). Resistant discourses are heavily policed so that any challenge can be marginalised and/or dismissed. Although the hegemonic social and cultural beliefs, structures and values constructing and constructed by dominant discourses will compel people to fight against the challenge presented by resistant discourses, they cannot fully remove alternative discourses. The power of the dominant discourse is to make resistant discourses as

unappealing as possible, therefore keeping them isolated from the populace. For instance, dominant discourses present female sexuality as passive and chaste (Fine, 1988; Weedon, 1997). Alternative discourses that present females as sexually active or powerful can bring retaliation of being labelled morally corrupt, or with derisive terms like 'slut'. This retaliation against dominant discourses can also occur within institutions which can discriminate against those that take up the resistant discourses. For example, within the legal or political institutions, women who have been offended against may then be held up as somehow responsible for the sexual crimes perpetrated against them (Weedon, 1997).

Subjectivity

Subjectivity, another central concept to poststructuralist theory, is related and interrelated with discourse (Weedon, 1997). As stated previously, discourses are everywhere, constructing meaning in the social and cultural world (Jones, 1997). Subjectivity, rather than being innate, is seen as being constructed by the social world and therefore the discourses that construct the meaning within those social worlds (Jones, 1997; Weedon, 1997). We do not sit in isolation from discourse and how we are constructed by it. The social worlds we inhabit, with their multitude of discourses, all work to create and constitute our sense of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Therefore it can be claimed that from a poststructuralist framework "we speak ourselves into existence within the terms of available discourses" (Davies, 2000, p. 55).

With the entwined connection with discourse, subjectivity can also be seen as socially, culturally and historically constructed (Jones, 1997; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). As

Weedon (1997) points out, the subjectivity of 'mother' has changed over time, as social, economic and political discourses have moved and shifted. While discourses of motherhood still often imply that she must meet all the physical and emotional needs of her child, and feel fulfilled doing so, social and political changes also imply that she holds positions outside of motherhood. Economic and feminist discourses conflict with patriarchal and religious discourses about the place of women and motherhood. Subjectivity exists at the intersection of these discourses (Davies & Gannon, 2005)

Subjectivity is not fixed (Davies, 1997b; Jones, 1997; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). As the dominance given certain discourses shifts and changes, the subjectivities created from them are also open to change (St. Pierre, 2000). Davies and Gannon (2005) see subjectivities sitting in the intersection of multiple discourses, but the position of this intersection and the discourses that contribute to it are not fixed. Shifting in location creates a fluidity and multiplicity of subjectivities. When an individual moves through and between the social worlds they inhabit, they can be exposed to multiple discourses. These discourses can create a wide possibility of subjectivities open for individuals to inhabit (Davies, 1997b, Jones, 1993). While there are multiple discourses opening up the possibility of multiple subjectivities, these subjectivities are limited by the dominant discourses, and are only as variable as those discourses. As dominant discourses construct our social worlds and the meaning constructed by them, they are also affect the availability of subjectivities. There is no pure subject outside of discourse (Jones, 1993).

There is no delineated separation between subject and discourse, each work to maintain and define the other (St. Pierre, 2000). These subjectivities can change and shift as the

discursive fields shift historically and socially (Weedon, 1997). Instead of a unitary consistent position, these subjectivities may be contradictory and ambivalent. The individual becomes a site of conflict, while one set of subjectivities calls us to act in the confines of a particular discourse, another will require a different set of conforming behaviours and practices (Weedon, 1997). For instance, menstruation education may present a positive description of menstruation being an indication of a young girl's sexual maturity to bear children, and girls are then celebrated for their ability to be mothers, but at the same time the subjectivity of a good girl, worthy of praise and social acceptance is one that waits for marriage and social security to become a mother. The contradiction is therefore menstruation is good because it allows you to be a mother, a subjectivity to reach for, but to take up motherhood too early will make you a 'slut' or a bad girl (Diorio & Munro, 2000). Young girls and women must find acceptable personal and societal ways to position themselves within the subjectivities and discourses that create them.

This poststructuralist idea of a variable subject that is constructed and reconstructed through discourse challenges the humanist view of an essential self (Barrett, 2005; Gavey, 1989; Jones, 1997; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). From a humanist framework, there is a 'real' self, capable of conscious, knowing rationality that sits outside the influences of society, able to view them critically and independently take up or reject the discourses presented to them (Jones, 1997; Weedon, 1997). The humanist self has freedom and is endowed with a will, which is expressed through language and action, rather than constructed by them. Language, although an useful tool to describe personal experience, is seen as separate from self and experience (Jones, 1997). Therefore the humanist subject is seen to have an inherent agency that sits outside of society. This distance enables the

individual to examine and choose, therefore capable of producing true knowing and effecting change (St. Pierre, 2000).

Poststructuralist critiques of the humanist self require a rethinking of the autonomous rational centre (St. Pierre, 2000). From a poststructuralist viewpoint, subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her [sic] sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32) is being constructed and reconstructed with, within and against the discourses provided (Jones, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Discourses are everywhere, constructing meaning and action. These discourses are inescapable and the meanings created through them in turn construct our subjectivities (Jones, 1997). Our view of ourselves as humanist subjects, with agency to stand outside discourse and make choices can be seen as a creation of the dominant humanist discourse. It is therefore the power given the humanist discourse, with its idea of a rational independent self, that creates that subjectivity (Jones, 1997; Weedon, 1997).

Poststructuralist theory is not about destroying the idea of a humanist subject; it is not about creating a binary of humanist/anti-humanist subject. Poststructuralism, rather, shows how the dominant humanist discourse works to create the idea of a central essential self (Davies, 1997b). By decentring the subject, we move from the idea of an essential self, but poststructuralism does not dispute the idea of a subject (Davies, 1997b; Gavey, 1989). Instead it concentrates on seeing the ways subjectivity is created through the “ongoing constitutive forces of language (with all its contradictions)” (Davies, 1997b, p. 274). This idea that subjectivity is an ongoing and shifting construction is often difficult to comprehend. This difficulty can be illustrated by the limitations of language. The common

use of pronouns, the “I” implies a fixed identity, but for poststructuralism there is no self, no actor outside of the discourses capable of making choice (Davies, 1997b).

In this project, I will be exploring menstruation education in relation to the ways discourses are used to construct our understanding of menstruation and the meanings we place on it. I will examine the discourses found in the lessons on menstruation, in both teacher and student talk, and also from the interviews with small groups of the female students. I will identify the discourses that have become dominant in our construction of menstruation, and how these are taken up by the girls, and if there are any points of resistance through the use of counter or resistant discourses.

Positioning

Another key concept in poststructuralist thought is positioning. Positioning is not taking up a role (Barrett, 2005). A role is something we do, able to step in and out of to perform a function. Positioning is more the merging of personal and public, we have more investment and commitment to it (Barrett, 2005). There is an emotional commitment to the subjectivities we position ourselves in. We position ourselves with subjectivities that contain aspects and discourses that appear agreeable and appealing, while rejecting and dismissing those positions that do not (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2007). From a subject position, other versions of the world may be seen as fanciful and/or illegitimate. How we are positioned is often determined by the discourses and subjectivities available and acceptable in a specific arena (Barrett, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000). As positioning myself as a poststructuralist I take up a discourse of no one truth to be discovered, as meaning being

multiple and often contradictory. This subject position to those positioned in a scientific enlightenment discourse may seem unbelievable and irrelevant. Therefore it can be seen that positioning makes only certain versions of the world make sense (Barrett, 2005).

It may be easy to accidentally slip into a humanist view of a self able to make independent rational choices over how we position ourselves (Jones, 1997).

We all *experience* ourselves as humanist subjects; we *do* 'consider our options', choose and think critically, act on our ideas. Our everyday language is suffused with a pronoun grammar which expresses our experience as active independent subjects. (Jones, 1997, emphasis in original, p. 263)

Within a poststructuralist framework we can see how language shapes and constructs our understanding of ourselves as humanist subjects (Jones, 1997). However, positioning occurs within the discursive construction of subjectivity. There are multiple discourses that we negotiate in the process of positioning ourselves and being positioned. When we take up or reject certain discourses we position ourselves, at the same time those discourses work to position us (Currie, et al., 2007). Positioning is a dynamic process. Butler (1992, cited in St. Pierre, 2000) claims that the act of positioning is "mine to the extent...I replay and resignify the theoretical positions that have constituted me" but at the same time "the 'I' who would select between them is always already constituted by them" (p. 305).

Positioning is constantly being negotiated and shifting as the people move through the various discursive practices they participate in (Davies, 2000; Barrett, 2005). Positioning can therefore, be seen as a collaborative process (Barrett, 2005). Individuals place themselves in a number of discourses, taking up a subject position. This subject position is also provided

by the discursive field. We create our position in a discursive field while at the same time the discursive field creates a subject position (Leahy, 1994; Weedon, 1997). When taking up a particular subject position we often, implicitly or explicitly, assign others with their position. The other is then seen as having been positioned (Davies, 2000). By positioning oneself as a teacher, the other may be positioned as a student. To be given approval and acceptance individuals will need to conform to the discursive construction of their position. As Davies (2000) points out, they may not wish to conform, they may not have the understanding and/or experience needed to conform to the discursive practices, or attempt to resist the imposed positioning. Some may conform because they cannot view another option, leaving them feeling angry and oppressed.

We position ourselves in a number of discourses which constitute a number of subjectivities. Each of these subject positions can be contradictory. Individuals must weave together these positions, creating an emotional meaning and moral system that links and legitimates the various positionings (Davies, 2000). There can be various subject positions but to be seen as existing within a specific discursive field, we must comply and adhere to the structures and systems of that position. But people can choose to position themselves with different discourses and take up different subject positions, thus opening up new discursive possibilities (Leahy, 1994). As Davies (2000) concluded, positioning shows how discursive practices construct the individual and those practices can be used to attempt to negotiate new subject positions. From a young age individuals learn how to position themselves within discourses, resisting those discursively approved positions is seen as a social failure. By creating discursive practices that encourage and reward certain subject positions,

positioning oneself within those discursive practices creates and strengthens the social order.

Agency

As show above, the poststructuralist subject is created and recreated within discourse, removing the idea of a humanist essential self (Jones, 1997; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Therefore, poststructuralism also challenges the humanist idea of agency (Barrett, 2005; Davies, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000). The humanist self sits outside of the social world, able to make independent rational choices (Davies, 2000). The humanist idea of agency supplies a view of agency that allows for individual access to the choice to find freedom from oppression, and the rational intellect and innate will to free themselves and the rest of society from confusion and error (St. Pierre, 2000). Agency, under this framework, is not always taken up, but humanism believes by opening up possibilities, individuals will be able to make agentic choices for their own improvement (Davies, 2000).

Davies (2000), however, challenges the very notion of 'free' choice. When a subject is positioned within a particular discourse, the idea of choice becomes illusionary. While humanists see a variety of choices for the subject to take up, poststructuralism views these choices as unattainable. The only choice possible is inscribed by the subjectivity constituted by the placement within the discourse. Although a subject can shift and change positioning within a discourse, there is no choice outside of the discourse that produces the subjectivity (Barrett, 2005). Therefore, the poststructuralist subject is not seen as an independent self capable of making choices, but rather always produced through discourse (Barrett, 2005;

Davies, 2000). But when we realise there are multiple discourses, offering a variety of ways to construct meaning (Weedon, 1997) we can see that it is not only possible for the subject to change position within a particular discourse but also to shift between discourses (Barrett, 2005).

Poststructuralism disputes the humanist idea of agency, but provides a different view of agency. Poststructuralist agency is not freedom from discourse, instead it comes through knowledge and awareness of the discursive construction of the subject (Barrett, 2005; Davies & Gannon, 2000; Davies, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000). Because the subject is not just inscribed from outside, but actively takes up the discursive construction of her/his subjectivity, agency comes from recognising this construction. This recognition allows to see the subject's immersion in and indebtedness to that discourse (Davies & Gannon, 2000).

With an understanding of how discourses work to construct subjectivity, we can make visible the structures and how they are produced and regulated. The process of making visible what was previously unknown, allows for the possibility of making them revisable (Barrett, 2005). When we are able to acknowledge the social construction of discourse and subjectivity, we can move away from the concept of fundamental essentialism, therefore the construction of subjectivity within a limited dominant field becomes something that can be resisted, subverted and changed (Barrett, 2005; Davies, 2000). Discourses are not unchallengeable truths, therefore they can be seen as open to resignification and subversion, both from within the discourse and from the presence of other discourses (St. Pierre, 2000). However, this agency, and the possibility of new subjectivities it can bring, is

not done through simple acts of opposition and resistance, instead it is worked through “a series of escapes, of small slides, of plays, of crossings of flights – that open (an other, slippery) understanding (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 319). In other words, agency is not simply presenting people with a variety of options they can pick and choose from, but rather through understanding and recognition of how the discourses shape us, and our own immersion in them, we are able to ask questions, and examine the discourses and practices that construct our view. The questions such as why, and what if, not only allow us to recognise our construction but can also provide small holes and opportunities to challenge and disrupt the dominant meanings and subjectivities these discourses construct (Davies & Gannon, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000).

There are a multitude of discourses that we move within and between. Being able to see how these discourses constitute our subjectivities through agency offers the possibility of using one discourse to counteract and modify another (Davies, 2000). Poststructuralist agency is not about freedom from the discursive construction of self, but rather entails the capacity to recognise multiple discourse, and the multiple meanings created and/or possible through discourse, so no discourse can control one’s identity (Davies, 2000; Davies & Gannon, 2005). Through this process of recognition of the social world we may be able to take up discourses that disrupt the dominant discourses. Autonomy is then, not from standing outside of the social structures, but by being aware of them and using a range of discourses that counter and disrupt the hegemonic cultural narratives and have the potential of creating new available narratives and subjectivities (Barrett, 2005; Davies, 2000).

Although this understanding of the discursive construction of meaning and self, and the ability to recognise and use a range of discourses is important, agency cannot happen within the isolation of the individual (Davies, 2000) For the individual to have agency with the discourses that construct his/her world, they need to be taken up by others and become visible within the dominant discourse. Agency can be readily attainable by some, and almost inaccessible to others. Davies (2000) points out those on the negative side of any binary, for example, black, woman, mad, are rarely heard as legitimate speakers and therefore seldom positioned as having agency. The right to have a voice and articulate meaning from within the collective discourses does not stem from some essence of the person, but from the position available to them within the discourses.

Feminist Poststructuralism

There is nothing inherently feminist about poststructuralist theory (Kenway, et al., 1994). Indeed, many feminists question poststructuralism for its disruption of the idea of an essential femaleness. There is an objection that poststructuralism undermines the possibility of sisterhood with its challenge to the humanist self. Without a unifying notion of women, some may see poststructuralism as an attack on feminism. Poststructuralism disrupts the essentialised belief that there is something central and common to all women, and without this unifying idea to rally around, some see poststructuralist theory as weakening the position of women (Weedon, 1997). However, feminist poststructuralism can also be seen as embracing complexity and contradictions, making feminism not only within the reach of white middle class women, but opening up the possibility to a range of ethnic, social groups and classes (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1997). When we view what it

means to be female as not an inherent, absolute truth that can be located and discovered, but rather see the meaning of women is constructed, we allow for the plurality of meanings that define women, all of them equally valid (Gavey, 1989).

Feminist poststructuralism is about difference (Kenway, et al., 1994). By recognising and deconstructing the binary of male and female, which place male as ideal and female as 'other', subordinate and lacking, feminist poststructuralism is able to challenge the power of the discourses around gender and sexuality (Davies, 1997a; Kenway, et al., 1994; Weedon, 1997). From a poststructuralist perspective there is no inherent truth, but rather meaning is created through discourse, therefore the labels of male and female, and how we understand them, are socially and institutionally constructed through discursive meaning (Beausang & Razor, 2000; Weedon, 1997). So while poststructuralism can offer a plurality of meaning of the concept of woman, different discourses can become dominant, socially, culturally and politically across time (Gavey, 1989; Kenway, et al., 1994; Weedon, 1997). These dominant discourses, although possibly oppressive, are created and recreated through their use, the use of which women are often complicit with (Weedon, 1997).

In an attempt to understand why women are so often implicit in their own oppression, feminist poststructuralism seeks to deconstruct patriarchal power relations, showing how those dominant discourses produce subjectivities that adhere to hegemonic assumptions of gender (Weedon, 1997). Girls and women may take up subjectivities that they feel provide them with acceptance within the dominant discourses, and avoid those that may bring marginalisation (Jones, 1993). By seeing how individuals "actively take up as *their own* the discourse through which they are shaped" (Davies & Banks, 1992, cited in Jones, 1993, p.

159, emphasis in original) we can account for what appears to be compliance to women's oppression (Jones, 1993). Therefore a feminist poststructural analysis can make visible the patterns that trap us in particular gendered ways of being (Barrett, 2005).

Challenges to inequitable gendered power relationships must be part of any feminist poststructuralist analysis (Kenway, et al., 1994). Feminist poststructuralism is focused on understanding how gendered subjectivities are constructed through discourses and begin the deconstructive work on subjectivity of woman (St. Pierre, 2000). Gender is not seen in isolation, an essential aspect that can be defined and understood:

The point of a feminist poststructuralist analysis is not to expose the hidden truth of sex/gender in all its simplicity but to *disrupt that which is taken as stable/unquestionable truth*. (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 320, emphasis in original)

Therefore, by highlighting the complicated and ambiguous ways gender is created, taken up and perpetuated, we can expand our the discursive production of gendered subjectivities, creating possible new subjectivities that resist and disrupt the dominant forms available (Kenway, et al., Jones, 1993; 1994).

Conclusion

Poststructuralism is not meant to unravel current truths and present a new truth. Meaning is always fluid, multiple and often contradictory (Davies & Gannon, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). What we know, our understanding of ourselves, and our social world, is constructed through discourse (Weedon, 1997). Therefore, feminist poststructuralism is used in this thesis, not to find the one true meaning of menstruation for young girls, but

rather to expose how the discourses associated with menstruation education construct our understanding of menstruation and the subjectivities of menstruating women (Davies & Gannon, 2005). This framework of feminist poststructuralism will be used when analysing the research already completed in the area of menstruation that has informed my own research, and then works as a theoretical lens during my gathering and analysing of the data related to my research in the discursive construction of menstruation instruction.

In the next chapter I examine recent literature in the area of menstruation research. With feminist poststructuralism as my theoretical lens, I will investigate the ways our understanding of menstruation is discursively constructed, what discourses are present within this understanding, and show the dominant discourses that make up our understanding of menstruation.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Introduction

With a theoretical framework of feminist poststructuralism to inform my reading I have surveyed the research literature into menstruation. For the purpose of this research I have tried to limit my review to literature published in the last twenty years, although Whelan (1975) and Taylor (1981) discuss similar discourses to those presented in more current literature showing a continuation of issues of shame, secrecy and hygiene associated with menstruation. In this section of my thesis I will give an overview of the types of research performed in this area, what gaps there may be in the current literature, and what limitations and restrictions exist in that research. I will, then, discuss in more depth the four prominent discourses associated with menstruation found in the literature. These discourses will inform and guide my own research as I look into the discursive construction of menstruation within the current instruction about menstruation in puberty education.

Literature Overview

The literature I have used to inform my research mostly examines people's experiences with menstruation (e.g. Allen, Kaestle, & Golberg, 2011; Beausang & Razor, 2000; Fingerson, 2006; Lee, 1994). These researchers investigate what menstruation means culturally and socially. While most of the literature reviewed recounts women's personal experiences,

there is also literature that examines men's understandings and reactions to menstruation (Allen, et al., 2011; Fingerson, 2006). Research into how menstruation is presented in the media is included because these representations, especially within advertising, informs how we view and think about menstruation (Kissling, 2002; Merskin, 1999; Raftos, Jackson, & Mannix, 1998). What is not included is the research that focuses solely on the biological aspects of menstruation, seeing menstruation as purely a physical process or a medical crisis needing intervention, e.g. medical or biological scientific data and journal articles. Although in a later section of this chapter, labelled menstruation as a medical issue, I will look at a discourse that views menstruation as a medical issue that needs 'fixed'.

The majority of the literature that speaks of women's experiences with menstruation interviews adults. These women, generally, age from 18 years upwards. Fingerson (2006) interviews women of various ages, including young women from the age of 12. While older women remember their menarche and early experiences of menstruation, there is little research that talks to girls and young women at the time they are experiencing these new events in their lives. I believe it is important to examine the experiences of young women at that stage of life, rather than looking at the memories of older women because this is the time in their lives when they first start becoming aware of menstruation and what it will mean, and their thoughts and reactions have not altered by the distance of time or subsequent experiences. With the dominant discourses of masculine power informing research, women do not often have the authority to voice their own experiences (St. Pierre, 2000). This silence of valid female experience is increased when it includes young women and children. Therefore, there is an obvious gap in the research when it comes to looking at

the experiences and understandings of young girls as they approach and/or begin menarche.

Along with the research that discusses the information gained from interviews where women discussed their experiences with menstruation, I have included research that examines the other sources of information used to construct an understanding of menstruation. Diorio and Munro (2000) look specifically at the education material given to young people about menstruation. They examined the resources teachers in New Zealand schools use to inform their students about puberty and menstruation, critically analysing the discourses around menstruation and the impact they can have on young people. A number of researchers also looked in depth into the advertising of menstrual products, e.g. teenage and women's magazines and television advertisements. These advertisements are often a major source of information for young women about how they should behave while menstruating, and present an idealised image of the menstruating female (Merskin, 1999; Raftos, et al., 1998). Kissling (2002) looked at how menstruation is represented, or not represented in television and films. All these different areas of research contribute to the overall understanding of menstruation and how it is incorporated into people's lives.

The majority of the literature reviewed for this research comes from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. While there is some research that addresses different cultural experiences with menstruation, for example Marvan (2005, 2007, 2008) extensively studied menstruation within her Mexican culture and society, the majority of the research follows dominant white, Western, middle-class women. This may indicate a gap in the research, and a need to look at menstruation from different cultures, ethnicities, and

social classes. For the purpose of this research I am primarily working within the dominant social and cultural environment that informs the teaching of menstruation within New Zealand school's puberty instruction. My research is dependent on the participants that volunteer, and with an awareness and acknowledgement of the varying cultural and societal beliefs and practices that may be part of people's experience of menstruation, I will be respectful of the differences I encounter, but I do not feel this research is the ideal place to investigate these differences in any depth. This thesis does not set out to explicitly investigate the experiences of different cultural and/or religious groups, which is an area that may need investigation in the future. (For further discussion on suggestions for future research see Chapter Seven.)

A critical review of the literature around menstruation research reveals four prominent discourses. These discourses are used to construct menstruation as a *hygienic crisis* that requires women to ensure their cleanliness and protect against their bodily emissions, rather than a hallmark of puberty and maturation (Costos, Ackerman, & Paradis, 2002; Merskin, 1999). The discourse of *shame and secrecy* is intertwined with menstruation as a hygiene crisis. Menstruation is seen as something that should be concealed both physically and verbally because it is seen as an embarrassing social taboo (Allen, et al., 2011; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Kissling, 1996b). Menstruation, often discussed in terms of reproduction and biology, creates a *medical discourse* that pathologises menstruation as exclusively about the reproduction process and as creating negative effects in a woman's life (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Simes & Berg, 2001). The fourth discourse shows how menstruation is used to construct the '*real*' woman, positioning her subjectivity within structures and meanings that inscribe girls' subordination to males and attempts to limit her role to heterosexual

motherhood (Lee, 1994). While for the purposes of this literature review I have separated these discourses into discrete sections, they are actually intertwined and their use maintains and constructs other discourses.

