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Putting Men Back in the Menstrual Cycle: A Qualitative Analysis of Men's Perceptions of Menstruation

Katherine Fishman

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, kfishman@siu.edu

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PUTTING MEN BACK IN THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY
INVESTIGATING MEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF MENSTRUATION

by

Katherine M. Fishman
B.A., Chatham University, 2011

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Psychology

Department of Psychology
In the Graduate School
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Psychology
in the field of Psychology

Approved by:

Kathleen Chwalisz, PhD, Chair

Barbara Bickel, PhD

Jane Swanson, PhD

Yu-Wei Wang, PhD

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
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MAJOR PROFESSOR: Kathleen Chwalisz, Ph.D.

Although menstruation is typically regarded as an indication of health (Kissling, 1996), strong cultural messages about menstruation perpetuate the belief that it is dirty, disgusting and a state that must be managed (Ussher, 2006). Many women internalize this belief and go to great lengths to hide their menstrual status (Chrisler, 2007). Negative attitudes toward menstruation have been linked to decreased body satisfaction (Schooler, Ward, Meriwether, & Caruthers, 2005), perceptions of decreased competence and likability (Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, & Pyszynski, 2002), and the belief that menstruating women are more emotional, less attractive, and more irritable than non-menstruating women (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, White, & Holmgren, 2003).

Whereas there is a relatively large body of literature regarding the significance of women and girls' experiences of menstruation, comparatively little is known about the development of men's attitudes towards menstruation. The lack of focus on how men learn and think about menstruation may have important implications on their attitudes toward women, particularly in their gendered relationships. Therefore, a grounded theory approach using semi-structured group interviews was used in this qualitative investigation. The purpose of the study was to better understand how perceive menstruation, where these ideas come from, and how their perceptions about menstruation may inform their view of women.

Two group-interviews were performed and comprised of men in two different student-interest groups. During the interview process, participants described their childhood and present-day experiences with menstruation, including how they learned about menstruation, the messages they received, and how they think about menstruation in the present day. In addition, participants were each asked to create and describe an image depicting the way that they think about menstruation.

A Grounded Theory approach was used to analyze the data. The emergent themes from this study were characterized by participant's feelings that they were too young to learn about menstruation in early adolescence and the internalization of dominant cultural messages that menstruation is not something that men should know or talk about. Participants were found to still hold these beliefs as adults, and also revealed they perceive menstruation to be associated with the display of heightened emotions and physical pain. Thus, menstruation was perceived as an overall negative event. Their negative associations with and feelings of disgust toward the presence of blood led to the development of means of avoiding menstruation (e.g. not talking about it and avoiding sexual encounters with menstruating partners). Overall, the participants indicated that they internalized three main beliefs about menstruation: (a) menstruation is associated with affective changes in women, (b) menstruation is irrelevant to men's lives, and (c), menstruation is disgusting because of its association with blood. The implications of the internalization of these beliefs for women, men and practitioners were discussed, and future directions were identified.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although there is a relatively large body of literature regarding the significance of women and girls' experiences of menstruation, comparatively little is known about the development of men's attitudes towards menstruation. The lack of focus on how men learn and think about menstruation may have important implications on their attitudes toward women, particularly in their gendered relationships.

Menstruation is often seen as an indication of a girl's entry into puberty, and symbolizes sexual and reproductive potential (Ussher, 2006). Menarche (first menstrual period) typically occurs around the same time as cognitive changes that allow more abstract thought (Stubbs & Costos, 2004). Lee (1994) hypothesized that menarche serves as a symbolic event in girls' lives in which they begin to enter a world of adult, heterosexual sexuality. The intersection of girls' advanced cognitive and sexual development allows them to become aware of social pressures and focus on their bodies in a new way. Laws (1990) emphasized the role of social forces and dominant culture in the development and reenactment of social norms and expectations. She stated, "We all form our feelings and views in part from very personal, individual experiences, but we are also exposed, directly and indirectly, to what amounts to a very restrictive ideology" (p. 127). Cultural messages that depict menstruation as disgusting perpetuate the idea that it is necessary to hide menstruation from others are confounded by congratulations many girls receive from older women as they reach menarche. These mixed messages often lead girls and women to feel ambivalent about menstruation and feel distanced from their bodies (Stubbs & Costos, 2004).

Gender theorists (e.g. Ussher, 2006; Young, 2005) have purported that the mixed messages girls receive at menarche are in part due to dominant discourses about women's bodies in the western ideology. Young (2005) argued that women's bodies have historically been conceptualized in relation to a male standard. Although it has been commonly accepted that women's reproductive capacity necessarily entails menstruation, it has still been regarded as a taboo subject (Ussher, 2006). Historical myths are contradictory in that they have simultaneously depicted women as the givers of life while their bleeding bodies have been met with disgust (Lee, 1994).

While several qualitative studies have suggested that adult women themselves experience their periods as something relatively routine (e.g. Allen & Goldberg, 2009; Kissling, 1996), outward expressions or acknowledgement of menstruation are still considered to be a taboo subject (Chrisler, 2011). In the public sphere, women's expressions of strong emotions are often dismissed under the guise of being the result of menstrual-related mood swings, thereby effectively negating any legitimate cause of anger (Laws, 1990). Similarly, menstrual related pain is not considered to be a valid excuse for absence from school or work. In the private sphere, meanwhile, sexual relations during menstruation are often negotiated between partners (Allen & Goldberg, 2009), and male partners are advised to be sensitive to female partner's mood swings during her "time of month" (Laws, 1990). Therefore, women often go to some lengths to conceal the fact that they are menstruating, an endeavor that is most often the message of contemporary advertisements of menstrual-related products.

Although Lee (1994) found that many women have expressed feelings of ambivalence toward their periods, the social expectation in western culture that menstruation should be kept hidden persists (Chrisler, 