Menstruation as a Hygiene Crisis

Probably one of the most common messages women and girls receive about menstruation is that it will bring about a hygiene crisis (e.g. Diorio & Munro, 2000; Merskin, 1999; Raftos, Jackson, & Mannix, 1998). Diorio & Munro (2000) noticed that much of the classroom material on menstruation focused on the need for young girls to find ways to manage their cleanliness while menstruating. It appears that much of the information used to educate young women about menstruation is produced by menstrual products industries (Allen, et al., 2011; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Merskin, 1999). This connection may contribute to the discourse of menstruation as a hygiene crisis. Advertisement and education material produced by menstruation companies emphasises the need for protection to maintain cleanliness and freshness (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Merskin, 1999; Raftos, et al., 1998).

This discourse of hygiene does not simply relate to the management of menstrual bleeding, but rather women's bodies in general (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Raftos, et al., 1998). Girls' bodies become disciplined by the hygiene discourse (Allen, et al., 2011). Young girls, and boys, are told puberty will bring changes to their bodies and maturity, but for girls these changes mean their bodies will create problems (Diorio & Munro, 2000). Menstruation, a quintessential symbol of being female, becomes something to be managed to prevent it tainting and spoiling the ideal of femininity. The hegemonic ideal of femininity presents

images of delicate freshness and purity (Raftos, et al., 1998). Menarche brings an attack on that ideal, therefore women must be conscientious in their management of menstruation to ensure they do not let their bodies taint their femininity (Raftos, et al., 1998). This does not simply apply to management of menstrual blood, but women are also encouraged to use panty shields to protect against normal secretions (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

Blood has always held a social taboo (Diorio & Munro, 2000). Blood has always meant injury or illness. It is therefore difficult to change the mindset that menstrual blood is actually a sign of health (Simes & Berg, 2001). But instead of health and fertility, menstrual blood is portrayed as dirty, smelly and disgusting (Raftos, et al., 1998). Menstruating girls and women are constantly warned their body will let them down and they must guard against leakage (Fingerson, 2006). Human blood may be viewed as unpleasant, but menstrual blood is disgusting, therefore extreme measures should be taken to ensure that a woman remains “clean”; no signs of blood or bleeding should be seen. This idea of the dirtiness of menstrual blood is at least partly cultural (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Lüders, 2004; Simes & Berg, 2001); “A mark on clothing does not become a ‘stain’ until it has been designated, linguistically and thus socially, as such” (Diorio & Munro, 2006, p. 359). Socially and culturally marks on clothing carry different meanings and judgement. Food or even dirt stains do not hold the same meaning as a similar stain caused by menstrual blood would. When the mark is caused by menstrual blood we construct it as a stain, not just on the clothing, but also on the women’s reputation and cleanliness (Costos, et al., 2002; Diorio & Munro, 2000).

It seems, however, that menstrual blood is the main aspect of menstruation that causes the focus on hygiene. Menstrual blood is often considered dirty and smelly. The idea that

menstrual blood has a bad odour is common (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Raftos, et al., 1998; Simes & Berg, 2001). Young women are instructed to find ways to conceal the odour, especially from being noticed by others. Menstrual product advertisements often promote their products' ability to deodorise or even remove these smells (Simes & Berg, 2001). The ideal of femininity is to be fresh, and therefore free of any natural odour (Bryman, 2001; Raftos, et al., 1998; Simes & Berg, 2001). However, as Fingerson (2006) points out, menstrual blood only smells when it comes into contact with these products and can rarely be smelled by others regardless of whether menstrual products are used or not. This constructed belief of odour is perpetuated by the menstruation industry and social discourses of femininity and menstruation.

Young girls and women are constantly warned about the need to maintain their cleanliness (Allen, et al., 2011; Costos, et al., 2002; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Merskin, 1999). This discourse of hygiene is maintained through the generations. Mothers, in their discussions with their daughters about menstruation, will mostly focus on the importance of appearance, with instructions on how to keep clean and purchase the right equipment (Merskin, 1999). This focus creates the message that it is right and normal to think of menstruation as unclean and disgusting (Costos, et al., 2002). The idea that the body is a site of messy unhygienic emissions that need management is something only girls must face. At the same maturation point, boys entering puberty are presented with experience of wet dreams. While wet dreams and menstruation both deposit bodily fluids outside of the body, boys do not receive warning about maintaining cleanliness in relation to these emissions, and are actually encouraged not to worry if their parents discover evidence of these occurrences (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

Male bodily fluids, such as semen, when found outside of the body are not identified as 'dirty' the way female bodily fluids are (Diorio & Munro, 2000). Women's bodies are seen as dirty and polluted places. There are large, highly profitable industries set up to create products devoted to concealing the emissions of a female body that constructs, and in turn is constructed by the male/female binary. Male bodies, and their emissions are natural and normal, they do not require outside interventions the way female bodies do (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Raftos, et al., 1998). The power given to the hegemonic discourse of hygiene is so dominant that even when researchers, such as Merskin (1999) and Raftos et.al. (1998) discussed the issues of presenting menstruation as a hygiene problem, they all still use the language associated with hygiene when describing menstrual products. In challenging the discursive construction of menstruation, including menstruation as a hygiene crisis, within menstrual product advertising, Merskin (1999) wrote "the current array of feminine hygiene advertisements targeted towards adolescent girls does serve to reinforce an ideology..." (p. 954). Her use of terms like feminine hygiene, and sanitary napkins show the subversive power of the dominant discourse as it dictates language even when trying to disrupt that discourse. Feminine hygiene and sanitary pads contribute to the discourse that menstruation is a hygienic problem, rather than a sign of maturation and a natural occurrence.

Menstruation as a Shameful Secret

Closely connected to the idea of hygiene is the construction of menstruation as something shameful, and as something needing concealment. The discourse of menstruation as a

shameful secret is found prominently in research about menstruation (e.g. Allen et.al., 2011; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Lee, 1994). Education in schools and from society about menstruation “introduces girls to the cultural baggage of secrecy and shame” (Allen et.al., 2011, p. 132). Menstruation can become a symbol that as girls they are considered ‘other’, as boys are not faced with the same messages of secrecy and shame connected to the control of their bodies (Allen, et al., 2011). This otherness can be internalised as shame, so that it is not just the act of menstruating that is shameful, but the young woman herself is full of shame (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2005), thus the female body becomes a site of shame. There are deep-seated historical and social beliefs that the female body is “corrupting, contaminating, unclean and sinful” (Lee, 1994, p. 346). The ideal of femininity presents images of delicate freshness and maternal life-bearing that are celebrated (Lee, 1994; Raftos, et al., 1998), which are countered by the disgust associated with the bleeding body (Lee, 1994). This idea of disgust can become embedded in a girl’s subjectivity. Puberty is often a time when young people feel an ambivalence about their bodies, for girls this is increased by discourses of menstruation constructing their bodies as bad and corrupting (Lee, 1994).

The changes in young people’s bodies that begin at puberty can attribute to the feelings of being more physically visible. But for girls, it also means they are forced to conceal any sign of their menstruation (Lee, 1994). Within the school context girls report a need for secrecy, working to manage menstruation, but also hide any physical signs from others (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). In their research Burrows and Johnson (2005) found that although girls wished the school would ensure they had better access to menstrual products, the girls felt unable to address these issues because menstruation was something embarrassing and

shameful and should be kept hidden. When the researcher suggested they approach staff to ask for a machine in the girls' toilets, she reported being met with "lots of incredulous laughter" and one girl responded "it's just too embarrassing" (Burrows & Johnson, 2005, p. 240).

From the onset of menstruation, girls are told they must accept the limits menstruation will place on their bodies and activities:

From the time of menarche, a girl learns to be ashamed of her body; she is told it limits her freedom, just because of the way it naturally functions ... where there is a vacuum of education, there is plenty of folklore to fill it. 'Hide menstruation, don't go swimming or wash your hair or take a bath or touch plants...' These are some rumours whispered to young girls. How are they going to learn to be proud of being a woman? (Weideger, 1978, cited in Lees, 1994, p. 286)

Girls can often feel trapped in an unwinnable set of rules when menstruating. They are faced with rules about acceptable behaviour from other menstruating girls. For example, wearing light coloured or tight clothing, as well as participating in strenuous or physical activities and hobbies, are seen as inappropriate or dangerous to maintaining the concealment of menstruation (Bryman, 2001; Raftos, et al., 1998). But this concealment also requires that she does not get caught being unable to fully participate in the activities she would normally participate in, thus drawing attention to her menstruation status (Bryman, 2001).

From the onset of menstruation girls learn that others, especially men, must never be aware of its occurrence. Menstruation must be concealed from others and shrouded in secrecy

(Bryman, 2001; Costos, et al., 2002). The concealment of menstruation goes further than a desire for privacy. The secrecy around menstruation removes the individual's right to choose, rather it imposes silence and can make girls complicit in the acceptance of secrecy. Hiding menstruation is so ingrained that although almost all women between puberty and menopause menstruate, everyone pretends that no specific woman is menstruating at any specific moment (Diorio & Munro, 2000). Menstruation is, paradoxically, considered a natural and normal occurrence, but at the same time something that no women are acknowledged and observed to be having (Koff & Rierdan, 1995).

Signs of menstruation must be rigidly governed. Girls learn they must be diligent about concealing menstruation (Bryman, 2001). The discovery by others that a woman is menstruating is seen, not only as an ultimate humiliation, but also a failure to maintain acceptable social rules about womanhood (Allen, et al., 2011; Fingerson, 2006). These feelings of humiliation are not only connected to bleeding and the fear of discovery through spotting and staining, but also connected to having others see menstrual products in your belongings (Schooler, et al., 2005). Both men and women report negative reactions when a wrapped tampon falls from a woman's bag. The woman in question is then viewed as less competent and likable (Stubbs, 2008). For some girls, this embarrassment and shame is not necessarily connected to the humiliation of being discovered, but simply by the fact that she is menstruating (Schooler, et al., 2005).

Some of these feelings of shame may be connected to the shame and secrecy associated with female genitalia. Girls and women are often unable to locate and identify the structure of their genitals (McKeever, 1984). For many women the stigma and shame is connected to

their vaginas and surrounding area that is often considered unspeakable and unpleasant (Schooler, et al., 2005). The applicator tampon is often promoted and favoured because it removes the need for women to touch their vaginas, therefore enabling women to separate themselves from their bodies (McKeever, 1984). With issues of shame and/or discomfort associated with their genitals, menstruation may only serve to draw attention to the body that women try to ignore (McKeever, 1984; Stubbs, 2008). Stubbs (2008) believes that the secrecy and shame attached to menstruation leads women to manage their menstruation cycles to the possible point of eliminating them altogether, this resulted from women distancing themselves from their physical body and taking up the dominant discourse of femininity, with its focus on physical appearance and passivity.

The secrecy around menstruation is not limited to just concealing the evidence, but also includes taboos about talking of menstruation (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Kissling, 1996b; Koff & Rierdan, 1995). These taboos enforce the isolation and secrecy associated with menstruation by creating rules and restrictions that define acceptable communication (Kissling, 2002). It can be argued that menstruation carries even stronger taboos than illness and death (Kissling, 1996b). Mothers are more likely and comfortable to talk to their daughters about conception, pregnancy and childbirth than to discuss menstruation (Kissling, 1996b). While some girls struggle with talking to their mothers due to embarrassment and the fear of what their mothers may say or how they will tell them (Diorio & Munro, 2000), talking about menstruation with fathers and men in general is viewed as an unbreakable social taboo (Koff & Rierdan, 1995; McKeever, 1984). The difficulties many find in talking openly about menstruation can lead girls to feel unprepared

and wishing they had more information to understand their experiences with menstruation (Neuman, 2006).

When talk about menstruation does occur, there appears to be rules about what can or cannot be discussed (Kissling, 2002). Menstruation vocabulary often uses words that tie menstruation to failure, uselessness and poor health. We talk about menstruation as occurring as a result of 'failed' reproduction, the dying and expelling of the uterine lining (Allen, et al., 2011). There are a multitude of euphemisms used to discuss and label menstruation. The existence of euphemisms attests to the negativity around menstruation, as the euphemisms work to conceal the actual nature of menstruation. For women, this works as a secret language to diminish embarrassment, while for males, it is used derogatorily (McKeever, 1984). Therefore, the language commonly used about menstruation contributes to the negative attitudes and perpetuates stereotypes that provide boys with socially acceptable opportunities to use their gendered power by ridiculing women (Diorio & Munro, 2000; McKeever, 1984). While there are rules prohibiting talk about menstruation, PMS is not censored, and is considered the only acceptable public acknowledgement of menstruation (Kissling, 1996b).

The shame and secrecy around menstruation can be seen in the advertisement of menstrual products. While advertisements now include images of actual products, there are still rules about concealment (Kissling, 1996a; Merskin, 1999; Raftos, et al., 1998). Menstrual products are never shown in bathrooms, despite the fact that it is the room they are most likely used and kept in, and they are never shown in use (Kissling, 1996a). In a current New Zealand advertisement for menstrual pads, a young man is discovered by his girlfriend and

her parents playing with her menstrual pads. At first glance this may be read as challenging the discourse of secrecy, but when taking in the advertisement rule that menstrual products cannot be shown performing the task they are designed for, it can also be seen as concealment of menstruation. In most advertisements menstruation is seldom mentioned, and the word 'blood' is never used (Kissling, 1996a; Merskin, 1999; Raftos, et al., 1998). Blood seems so taboo, even in the animations of how protective a product may be, the blue watery liquid used is far from the reality of the colour and consistency of menstrual blood. As Merskin (1999) commented in reference to this liquid "No, women don't secrete blue liquids" (p. 955).

Menstruation as a Medical Issue

Menstruation as part of the puberty instruction is taught as a health subject within New Zealand schools. The way we teach menstruation, with the use of scientific and medical terms such as eggs and reproduction contributes to the medicalisation of menstruation (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Simes & Berg, 2001). By expressing menstruation in these medical terms, it removes women's reproductive process; the egg being released, the thickening of the uterine lining and its disintegration, from the women's awareness (Simes & Berg, 2001). "These are issues that girls do not "feel" during their periods, but are organs and processes that happen inside the girls unseen" (Fingerson, 2006, p. 59). In framing menstruation in terms of reproduction, the purely female process of menstruating is placed outside of her personal experience into the realm of science and medicine (Fingerson, 2006; Simes & Berg, 2001).

The use of medical and biological discourses to construct menstruation places it almost exclusively as part of the reproductive process (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Simes & Berg, 2001). Menstruation is often labelled as 'failed reproduction' (Diorio & Munro, 2000). This construction of menstruation makes women's bodies the passive site of reproduction. Eggs not fertilised by male sperm are unwanted bad eggs. When these eggs are flushed out, menstruation occurs (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Simes & Berg, 2001). Fingerson (2006) found that young girls took up this discourse of menstruation as reproduction, and that this discourse relegated women to see themselves in terms of child bearing and pregnancy. As one female teenager stated in relation to reproduction, it is "what the female body is made for" (Fingerson, 2006, p. 63). When asked why menstruation occurs, a male teenager responded "I guess the reason they menstruate is because a boy hasn't had sex with them" (Fingerson, 2006, p. 63). It can be argued that women's bodies and sexuality are constructed as passive objects to active male subjects and sexuality (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

Alongside a medical discourse of menstruation as reproduction, is the discourse of menstruation as 'illness'. Diorio and Munro (2000) showed how menstruation is often presented with the attachment of uncomfortable and adverse consequences. Menstruation is often depicted as bringing physical discomfort, and unruly emotional disruptions. These depictions become embedded even before menarche through cultural beliefs, and advertisements that present cures for the ailments of menstruation (Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Costos, et al., 2002; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Simes & Berg, 2001). Diorio and Munro (2000) described how puberty was often presented as "one of the most exciting facts of life" (p. 357), but young girls are taught that puberty will bring menstruation, and in turn a lifetime spent dealing with pain and discomfort. The discourse of menstruation as illness

acts against the idea that menstruation is a natural occurrence. Fingerson (2006) argued that this discourse takes agency from the menstruating woman and places it with some outside 'other' who has the power to define and control what is considered normal and natural. Menstruation becomes something that needs control and treatment, relying on medical or pharmaceutical interventions to treat the symptoms, or, in some cases, restricting or suppressing menstruation all together.

This discourse of menstruation as an illness has taken many forms over the centuries, constructed through societal, cultural and economic means (Kissling, 1996a; Simes & Berg, 2001). Kissling (1996a) found that when women's work was essential and beneficial for the economy, menstruation is presented as a sign of natural health, but when women's labour becomes superfluous it is then classified as a sickness. In the late nineteenth century woman's natural state was seen as sick, partly due to the pathologising of menstruation. However, for economic reasons this illness was not extended to working class women. At that time it was said that women needed to retire from public activity and get absolute rest to as to not weaken their uterus. One medical doctor presented the idea of menstrual pain came from the anger women had with God for creating her a woman, and therefore must rid herself of that anger and accept her biological function. These ideas of menstruating women needing rest continued to the 1970s, when women were encouraged to avoid strenuous exercise contributing to the discourse that females are docile and passive, and the ideal of femininity are women who are not bold, or actively involved in any type of strenuous activity (Simes & Berg, 2001).

Fingerson (2006) also found that although young girls were taught and could repeat the medical and scientific discourse of menstruation, they also found it to be unhelpful to explain and prepare them for the experience. She claimed that the use of scientific terms distanced the young girls and women from their bodies, that while most could describe the process of menstruation with the scientific terms they were taught in school or from their mothers, they struggled to describe their own personal experiences with menstruation. Diorio & Munro (2000) also claimed that the medical discourse obstructs and obscures any other constructed understanding of menstruation. They acknowledge that it is appropriate to teach the medical discourse on menstruation, but there is also a need to include other discourses that will expand the understanding and acceptance of young people. As McKeever (1984) claims, reducing menstruation to a physiological phenomenon discounts the diverse social, cultural and personal complex meanings and experiences. This can also be seen as contributing to a limited diversity in the constitution of womanhood.

Menstruation as Constituting the 'Real Woman'

The focus on reproduction within the medical discourse of menstruation is also used within the discourses that constitute the ideal 'real' woman. Menstruation, as the overt sign of puberty, signals the natural transition from child to adult (Diorio & Munro, 2000). For boys, this transition offers a wide range of possibilities, including family, career and adventure, but girls entering puberty often have their future roles limited to that of motherhood (Brooks-Gunn, 1987; Diorio & Munro, 2000). Diorio and Munro (2000) propose that in the way menstruation is presented motherhood is constructed as the main objective of females. Girls are told menstruation can be painful and bothersome, but that it is a good event

because it means they can have children. Chang et al. (2009) also contributed to this discourse when they stated that “the onset of menarche can be positively associated with physical maturity, along with the ability to marry and reproduce” (p. 2041). Diorio and Munro (2000) state that puberty education is different for boys and girls, noting that boys are encouraged to feel excitement and power with their journey through puberty, while girls are cautioned about the negative effects of menstruation and having themselves defined early as mothers: “While girls are told to be excited about growing up so they can have babies *in the future*, boys have their developing adulthood linked to power and pleasure *now*” (Diorio & Munro, 2000, emphasis in original, p. 354).

With reproduction and motherhood being signalled as the purpose of menstruation, girls are taught their bodies are essentially “gender differentiated reproductive vehicles” (Diorio & Munro, 2000, p. 348). Menstruation becomes understood solely within heterosexual reproductive terms, allowing no space for young women who do not view themselves as heterosexual or do not want children to understand and incorporate menstruation into their own subjectivity. This prescription of heterosexual reproduction creates a subjectivity of sexual objects for male pleasure and as the mother of men’s children, making women subordinate in the male/female sexual hierarchy (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Lee, 1994). Girls’ sexuality, at that stage, is represented by impregnation, the passive act of having an egg fertilised. This presentation lacks the idea of personal power and enjoyment, and connecting sex with pregnancy presents heterosexuality as the sole sexuality for women (Diorio & Munro, 2000). Menstruation begins the association of female with the reproductive and sexual role of motherhood, but at the same time are warned against

sexual activity and girls find they are subjected to more parental rules and restrictions than boys at the same point of their sexual maturation (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

Therefore it can be seen that discourses in and around puberty construct boys and girls differently. Burrows and Johnson (2005) showed how boys are able, and even encouraged, to talk about the changes that occur for them during puberty, but for girls the secrecy around menstruation makes their puberty experience taboo. This may reinforce the notion that girls' bodies are inferior. In her study into the depiction of menstruation in the media, Kissling (2002) found that representations of menstruation were used to reinforce the binary of men and women; with women as passive, dependent and relationship focused and men as active, independent and aggressive. Binary creations of ascendant/descendant positions, with the female being on the descendant side of the pair, means that aspects of femininity are viewed as inferior or wrong. Burrows and Johnson (2005) say this can work to create a tool for oppression and ridicule. Diorio and Munro (2000) claim that the way menstruation is taught in the classroom can create an "officially sanctioned discourse which offers boys opportunities to practise male power by ridiculing women" (p. 351). However, Allen et.al. (2010) found that menstruation can also be used as a tool to gain power over boys, using it to fluster and embarrass. While this is not challenging the negative presentations of menstruation, it is using the discourses to position themselves as more powerful and gain agency.

This chapter reviewed the research literature conducted in the area of the construction of societal and cultural understanding of menstruation. It also informs the research I plan to perform in how menstruation is taught in New Zealand schools. Through classroom

observations and interviews with both the teachers and small groups of adolescent girls, I will be looking at the discourses presented by the teachers, and if they continue to contribute to these identified discourses, and contribute to the dominant construction of menstruation, or whether there are attempts to open up the possibility of other discourses that will create a wider range of subjectivities available to young girls.

In the next chapter I will outline the processes that I followed in creating this research. After discussing the process of reflexivity and how I worked to maintain a reflexive approach to my research, I will outline the process of gaining ethics approval from the University of Otago, and then the procedures, observation and interviewing, of my research. The data collected was analysed through a process of discourse analysis, and this is discussed in the next chapter, before finishing with an outline of the school and lesson structure.

Chapter Four: Research design

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the design of my research, and the methods I have used to collect and analyse the data. In my investigation into the discursive construction of menstruation in puberty education, looking at what discourses are made available to young women about menstruation, and how these are taken up and/or resisted, as well as how these discourses construct women's subjectivities, I was able to observe three classes within the puberty unit of an Intermediate school, and conduct interviews with both the teachers, and small groups of girls. This chapter will outline and examine the methods I used in conducting this research. I will discuss the importance of reflexivity and how the reflexive process informed my research. I will then look at the ethical process of research in general, and specific ethical issues I faced in researching menstruation in a school setting.

During my research I was able to observe three lessons within the Positive Puberty unit. These observations focused primarily on the discourses found and used within the lesson on menstruation, and how the teachers and students created and maintained these discourses. I will examine some of the ideals of observation research as they apply to my specific research needs. Following this will be a discussion of both individual and group interviews. As part of my research I interviewed the two teachers individually and did group interviews with a small group of five girls from each classroom. These interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. To analyse the material collected in these transcriptions and observation field notes, I used a process of discourse analysis to investigate the discursive

construction of menstruation within puberty education, looking at the discourses presented within the lesson, how these discourses were maintained and created, and how the young women positioned themselves within this construction. I then provide a discussion on how this discourse analysis was implemented. The chapter concludes with a broad overview of the lesson and management techniques as well as teacher and student reactions to the topic. While the research presented is focused on the discourses around menstruation this outline gives a context to those discourses by showing the structure and environment they were constructed within.

Reflexivity

From the very initial stages of this research, when developing my research topic, I was aware of how the 'I' influenced my choices and direction. As a woman with my own personal experiences with menstruation, as someone that identifies as feminist, and as a student with a developing academic interest in puberty and sexuality education, who I am and what I think has influenced the development of my research questions, my ethical considerations, and the practical process of data collection. This is not to say that my research was solely based on my personal interest, or indeed personal amusement, but rather aspects of myself pointed me towards a topic that was both academically and socially important. Within a tradition of objectivity and neutrality within research, and a dominant academic discourse that constructs personal voice as unreliable and illegitimate, the researcher's subjectivity is often negated, minimised or criticised (Jones, 1992). However, within a postmodern approach to research and academia, the subject becomes an important part in the presentation of their research. The researcher is, therefore, not some

independent bystander able to impartially identify and record the 'true reality', but instead brings their own subjectivity into the field of research, and their subject position will influence the data collected and how it is understood (Jones, 1992; Pillow, 2003). As Jones (1992) says, "all of us *inscribe* rather than just *describe* reality" (p. 25). It was therefore important for me as the researcher, to be reflective of the influences of my own subjectivity, and my subject position throughout the research process.

On a fundamental level, reflexivity is about giving a full and honest account of the research process, but it can be seen as more than that (Reay, 1996). It becomes about recognising "the difference our differences make", looking at the processes and position we are caught up in (Reay, 1996, p. 443). Reflexivity is an increased attention to the subjectivity of the researcher, who he or she is, and how she or he affects data collection and analysis. This leads to questions about the researcher's ability to represent another, and the power and ownership within the research process (Pillow, 2003). As a researcher, I became aware of how my own learning styles, my feminist and other personal belief structures and personal reactions and interactions with the other participants all play a part in the construction of this research. These influences cannot simply be removed, but as a reflexive researcher I work to be aware of them, and how they might affect and influence my research. However, some see the proliferation of reflexivity as indulgent and narcissistic when all researchers do is talk endlessly about their position (Pillow, 2003). Bourdieu (1990, cited in Reay, 1996) differentiates between a narcissistic tendency and genuine reflexivity through subjecting of the position of the observer to the same critical analysis as that of the researched. The answer then, as Pillow (2003) recommends, is not to stop questioning, but to make visible the ways reflexivity is used.

Reflexivity not only contributes to the production of knowledge, but provides insight into how that knowledge is produced (Pillow, 2003). It enables the researcher, and therefore the reader, to step away from the traditional view of the privileged non-position of knowledge by analysing “the modes of production, the roles it played in society, the interests it served and the historical processes through which it came to power” (McCarthy, 1994, cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 178). When we question the concept of objectivity, Pillow (2003) says we must also question the subjectivity of the researcher. Reflexivity is not a task that is performed, but rather an ongoing process of self-awareness and reflection throughout the whole process of research that makes visible the practices and construction of knowledge in order to produce a reflective analysis (Pillow, 2003).

The researcher must be aware of his/her own subjectivity and how that influences the production of the research. Pillow (2003) says it is impossible to write ‘unshackled’ from our subject positions as, since stated earlier in Chapter Two, subject positioning is not simply a role that can be stepped in and out of. So it is important for the researcher to, at least, be reflexive on her/his own subjectivity and find ways to acknowledge the ways it has influenced the research. I have personally found the way a discourse of concealment about discussing menstruation has affected my comfort when writing about menstruation and in particular menstrual blood (Kissling, 1996a). Reflexivity is not simply achieved by providing confessional accounts, but rather, considering how this subjectivity has moulded, guided and impacted the research. Reflexivity, according to St. Pierre (1997) may lead us to consider why we read and respond in the ways we do, therefore theorising our own lives, and moving towards an ongoing validity of response. Pillow (2003) also discusses the need

to be aware of how we use reflexivity in relation to knowing 'the other'. While much of research focuses on representing the other, reflexivity can show the limits to achieving that recognition. When working with 'the other', reflexivity can lead us to looking at how much participation 'the other' has in the production of their representation. Reflexivity should always take into account the unequal power relationship within the research process, not dismissing its influences, but looking for ways to make the research process about partnership and collaboration, although the degree of which may move between full collaboration to groups working together to produce new meanings and understandings.

As part of this reflexive process I spoke with both teachers about any effect my presence within the classroom lessons may have had. I brought another dynamic into the class and therefore will always have an impact on what is being observed. Ms Harris² thought I had little effect on her class, partly because the school gets a number of student teachers and researchers through the year, so the students have become accustomed to having new people in their classes. She also decided, given the sensitivity of the topic, to prepare her class for my presence:

Ms Harris: it was interesting because I thought it might do, and I had talked to the kids before you came in, and I talked to them a couple of times. First I just mentioned there'd be someone in that particular session observing and they had quite a few questions. Will she be involved? No she'll just be observing. And I said she'd actually be observing me teaching. So I deflected them to you observing me teaching, not listening to what they were saying, and how they were interacting and things like that. And while it might have, they were probably a bit curious to

² All the participants in this research have been given pseudonyms.

start with once they got into it, I don't think they remembered you were there.
(Teacher interview 1)

In the other class, my actual observing did not appear to cause any major impact on the behaviours of the students. However the teacher reported that me being there on that day to observe that particular lesson caused some management issues and may have caused the lesson to be longer than the students were used to:

Ms Summers: Well it did, because I would have that session, I would have stopped I wouldn't have taken the session then, because I had a group of kids that weren't, that hadn't come back from another session so I would have just said, look let's go on with something else, and wait until they come back, which made the lesson really long, it wouldn't have been as long as it had been. But because you were there I sort of had to run with the time we had, so that kind of, that beginning stuff I had to draw it out until, cos I was waiting for everyone to come back.
(Teacher Interview 2)

This delay in the beginning and the lengthening of the lesson, may have resulted in some attention difficulties for the students, and the awkwardness of the teacher having to adjust her lesson plan at the last moment.

While it appears that my presence did not greatly impact the lesson, as a researcher I need to be aware of the influences and opinions I bring to the research, how that impacts my interpretations of events and the ways the participants react to my presence and how that in turn can influence their behaviour and presentation of their beliefs. It is impossible for these influences not to occur, but with awareness they, and their impact can be acknowledged and the processes become more transparent. Reflexivity is not a discreet process, a goal that can be ticked off as achieved, but rather an ongoing process, that is

constantly worked with and negotiated throughout the research process (Reay, 1996). Therefore as I moved through the research process, as laid out in this chapter, I tried to assume a reflexive approach.

Ethics

As researchers, our interview practices must also be ethical. One primary factor of ethical research and interviewing is to do no harm. This is often harder to achieve in practice than in principle (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). The interviewee is often asked to provide the intimate and personal meaning structures of their lives, with the knowledge that information is being recorded to be used as part of the research (Limerick, 1996). The interviewer is not simply asking questions, but requiring the interviewee to expose themselves to another person, and therefore the whole process should be handled with sensitivity and awareness to cause as little harm as possible (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). This is particularly pertinent to this project as I will be asking young women to discuss a topic that is often surrounded with discourses of secrecy. There are some key concepts to performing ethical research. In the following section I will address three of these concepts; voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality. These concerns were attended to by seeking approval of the University of Otago ethics committee, to ensure ethical practice.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in interviews must be voluntary. The interviewee must have the right to choose to participate, or withdraw their participation at anytime. This is another aspect that is

often easier to define in principle than to implement in practice (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Both Nairn, Munro and Smith (2005) and Limerick (1996) identified the ways voluntary participation can be influenced in a school setting. People may feel obliged to participate based on the social and discursive power structures of the institution, and Nairn, Munro and Smith (2005) reported that some of her participants were 'volunteered' by their teacher and felt unable to refuse. She gave them the option of withdrawing from the interview, but as this would mean returning to the teacher in question, it appeared not to be an option the students felt capable of choosing.

Although all the girls participating in this research were presented with individual consent forms, it is hard to truly guarantee their participation was voluntary. The girls could have withdrawn at that time by simply not consenting. However, the teachers chose the group of girls they felt would be the most useful for my research, and the most interested in partaking in it. I did make numerous mentions that their participation was voluntary, and they could stop at any time, and the girls did appear happy and eager to be interviewed, however, with the rules and practices within a school setting it may have been difficult for the girls to pull out and return to class, feeling an obligation to follow the instructions of their teacher. One way of countering that, was interviewing within a group, a girl could not participate but not have to return to her class. Her silence would not seem disrespectful to the authority of the teacher, nor would she have to acknowledge any lack of participation. As it was, this did not seem an issue within my interviews as all the girls participated fully, and apparently with their agreement.

Children's participation in research is often governed by adults. There are a large number of adults acting as gatekeepers that must be navigated before the child can be approached with the option of participating in a research project (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Valentine, 1999). Schools will often have set up a system of protocols that the researcher must process through before being able to contact child participants. Adults, parents or teachers, often have the ultimate authority over whether a child participates in the interview or not, volunteering the child's participation, or preventing the child from choosing to participate (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Valentine, 1999). These gatekeepers can also be influenced by their subject position, and the dominant discourses that construct their beliefs and understanding of a topic. While many of the schools I approached declined to participate for practical issues of time constraints, scheduling, and other commitments, one school informed me that research into menstruation education had no significance or importance, despite that at the same time there was controversy involving the CEO of New Zealand's Employers and Manufacturers Association calling women less productive because of their 'monthly sick problems'. This could be seen as conforming to the dominant discourse of secrecy around menstruation. As Burrows & Johnson (2005) also found, there is often reluctance, a belief that menstruation is not a topic that people will want to talk about, or see as a vital area of investigation. Menstruation can be seen as not just a taboo topic of discussion, but also becomes a topic that people prefer to ignore and avoid. The gatekeepers, and protocols around attaining access to a school are, ideally, in place to protect the schools, and the children from inappropriate requests, but they often take the choice away from the child (Valentine, 1999).

Informed Consent

Alongside the concept of voluntary participation is informed consent (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). The participants in the interview must be informed of the research and what their participation will entail before volunteering their participation. However, being given consent does not provide the interviewer license to use the information for any purpose they desire. The consent is given to the objectives and expectations stated on the information sheet, and to use the interview material for other purposes could be seen as deceitful (Tolich & Davidson, 1999).

With children, consent must also be gained by their parents and guardians. Under the age of 18, it is said that children are unable to give their full consent. They are seen as reliant on parents and guardians to protect their interests and make decisions for their wellbeing (Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996; Morrow & Richards, 1996). This is based on an apparently arbitrary age of legal consent, that Morrow and Richards (1996) state is not based on any evidence of young people's maturity or decision making skills. They quote the Gillick-competence as another way to determine if the child's competence to give her or his consent. The Gillick-competence

stipulates that a competent child is one who 'achieves a sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him or her to understand fully what is proposed' and further that the competent child also has 'sufficient discretion to enable him or her to make a wise choice in his or her own interests'. (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 95)

Therefore a child's ability to consent is not based on a legally specified age, but rather their ability to understand the process they are being invited to take part in, and make a

determination of whether it will be beneficial for them to participate. Not all children will be able to do this before or after a predetermined age, so all children should be assessed individually. Mahon et.al. (1996) suggests that children alone should be approached directly for consent. Contact with parents should be to gain permission to contact their children, rather than them consenting, or not, to their children's participation in the research.

In this study I provided information and consent forms to both the girls and their parents and/or guardians. I did not have any direct contact with the parents as the information and consent forms were sent home with the students. This did provide the parents with an opportunity to decide the research was inappropriate for their child's maturity level, and/or any social or cultural objections. While this did provide a safeguard, after the initial consent the actual decision to participate belonged to the girls, as they could choose to volunteer for the interviews or not.

Confidentiality

When research is conducted through interviews, anonymity cannot occur. However, it is the researcher's duty to ensure the confidentiality of the participants in reporting. This means that the researcher will be able to identify the participants, but this information will not be recognisable by the public (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). When working with children, one option is to give the children the right to choose their own pseudonyms, therefore including the child in the process of their own confidentiality, and ensuring they are aware their own names will not be used (Valentine, 1999). In this project I asked the participants to choose their own pseudonyms, and make all endeavours to keep any identifying details of the

young women and of their school anonymous in the completed thesis. Because the research was conducted in a New Zealand city, the identity of the school can be as exposing as the names of the participants, so the confidentiality must also include the schools' names and locations.

When working with children, the need for confidentiality may become a difficult process to navigate (Mahon et.al, 1996; Valentine, 1999). Children, and the spaces they inhabit, are not always given the same privacy that adults are accustomed to. Children's rooms in their homes are often entered by adults without the child's consent, and in the school setting, it can be hard to find a space that does not include adult supervision and interruptions, making it difficult for children to talk without being overheard (Valentine, 1999). A final issue when it comes to confidentiality is that of reports of potential harm. Although children are entitled to the same confidentiality as adults, when disclosures of potential harm, such as abuse or neglect, are made, the researcher is in a position of having to attend to this (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Mahon et.al. (1996) and Morrow and Richards (1996) all say that these disclosures, if they occur, need to be addressed, but the child should be informed that nothing will be done without informing them. If action needs to be taken, decisions should not be made by the child but at the same time they should know it is going to occur, so they will not feel blindsided. While I ensure that all the participants had a list of people and places they could go to talk about any issue that came up during the interviews, none of the participants in this study disclosed anything that indicated potential or current harm to them.

Observation

I was given full access by one local intermediate school to their lesson plans, actual lessons, and the teachers and students involved. A schedule was set up with the help of the Head Teacher of a three classroom syndicate. I gained permission to observe the lesson on menstruation given by two of the three teachers and the supplementary girls-only lesson/recap on menstruation given at the end of the unit. This consists of one class lesson within the positive puberty component of the curriculum. The unit also includes identifying and labelling the reproductive and genital organs of both sexes, and a lesson on wet dreams and erections. While I did not observe these lessons, future research may wish to look at a comparison between the menstruation and the erections and wet dreams lessons. As the third teacher was new to both the school and teaching of this topic, the Head teacher thought it best that he was not given the added stress of being observed. Although it may have been interesting to see how the gender of the teacher relates to teaching sex and puberty education, that was not the focus of this research, so I happily complied to limit my observations to the remaining two classes.

My initial process of data collection was observation. As part of the qualitative research process, observation offers a view of the naturally occurring events, interactions and behaviours of subjects within a specific cultural or social setting (Adler & Adler, 1994). Historically, observation, probably influenced by quantitative methods of standardised and controlled experiments, was seen as being performed by a researcher that stands outside of events, without manipulating or directing their course, and thereby producing valid and reliable data (Adler & Adler, 1994; Angrosino, 2005). However, from a post-modern

perspective, “avoiding researcher influence on subjects is an idealistic improbability” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 382) and the traditional view of objectivity, validation and replication gives way to investigating a “greater consciousness of situational identities and to the perception of relative power, particularly in reference to studies dealing with gender, sexuality and people on the sociocultural margins” (Angrosino, 2005, p. 734). Therefore, instead of looking for one measurable valid truth, the role of observation within my research was to observe and record the multiple discourses and how they worked separately and together to construct a variety of subjectivities.

According to Bryman (2001), there are five major types of observation research. Structured, or systematic observation, takes place within a set of formulated rules that detail a predetermined framework of what should be looked for and recorded. Each person taking part in the research is observed for the same length of time under the same criteria. The second type, of participant observation, is probably the most well known of the observation types. It involves the researcher’s prolonged immersion into the social setting of his/her field of interest. Within this setting, the participant observer will seek to observe all the members of that setting and elicit the meanings they give to their behaviours and environment. Non-participant observation is when the observer enters into the natural or social setting but does not participate in what is happening. S/he observes the behaviours and activities of that setting, but remains separate from it. Usually associated with non-participant observation is that of unstructured observation, the fourth type of observation. The aim of unstructured observation is to record as much information and detail as possible to create a narrative account of the behaviour of those being observed. The final type of observation falls into two categories, simple and contrived observation. With both these

observations the observer remains unobtrusive and those being observed are not aware of his or her presence. With simple observation, the observer has no influence over the events or setting he or she is observing, whereas the contrived observation actively alters the setting of their observation (Bryman, 2001). In this project I used a simple unstructured observation of the classroom lessons on menstruation.

My observation was specific to the lessons on menstruation. As my focus was on discourse, my classroom observation covered not only the language used, and the ways in which discourse was created and presented within the framework of the lesson, but also body language, and students' and teachers' reactions and interactions with the material. However, I only observed three 40-minute classroom lessons, so what I observed in these classes was more a snapshot in time, and I have had to base my research on those specific observations, supplemented by conversations with the teachers, and information gained from later interviews, rather than a broader understanding of classroom life. Within this framework I would be seen as doing non-participant, unstructured observation. The students and teachers were aware of my presence and reason for being there, but I did not take part in any aspect of the menstruation lessons. Instead I sat to the side in all the classes and took as detailed and extensive field notes as possible.

Observation requires detailed and extensive field notes (Neuman, 2006). This is often viewed as a tedious but necessary part of the observation process. It provides the researcher with a detailed report of the observation that can be referred to during the research. These field notes should set out to describe the physical setting and social interaction in as much detail as possible, as the core of how we position ourselves, and

others is often communicated through the mundane, trivial everyday interactions. It is not just in the big moments that we can see and understand ourselves, but also in the small and common moments (Neuman, 2006). When observing the classroom lesson it was important to not just record the verbal language, but the social interactions and reactions of the students and teachers. As Neuman (2006) stated people express social information, feelings and attitudes through non-verbal communication, and their relationships with others is often shown through how they position themselves within a group, it is therefore important to observe and record these aspects of communication.

Interviewing

After I had completed my observations, I was able to interview both teachers, and two groups of five participants from those teachers' students. These interviews took place in a separate private room, within the students' classroom block. It therefore provided a space within the school environment, but outside of the actual classroom which hopefully contributed to a more personal, less rigid instructional atmosphere. The teachers were given book vouchers and students were given movie vouchers at the conclusion of the interval in appreciation for their time and contribution towards this research.

Individual and group interviews are a site of power relations (Dyck, 1997). The interviewer must be aware of and negotiate the power relationships between interviewer and interviewee, but it is impossible to completely remove its effect (Dyck, 1997; Limerick et.al., 1996; Nairn, Munro & Smith, 2005; Tang, 2002). For some researchers, this is addressed by like interviewing like. For example women interviewing women, or interviews happening

between people of the same ethnic group (Nairn, Munro and Smith, 2005). The idea that paying attention to who interviews whom will therefore address the power differences seems based on a very essentialist view of the self (Nairn, Munro and Smith, 2005). To think one woman will fully understand another's experience simply on the basis of gender fails to take into account other variables such as ethnicity, class, age, religion, and so on. For instance as a female it could be said that I could be seen as equally sharing the experience of menstruation, but this fails to acknowledge the ways that being a middle-aged woman, of Pakeha and Scottish heritage who learned about menstruation in the early 1980s contributes to my positioning in the interview.

As Nairn, Munro and Smith (2005) also points out there are other issues that this idea of like interviewing like fails to address or can even attribute to. If, in the New Zealand context, in an attempt to address the power imbalance of Pakeha interviewing non-Pakeha, we absent Pakeha researchers from the interview process we are also abrogating our responsibility and partnership under the Treaty of Waitangi (see also Bishop, 1996). It also runs the risk of othering minority groups. The issues and experiences of Māori, women, the working class become 'not our problem'. Therefore while we must address the power relations in interviewing people of difference, this is not achieved by abrogating our responsibilities, but rather we should develop reflexive practices that acknowledge and negotiate those power imbalances. Within the interview process for this research, it became clear that a male interviewer would not have been well received by the group of female students. As much of what they talked about involved their discomfort about boys knowing, this same non-comfort would probably be evident if talking to a male interviewer. Although not an issue in the scope of this research, this idea of like only interviewing like may need to be addressed

in future research, while girls and young women may feel more comfortable talking to other women, by maintaining this gender division are we contributing to, and encouraging the power given to the discourse of secrecy, especially in relation to not discussing menstruation with males.

Children, especially students used to the dynamic of the teacher-student relationship, often view adults as being knowing and powerful. Mahon et.al (1996) found one key issue that could affect the process of interviewing children was the degree that most children viewed the adult as an expert. Children are often accustomed to adults in a position of authority, such as parent or teacher and are used to responding in a prescribed manner. Fingerson (2006) found when talking to young people about menstruation, they seemed focused on giving the 'right' answer in the context of the learnt classroom material, rather than their individual and personal experiences. For Burgess (1988), one way to disrupt the idea of questions that test the participants' knowledge is to create a non-hierarchical relationship where both or all parties contribute to the conversation. The interviewer is, therefore, not some distant neutral questioner, but rather an equal participant in the research conversation. While it is important to maintain the purpose of the interview, I also found it helpful to join in on the jokes, and allow the conversation to drift off topic occasionally. My age and life experience denies my entry into these young people's cultural group but, hopefully by also separating myself from the perceived behaviours of a teacher I was able to create a more informal, less classroom-like interaction.

The individual interview.

As stated above, as part of my research process I conducted interviews with both teachers and students. After some consideration, it was decided that group interviews with the student participants would be the most beneficial and productive approach. The teacher interviews were done individually, and on the last day of my presence in their school. Although the scope of my research made my contact with the school, and the individual teachers, limited, I was hoping by conducting the interviews at the end of the process a connection, albeit a small one, or the beginnings of a partnership could be formed. However, with an awareness of time constraints, any relationship formation with the teachers involved in this research was superficial at best, and therefore probably had little impact on the interview process, but by waiting until the end of the school involvement period, the teachers were more aware and knowledgeable of who I was, and the purposes of my research than they would have been if I had conducted the interviews at the beginning of my time in the school. The interview process is a personal and powerful interaction between people that are, often, almost complete strangers (Dyck, 1997) and as an interviewer, I need to be aware of the potential vulnerability and exposure participants may experience, and the possible power dynamics that can appear during the interview process. In the following section I will examine these issues in greater detail.

The interview is not simply a process of the participant retelling their experiences to a neutral, objective observer, but rather it should be seen as a joint construction between interviewer and interviewee where meaning is negotiated (Dyck, 1997). Both the researcher and participant come to the process with their own purposes and expectations. It is often the personal experiences of the researcher that guide the questions and directions of the

research (Dyck, 1997; Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, & Grace, 1996). Therefore, the researcher's position in the research and the subject position of all those involved becomes a critical part of the interview process (Limerick, et al., 1996). My own experiences with menstruation, combined with my interest in feminism and poststructuralism contributed to the interview, the questions asked and the form the interview took. I cannot be seen as an unattached recorder of someone else's story, but rather directly and indirectly shaping the way the interviewee's story is constructed. It is, therefore, necessary to be aware of the power relations within an interview, and how they may affect the retelling.

The group interview.

A way to disrupt the power dynamic of adult as expert is to conduct interviews in small groups (Mahon et.al., 1996). Children are not often asked to express their personal opinions, especially within the school setting, where they are expected to recite the 'facts' expressed by adults (Mahon, et al., 1996; Morrow & Richards, 1996). So the interview process may be unfamiliar and unsettling, requiring time for children to develop a relationship with the interviewer (Morrow & Richards, 1996). With the constrictions with contact and availability presented by this research I had limited time to spend developing that relationship, but the focus group interviews may lessen the unfamiliarity of the experience. The peer relationship between the participants may create a more comfortable space and their interactions could lead to more spontaneous talk, with richer descriptions as they interact amongst each other. In the interviews I performed, all the girls appeared to have a comfortable, friendly relationship with each other that added to their willingness to contribute, often sparking off discussions amongst themselves without having to rely on me to lead them. As a novice to

the process of interviewing, this interaction brought up issues I had not planned for. Discussions with the girls often lead to them speaking on top of each other, while at the time still making the discussion understandable, later transcribing became problematic and could lead to information being lost. However, it is also possible that the group dynamic may work to silence the participants, or constrict what is discussed (Nairn, Munro, & Smith, 2005; Valentine, 1999). At an age when peer acceptance and separation from the adult generation is beginning to be important, young people may not wish to express views that their peers may not agree with, not wishing to be stigmatised or excluded (Valentine, 1999). It may, therefore be useful to offer the opportunity for individual interviews, or have the time to establish a rapport, not just between interviewer and interviewee but amongst the group of participants as well. In the case of this research I was faced with limits and time constraints which meant I was unable to establish any depth of rapport, or provide extra interviews. However, none of the girls indicated they would prefer to talk privately and indeed seemed more comfortable working with me as part of a group.

Discourse analysis

With the field notes gathered during my observation of the three classroom lessons on menstruation, and transcripts of the four different interviews as data, the next process was to analyse the ways menstruation was spoken about, and how meanings and understanding about menstruation were constructed. The analysis considered what discourses were present, how these discourses were taken up and incorporated into individuals'

subjectivities, in what ways were these discourses challenged, and how, if at all, were alternative discourses presented within the lessons, and interviews?

Discourse analysis can be used to analyse a wide variety of discourses, not just limited to talk (Bryman, 2001). As discussed in Chapter Two, discourses are the way we speak about things, the language and statements socially and culturally produced to create meaning and understanding of our world (Gavey, 1989; Kenway, et al., 1994). Discourses can be found in a wide variety of sources, for example, classroom text and video (Bryman, 2001). These all contribute to and maintain the poststructuralist idea of discourse, that produce and shape the social 'realities' and in turn subjectivities that are constructed through discourse (Baxter, 2002). Discourse analysis is not the pursuit of an external reality waiting for the researcher to locate and define. There is no one truth or definitive meaning that can be identified and labelled, rather there are multiple definitions and ways of understanding. Therefore discourse analysis does not focus on the referential factual information that can be found in interviews, but as described in the introduction to Wetherell's (1999) chapter *Discourse Analysis*, aims to "uncover the larger patterning of thought that structures the way language is used and, more specifically, how the meaning of that language was created, reproduced, and interpreted by those involved in its use" (p. 265).

Within a poststructuralist theoretical framework, Cameron (2001b) states, there are multiple meanings that are constructed through language and discursive formations. Meanings constructed can often shift and contradict each other, but rather than dismiss these contradictions or view them as a puzzle that when solved will uncover the truth, discourse analysis sees these contradictions as reflecting the multiple discourses people

operate within and draw from. These shifting and multiple ways of understanding the world can be examined through discourse analysis, providing interesting and valuable data that reflect the complexity of the participants' lived realities (Cameron, 2001b). Discourse analysis emphasises the multiple versions of reality and how our use of discourse creates and maintains these realities. Discourse analysis is constructionist, as it examines how discourse is used to pick one of many viable versions and build it up into reality (Bryman, 2001).

While language is used to construct our meanings and understanding, Alvesson and Karreman (2000) propose that not all talk is about constructing meaning and creating and maintaining one's position within a social setting. They argue that talking a certain way, reproducing a particular vocabulary does not imply specific cognition, feelings or practices; talking about the weather does not constitute your subjectivity as a meteorologist or a politician may produce a specific politically acceptable opinion without any personal feelings or practices (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). However, language is not neutral and transparent (Wetherell, 1999). Who we are, how we speak and present ourselves, our subjectivity is governed by the discourses that created them. There is no real self sitting outside those discourses, so seemingly innocent or insignificant talk can be seen as influenced and even created through the discourses that make up our understanding of the world and ourselves (Jones, 1997; Weedon, 1997).

When we examine the spoken discourse of an interview it is important to realise that language is not a neutral transparent medium (Wetherell, 1999). Language and talk are not simply used to describe our worlds. We should not treat them as purely referential,

providing information without being contextually based (Cameron, 2001a; Wetherell, 1999). The talk of an interview is therefore not a straightforward factual account of the interviewee's experience; we must take into consideration that all talk is designed for the context it occurs in. During an interview the speakers will consider the purpose of the process, their roles and perceived norms of communication so to shape their language and talk (Cameron, 2001). Cameron (2001) claims that "no one ever answers a question without thinking about the other's motive for asking it and their likely reception of various possible responses" (p. 148) This is probably even more likely within the structure of a research interview where the interviewee is aware that their answers will be recorded and analysed.

Baxter (2002) sees discourse analysis as providing a tool to make sense of the complexities and ambiguities of the conflicting and contradictory discourses, and understand how the power of various discourses is maintained, created and exercised in different locations. With the multiple and complex meanings and perspectives that poststructuralist theory examines, discourse analysis provides a means to recognise and acknowledge connection between these discourses. It provides a way to explain language beyond the surface, or the simple meanings, to the rich depth of multiple meanings available, and how those meanings can be taken up, and at the same time restricted. Discourse analysis, as Baxter claims (2002) "equips feminist researchers with the thinking to 'see through' the ambiguities and confusions of *particular* discursive contexts where women/girls are located as simultaneously powerful and powerless" (p. 9, emphasis in original). It can be used to highlight the tensions and contradictions of experience, and also celebrate the subject positions that resist the dominant discourses.

With this understanding of discourse analysis, I have used this approach to analyse the use of discourse within the classroom lesson, and the ways the girls that were interviewed take up, maintain or challenge the commonly presented discourses around menstruation. In making written transcripts of the interviews I was able to read and re-read our discussions as a means to analyse their talk, thus examining how they construct their subjectivity of menstruating women, and negotiate the numerous discourses they are presented with. Likewise, an analysis of the discourses with the teaching instruction and resource material, and additionally any prior personal knowledge they gained, gave me a solid overview of the discourses presented to the girls. The data gained in the interviews showed the complexity of multiple meanings and subjectivities that girls have to negotiate, and how they both take up and resist the dominant discourses.

The Lesson

These processes of data collection and analysis took place at the end of August 2011 when I was able to attend and observe three classes within the Positive Puberty unit of a South Island intermediate school as part of my research into menstruation education. There I observed a lesson in two different classes and a supplementary, female-only class of the combined three classroom syndicate. The unit on Positive Puberty, including the lesson on menstruation, sat within and complied with the standards outlined by the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), but the actual lessons making up the unit were designed and constructed by the teaching staff of the intermediate school. The lessons were standardised to allow all of the classrooms to be teaching the same basic material, but also allowed room for the

teachers to personalise the lesson to meet the needs and questions of their individual classes.

The lessons started with a recap of a previous lesson about identifying the reproductive and genital organs of the body. This worked as not only a revision of learned material, but also refreshed the knowledge that would be required for the lesson on menstruation. The topic of menstruation was introduced, and the biological explanation of the process was given. Both teachers stressed that this was a natural and normal cycle to a woman's body. A large proportion of the lesson was devoted to the issue of menstruation management. A selection of menstrual products were handed around, and there was a discussion on how the products were used and what benefits each type of product gave. The fact their teacher had a seemingly vast selection of menstrual products in her desk seemed to surprise and amuse one girl: "But it was kinda awkward, it was kinda weird seeing the teacher pulling out all of these sanitary pads and tampons, and stuff, out of nowhere, like just rolling them out" (Emma, Group Interview 2).

As part of the lesson in menstruation, both teachers played a short video "A Period in Time" (Johnson & Johnson, 1997) for their students. One teacher played the video in its entirety, allowing the children to remain focused and engaged with it. The other teacher made a few pauses to discuss with her class what the video had said and shown. Ms Summers said she found the video a good resource as her students seemed very interested in it and the ages of the people in the video made her students more able to connect with them:

Ms Summers: I like the video, because its got real students talking about their experiences and the different ages and um, and the kind of given, and its coming

from their age, because we're adults and we can talk about it, but it's hard for them to understand that we actually have been through it before. (Teacher Interview 2)

One girl seems to agree with this, saying how her teacher is "really old and she kept talking about how it was back then but it's not like that now" (Grace, Group Interview 1).

At the beginning of each class the students were instructed to push back their desks and form a rough circle on the floor, which one teacher named a 'security circle'. Left to find their own space in the circle, most of the students formed gender divided groups. Although in talking with the teacher after the lesson, this division may not be specifically related to the topic, but rather the age of the students where social behaviour and comfort was already starting to develop along gender lines. She explained that one year she attempted to mix up the gendered seating by making the students sit boy girl. But in the end this proved to be too disruptive and severely limited the students' willingness to participate in discussions.

The other teacher, Ms Summers, used the circle to help with classroom management. Working as a group within the circle helped the students stay focused on the material and stay engaged in the work.

Ms Summers: Getting them down on the floor, working in a circle is the best way to do it otherwise you can have people fidgeting at their desks and kind of not turning of but being a bit nervous so they'll do other things in their desks that makes you think they're not listening. (Teacher Interview 2)

Positive Puberty is considered a potentially sensitive topic, and bringing the students down into a circle, different from the normal classroom seating routine, helps create a different environment and mindset for the students. Circle work was meant to aid in a sense of community and team work, a safe place for students to talk and ask questions.

Another aspect to the lesson that may contribute to the ability for the students to work productively as a team within a sensitive topic is the placement of this unit within the school year. The lessons in Positive Puberty take place in the third term. According to the syndicate lead teacher, Ms Harris, the timing in the school year is beneficial and well planned. Any earlier in the year, most the children would not have the maturity to handle the topic matter without reacting with embarrassment and silliness. She also said that by this time in the school year, the teachers will have a good understanding of the children in their class, and classroom dynamics, therefore helping them manage any embarrassed or disruptive behaviour that might occur:

Ms. Harris: We do it term three because by that stage we've had them for two and a bit terms. You know the dynamics of the class, you know the ones that are going to be silly, and you work with them because silly is often I'm embarrassed and I'll draw attention to myself, while other ones are embarrassed and just disappear, you can almost see them disappearing you know, but I figured they are getting something from it. (Teacher Interview 1)

A number of the girls interviewed also agreed that by having it later in the year it gave the students time to get to know each other before having to take a potentially embarrassing topic.

At the end of each lesson within the Positive Puberty unit, the students were able to put any questions they had in a question box. The questions were either addressed at the beginning of the next lesson, or set aside to be answered in the lesson they were related to. The rules of the question box were that at the end of every lesson, all students were required to place something in the question box. Those with questions could ask them anonymously, and those without questions could place in blank pieces of paper, or just draw a doodle of some kind or make a comment like 'no question' on their paper. Since this meant that all the students had to put something in the box, those with questions did not have to feel singled out, or identified by asking theirs. For one girl this box was good because the notes were private, "like all the pieces of paper are the same, but the students wouldn't read them, the teacher would read them and the teacher would be the only one to see them" (Emma, Group Interview 2). But another student had concerns about using the box to ask her questions, "cos it's like if you put it in the box people can like see you putting it in the box and they will ask about it" (Holly, Group Interview 2).

It was within this setting that I was able to observe discourses of menstruation made available to the girls within the teaching of puberty, and interview groups of girls to see how they negotiated this construction into their own subjectivities of menstruating women.

Chapter Five: Previously established discourses.

Introduction

The previous research into the discourses found and used in the construction of menstruation identified four main dominant discourses. Although for the benefit of clarity, I have written about these four discourses as discrete and separate, this is not to imply that they appear that way within the lesson, or indeed greater society. The discursive field of menstruation is made up of a systematically related set of discourses. Some of these discourses are contradictory and competing, others co-exist and contribute to their mutual production (Kenway et al., 1994). Therefore, we can see the discourse of secrecy within the discourse on hygiene, and the discourse of hygiene contributing to the discourse that constitutes womanhood. Although for the purposes of this discussion I have separated the four discourses, we should be aware that this is an imposed separation, and not how they are used in the construction of menstruation. Likewise, because discourses are seldom discrete and independent of each other, the language, the ways in which we talk about things, in this case menstruation, is also not a discrete process. There can be multiple readings for the quotes from the interviews used in this research, and one quote may contribute to, and/or recreate a number of the discursive constructions of menstruation.

In the following sections I will examine the four dominant discourses already identified in Chapter Three, *menstruation as a hygiene crisis*, *menstruation as a shameful secret*, *menstruation as a medical issue* and *menstruation as constituting the 'real woman'*. These discourses were identified and examined in previous research into menstruation and I was

able to observe their continued use within the puberty lessons. I will discuss how these discourses inform our understanding of menstruation and create meaning within these lessons.

Menstruation as a Hygiene Crisis

While not the only focus, menstrual products and their use took up a large proportion of the lesson in menstruation. In their 2000 study, Diorio and Munro found that much of the classroom material focused on girls' management of their periods and ensuring their cleanliness. My research appears to show a continuation of this focus on management. While the discussion on menstrual products and their use in managing menstruation could be seen as an essential part in the education on menstruation, I propose that the emphasis placed on this one aspect contributes to the discourse of hygiene, and particularly the hygiene crisis associated with the female body.

The language used in this discussion of menstrual products by both teachers and students mirrors that found in wider society (Fingerson, 2006). We use the terms feminine hygiene products and sanitary pads when talking about menstrual products, and although when talking with the girls they tended to use the terms 'pads' and 'tampons' there were a number of occasions the longer term 'sanitary pad' was used. This may show there is still a connection between these products and the idea of menstruation affecting hygiene. Along with the language used to describe the actual products, is the way management of menstruation was discussed that embedded it into the discourse of hygiene. Within the lessons, menstruation was discussed as being messy, with the need of 'sanitary' products to

ensure girls remain clean without the risk of staining or spillage. This language maintains the discourse that menstruation requires hygienic intervention.

The use of the word 'protection', in relation to purpose of menstrual products, was found in both the lessons and in the video shown. These products were said to provide the girls protection from their menstrual blood, and protect against that blood becoming public. When we see language not simply as a transparent label, but the way we construct meaning and knowledge (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997), the word protection could be seen as intensifying the hygiene discourse by making menstrual blood something to be feared. The use of terms like feminine hygiene and sanitary pads may contribute to the construction of menstruation as an unhygienic process that requires management (Allen, et al., 2011; Fingerson, 2006; Merskin, 1999). Protection could imply that this process is not just unhygienic, it is dangerously so; thus potentially taking menstruation from a hygiene issue into a hygiene crisis.

During the lesson on menstruation, the teachers stressed that it is a natural occurrence as part of growing up and should be considered normal. However, the positioning of menstruation, and particularly menstrual blood within a discourse of hygiene can construct menstruation as something unwanted and unnatural. This meaning of menstrual blood as unclean and toxic has been historically and culturally constructed. Historical taboos state that crops can fail and be destroyed if a menstruating woman walks by, and that being near a menstruating woman can render a man impotent (Fingerson, 2006; Merskin, 1999). Leviticus 15 of the Christian bible speaks to menstrual blood being the root of all evil (Merskin, 1999). We can see the taboos around menstruation are still being constructed and

maintained by this idea that women, and indeed society, still need protection from menstrual blood. When we focus our instruction on the use of menstrual products to maintain hygiene and protect from menstrual blood, we create a message that it is right and normal to think of menstruation as unclean and disgusting (Beausang & Razor, 2000).

As part of the instruction on the use of menstrual products in both classes and reinforced in the supplementary class, the importance of correct disposal of used pads and tampons at school was stressed. The students were told of a special container in the girls' toilet where they were expected to dispose of their menstrual products. The girls were instructed to never flush their used tampons, or put them into the rubbish, but rather always use these containers. This could simply be read as a practical plumbing issue, or indeed a health and safety regulation requiring all blood related rubbish to be treated a certain way. However, when this instruction is seen within the multiple representations of the discourse of hygiene, it could also be seen as constructing and maintaining the meaning of menstrual blood as somehow unclean and toxic. The students are told that the disposal of menstrual blood requires special equipment and precautions.

This idea that there is something unclean about menstruation may contribute to the way the students responded to the menstrual products that were part of the lesson. As well as discussing how they were used and what benefits each type of product had, the teachers handed around samples of these products. Even though these products were brand new, having to be first removed from their packaging, there was a great reluctance from the majority of both the boys and girls to touch any of the products. Many would simply pinch

the very edge of the product they were given and instantly drop it into the lap of their neighbour:

Holly: I didn't really want to touch them, I chucked them onto Sally's lap.

Interviewer: Are you Sally?

Sally: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's nice of you [laughter] did you pass them or did you chuck them at her?

Holly: It's like I chucked them, I grabbed the wrapper then put them on her lap [pause] nice and friendly [laughter] (Group Interview 2).

This avoidance of physically touching menstrual products could be seen as a fear of contamination. As shown previously, there are many historically constructed taboos about menstruation (Fingerson, 2006; Merskin, 1999), and menstrual blood is seen as dirty and smelly (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006). Therefore the products themselves, are also seen as dirty and may be viewed as having the potential to contaminate. The function of menstrual products is directly related to menstruation, with its constructed meaning of being unclean and toxic, therefore this may contribute to people's reluctance to touch the products in fear they too will be contaminated by the unclean aspects of the products' use.

While most complied with this construction of menstruation, and in particular, menstrual products as being unhygienic, there were a couple of girls that challenged the discourse. Nicole reported seeing another female student smelling the menstrual pad (Group Interview 1). This brought a lot of laughter, and could appear to be done for humorous effect.

However, this student may have used humour to resist the dominant discourse of hygiene, while avoiding the retaliation for doing so. Humour can be a useful tool to “introduce and develop topics which would be taboo in serious mode, while protecting the speaker from the consequence of having broken the taboo” (Green, 1998, p. 182). In discussing how mental health patients and professionals negotiated discussions of difficult or forbidden topics Emerson (1973, cited in Griffiths, 1998) discovered:

Joking provides a useful channel for covert communication on taboo subjects. Normally a person is not held responsible for what he [sic] does in jest to the same degree as he would be for a serious gesture. Humour, as an aside from the main discourse, need not be taken into account in subsequent interaction. It need not become part of the history of the encounter, or be used for the continuous reassessment of the nature or worth of each participant, or be built into the meaning of subsequent acts. For the very reason that humour officially does not ‘count’, person are induced to risk messages that might be unacceptable if stated seriously. (p. 875)

Therefore we can see that the use of humour allows for the possibility of introducing and resisting dominant discursive regulations, while minimising the risks and consequences. The dominance of a discourse comes from the social and cultural power it is given, and the compliance with the discourse within the majority of the population. Menstruation is unhygienic because we construct and maintain the belief that menstruation is unhygienic. Actions that create alternative discourses must be discouraged or marginalised if the discourse is to maintain its position as dominant. The girl that does not treat the menstrual pad as unclean, as constructed by the discourse, may face being labelled as dirty herself. To avoid this derogatory labelling she uses humour to position herself as silly or a joker.

Olivia seems to have created a subjectivity within discourses that resist and challenge the dominant discourses, considering herself to be different and “out there” (Group Interview 1). It appears she uses this position to act outside of the dominant discourses. Within her subjectivity of being different, or perhaps a rebel, Olivia took the menstrual pad and rubbed it against the skin of her face. “I just ignored all the boys and was like, hmmm, it’s soft” (Group Interview 1). Olivia is not ignorant of the discourse of hygiene, and appears to be aware that her actions directly challenge that discourse and may bring repercussions, but at the same time actively resists the discourse that says she should view menstrual products as unclean and therefore unappealing. Olivia does not sit outside of the discourse of hygiene, able to make a rational choice to ignore it, instead she can be seen as finding small moments of resistance and subversion to open up the possibility of alternative discourses (Davies, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000).

The way we position ourselves within multiple, often competing and contradictory, discourses can be seen in Olivia’s response to management of menstruation (see Kenway. et al., 1994). While she speaks clearly about not worrying about what people think of her reaction to the menstrual products, and acts in ways resistant to the discourse of hygiene, she also takes up the discourse of hygiene when discussing the girls’ needs to ensure the proper management of their hygiene:

Olivia: Cos I don’t want it to be really uncomfortable, just like sitting there going ah I think I should change it now, but you’re not knowing cos, you don’t like sit in class checking, oh its light, so I’ll just leave it. (Group Interview 1)

Therefore Olivia's acts of resistance, her ability to subvert the hygiene and secrecy discourses that says menstrual products should be treated as dirty and shameful does not mean she is able to completely remove herself from this discursive construction of menstruation. Her agentic act of resistance with the menstrual pad does not signify she is unaffected by the discourses of hygiene and shameful secrecy, but instead can be read as her finding small spaces to begin to subvert and resist these discourses, while continuing, on other levels, to conform to them (Davies & Gannon, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000). The students are told that menstruation is a normal healthy occurrence, but for Olivia and the other girls it is something that must be guarded against. Their bodies become treacherous, letting them down and they must take measures that ensure they appear outwardly clean, therefore no sign of blood can be seen (Costos, et al., 2002; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Lees, 1994).

The importance of maintaining the appearance of cleanliness is something the girls all seem acutely aware is their responsibility (Merskin, 1999). As the above comments show, there appears to be a great concern of not being able to tell when they are at risk of leakage, or how long a product will last and absorb before having to be replaced. Part of this concern may be seen as lack of experience, with one girl being worried "you're disappearing to the toilet like ten times a day" (Grace, Group Interview 1). However, this can also show a need to get it right when it comes to managing their periods. Signs of a failure to manage their menstruation, such as leakage or staining, appears to be a fear of many of the girls:

Interviewer: Would that be the really worse thing ever if someone saw something?

Kate: Yes.

Nicole: Yeah it'd be just.

Kate: Especially ...

Grace: I don't usually think about it.

Kate: Especially if you're in public, cos my mum was wearing white jeans and she was on a bus.

Grace: Thanks for that. (Group Interview 1)

Although this can be seen as contributing to a discourse of secrecy, the girls all seem aware they must be conscientious in maintaining their hygiene and appearance of cleanliness, as failure to do so will risk being labelled as dirty or not acceptably feminine (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Raftos, et al., 1998).

From talking with the groups of girls, and listening to the classroom discussions, it appears the fear of stains, or leakage showing is a major fear for most of the girls. Although the teachers tried to be reassuring that this was something every woman had to face, it appears to have done little to counter the belief that stains would bring embarrassment and derision. However, the same feelings of embarrassment and failure do not accompany any and all stains. One of the girls came to the interview with black markings on her face, when asked about them she happily explained they were face paint from a school sporting activity. She'd tried to wash it off after the game, but found that with only water the paint had left stains on her skin. Although highly visible and rather odd looking, she found it amusing and thought it was fun when people stared at her during the day. These stains did not carry any message of being dirty or failing to maintain personal hygiene. However, the idea of leakage of menstrual blood causing a stain on her clothing was something she was

very uncomfortable with: “If we have an accident, and everyone will see, the boys will see it” (Emma, Group Interview 2). As discussed in Chapter Three, Diorio and Munro (2000) propose the idea of a stain being unacceptable is created socially, therefore face paint holds no negative meaning, whereas the marks formed by menstrual blood are seen as disgusting and unacceptable.

While all the girls appear to take up the discourse of hygiene, with its emphasis on concealment and control of their bodily emissions, there seems to be a degree of resentment attached to this practice. Societal and cultural practices reinforce the dominance of the discourse around managing hygiene. The discourse becomes so embedded in our understanding of our world that it is seen as indisputable truth (Kenway, et al., 1994). The girls may find it inconvenient to always have to be prepared, “[her mother] like had all the supplies sitting in like every single bag she took” (Nicole, Group Interview 1), and many seemed to resent having to go to the bathroom multiple times a day, they all seemed to incorporate this discourse into their subjectivity, creating a view that as females they need to be constantly on guard against their bodies that are messy and unclean.

The boys’ reaction seems to contribute to the subjectivity of female meaning messy. A number of the girls reported boys saying “I’m glad I’m not a girl” (Nicole, Kate, Emma, Group Interview 1). Kate reported being teased she’d “have to go to the toilet about seven times a day” (Group Interview 1). Girls’ bodies are not only different, they are deemed inferior and unappealing. Being a boy becomes the ideal because their bodies do not produce these unhygienic, unwanted emissions (Diorio & Munro, 2000). This binary positions male or boy in the ascendant position, with them becoming the norm and most desirable. Girls viewing

themselves in relation to the male ascendant position of this binary, view their own subjectivity as less, or deficient, because their bodies present a hygiene problem that needs management (Davies, 2000).

Menstruation as a Shameful Secret

It is the boys' reactions and presence that the girls seemed to focus on during our conversations about their experience of learning about menstruation. The girls expressed a sense of embarrassment that the topic was being discussed in front of the boys. Although they agreed that it was important that the boys learned what happened during menstruation, they all preferred if the boys could be taught separately:

Kate: Umm, I'd teach them separately, like like.

Olivia: You could teach them separately, but still teach them exactly the same thing,

Sally: If there was two groups, like boys and girls, like boys could learn about girls with a male teacher, a woman teacher I mean (Group Interview 2).

Menstruation as a secret appears to be a discourse that the girls have readily taken up. While they may accept that the boys will be taught the subject, the girls seem to prefer to have no part in that lesson. Talking about menstruation around the boys is seen as awkward and embarrassing. This idea that the genders should be taught separately was not limited to the girls, the male teacher also seemed to take up the discourse of secrecy around menstruation.

Ms Harris: Um, I guess I took the session with [a male teacher's] class today, this is the first year he's done it and he was a little bit, and I said, 'that's fine, I'll come and take it for you', [he said] 'I'll take the boys out', and I said 'no no leave the boys in, and you'll bring yourself in as well', you know (Teacher Interview 1).

Although a couple of girls saw a drawback to the boys being taught separately, it appears when they have had separate classes in the past, when the class returns as a whole there is a lot of interest in the other group's lesson. The girls realised that they would then have to tell the boys what it was they were taught:

Holly: I hate that when we do separate classes and they come back and are like what did you learn about?

Sally: 'I don't want to tell you' [is what I'd tell them].

Holly: I really don't want to tell them (Group Interview 2).

Kissling (1996a) also found girls complained the most about the presence of boys in their lessons of menstruation. Talking about menstruation is considered a major taboo (Kissling, 1996b), and talking about menstruation to men is an even greater taboo, usually considered as something that should never be done (McKeever, 1984). Although the girls I interviewed, along with the participants of Kissling's (1996a) participants, did not talk directly to the boys about menstruation, their presence in the classroom was seen as an embarrassment, and potentially giving boys an opportunity to ridicule their female classmates.

Although the boys seemed to be the girls' primary concern, the discourse of secrecy appeared entrenched into their beliefs about menstruation. Menstruation is something that must be concealed and shrouded in secrecy (Beausang & Razor, 2000; Kissling, 1996a; Simes

& Berg, 2001). This secrecy extends not just to the actual occurrence, but also to any discussion of menstruation as a topic (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Kissling, 1996a). Both teachers stressed the importance of having someone to talk to about their periods, and how there should be no embarrassment in doing so, however, this seemed to have little effect on the dominant discourse of secrecy. The girls in the class appeared to discount this idea, or feel uncomfortable about doing so. One girl responded “do we have to?” (Field Notes, 31/08/2011) in response to telling their parents or family members. This reluctance could be compliance to the dominant discourse on secrecy, and considering the power we appear to place in the idea of silence around menstruation, any challenge to that discourse could seem daunting and unachievable.

The idea of talking to mothers and other female caregivers is often met with reluctance, the idea of talking to fathers or other males appears to elicit horrified laughter. When Ms. Harris suggested the girls could talk to their fathers there were many horrified looks, and when I brought up her comments in my interview with the girls I received the same looks. Talking to men, even if the man is their primary caregiver, about menstruation is still seen as a social taboo (Koff & Rierdan, 1995; McKeever, 1984). Most of the girls in one of the interviews believed their fathers would tease them if they approached them about menstruation:

Olivia: I'd never tell my dad about it.

Kate: My dad would tease me like.

Nicole: My dad would find it really funny, my brother gives me a really hard time about it too (Group Interview 1).

The other group of girls did not think they could talk to their fathers because they would not know enough about menstruation, or understand what it was like:

Emma: Cos they'd never been through it so what would they know about it.

Sally: They do know about it, but they don't know all the details.

Emma: They haven't experienced it.

Holly: Yeah and they don't know as much as your mum or auntie or stuff (Group Interview 2).

The discourse of secrecy does appear to be strongest when it comes to talking to boys and men about menstruation. As I will show, all four discourses work to 'other' women, and place them on the descendent side of the male/female binary. The discourse of shameful secrecy is used to tell women there is something unacceptable about their femaleness, and while the secrecy could be claimed to protect women from the teasing and uncomfortable reactions of men, it also creates a subjectivity built on the idea there is something wrong and undesirable about them as menstruating women (Allen, et al., 2011; Schooler, et al., 2005).

While most of the girls I talked with had had 'the Talk', or a discussion on menstruation with their mothers or other female caregivers, they also did not appear comfortable or eager to discuss menstruation in private:

Emma: My auntie read me a book, I didn't ask for it.

Interviewer: Did you not want it?

Emma: No but she just told us to sit down because of my sister, so. (Group Interview 2)

While the 'Talk' with mothers or other female caregivers, does seem important, there is a concern about what their mothers might say and how much embarrassment and discomfort that might cause (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Koff & Rierdan, 1995). There also appears to be a level of ambivalence around who the girls would prefer to talk to about menstruation, if indeed they wanted to talk to anyone. Although mothers seem to be the primary source of this 'talk', some of the girls appear to prefer to talk with others. One girl said she'd go to a friend's mother because she's "really hard to embarrass" (Olivia, Group Interview 1), while others preferred the idea of someone they didn't know, or wouldn't have to see regularly: "I find it better talking to people you don't know because then they're not going to, like, look at you any different" (Nicole, Group Interview 1).

The concealment of menstruation goes beyond talking about it to encompass any association with menstruation. During one of the lessons I observed, a female student from another class came into the room, she appeared to be delivering school management/teaching information to Ms Harris. Her appearance in the middle of the class on menstruation appears to have caused a lot of nervous laughter and embarrassment. There are only two year levels at an intermediate school, so the introduced student would be either in the same year as this class, and therefore learning similar material; or would be a year ahead, and therefore learned the material the previous year. But even with this knowledge, the students' reactions seemed to like that of being caught doing something embarrassing or wrong. It could be seen that the discourse of secrecy is embedded with and reinforced by the idea that menstruation is something shameful that should be kept secret.

The secrecy around menstruation is more than a desire for privacy, it becomes an imposed need for menstruation to become and remain hidden (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Koff & Rierdan, 1995). Diorio and Munro (2000) discuss this hiding of menstruation in terms of society's pretence and refusal to acknowledge that the women around them may actually be menstruating at any given moment. This pretence may also contribute to the girls' reluctance to talk within the class. Although the teachers and lesson material stresses that menstruation is a normal occurrence, the discourse of shame and secrecy appear to be taken up by the girls and create a reluctance to associate themselves with menstruation:

Kate: And like when we were, wanted to know something you were too scared, or I was sometimes too scared to put my hand up cos I thought they might laugh (Group Interview 1).

Holly: it's awkward because I'm a girl, cos if you say something that's something embarrassing then, you'll have something said about you (Group Interview 2).

By providing an opportunity to ask their questions privately, without a direct connection to themselves, the use of the question box may provide opportunities for students to challenge this discourse on secrecy. As discussed earlier, the girls saw it as private with only the teacher being aware of who wrote which question, although there was some practical concerns of the validity of this privacy, with Holly worrying people might ask her what she wrote. While it could be seen as maintaining the secrecy discourse by designating questions about menstruation as being something that should be only asked in private, it is used within a lesson structure that allows for, and encourages open questions. Therefore, the idea of a question box both acknowledges the discourse of shame and secrecy and opens up the possibility to challenge and subvert it.

The discourse of shameful secrecy does not just define the ways in which talking about menstruation is controlled and regulated, but also defines rules about menstruation itself. Girls and women learn that menstruation is something that should not be seen or discussed (Allen, et al., 2011; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Schooler, et al., 2005). Although both teachers talked about menstruation as a natural, normal experience, the girls' talk about menstruation indicated a sense of shame and need for secrecy. They expressed concern that people would be aware of why they were leaving to go to the bathrooms during class time. Fingerson (2006) also reported the girls in her research were concerned about speculation whenever they would leave the classroom, and that girls' behaviour would be always associated with her menstruation cycle. For Nicole, her concern about managing her menstrual flow meant she might have to make multiple trips to the bathroom, drawing attention to herself:

Nicole: Yeah cos you can't really tell if it's, like if you're wearing a pad it's going to absorb all the whole thing, you don't know if it's going to be a light flow or a heavy flow so that means like wherever it happens you've got to go the toilet and then everyone's going 'where does she keep on going?' and then they'll soon figure it out. (Group Interview 1)

As discussed earlier, the risk of staining and spillage created a sense of failure in managing the hygienic requirements of menstruation (Allen, et al., 2011; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Raftos, et al., 1998). This same spillage and staining can also be read as a failure to ensure the secrecy imposed on menstruation. Girls receive cultural and social messages about menstruation tainting the ideal image of femininity, and how they must ensure there is no visual sign that menstruation is occurring (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Raftos, et al., 1998; Simes

& Berg, 2001). Therefore staining and spillage can be seen as not just a failure to comply with the hygiene discourse, but also a failure in maintaining the secret that menstruation exists. Kate's story of her mother's stain showing in public is not just reinforcing the discourse of hygiene, but also used to show the shame that not maintaining secrecy can bring. The girls appeared horrified by the idea of this stain in a way that a food or other source of stain would not bring:

Kate: I'm like worried I'll leave it too late or something and it will just like sort of leak out and everyone will see cos you, I might forget or something.

Interviewer: Would that be the really worst thing ever if someone saw something?

Kate: Yes. (Group Interview 1).

This need to keep menstruation hidden has resulted in the girls constructing varied and rather unusual plans to ensure they maintain secrecy. It can be seen as the girls taking up the discourse of shameful secrecy to where they are complicit in its construction and contribute to the acceptance that menstruation is something that should remain concealed at almost any cost (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Simes & Berg, 2001). The girls talked about writing reminders on their hands so they would not forget to attend to the management of their cycle. The fear being, that if they were to forget, the resulting spillage would bring attention to the fact they were menstruating and therefore they would fail to conceal their menstruation. Grace, who identified this as her biggest issue with menstruation went as far as wishing "we could keep ipods or stuff in our pocket so we could have an alarm that goes off" (Group Interview 1).

While managing their periods to ensure they remain hidden from public awareness appears to be something the girls feel they have some control over, maintaining secrecy around the menstrual products provides an extra issue. The girls were aware that their mothers and older sisters kept menstrual products in their bags, or hidden in the toilet or bathroom at home, and appeared to take up this discourse around the concealment of these products (Fingerson, 2006; Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, & Pyszczynski, 2002):

Nicole: I mean, she like had all the supplies sitting in like every single bag she took.

Grace: Yeah my mum has them hidden everywhere (Group Interview 1).

The need for concealment also becomes obvious when the girls discussed purchasing the products. Most of the girls had already decided they would let their parents or caregivers purchase their supplies, not wanting to be seen or directly connected to menstrual products. One girl, whose father had the family responsibility of grocery shopping, preferred him choosing and purchasing the products she would need, this regardless of her earlier claim that she would not want to talk to her father about menstruation. It would appear that the embarrassment and need for secrecy around purchasing such an overt marker of menstruation outshone any similar embarrassment in talking with her father.

Nicole may accept her father's involvement in the purchase of menstrual products because it allows for her to be removed from the experience, "my dad he gets the groceries ... but he'd look after it, and everything, I wouldn't touch it" (Group Interview 1), but for most the shameful secrecy discourse applies to menstrual products in the same way it does to menstruation. Kate's reason for letting someone else buy her supplies was her concern that "a guy in your class that walked down the same aisle" (Group Interview 1). Menstrual

products may be in the open in the supermarket, but none of the girls wanted to risk association with them. Being seen with, or associated with menstrual products appears to have negative connotations, for a woman to be seen with a tampon or menstrual pad will negatively affect how she is viewed (Roberts, et al., 2002; Stubbs, 2008). This association could be a reason why so many of the girls did not want to examine the products too closely when they were passed around in the lesson, and why there was some caution about going to the teacher's desk to look at them at the end of the class. The strips of paper and cotton are not where the shame comes from, rather the shame comes from the meaning we construct around the idea of menstrual products. We construct their meaning to be embarrassing and unsanitary and then build a discourse that says it would bring shame if they are not kept secret (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997).

During the lessons on menstruation, the teachers attempted to subvert the discourse of shameful secrecy by teaching with a comfortable open manner. Both teachers employed humour as a way to distract from the embarrassment and shame that might be attached to the topic:

Ms. Summers: I guess I kinda use a bit of humour and I just sort of, and I don't go in there a bit thick and heavy about it. I just sort of go in there and go, oh I know you've been looking forward to this unit all year, and this is your favourite one, and kinda put a joking tone to it. (Teacher Interview 1)

Ms. Harris also contributed part of her personal experience with menstruation to the lesson, using these experiences as examples. This may work to resist the discourse that menstruation is something that should not be discussed. The use of humour to portray menstruation without the confines of embarrassment or silence, and by discussing their

own experiences, the teachers offer space for other girls to resist the discourse they should also remain silent. However, the shameful secrecy discourse is one that the girls seemed to actively take up and incorporate into their own subjectivities.

In taking up this discourse, the girls construct a subjectivity where their bodies are a source of shame (Lee, 1994). Shame goes beyond feeling guilty or bad about something you've done, shame speaks to there being something inherently wrong. Menstruation, girls are told, is a natural process of growing up or becoming a woman, but at the same time they are subjected to a discourse that tells them there is something shameful about that process and it should always be concealed. Girls are encouraged to strive for the ideals of femininity and beauty, but warned menstruation will let them down, taint that image (Raftos, et al., 1998; Roberts et al., 2002). Therefore to be a woman they must learn to hide the thing they are told makes them a woman. All this can create a subjectivity where being female becomes an unwanted burden:

Kate: But it's just awkward, they find it really funny and they're always going, 'aw, I'm glad I'm not a girl', but it's like, thanks for the encouragement you know. (Group Interview 1).

Thus, for Kate, being a girl and therefore having to deal with menstruation is something that she, and others, find bothersome and annoying. Her wish for encouragement is therefore not just about dealing with the effects of menstruating, but also for what it means to be female.

Menstruation as a Medical Issue

Menstruation is a girl's first overt sign of puberty and maturing into an adult. Although menstruation holds personal and social meaning for girls and women, it is often taught within a medical and scientific discourse (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006). These discourses may obscure the other constructions of menstruation, they can also work to distract and divert from any sense of embarrassment that the subject may engender. In one class when the discussion about female genitalia brought embarrassed laughter and disruptive behaviour, the teacher appeared to use the scientific information to focus her students and create a distance from their embarrassment. Fingerson (2006) also found that the girls she spoke with would comfortably recite and discuss their scientific and medical knowledge of menstruation, but became embarrassed and resistant when asked about their personal experiences.

At the start of each lesson, menstruation is introduced within the women's reproductive cycle. The medical understanding of menstruation is explained as the reason menstruation occurs. The power Western society places in the medical and scientific discourses makes it difficult for anyone, myself included, to argue against this meaning (Diorio & Munro, 2000). However, from a poststructuralist viewpoint, you see that all meaning is constructed through particular discursive practices, therefore it may open up the possibility of alternative meanings about menstruation (Kenway, et al., 1994; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). The medical model of menstruation is not wrong or invalid, but rather only one of multiple possible meanings.

The language around menstruation as part of the reproductive cycle tends to be negative in association (Diorio & Munro, 2000). The teachers' description of the reproductive cycle, and menstruation's place within it, contained the same sort of language use. Ms. Summers talked about menstruation occurring when the egg died and reproduction failed. When you view language as constructive, rather than a transparent medium, the way we describe menstruation contributes to its discursive construction (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). While the teachers worked diligently on creating messages that menstruation is a natural and normal occurrence for girls and women, the focus on reproduction may also be creating a message that menstruation is about failure. When we construct menstruation as occurring when reproduction has failed, we make reproduction the ultimate goal, the only correct outcome, and menstruation happening when we fail to meet that outcome (Fingerson, 2006).

Constructed within the reproductive cycle, menstruation becomes intrinsically linked with pregnancy (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006). Within the lesson, menstruation is discussed as the maturing of the girl's body so that she can have children. This focus on pregnancy may regulate the girls' understandings of their physical and sexual maturity to a specific biological function, in this case procreation. As one teacher put it in the supplementary lesson, "this is what our bodies are built for" (Field Notes). Although I will discuss how this message of motherhood works to construct an emotional and sexual subjectivity within girls, it can also be seen that girls can create a subjectivity based on their biological function. Their subjectivity becomes biologically determined to that of childbearing (Fingerson, 2006).

By connecting menstruation with reproduction and pregnancy, one teacher noted that it created an issue about how much information about sexuality the students should be exposed to. When creating and collecting up the resources, they left a few out because it was not believed they were appropriate for the year seven age group, and should be left to the following year when they began their “sexuality road highway” (Ms. Harris, Teacher Interview 1). Ms. Harris reported that there was currently a discussion amongst the teachers about how much information the children already had, and how much further they should go in teaching sexuality as part of puberty. Menstruation is constructed within a discourse of reproduction, but the teaching about conception is deferred to later years:

Ms. Harris: That once they got, had a period, they can become pregnant you know, and I sort of thought, this is very not, more into the year eight thing, but I think it’s important that they understand that, what that means, cos we are finding that um, there are the odd children that are becoming more sexually active at a younger age... so if we need to make any changes as a year seven group we would (Teacher Interview 1).

This lack of teaching may lead to misunderstandings about sex and conception, or a detachment from their own bodies and its processes. There does seem to be an uncertainty about how much sexuality education should take place within the puberty education unit, with an awareness that the children already seem to have a lot of information, and how much of that should be included within the structured lesson. There is a similar ambivalence from the girls. While discussing boys learning about menstruation, I asked how they felt about learning what happens with boys’ bodies. The girls appeared to be reluctant and have an embarrassed disinterest in the functions of boys’ bodies, but also appeared to understand the need for that information, in particular how it would affect them:

Emma: It was good to learn about it, it was just awkward at the time cos no one really wanted to [learn about it], but it was good too.

Sally: Not really important but we need to know, for like later in life. (Group Interview 2)

Alongside the reproductive definition of menstruation, the medical discourse also constructs menstruation in terms of illness. Menstruation is often associated with a list of negative consequences and physical ailments (Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006). A number of researchers found that the discourse of illness was prevalent within the construction of menstruation (e.g. Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006; Kissling, 1996). However, in teaching the unit there seemed to be a direct attempt to subvert this discourse of illness by opening up the possibility of resistance. The teachers acknowledged that there were symptoms some people reported having when menstruating, but on a number of occasions reiterated that each person was different, some might only have a couple of symptoms and “a lot of you might not have any at all” (Field Notes). This can be seen as going beyond labelling menstruation as natural and normal. In doing so, the discursive construction of menstruation is that girls’ bodies will be a site of discomfort and pain and this is viewed as a normal experience for girls to have to learn to endure (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006). But, by acknowledging there may be a variety of symptoms, and a variety of experiences with those symptoms, the teachers have opened up the opportunity to resist the discourse that constructs menstruation as painful and unpleasant, allowing for the construction of menstruation as healthy and pain free.

As shown earlier, the teachers can use the instruction on menstruation to disrupt and subvert the discourse of menstruation as illness. But this is not to imply that they somehow sit outside of the discursive construction of menstruation, able to remain unaffected by the discourses that construct it (Davies, 2000). The teachers' understanding and own subjectivities as menstruating women exist within this discursive construction and they continue to construct and be constructed by the discourses surrounding menstruation (Gavey, 1989; Jones, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Therefore, while the teachers are able to open up areas of resistance to the dominant discourse, they are also constrained and conditioned within the power given the dominant discourses. As discussed earlier, our understanding of menstruation is situated primarily within a scientific and medical discourse, which when taken up by the teachers may leave them feeling underprepared for imparting a complete understanding to their students. This discourse may contribute to Ms. Summers' desire to have an outside health professional teach the puberty, and in particular menstruation, unit to her students:

Ms. Summers: Maybe it's an area that you value a health expert to come in and actually give that other side of it...it's just something they've got explicit knowledge of, where we've got holistic knowledge of...give the kids the chance to meet an expert and... give some more detailed answers than perhaps I'm able to give. (Teacher Interview 2)

As with everything from a poststructuralist viewpoint, there can be multiple readings of Ms. Summers' interest in a health professional taking the puberty lesson. She acknowledged that coming from a family of health professionals contributed to her thinking, and as an intermediate school teacher there is often, perhaps unrealistic, expectations that the teachers will be experts on all subjects. However, we can also see how the medical

discourse of menstruation obscures and overrides all other constructions of menstruation, making the teaching about the subject solely focused on the scientific meanings the discourse positions (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

Menstruation as Constituting the 'Real Woman'

In some ways the constitution of womanhood constructed by this discourse can be seen as a by-product of the male-female binary created within the previous three discourses. The discourses of hygiene, secrecy and medicine construct menstruating woman, not just in their own subjectivities but in contrast to the male. Within this binary, woman is labelled as other, inferior, lacking or just odd in relation to the ascendant male side of the binary (Davies, 2000; Kenway, et al., 1994; Kissling, 2002). Puberty, and menstruation, are presented as the beginning of womanhood, and is taught as a natural and positive progression. However, it can also be seen as the beginning of the overt binary separation of male and female, with female constructed as the deficient side of that binary (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Kissling, 2002).

Within this binary, menstruation can be seen as a focal point for the negative differences associated with women. Women bleed and men do not, the male body is viewed as the norm, the ideal, and therefore menstruation, the bleeding, marks the female body as different and inferior (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the boys responded with "I'm glad I'm not a girl" (Group Interview 1) to the perceived messiness of menstruation; this taunt can also be seen as applying to the wider context of womanhood. Boys can use their understanding of menstruation to ridicule and control girls:

Kate: They find it really funny and they're always going 'aw I'm glad I'm not a girl', but it's like thanks for the encouragement you know.

Nicole: Yeah, we're like just sitting there like, like listening to her, and they're just cracking up laughing like, ah, thanks, we appreciate the encouragement (Group Interview 1).

While some might read this as simple peer teasing, menstruation continues to be a subject of gender-oriented, and often sexist, humour in entertainment and the media, and is used to control and negate women in the social, cultural and economic world. This teasing of girls about menstruation can be seen as an entry into what Diorio and Munro (2000) call an "officially sanctioned discourse" (p. 351) that is used to control and oppress women.

The previous quote also shows how the girls take up this discourse that marks them as somehow lacking and inferior. By positioning themselves in the descendant side of the binary, they create a subjectivity of themselves as women that can be viewed as different and challenging. While all the girls expressed annoyance at the boys' teasing, they also indicated they wished they were more encouraging. This can be seen as them taking up the discourse that something about womanhood requires sympathy and support. Rather than a subjectivity based on pride and excitement, the discourses around menstruation creates a view of womanhood that is troublesome and negative (Diorio & Munro, 2000). The girls respond to the taunting of their male peers, not by countering it with pride in their gender, but rather with an annoyance they cannot be given encouragement and support for being a girl.

Within instruction on menstruation, being a girl is inherently connected to being a mother (Brooks-Gunn, 1987; Diorio & Munro, 2000). Similar to the medical discourse focus on reproduction, the discourse of womanhood associates menstruation and the sexual maturity of girls to procreation and motherhood. Girls are told that menstruation is a positive experience because it means they will be able to have children, but as Diorio and Munro (2000) point out pregnancy and motherhood is something the girls are also told should happen much later. Therefore while motherhood is presented as a positive outcome of menstruation, the girls seem unable to connect with it as it appears to them to be something far into the future. As Sally points out its “not really important but we need to know, for like later in life” (Group Interview 2). Within this discourse of womanhood, menstruation is something that must be endured until, until pregnancy, until motherhood, until some later accepted event, without any immediate benefits (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

Although the girls do not report feeling any immediate connection with the idea of motherhood, the discourse of procreation and how it constitutes the ideal ‘real’ woman is still prominent in the teaching of menstruation. The power of this discourse comes from its creation and recreation until it becomes seen as commonsense and indisputable (Kenway, et al., 1994). Women have babies, or perhaps more importantly women want to have babies. This is a discourse that does not just occur within puberty education, nor does it begin there. We can see it in the play of children, and in many of the social, cultural and economic practices of our society:

In Western society, all women live their lives against a background of personal and cultural assumptions that all women are or want to be mothers and that for

women motherhood is proof of adulthood and a natural consequence of marriage or permanent relationship with a man. (Letherby, 1994, p. 525)

One way the dominance of this discourse is maintained is by making other discourses seem fanciful and unrealistic (St. Pierre, 2000). The idea that a woman might choose not to have children, or have no desire to be a mother becomes viewed as inconceivable, or simply an aberration. Therefore motherhood becomes talked and taught about as a certainty rather than a possibility or a choice.

While the teachers, or perhaps teaching material, took up the discourse of motherhood by presenting it as an inevitable outcome of maturing into womanhood, a number of the girls seemed to be finding ways to attempt to resist and subvert this discourse. When I asked one group of girls if they saw anything good about menstruation, Emma replied “you have a choice of having kids or not” (Group Interview 2, 14/09/2011). It may appear that Emma still incorporates the discourse of motherhood into her construction of menstruation, by making it a choice she is able to subvert some of the power created through the use of the discourse, and open up the possibility for a less limited range of subjectivities. The idea of choice, or indeed the rejection of motherhood as a goal, can be also be seen in the interaction between two girls in the group interview:

Olivia: Just like when they have a kid and everything.

Kate: if.

Olivia: I said if, I said when/if I think. (Group Interview 1)

While Olivia did originally say “when” in her first statement, by Kate challenging that certainty, and offering up a resistant discourse of a more varied subjectivity of womanhood,

Olivia was able to see beyond the imposed limits of the dominant discourse. This resistance may be momentary, based on complying to the peer pressure of her friend, or simply fleeting. But by making other discourses visible, and in turn showing how particular discourses, in this case the discursive construction of womanhood equalling motherhood, works to construct our subjectivity, girls have more opportunity to recognise and take up different discourses that are able to resist and disrupt the dominant discourses (Davies, 2000).

At the end of the supplementary lesson, a similar challenge to the dominant discourse of motherhood was made. As the students were all moving, preparing to return to their own classes or back to their desks, Ms. Harris was reassuring the girls that menstruation was not an awful event, and she made a comment that because of it they would be able to have children. One girl responded “if they wanted them” (Field notes), to which she received a nod, but no further comment. Although the timing of the comment, at the end of the lesson, and it being the final lesson in the unit, probably contributed to the lack of response, it could also be seen as a missed opportunity for the teachers to disrupt the discourse of essential motherhood. By constructing motherhood as the intended outcome of puberty and menstruation we are teaching girls to “understand their bodies essentially as gender differentiated reproductive vehicles” (Diorio & Munro, 2000, p. 348). But by acknowledging there are women that may not be able to, and/or have no desire for children we are able to disrupt the heteronormative and reproductive understanding of the female body and sexuality (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

Within the lesson of menstruation, reproduction becomes solely a female issue. There was no mention of the man or father's role in the reproduction process, instead it is girls that have babies. While it is possible that the male involvement in procreation is discussed in the lesson on erections and wet dreams; without any immediate association with male involvement, pregnancy and reproduction becomes the responsibility and function of women. Combined with the message that pregnancy is what a women's body is built for, girls may find it incredibly difficult to construct a subjectivity of themselves as women outside of the role of motherhood. This focus on motherhood works within the discourse of the ideal 'real' woman by defining her sexuality solely within the terms of heterosexual reproduction (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Lee, 1994). Girls start to learn their bodies and indeed their sexual maturity exists to serve the function of procreation, a task existing outside of their own personal power or enjoyment (Diorio & Munro, 2000). An example of this occurred during the discussion on how puberty alters a girl's body by the development of breasts and enlargement of her nipples. This change was explained solely in terms of motherhood and a woman's ability to breastfeed her child, devoid of any mention of personal or sexual pleasure (see also Fine, 1988).

As discussed, previously in this chapter, within in the medical discourse, direct references to sexuality are usually excluded from the puberty instruction and addressed in the following year's sexual highway class. Therefore the construction of female sexuality could be seen as a topic more associated and relevant to sexuality education than to instruction in puberty and menstruation. However, when menstruation is taught in terms of reproduction we are beginning the links between puberty and sexuality and laying a foundation for girls to develop a sexual subjectivity (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Lee, 1994). Although not observed as

part of this research, previous studies into the construction of puberty and sexuality education show that boys receive messages that puberty brings the possibility of active male pleasure and sexual enjoyment (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fine, 1988). For girls, these messages of pleasure and enjoyment remain absent from the discursive construction of menstruation and female puberty, or in relation to pregnancy which is cautioned against (Diorio & Munro, 2000).

The construction of the 'real' woman is not just woman as mother, but also relates to an image of ideal femininity that menstruation is seen as threatening (Raftos, et al., 1998). Interconnected with the discourses around hygiene and shameful secrecy, the discourse of 'real' womanhood creates an image of delicate freshness and purity, and involves the complete disguise of any indication of menstruation (Diorio & Munro, 2003; Merskin, 1999; Raftos, et al., 1998). While the girls do not directly talk about maintaining this ideal, they did convey their almost obsessional worry about going to the toilet multiple times a day:

Sally: Like every two or three hours (Group Interview 2).

Grace: You're disappearing to the toilet like ten times a day (Group Interview 1).

Kate: Just getting to the toilet every two or three hours, what if you're on a huge three hour work or something (Group Interview 1).

Interviewer: If you had to tell me your biggest issue...the thing you talk about the most.

Grace: The toilet bit.

Nicole: Same (Group Interview 1).

And the amount of time they associate with each management activity may indicate they have incorporated the importance placed on maintaining an image of fresh and clean femininity, and a concern about failing to meet that requirement. For Sally one of the worst things about menstruation was “spending a lot of money buying all the things you need because you’re a girl” (Group Interview 2). This may be a simple indictment on the cost of menstrual products, however, it can also be read as an awareness on Sally’s part of how the discursive construction of menstruation means that the maintenance of the expected ideal image of womanhood requires extra and specialised behaviours and interventions. Dealing with being a girl requires you to purchase and require special things.

Chapter Three’s Literature review showed previous research into menstruation identified four dominant discourses associated with our understanding and teaching of menstruation to young adults. In the decade or more since the majority of this research was conducted, I have found that these four discourses still exist and are given power in our discursive construction of menstruation. In the observations of puberty lessons and interviews completed with the teachers and girls as part of this research I have identified three new, or little investigated, discourses around menstruation. In the following chapter I will explain and examine how each of these three discourses work to construct menstruation and contribute to the creation of girls’ subjectivities.

Chapter Six: Unexamined and underutilised discourses.

Introduction

The four dominant discourses discussed in the previous chapter are well researched and examined within current and recent literature into menstruation. As I have shown, however, they still contribute to the construction of menstruation and the available subjectivities for young women. While these discourses are prominent in our own construction of menstruation, and the way we teach girls to prepare and understand their own menstrual cycle, I also identified three other discourses within the classroom lessons and/or behaviour and conversations of the participants. Within this chapter I will identify and examine the discourses of dread, celebration and consumerism, and look at how they work to construct menstruation and their effects on the range of subjectivities presented to young women.

Discourse of Dread

This idea of dread attached to menstruation may be read as an emotional reaction to its discursive construction. The four dominant discourses discussed in the previous chapter can be seen as constructing menstruation as something negative and dreaded. Media and advertising present menstruation as physically uncomfortable and as a threat to cleanliness and hygiene (Beausang & Razor, 2000, p. 45). The only positive aspect of menstruation presented is the idea of motherhood. However for many girls this ideal holds little appeal and when it does, motherhood becomes something to defer until some time into the future

(Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Diorio & Munro, 2000). It is, therefore, of little wonder that girls feel dislike towards menstruation and look upon it with dread (Beausang & Razor, 2000; Kissling, 1996a).

The boys' comment of "I'm glad I'm not a girl" (Reported in Group Interview 1) showed there is little joy or excitement surrounding the onset of menstruation. The dominant discursive construction of menstruation associates it with societal rules on behaviour and appearance. Girls learn that becoming a menstruating woman differentiates them from the boys, creating rigid requirements and surveillance their male counterparts do not face (Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Fingerson, 2006). While they see boys being able to talk about and even perhaps, celebrate the changes that puberty brings for them, girls face messages that construct menstruation, and therefore the female body, as something shameful and therefore in need of being hidden (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). Positioned as inferior and different from boys, girls also face restrictions on behaviour. Although not as rigid and controlling as in the past, menstruation is seen as limiting participation in many activities, and placing restrictions on others (Diorio & Munro, 2000). Beausang and Razor (2000) reported when one girl asked whether to shower or bathe during menstruation her teacher responded "A shower... You don't want to take a bath in THAT!" (p. 525). The girls interviewed in this study, also seemed to be considering the effect menstruation might have on their activities. One girl spoke about her fear of swimming: "It would be kind of awkward if like you didn't know about it and you went into a swimming pool and the water went red" (Meg, Group Interview 2). While it does appear that Meg is either exaggerating or has an unrealistic fear of the outcome, i.e. turning a whole swimming pool red, it can also show that girls become conscious of the limitations menstruation will

impose on them from an early age. Girls discover they must learn to adapt their behaviour and activities to manage their periods and conform with social and cultural expectations.

Faced with this constructed meaning, the girls seem to feel resentment about menstruation, and show little interest or excitement about their menarche. Menstruation, as Nicole puts it, “sounds just like a pain in the butt” (Group Interview 1). Faced with the dominant discursive construction of menstruation, girls construct a predominantly negative emotional response. During all three of the lessons I observed, the teachers stressed that menstruation was a natural and normal process of development. Indeed this was incorporated into the language used by the girls interviewed, with them all talking about it being ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ (Group Interviews 1 & 2). However, understanding menstruation as normal and natural is not the same as feeling excitement or happiness about their ongoing menstruation:

While girls are encouraged to be positively excited about developing into adult women, the changes in their bodies are depicted contradictorily as sources of stress to be endured and of outflows to be managed and concealed. (Diorio & Munro, 2000, p. 350)

Therefore while girls can construct a meaning of menstruation as normal and natural, they may also construct the discomfort and bothersome nature of menstruation as normal and natural. This, in turn, may construct a subjectivity that aligns womanhood with discomfort and bother.

The subjectivity of a menstruating woman can be seen as sitting in the intersection of these discourses, creating a subjectivity that is bound and defined by the discourses that

constitute it (Davies & Gannon, 2005). Within the social and cultural construction of menstruation applying rules, restrictions and burdens, the girls seemed to view their oncoming menarche with a sense of dread. The power of these discourses is that we, as a society, tend to take them as commonsense truths, and we see the constructed subjectivity as only logical and inevitable (Kenway, et al., 1994). The view of menstruation bound by these 'truths' can lead to a humanist view of an essential female menstruating self (Davies, 2000). We therefore see the negative emotional reaction and impact of menstruation on women's lives as a natural and normal part of being female, an aspect of their unquestionable essential self. It could then be argued that these emotional responses to menstruation are an unalterable component of being female. Dread and dislike are viewed as undeniable natural reactions to menstruation, so there is no point in challenging or trying to modify them. When discussing one student's overt fear about menstruation Ms. Harris said "they've just got to get over it and move on" (Teacher Interview 1). Not wanting or liking anything about menstruation seems to be an expected and accepted emotional reaction.

While the girls I interviewed did not express that same high level of fear or hatred for menstruation, there was a sense of ambivalence or dread. When asked if any of them were looking forward to starting menstruation, the girls in one interview showed a degree of ambivalence:

Holly: I guess it's part of growing up so kinda, kinda not.

Emma: So sorta sorta not. (Group Interview 2)

Although these responses acknowledge the possibility of positive reactions to menstruation, when combined with the silences and laughter received in response to questions about “are there things you like about menstruation?” (Group Interview 2), we may see that the girls struggle with the idea of menstruation being something positive and enjoyable. Dread is, therefore, not solely attributed to the fear or hatred of menstruation, but also includes ambivalent and/or negative anticipation of menstruation. The girls I spoke with all seemed to accept menstruation would become a part of their lives, but none of them appeared to be looking forward to it, and they tended to see it as something that was a nuisance to be endured.

Our emotional reaction to menstruation, like all our emotions, are often thought of as a natural and universal reaction. All people feel sadness, grief and joy. Emotions are said to exist within the private sphere, where emotions are personal and internal (Boler, 1999). The dislike, concern and nervous embarrassment towards menstruation are seen as the normal expected emotional response and reaction. This is the reaction the teachers expect from their students, ranging from nervous giggling to extreme discomfort or fear. Ms. Harris reported that one year a student hid under the classroom sofa during the lessons on menstruation. While this reaction may seem extreme, it was also deemed understandable by the teacher and in the end accepted as the best way for him to deal with the topic:

Ms. Harris: But I actually realised he was actually listening better under the couch than sitting feeling embarrassed, so he spent the whole session, every session under the couch. (Teacher Interview 1)

There appears to be an expectation that students will feel universally uncomfortable and unwilling to deal with or participate in any lesson about menstruation, and as a

consequence teachers have to develop strategies to deal with these emotional reactions to the topic.

Having effective teaching strategies that engage students and divert and manage disruptive behaviour is an important part of a teacher's repertoire (e.g. McGee & Fraser, 2012). However, the automatic assumption that negative emotional reactions to menstruation are natural and immutable contributes to the dominance of the hegemonic construction of menstruation. We do not ask why the students, and indeed greater society, react to menstruation in this way, rather seeing it as a natural and therefore correct response. Teachers found positive and creative ways to manage the discomfort of the topic, mothers tried to find emotionally delicate and sensitive ways to discuss menstruation with their daughters (Costos, et al., 2002), and within my research I was aware of a need to practise sensitivity and caution in conducting interviews. It can be seen that we are all constructed within a discourse that menstruation is an emotionally wrought topic, and by our own actions continue to recreate that discourse (Gavey, 1989; Scott, 1988).

These measures, to manage the sensitivity and discomfort when addressing menstruation, can be read as an indication that menstruation is considered the private and personal experience of women. The discourses of shame and secrecy are used to create rules around hiding and even negating our awareness of menstruation. Girls learn that speaking about menstruation is deemed unacceptable (Kissling, 1996a), while at the same time they are learning that their emotions must be controlled and regulated (Boler, 1999). Within the rational/emotional binary, the male is seen as a rational person, expressing emotions only in an understandable and situationally acceptable manner, whereas the female side of the

binary positions women as emotionally erratic and less able to behave and think in rational terms (Evans, 2002). This binary construction of rational/emotional presents a view of emotions as inappropriate and illogical. Emotions, therefore, need to be regulated and we, women especially, must learn how to control them and not express emotions publicly (Boler, 1999). When associated with menstruation, this view of emotional instability is amplified. As discussed in Chapter Three, PMS is a menstruation topic that is not regulated by the discourse of secrecy (Kissling, 1996b). PMS is presented as a scientific and rational way to explain and negate female emotionality. Menstruation will cause a woman to lose the required control of her emotions, and these emotions are seen as signifying her inability to reason and be included in the public arena (Boler, 1999; Kissling, 1996b).

Emotions are considered internal and private, and as such they are restricted from the public sphere (Boler, 1999). Combined with the discourse of secrecy that silences any discussion of menstruation, this construction of emotion makes menstruation a taboo topic. We do not speak of menstruation, and our emotional reactions are governed by scientific and rational specifications (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Kissling, 1996b; Koff & Rierdan, 1995). However, from a poststructuralist viewpoint, emotions are not universal, natural and private, rather they are discursively constructed with societal and cultural practices (Boler, 1999). "Emotions are not private reactive responses to events, but are socially organized and managed through 'social conventions, community scrutiny, legal norms, familial obligations and religious injunctions'" (Zembylas, 2005, p. 936). This view takes emotions from the private and personal and into the public and political sphere. Emotions are seen as socially and collaboratively constructed, and work to define how we respond and think (Boler, 1999; Evans, 2002; Zembylas, 2005). Therefore while it may appear normal and

natural to look upon menstruation with dread and dislike, these emotional reactions are the products of our social and cultural construction, “one is convinced that one’s way of feeling springs from an authentic core self – even though that feeling is really a social construct” (Evans, 2002, p. 32).

While dread may be viewed as a constructed emotional response to the discursive construction of menstruation, I also agree that dread is a discourse of its own, separate although intertwined with the other discourses associated with menstruation. When we see emotions as not private impulses that happen to a passive participant, but rather socially created through language and culture we are able to view emotion as a discursive practice (Zembylas, 2005). The dread and discomfort associated with menstruation is not an innate natural response, but created through discourse, which is then recreated through our expression. The emotional discourse of menstruation creates feelings of dread and discomfort, which we then recreate through our thoughts, practices and languages. This discourse of dread becomes woven in the way we talk about menstruation, and how we teach it.

During the lessons, both teachers made acknowledgement of the fact their students probably did not wish to be there learning this topic. One teacher explained how she used humour to deal with her class’s reluctance of the topic: “I just sort of go in there and go, ‘Oh I know you’ve been looking forward to this unit all year, and this is your favourite one’ and kinda put a joking tone to it” (Ms Summers). While the use of humour and acknowledgement of any tension may be helpful teaching practices, of course by assuming menstruation is a topic that will make the students feel uncomfortable and resistant to

discussion, we are taking up and recreating the dominant discourses, allowing very little room for other interpretations. In talking with the girls I asked them how they would teach the subject if they were the teacher, Sally said “don’t go into lots of details” and for Meg it was simply “probably wouldn’t teach it” (Group Interview 2). While both groups of girls admitted they found the lessons on menstruation helpful, they also appear to take up the discourse that menstruation is not something they should feel comfortable with, but rather something to be avoided and even dreaded.

Although this discomfort could be read as being part of the discourse of secrecy, with its rules about not talking about menstruation, it can also be seen as expanding beyond communication rules to our emotional construction of menstruation. “Do we have to?” appears to be a common response to many of the aspects of menstruation discussed during the lesson. Talking to parents or other adult caregivers, buying and using menstrual products, and the physical changes that come with puberty all appear to be met with resistance and a sense of dread (field notes). Within this construction, everything associated with menstruation becomes bothersome, and most wish they could avoid it. When asked what they thought about menstruation, one of the girls I interviewed responded with a list of things she dreaded having to deal with:

Kate: Yeah it sounds like, I don’t like the sound of it, because like you just don’t know when you’re about to start and then you start and then it’s like when are you going to finish. And then you don’t know when you’re suppose to stop using the pad and stuff and then it’s embarrassing having to tell someone or ask them to buy you more. It just seems awkward. (Group Interview 1)

For Kate, menstruation is constructed as being a bother and a complication. Menstruation brings a subjectivity that is bound by rules and requirements that she must constantly be aware of and negotiating. Within this subjectivity Kate seems to view little joy or spontaneity, but rather is faced with restrictions and control.

For many girls, puberty, and in particular menstruation, is seen as the onset of changes that bring an increase in restrictions and social surveillance (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Lees, 1994). Menstruation's connection with reproduction leads to more parental rules in the attempt to prevent pregnancy and girls find themselves with more restrictions than their male counterparts (Diorio & Munro, 2000). At the same time the discursive construction of menstruation accentuates the need to maintain an acceptable image of femininity that is clean, pure and delicate (Merskin, 1999), requiring girls to alter and restrict their behaviour to attain this ideal. The onset of menstruation indicates an increase in gender differentiation, and a girl's perception of her embodied femininity and herself as a female (Usmiani & Daniluk, 1997). When the girls in the interviews talked about their concerns about managing their menstrual cycles, the examples they used all applied to physical activity, e.g. swimming and hiking (Group Interview 1 & 2), and while they did not express a belief they could no longer partake in such physical activities, menstruation was seen as an added difficulty that they needed to be aware of and work out ways to overcome. This supports the idea that menarche will limit the options available to girls and restrict them from certain activities.

Within this construction of menstruation that brings restrictions and limits on girls' behaviour and experience, the girls' language and perception of menstruation is that it is to

be dreaded and endured. Dread is not necessarily about dislike or avoidance of menstruation. As Sally said, “but you don’t want it not to happen” (Group Interview 2), showing that while there may be some resistance and reluctance associated with menstruation, the girls did view it as a normal and natural part of their puberty and maturation. But, although constructed in this manner, the girls also viewed it as something that they just had to endure, a ‘necessary evil’ that will bring little positives, but a number of burdens, inconveniences and embarrassment:

Emma: You want it to happen so you can get it over and done with, but like you don’t.

Holly: But it’s kinda not over and done with.

Emma: So fast forward time. (Group Interview 2)

While Emma was aware that menstruation was not a one-off experience, her desire to ‘get it over and done with’ can be read as her construction of menstruation as a dreadful, bothersome experience that she has no control over, for her it becomes something that has to be endured, unless of course she can find a way to fast forward though the days she is menstruating.

Discourse of Celebration

Counter to the discourse of dread, we can see a discourse of celebration. For decades, researchers have been proposing and advocating for a reframing of menstruation that allows for celebration and a positive interpretation (e.g. Gillooly, 2004; Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2011; Lee, 1994; McKeever, 1984; Parlee, 1974). Our understanding, teaching, and

indeed research into menstruation is often focused on the negative aspects and attitudes associated with menstruation, allowing for little room to view menstruation as a positive and exciting aspect of being female:

current social norms concerning menarche and menstruation emphasize cognitive understanding and a proper use of sanitary devices to reduce fear of excretory soiling and successfully conceal all evidence from others. Thus, age old menstrual myths continue to influence attitudes and behaviours ensuring that a major characteristic of being a mature female remains a source of shame, embarrassment, and secrecy. (McKeever, 1984, p. 45)

While we maintain a construction of menstruation that is a negative experience that must be endured, menstruation remains a taboo topic limiting opportunities for open discussions and change (Costos, et al., 2002).

The societal and cultural power gained through the dominant discourses is created and maintained by presenting that view of menstruation as the unquestionable truth (Kenway, et al., 1994). This construction becomes thought of as 'this is the way menstruation is', therefore hiding the constructed nature of menstruation behind the idea that we are simply reporting the facts about menstruation (St. Pierre, 2000). Society, women and men, are taught that menstruation is a negative and bothersome experience as a fact or truth, and ideas about celebrating menstruation are seen as merely amusing jokes, or at best a way to balance the negative 'truth' about menstruation (Costos, et al., 2002). However, from a poststructuralist framework, the idea of a discourse of celebration is not about finding ways to lessen the impact of the 'real truth' about menstruation, but rather one of multiple meanings that can construct our ideas of menstruation (Kenway, et al., 1994; Scott, 1988).

Our understanding of menstruation has always been historically, economically, politically and religiously constructed (Kissling, 1996a; Whelan, 1975). At each moment the constructed view of menstruation was seen as the correct meaning, and other views were dismissed as fanciful or incorrect (Scott, 1988; St. Pierre, 2000).

So for many the idea that menstruation can be viewed as something exciting and joyful and deserving of celebration may seem a joke or wishful thinking. During one of the lessons, Ms. Harris made a comment that when a girl first started her period she could make an announcement on the school wide intercom. The class, and indeed myself, saw the comment as a joke and laughed it off. When I mentioned her comment during an interview it was again met with laughter (Field Notes, Group Interview 2). While I do not know the school community's rules about appropriate and acceptable use of the intercom, and therefore cannot judge how much those rules might have contributed to the class' reaction, it can still be seen that the idea of publically sharing menarche is something girls do not consider appropriate or positive. In an attempt to combat the discourses of shame and secrecy, Ms. Harris presented menstruation as something good and positive in a young women's life. In doing so, she also introduced a discourse of celebration that does not just combat negative constructions of menstruation, but creates a meaning of menstruation that is about pride and celebration.

When menstruation is viewed within the gender binary division, we can see how it becomes difficult to view menstruation as positive (Stubbs & Costos, 2004). The male/female binary sets up the male as representing everything correct, positive and normal, and therefore anything outside of the male is deemed less, incorrect or deviant (Davies, 1997; Kenway et

al., 1994). Menstruation, sitting entirely on the female side of the binary, is constructed as deviating from the normal and therefore a negative experience (Stubbs & Costos, 2004). According to Steinem (1983), if menstruation was a male experience it would be celebrated, and menarche would bring open congratulatory acknowledgement of the milestone event. She claims that men would brag about how long and how much they bleed. However, within a gendered society where menstruation is the domain of women, it becomes difficult to view menstruation as something positive and celebratory because we view female as deficient and needing to be fixed or brought into line with the desired male position (Stubbs & Costos, 2004).

When starting this research, I was also affected by the dominant discursive construction of menstruation, and the humanist discourse of agency. The idea was that if we can teach and show girls that menstruation is natural and normal, they will no longer be bound by the negativity of shame, secrecy and hygiene, and therefore better able to make choices for their own improvement (Davies, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000). However, many of the girls seem to have taken up the idea that menstruation is natural and normal:

Sally: Not to be worried about it.

Emma: That it was normal, that it happens

Holly: It's just human nature.

Holly: It's part of growing up. (Group Interview 2)

But, as shown previously, by constructing menstruation as normal and natural, we also attribute normal and natural to the discourses that constrain and frame menstruation in negative ways. That menstruation will bring physical discomfort, an attack on personal

hygiene and embarrassment are all seen as normal and natural responses. The discourse of celebration not only supplies a view of menstruation that goes beyond accepting the dominant discursive construction of menstruation by presenting it as something to feel excitement and pride about, but also offers a chance to recognise and question the other discursively constructed meanings (Davies, 2000; Davies and Gannon, 2005). Even if the discourse of celebration is resisted, by introducing it, we open up the possibility of questioning the dominant discursive construction of menstruation. Being aware of, and having access to another discourse, opens up the students' ability to resist and subvert the dominant discourse and have access to a wider range of subjectivities, including one that sees menstruation as a celebratory event.

The idea of celebration rituals is rare in the Western world, where the discursive construction of menstruation demands secrecy and creates a sense of shame. Viewed within the medical discourse, Western culture is focused on controlling and in some cases eliminating menstruation (Fingerson, 2006; Stubbs & Costos, 2004). However, celebration rituals and ceremonies are seen as a cultural part of life in much of the non-Western world (Kissling, 2002). For example, the onset of a girl's first menstruation is seen by the Navajo as among the most important religious rites, and is a time of celebration and rejoicing (Frisbie, 1967 cited in Kissling, 1996a). From a Western lens, the seclusion and activity limits placed on women during these rituals can be seen as repressive and isolating, but if we are able to step outside of this dominant discourse these celebratory rituals and practices can be viewed in another way. Seen within different cultural lens, the seclusion creates a women's-only space with valuable time away from their usual requirements (Kissling, 1996a).

It appears one of the obstacles to this idea of celebrating menarche and menstruation is the girls' and young women's attitude towards menstruation (Kissling, 1996a). As explained previously, the power of the dominant discourse comes from the way other, usually resistant, discourses are positioned. Therefore the idea of making menstruation a celebratory event becomes viewed as fanciful and silly (St. Pierre, 2000). When talking with her participants about a workshop meant to celebrate and excite girls about menstruation, Kissling (1996a) reported that the girls found the idea bizarre. She reported one girl saying "I wouldn't want to celebrate something that's not very exciting, you know!" while another girl "expected she'd be 'dying of laughter the whole time'" (Kissling, 1996a, p. 499). Faced with a discursive construction of menstruation where the only potential positive aspect is seen as the possibility of motherhood some time into the future, it may be difficult for young women to feel or express any sense of joy or excitement.

Even for girls that view motherhood as their ideal goal, it is generally considered something that will occur much later in their lives, and actual pregnancy, although significant is a relatively rare event in most women's lives (Diorio & Munro, 2000). By presenting a view of maturity and adulthood that includes motherhood but expands beyond that narrow definition, we are able to see menstruation as an important milestone in a young women's life. During the conclusion of the follow-up lesson, Ms. Harris summed menstruation up as a wonderful event in girls' lives, stating it was exciting because they were growing into women. This was worth celebrating, she said, because it meant they were becoming teenagers, would go off to secondary school, get jobs and have lots of exciting experiences awaiting them (Field Notes). In this way Ms. Harris linked menstruation and their

developing maturity to current, or close events that the girls could relate to and feel excited about. One of Diorio and Munro's (2000) criticisms about the way we teach menstruation was that "girls are told to be excited about growing up so they can have babies *in the future*, boys have their developing adulthood linked to power and pleasure *now*" (Diorio & Munro, 2000, p. 354, emphasis in original). By using events that are current and relevant to the girls, we may be able to disrupt this binary, and present menstruation as a gateway to adult or teenage enjoyment.

When asked if there was anything good about menstruation, or anyway to explain it without it seeming scary, the girls appeared to focus on this idea of growing up:

Olivia: Well just knowing that you're growing up and you're becoming an adult.

Kate: Well before they saw something, just like saying you're growing up now, I'm going to go explain something about growing up, then it wouldn't be so scary.
(Group Interview 1)

These interviews took place after the lesson where Ms. Harris talked about celebrating menstruation because the girls were becoming adults, so I am unable to make any definite claims that her use of a celebratory discourse created this idea of 'growing up' as a positive thing. However, by including it, Ms. Harris is contributing to the creation of a wider range of available subjectivities that includes current excitements such as the prospect of being a teenager, and future multiple options, be they family, careers, travel and so on.

For some girls the idea of adulthood was viewed with excited anticipation. Olivia in particular, seemed to view adulthood as some sort of secret society she would gain access to:

Olivia: Like growing up and like knowing everything, that, like, your parents conceal from you, cos they don't want, cos they don't want, cos they think, cos, my mum thinks it's really embarrassing, she doesn't talk about it. And finally knowing all the secrets.

Interviewer: Secrets about menstruation?

Olivia: Yeah, and all that other stuff adults know. (Group Interview 1)

Viewing menstruation as the beginning of adulthood, Olivia seems to feel excitement about it because of what adulthood will bring her now. This is not about delayed pleasure, or fulfilling a defined role of motherhood for her, but rather access to knowledge and secrets she believes adults have and which she is eager to learn. While growing up was generally viewed as something positive, there was some ambivalence related to it as well. The girls recognise growing up would bring new responsibilities and challenges, and often felt nervous about those:

Interviewer: So when she said today it's about becoming a teenager and getting a job and all those things that adults do.

Olivia: That's kinda the scary bit because you don't want to grow up.

Kate: Yeah but you do in a way, and then you don't.

Nicole: Everyone had to put a question in the question box and most people wrote I don't want to grow up.

Interviewer: So being told this is part of growing up might not be a good thing?

Kate: Umm, well, yeah it is actually because if, cos if you're not growing up it's like I'm stuck here like this so it's keep going and it might be over.

Olivia: I want to grow up but I don't want to grow up.

Kate: Yeah like you grow up but then act like anything you want. There's the positives and then the negatives. (Group Interview 1)

This discussion can be seen as showing the ambivalence a lot of the girls felt when thinking about growing up. While they had all expressed a desire to grow up, there was a sense of nervousness and uncertainty of what that would mean for them. Even Olivia, who had earlier expressed a great interest in gaining access to adult's secrets, also now showed her uncertainty about becoming an adult.

This ambivalence should not discount the discourse of celebration. Lessons in menstruation occur at the beginning or early stages of puberty, when young people are not completely aware or prepared for the changes that will occur. Therefore some level of ambivalence or nervousness is to be expected. By presenting a discourse of celebration, we may be able to supply girls access to a discourse that resists the dominant construction of menstruation, and offer up spaces where the dominant ways in which menstruation is constructed can be challenged and subverted.

Discourse of Consumerism

Advertisements and marketing play a large part in women's understanding and the construction of their subjectivity as menstruating women. With the taboos around talking that the discourse of secrecy creates, for many women the only information they receive is from menstrual product advertising (Merskin, 1999). Our construction of menstruation, whether we view it with dread or celebration, is often informed by what we see in the media and advertisements. Although there may be useful information from these sources,

there also needs to be an awareness that menstrual product advertisement is about selling their product in the best way for the company.

During Ms. Summers' lesson on menstruation, a discussion about menstrual product advertisements occurred. It was one of the few times the students became actively and verbally engaged in the topic. They had a large degree of knowledge and could name and describe advertisements that neither the teacher nor myself were aware of at the time (Field notes). Although not fully realised, the teacher was able to use this interest to create a discussion in the previously reluctant students. The young people's interest in advertising can be a useful education tool, as I will discuss further in chapter eight, but advertising also contributes to, and recreates the dominant discursive construction of menstruation.

Advertising is a reflection of social and cultural beliefs, and as such is constrained and created within the dominant discourses that construct those beliefs (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009; Merskin, 1999). The images and messages within an advertisement must adhere to the social and cultural construction of the world. These images and messages, while idealised and sanitised, are reproductions of how we perceive our world, the objects, experiences and meanings that seem obvious and natural. In doing so, advertising also creates and reinforces our discursively constructed view of society. Advertising shows us how to react and interact, the acceptable subject positions, rules and values (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). In this way "advertising and society are closely intertwined insofar as advertising portrays the established social order, while society with its values and beliefs finds ways of re-creating itself in the discourse of advertising" (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009, p. 2536).

Advertisements of menstrual products are, therefore, created within dominant social and cultural beliefs and structures. Their content must conform to and recreate the dominant discursive construction of menstruation, contributing to the way we take up and maintain the created meaning of menstruation (Merskin, 1999; Simes & Berg, 2001). At first reading, the prevalence of menstrual product advertisements, on television and in magazines, and indeed the students' knowledge and awareness of them, could be seen as disrupting the discourse of secrecy used to construct menstruation (Simes & Berg, 2001). However, when the advertisements are critically analysed it was found that all of the examined advertisements contributed to, or maintained the dominant discursive construction of menstruation, using the demands of hygiene, need for secrecy, and the ideal image of femininity to sell their products (Havens & Swenson, 1988; Raftos, et al., 1998; Simes & Berg, 2001).

The nature of advertisements requires them to immediately connect with their audience (Merskin, 1999). The time constraints of television advertising, or their ability to catch the attention of a magazine reader, means that a shared meaning must be instantly created. Advertisements directed at young people are becoming more flashy and frenetic. They are seen increasingly as entertainment with young people responding to the gimmicks, humour and music, as well as the current celebrities (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). The students in the lesson all spoke of the humour, the dancing or the oddity of the advertisements they knew, but did not mention the relevance of the product. Indeed they all spoke about the advertisements in relation to the images, i.e. the dancing man, the woman with the beaver, and it was only when asked directly by Ms. Summers did they express any connection or

awareness to the actual product being advertised (field notes). While many people still think menstrual product advertising presents useful information to women, Simes and Berg (2001) found there was little useful information to be found, but rather the perpetuation of negative attitudes and views of menstruation.

Advertising, as well as other forms of marketing, is about getting people to not only buy their product but become loyal to its brand (Merskin, 1999). Within menstrual product advertising, the message is that only their product understands the needs of a menstruating woman, or more often, without their product a woman's body will be out of control and the woman will fail at maintaining the appropriate acceptable image of femininity (Raftos, et al., 1998). While these discourses do not originate from the advertisement, they are recreated in them, and used to present their products as a way to maintain the socially acceptable constituted subjectivity (Raftos, et al., 1998; Simes & Berg, 2001). Relying on the discursive construction of menstruation, women's need to conform with the dominant subject position, and fear of what will happen if they fail to adhere to that construction, menstrual product advertising tells women if they use their product then they will be clean enough, discreet enough and feminine enough to conform to, and be accepted as the 'proper' female subject (Simes & Berg, 2001).

Along with advertising, menstrual product companies have found other forms of marketing to increase brand loyalty. The use of bright coloured or patterned packaging has become one way to create interest in and/or loyalty to a particular brand of menstrual product. As discussed in the previous chapter, when the teachers handed out samples of menstrual products for the students to examine and become familiar with, most of the students

showed a great reluctance to touch them and very little overall interest. However, in Ms. Summers' class, at the end of the section about the menstrual products she held up a tampon with a purple with white floral wrapping. The previously disinterested class all seemed to begin to pay attention and a number of students, both male and female, requested to hold it for a closer look.

One reading of this reaction could show that the packaging helps dispel some of the constructed shame and embarrassment associated with menstrual products. The students were able to hold and examine the tampon without any of the previous stigma or embarrassment. The wrapping provided a means of challenging the discourse that presents menstrual products and menstruation as dirty and shameful (Diorio & Munro, 2000; Raftos, et al., 1998). However, another reading could show that by disguising the actual product the wrapping recreates the discourse of secrecy. Being seen with, or the discovery of menstrual products in a woman's possessions is often claimed to be one of the most humiliating experiences, and indeed, it has been shown that people's opinions of women found to have products in their possession becomes increasingly judgemental and negative (Roberts, et al., 2002; Simes & Berg, 2001). The wrapping, at least partially, conceals the true nature of the product, and therefore, by buying the brand that has designer wrapping, a woman will need to be slightly less vigilant about ensuring she does not fail the discourse of secrecy.

The majority of menstrual product packaging consists of soft colours, or those deemed feminine: pinks, purples, light blues, and often have some sort of floral pattern. Again the packaging boxes and bags maybe be seen as a way to reduce any stigma associated with the possession of menstrual products, and by providing aesthetically pleasing packaging

contribute to the discourse of celebration by making the packaging exciting. However, as shown with advertising, menstrual products rely on and recreate an ideal of femininity constructed within a discourse that outlines what it means to be a 'real' woman. To be acceptable within this construction women must always be fresh and present themselves as 'pure'. This image was often represented by women wearing white or soft pastel coloured clothing. While these colours provided the viewer with 'proof' of the products' protection abilities, it also showed the ideals of essential womanhood. Flowers also appeared in many of the advertisements, seen as a reference to the products' ability to counter any perceived unhygienic smell created by menstruation, and also an illusionary cue to them maintaining the desired purity of the woman (Merskin, 1999). The design of the menstrual product packaging, its use of soft feminine-aligned colours and images, can be seen as contributing to the discourse of femininity and womanhood, as well as using these discourses to market and sell their products.

While many may view advertising and other forms of marketing as simply ways companies promote and sell their products, the discursive messages recreated and conformed to within these advertisements in turn contribute to our constructed understanding of menstruation. With television advertising and the multitude of menstrual product advertisements found in teenage magazines like *Cream* and *Seventeen*, young girls are exposed to numerous messages about the way to view menstruation. These views are often internalised as the ideal, and negative comparisons often lead to damaging self-image and health (Hill, 2011). Media and advertising creates and recreates the image that we assume as our identity or subjectivity. "While people believe they are expressing their selves and attaining happiness they are, in fact, developing, monitoring, and molding their identities with respect to

unrealistic ideals promoted by consumer culture through advertising” (Dittmar, 2007 cited in Hill, 2011, p. 354). We can therefore view advertising not as simply a process of selling product, but informing the ways subjectivities are constructed within the dominant discourses.

The effort given to marketing is about capturing consumer loyalty and thus ensuring a retail profit (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009; Hill, 2011; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Merskin, 1999). When you consider that a woman will menstruate for roughly 40 years of her life, achieving brand loyalty is a goal of most menstrual product companies. Therefore marketing is often directed at young women and girls, in the hope of establishing a lifelong loyalty to their product. For young people and teenagers, brand loyalty is not solely about only purchasing the specific brand, but rather taking on board the identity of that brand. For example, children do not just wear the branded clothing, but also put on the brand’s identity and persona, wearing the brand’s identity as their own (Hill, 2011). Therefore products are marketed in ways that are appealing to their audience, that speak of a common reality (Hill, 2011; Kenway & Bullen, 2001), and also create the ‘cool’ factor, where participation in a brand identity will guarantee acceptance and popularity (Hill, 2011).

During my conversations with the girls, they all mentioned the multitude of products available and their confusion about what they should be purchasing. At first I thought this was simply not knowing whether they should use a tampon or pad, or which of the variety of types, e.g. wings, slim fit, applicator and so on, would be best. But as the conversation progressed it became clear that the girls were also worried about which brands they should buy:

Grace: I'd probably say more about brands and stuff, because there's like a billion of them and that's all she told us.

Olivia: Yeah, there was a lot of talking about pads versus tampons, but you sort of want to know which one, you know, which brand, ... which pad, which tampon.

Nicole: Sort of like the brands and which works best for which thing. (Group Interview 1)

Although this could be read as a concern about the functionality of the products, it can also show that brands are a part of the girls' awareness, and may indeed hold more importance to them. During a conversation about purchasing menstrual products Holly said she'd go to her friends for information about brand purchasing: "If my friend already knew, they'd understand, so I could ask one of them what brand they use and then get my mum to buy that one, cos I don't want my mum choosing for me" (Holly, Group Interview 2). This appears to show that the need to have the right brand, the brand that will bring peer acceptance and approval can outweigh the need for secrecy. All of the girls appeared to want to keep menstruation a secret from others, even their peers, but Holly was willing to risk breaking that discourse of secrecy so she would possess the right brand of menstrual product, a brand she did not trust her mother to know.

Conclusion

While these discourses are not exactly new, I do feel they are under examined and utilised. The discourse of dread, the negative emotional reaction to menstruation is still often considered a natural response, rather than a discursive construction. After decades researchers and educators are still talking about the need to present menstruation in a

positive light, but there is still a reluctance to the idea of celebration. Advertising and marketing have a major influence over children and young people, and menstrual product companies' use of advertisement has a large impact on how menstruation is constructed. These discourses along with the previously discussed ones influence the way we teach menstruation, and can also be used to examine and challenge the ways in which we understand menstruation. In the next chapter I will look at how understanding of the discourses that construct menstruation can be used in teaching, opening up the possibility of resistant discourses and subversion of the dominant construction of menstruation. I will also look at where this thesis fits within the established research, and what possible gaps in the field there might be, or the direction of additional research.

Chapter Seven: Implications.

Finally, it is important that this research is not seen as sitting in isolation, but contributing to the wider research into puberty education, and menstruation, and indeed sexuality education in general. It may also be helpful in informing the ways in which we teach menstruation to young people, by providing opportunities and, hopefully, inspiration to expand teaching practices to open up young people to a wider range of discourses and possible subjectivities. In this final chapter I will look at where this research sits in the body of research into puberty and sex education, and also present gaps and/or ideas that may warrant further investigation. I will then look at the impact this research may have on the teaching of menstruation, and possible suggestions of practical ways to introduce new discourses and encourage a wider range of available subjectivities.

Research implications

Within the wider category of sexuality education research, there appears to be little focus on puberty education, and even less specifically addressing the ways we teach and develop meaning around menstruation. While researchers, teachers, policy makers and the general public all express a need to teach young people responsible sexual behaviour and a positive self-image; puberty, and specifically menstruation, is often overlooked in this focus on older age teenagers and their sexuality education. However, I propose that if we are to express an interest in young people's sexual health and wellbeing this must start in the ways we initially address puberty. Lessons on menstruation are often the first time that young women and girls are formally taught their bodies are sites of reproduction (Diorio & Munro, 2000). During my observations of the lessons on menstruation, motherhood and pregnancy

were presented as the primary reason for menstruation (Field Notes). Diorio and Munro (2000; 2003) found that the focus on the reproductive discourse within menstruation education often defined female sexuality in heterosexual and passive terms. Therefore, if we are invested in teaching young girls good sexual health and preventing unwanted teenage pregnancy (Allen, 2007), it may be important to look at how the teaching of menstruation is informing girls' sexual subjectivity at this earlier age.

Along with reproductive issues, sexuality education encourages young people to create and maintain a good self-image as sexually maturing individuals (Allen, 2004; Diorio & Munro, 2003). The discursive construction of menstruation and its influences on how we teach menstruation to young people may have a negative impact on the ways female subjectivity is constructed and viewed. When we construct menstruation as 'other' within the male/female binary, we can be constructing the female body as inferior and wrong, making it difficult for young women to view their femaleness, and their biological and sexual processes in positive ways (Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Diorio & Munro, 2000; Kissling, 2002). It may be useful to look specifically at the ways the construction of menstruation influences and determines how young women negotiate the construction of themselves as women, their physical image as well as their sexual being. While there is research that examines the discursive construction of menstruation as explored in Chapter Three, it seems very little of the research actually examines how girls and women negotiate these discourses while constructing their subjectivities.

As stated above, there is limited research into menstruation and puberty education; this is especially true in relation to New Zealand research. During the process of this thesis

research, I was able to locate only one article about menstruation research performed in New Zealand, and another written on the broader topic of puberty (see Diorio & Munro, 2003). This article (Diorio & Munro, 2000) was my initial entry into the topic of menstruation education, and was used extensively through this thesis. However, as useful as the Diorio and Munro article has been, this also shows a considerable lack of research in menstruation education and understanding within the New Zealand setting. This lack of New Zealand based research may be related to menstruation being constructed as a biological event occurring independently of the social and cultural world (Diorio & Munro, 2003), therefore the need for research relevant to New Zealand socio-cultural factors and influences may be also constructed as irrelevant or unnecessary. Nonetheless, from a poststructuralist framework where meaning is constructed through the use of language and power (Kenway, et al., 1994; Scott, 1988), I propose that our understandings of puberty, and menstruation, is at least partially constructed within the culture of New Zealand society, and therefore warrants further research into how this influences our understanding.

When looking at the different cultural and social influences that contribute to the discourses surrounding menstruation and how meaning is constructed within New Zealand society, it may be beneficial to investigate how different ethnic and religious groups construct menstruation, and how this in turn informs how we treat menstruation within education, and socially. When I started this thesis I made a choice not to investigate and/or research specific cultural or religious contributions to the construction of menstruation, unless specific data from my field research lead me in that direction. This decision was not based on a belief that such areas were irrelevant. Indeed, in October 2010, menstruating women were excluded from attending some of the collection tours at Te Papa, Museum of New

Zealand, due to Māori cultural beliefs and sensitivities (Wade, 2010). This controversy, and discussions about ethnic and gender inclusion/exclusion contributed to my thesis proposal, but within a Masters' thesis I felt I could not give the time and space required to begin to adequately address the ethnic and cultural influences on our construction of menstruation. Therefore when looking at menstruation from a New Zealand perspective, it may be useful for future research studies to consider the different cultural practices, especially indigenous Māori practices, associated with menstruation, and how these can be presented and respected within education in puberty, while still encouraging positive gendered subjectivities.

While not directly about the ways menstruation is constructed within puberty education, I have been interested in people's reactions, both socially and academically, to the idea of my research into menstruation. As I discussed in Chapter Three, there are strong discursive rules that construct a belief of secrecy around menstruation. This dominant discourse of secrecy usually means that people are reluctant to talk about the topic of menstruation, believing it to be taboo, or socially inappropriate. My attempts to engage in conversation, both with academic peers and personal friends, were often seen as shocking or intimidating. The topic of menstruation is often considered uncomfortable for people, and as a number of the girls I interviewed said talking about menstruation was "awkward" (Group Interview, 1 & 2). Along with the discourse of secrecy that inhibits discussion about menstruation is the constructed understanding that menstruation is embarrassing and an awful experience. The physical and emotional discomfort attached to the topic of menstruation is often considered a natural and normal reaction, although from my poststructuralist viewpoint, we can see this as being a creation of the dominant discourses of secrecy, shame and dread.

Therefore, when I told people I was planning on researching menstruation, I received a lot of comments along the lines of ‘why would I want to do such a thing?’ While it may be important as a reflexive researcher to ask questions about the purpose and relevance of a particular line of research, I also began to question why so many found the topic uncomfortable, or questioned its importance. Is the discourse of secrecy so dominant that we prefer to step away from it, ignoring it as an issue within sexuality and puberty education? Does the construction of the male/female binary make menstruation, a decidedly female function, somehow less important or relevant? While a number of researchers have looked into how and why we teach sexuality to young people (eg. Allen, 2004; Diorio & Munro, 2003; Munro & Ballard, 2004), I also think it is important to look at the way menstruation is often dismissed or relegated to unimportant in terms of our research into puberty and sexuality education. As we hope that through education, young people can become more aware of the discursive construction of menstruation and in doing so open up a wider range of subjectivities, we might first need to look at how our own subjectivities are constituted and recreated and how they affect, limit or expand on what we present as researchers and teachers.

Teaching practice implications

The implications for teaching practice are about this idea of making a wider range of discourses available to the students, and therefore opening a wider range of subjectivities. Although some discourses raise issues of exclusion, gender inequality, and social justice, the idea is not to label any particular discourse as invalid and remove it from the teaching of

menstruation. Indeed, from a poststructuralist theoretical framework, all discourses and the multiple meanings they construct, have value and significance. Therefore, while it may appear tempting to simply remove the discourse of shameful secrecy from our instruction and talk about menstruation, the meaning that the discourse constructs may be read as valid and important. My purpose for this research, and the implications for teaching menstruation, is not about declaring the subject matter right or wrong, but instead working to make visible the ways discourses construct our understanding of menstruation, and finding new ways to include alternative discourses that allow for a greater range of subjectivities.

When we work to make visible the discourses that construct meaning and inscribe our subject position, we provide opportunities for agentic decisions about whether we wish to take up, resist or subvert the discourses presented (Barrett, 2005; Davies, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000). As teachers it may be of value to look at why we teach certain aspects of menstruation, which discourses we are presenting and why these are deemed important information to impart. For instance, during the lessons I observed a large portion of the 40 minute lesson was taken up discussing menstrual products and their use. And while teaching about hygiene and period management is appropriate, by focusing on this one aspect we may be limiting the variety of other meanings that could be constructed about menstruation (Diorio & Munro, 2000). So it may be important to ask why we feel the teaching of hygiene should be the primary focus of a lesson. As teachers, (and researchers), we do not sit outside of these discursive constructions, unaffected by them. Our understanding of menstruation is, at least in part, constructed by this discourse of hygiene, that we in turn recreate with our teaching of hygiene and management thus maintaining its

power as a dominant discourse. The power of this discourse is that we do not question it, we do not ask if this is something we need to teach young girls, if it should be a priority or if there are other things that have importance or are simply of interest that needs to be included in our teaching.

One aspect that appears to need inclusion in our teaching of menstruation is the idea of constructing menstruation as something positive and exciting. Almost thirty years ago, McKeever (1984) advocated for a change in how we view menstruation by removing the ideas of shame and negativity from the ways we conceptualise menstruation. This same idea is still being presented by current researchers (eg. Allen, Kaestle, & Goldberg, 2011; Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2011), showing that while we may be aware of the need to present a positive picture to young women about menstruation, girls are still being presented with a view of womanhood that constructs menstruation in negative ways (Diorio & Munro, 2000). It may be through providing a greater range of discourses that we can open up the possibility of constructing menstruation as positive. When Ms Harris introduced a discourse of adulthood, she opened up a possibility that some girls may be able to take up a subjectivity that was not limited to motherhood and/or discomfort, but provided the possibility of increased independence and a variety of experiences (Field Notes). Another possibility to expand on the variety of discourses presented may be to pursue the idea of celebration. During the lessons on menstruation, both the teachers made suggestions that the girls could announce on the school intercom system when they got their first period. While this appears to have been said in jest and was received as a joke, I do believe it also provides an opportunity. I am not saying that as part of the lessons in menstruation, announcements of menstrual status should be made school wide, although I am not

discounting it either, but it may provide the opportunity to at least discuss the idea of celebration or the lack of celebration that exists around menstruation. Why, when menstruation is something all women will experience, do we not celebrate it like the other milestones in an individual's life? It may be beneficial to also bring into the conversation non-Western rituals around menstruation, for instance, in some cultures menstruating women have women's only spaces away from their usual responsibilities and requirements. And although this may look like, and could be read as isolation and discrimination, it can also be read as a holiday away from the daily chores, a spa retreat without worrying about housework and/or a job, or for the girls, cleaning their room or doing their homework. When presented this way, the discourse of celebration might start to have an appeal for some young women.

The idea is, therefore, not to undo how we teach menstruation, but rather to expand on it, to bring in a wider range of discourses, and examine and question the discourses that are used to construct menstruation. Critical literacy may be a useful tool to encourage this conversation about the discursive construction of menstruation. At its heart critical literacy seems to be about asking the questions that uncover how and why meaning is being constructed by helping students "focus on uncovering the perspectives and positions that underpin texts, and to ask and judge what these perspectives might mean in terms of the social construction of their world" (Sandretto with Klenner, 2011, p. 14). In asking these questions the students may be able to recognise how they are being constituted within the various discourses, and use this knowledge to find ways to challenge or embrace the constructed meanings (Davies & Gannon, 2005). In relation to this research and the specific classroom lessons I was able to observe, I believe there would have been an ideal

opportunity for a critical literacy approach. During Ms Summers' lesson the students showed an established interest in the advertising associated with menstrual products. This interest provided the teachers with an opportunity to engage the students in a critical literacy examination of the text of the commercial. For example, if we were to use the *U by Kotex Last Line of Defence* tampon advertisement, we have an opportunity to question and perhaps challenge some of the direct statements in the advertisement, like three out of four women worry about leakage. Is this true? How do they know? What does it say about being a menstruating woman? But critical literacy also allows us dig deeper than the surface questions, and by engaging in a dialogue around the questions of who constructed these advertisements and why, and who is included and excluded from being represented, we are engaging students in a process of questioning and challenging that is not about finding the right answer, or remembering the information imparted by the teacher (Sandretto with Klenner, 2011).

Conclusion

The dominant discourses that construct menstruation remain dominant because they have been created and recreated as commonsense beliefs, just the way menstruation is. We see these discourses in advertising, media, teaching, and just the personal ways we discuss, or remain silent about menstruation. We tend to see these understandings and attitudes towards menstruation as being true now and always, but the meaning of menstruation and the attitudes towards it have changed through history with social and cultural changes. There was a time when menstruation was viewed as having no biological purpose, and women were simply choosing to menstruate (Fingerson, 2006), and in the 1940s researchers

pointed to penis envy and female castration complex as being the reasons why menstruation had a negative psychological impact (Greif & Ulman, 1982). While these beliefs are no longer held as valid or true, the meanings constructed by the dominant discourses of today are presented as truth and commonsense.

Teachers and researchers do not sit outside these constructed meanings, able to act independently of the social constructions of meaning and subject position. As a researcher I had to negotiate my own subjectivity and the discourses that constituted it. The teachers also had to work within their own subject positions:

Interviewer: How do you actually feel as a teacher, teaching this actual subject?

Ms Summers: I find it harder to take than other subjects.

Interviewer: Is there a reason? What would you say the reason for that was?

Ms Summers: I don't know, it just feels so personal, and I guess everyone's journey through it is personal. (Teacher Interview 2)

While Ms Summers' teaching ability is not the issue here, the discursive construction of menstruation as something secret, as private and personal, adds an extra difficulty to the teaching. She is not able to step outside of this discursive construction, but instead must work within it.

Ms Summers' ability to talk openly about menstruation in the lesson, and indeed both teachers' explicit decisions to include personal experiences as part of the lesson (Field Notes, Teacher Interviews), could be read as challenging the discourse of secrecy, and presenting a subjectivity where menstruation is matter-of-fact without any associated

shame or secrecy. From a poststructuralist viewpoint, this is the way we can provide greater opportunity and variety for young women to understand and construct themselves as menstruating women. By making other discourses known and available, and providing an understanding of how the discourses work to construct menstruation young woman may be able to take up, or challenge a variety of constructions. A young women may celebrate her period because it means she is biologically ready to have children, or she may celebrate it because it means she is becoming a teenager and may soon be able to date and go to parties. A young woman may learn how to manage her period, ensuring her hygiene and presentation, but feel no shame or embarrassment when seen with or purchasing menstrual products. We construct, and are constructed by the dominant discourses that create meaning of our social world (Kenway, et al., 1994). However, these discourses are not immutable but rather change over time (St. Pierre, 2000). Therefore by exposing the construction of meaning and providing a variety of discourses we may be able to move our understanding of menstruation to allow for a greater range of subject positions.

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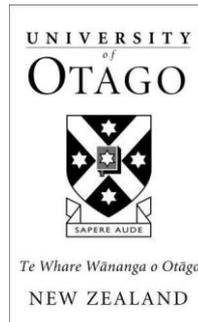
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Appendix A

Reference Number 11/024
22/03/2011



An Examination of the Discursive Construction of Menstruation in Puberty Education

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS / GUARDIANS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This research is being undertaken for my Masters of Arts in Education at the University of Otago. The aim of this project is to investigate the language around menstruation, how it is presented within the classroom lesson, and how it is spoken about and understood on a personal level. This, in turn, informs how young women feel about themselves. By investigating this process I hope to identify ways to increase a sense of knowledge, acceptance and confidence about menstruation and its effects on young women's sense of self.

What Type of Participants are being sought?

The participants I seek are female year seven students who have taken part in the classroom lessons on menstruation, regardless of their menstruation status and their teacher.

What will Participants be Asked to Do?

Should you agree for your child to take part in this project, she will be asked to participate in either a one-to-one interview, or group interview; the type of interview will be her choice. The interview will take approximately an hour and occur in a private space within her school environment. The timing of the interview will be negotiated to suit the participants. They may take place during class time or out of class time (e.g. lunchtime). She will also be observed during class lessons on menstruation.

Can Participants Change their Minds and Withdraw from the Project?

Please be aware that your child may decide not to take part in the project or withdraw from the project without any disadvantage to her of any kind.

What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?

Your child will be asked her name and age. However, for the purposes of this project I will ask her to choose a pseudonym. Her real name will not appear in my research and therefore she will remain anonymous. Our interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. Professional transcribers will be used to transcribe the interviews. The people who transcribe the interviews will not share your child's information with anyone else. The information she gives me during the interview will be used as part of my Master of Arts thesis, but will be used in a way that ensures her anonymity.

The interview will focus on her experiences and understanding about menstruation. Although I will have questions to focus on this, I am more interested in hearing her thoughts and opinions rather than having her simply answering my questions. If, at any time, she feels hesitant or uncomfortable answering a question or discussing something, she will be reminded that she has a right to decline to answer, or withdraw from the project.

The information I gather from these interviews will only be available to my supervisor, the transcribers and me. The interview recordings will be stored securely, with only myself and my supervisor having access to them. At the completion of the project, the recordings of your child's interview will be destroyed. The information gathered from the interview will be used within my thesis. You are welcome to request a summary of this thesis should you wish

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

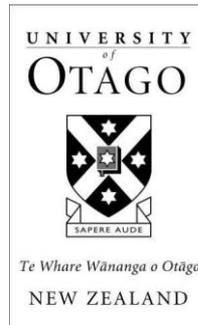
Carole Agnew or
College of Education
University Telephone Number:- 479 5975

Dr. Susan Sandretto
College of Education
University Telephone Number: 4798820
Email: susan.sandretto@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

An Examination of the Discursive Construction of Menstruation Instruction

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS



I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My child's participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw my child from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. Personal identifying information from audiotapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project, but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;
4. The interview will be about my child's understanding, experiences and beliefs about menstruation. It will be more like a conversation than answering a set list of questions and my child will be able to decline to answer any particular question or withdraw at any time; and,
5. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

I agree for my child to take part in this project.

.....
(Signature of parent/guardian)

(Date)

.....
(Name of child)

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

The information collected will only be available to the transcribers, my supervisor and me. It will be stored securely, and then at the completion of this project, it will be destroyed. You are welcome to request a summary of my thesis should you wish to read it.

If you have any Questions about this project:

Feel free to contact myself, or my supervisor

Carole Agnew

College of Education

University Telephone number: 479 5975

Or:

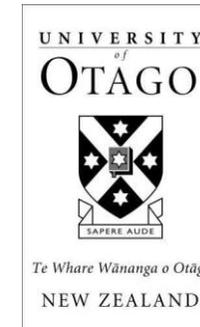
Dr. Susan Sandretto

College of Education

University Telephone number: 479 8820

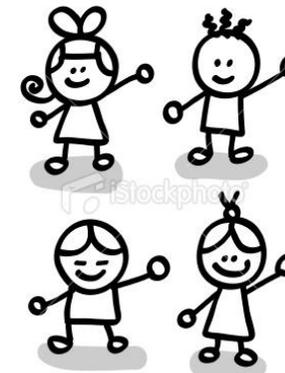
Email: susan.sandretto@otago.ac.nz

General Information for Students



Information Sheet for Students:

An examination of the discursive construction of menstruation in puberty education.



Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information booklet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind.

What is this project about?

This research is my university masters project. As part of this project I will be talking to a group of young women about their personal and classroom experiences and understanding menstruation and how this experience affects how they feel about themselves. I want to find ways to increase a sense of acceptance and confidence about menstruation and the way young women feel about themselves.

Who do I seek?

I would like to talk to young women in Year Seven who have taken part in the lessons on menstruation, regardless of whether or not they have begun to menstruate.

What will you have to do?

Should you decide to take part in this project, you will have a choice of individual or group interviews. These interviews will take about an hour and occur in a private place at your school. The timing of the interview will be negotiated to suit the participants. They may take place during class time or out of class time (e.g. lunchtime). You will also be observed during a class lesson.

Can you change your mind about participating?

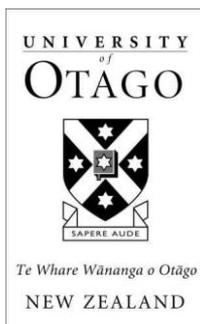
You can decide not to answer any question during the interview, as well as decide you do not wish to take part and withdraw from this project at any time, without any disadvantage to you.

What information will be collected?

I will ask your name and age. However, to ensure your privacy a pseudonym, or other name, of your choice will be used in this project. Only this pseudonym will appear in the written project. The interview conversation will be about your experiences and opinions of menstruation. The people who transcribe the interview will not share your information with anyone else. If, at any time, you do not wish to discuss something you have the right to decline to answer.

An examination of the discursive construction of menstruation in puberty education.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING STUDENTS



I have been told about this study and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered in a way that makes sense.

I know that:

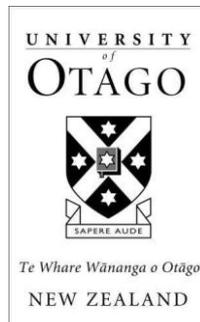
1. Participation in this study is voluntary, which means that I do not have to take part if I don't want to and nothing will happen to me. I can also stop taking part at any time and don't have to give a reason;
2. Anytime I want to stop, that's okay.
3. The researcher will audiotape me so that she can remember what I say, but the tape will be destroyed after the study has ended.
4. If I don't want to answer some of the questions, that's fine.
5. If I have any worries or if I have any other questions, then I can talk about these with the researcher or her supervisor.
6. The paper and computer file with my answers will only be seen by the researcher and the people she is working with. They will keep whatever I say private.
7. I will receive a small gift as thanks for helping with this study.
8. The researcher will write up the results from this study for their University work. The results may also be written up in journals and talked about at conferences. My name will not be on anything the researcher writes up about this study.

I agree to take part in the study.

.....
Signed

.....
Date

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.



An Examination of the Discursive Construction of Menstruation in Puberty Education.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This research is being undertaken for my Masters of Arts in Education at the University of Otago. The aim of this project is to investigate the language around menstruation, how it is presented within the classroom lessons, and how it is spoken about and understood on a personal level. This, in turn, informs how young women feel about themselves. By investigating this process I hope to identify ways to increase a sense of knowledge, acceptance and confidence about menstruation and its effects on young women's sense of self and womanhood.

What Type of Participants are being sought?

The participants I seek are the teachers who teach classroom lessons on menstruation to female year seven students.

What will Participants be Asked to Do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to teach your regular lessons on menstruation and wear a microphone so that the lesson can be audiotaped. You will also take part in an interview. The interview will take approximately a half hour and occur in a private space within the school environment. The timing of the interview will be negotiated to suit the participants. They may take place during class release time or out of class time (e.g. lunchtime).

Can Participants Change their Minds and Withdraw from the Project?

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project or withdraw from the project without any disadvantage to you of any kind.

What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?

I will ask your name and age. However, for the purposes of this project I will ask you to choose a pseudonym, your real name will not appear in my research and therefore you will remain anonymous. Our interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. Professional transcribers will be used to transcribe the interviews. The people who transcribe the interviews will not share your information with anyone else. The information you give me during the interview will be used as part of my Master of Arts thesis, but will be used in a way that ensures your anonymity.

The interview will focus on your experiences of teaching menstruation. Although I will have questions to focus on this, I am more interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions in regards to the classroom lesson, rather than simply answering my questions. If at any time you feel hesitant or uncomfortable answering a question or discussing something, you are reminded that you have a right to decline to answer, or withdraw from the project.

The information I gather from these interviews will only be available to my supervisor, the transcribers, and me. The interview recordings will be stored securely, with only myself and my supervisor having access to them. At the completion of the project, the recordings of your interview will be destroyed. The information gathered from the interview will be used within my thesis. You are welcome to request a summary of this thesis should you wish

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

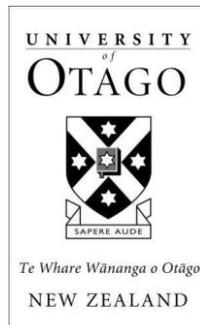
Carole Agnew or
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University Telephone Number:- 479 5975

Dr. Susan Sandretto
College of Education
University Telephone Number:
4798820
Email:
susan.sandretto@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

An examination of the discursive construction of menstruation in puberty instruction.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING TEACHERS



I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. Personal identifying information from the audiotapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;
4. The interview will be about my experiences teaching menstruation, the teaching material, what works and what doesn't, and any suggestions about changes that will be beneficial. I am able to decline to answer any particular question or withdraw at any time;
5. As a sign of gratitude for my participation I will receive a book voucher; and
6. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

I agree to take part in this project.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Teachers

An examination of the discursive construction of menstruation in puberty instruction

During this interview you can choose not to answer any of the questions that come up, and you are able to withdraw from this project at any time you wish.

- Do you feel there are any issues in presenting menstruation to the class?
 - Are the resources available and appropriate?
 - Are there any disruptive/restrictive aspects to teaching the topic?
 - Are there things you would like to be able to add into the instruction, or remove from it?

- Is there anything else you wish to add about the teaching of menstruation you do not feel has already been addressed?

Appendix C

Interview Guide for Students

*An examination of the discursive construction of menstruation in puberty
instruction*

During this interview you can choose not to answer any of the questions that come up, and you are able to withdraw from this project at any time you wish.

Privacy is very important so we can speak openly during this discussion, and you all get to pick a pseudonym, a name to use instead of your real name, for when I write up this project.

- What are your experiences with menstruation? (if not yet menstruating, ask “what about your Mum, your older sisters?”)
- Can you tell me the things you’ve heard about menstruation? (from home, from school, from friends).

- Did you think the lesson was helpful for your understanding of menstruation?
 - If yes, what made it helpful, what information did you like knowing, what information wasn’t so useful, what do you wish had been talked about?
 - If no, why? Where did the most helpful information come from, what made that helpful and the lesson not, what could be done to make it better.

- Is there anything else you want to say about menstruation that you don’t think we’ve covered?

Appendix D

Support list

*An examination of the discursive construction of menstruation in puberty
instruction*

Sometimes talking about personal experiences can make you think about things you would like help with. After this interview you may feel you have things you would like to discuss with someone. Sometimes just talking to friends helps. But if you need adult advice, here is a list of people helpful to talk to:

- Your Parents
- Your teacher
- Your GP
- Youthline (0800 37 66 33)
- Family Planning (477 5850)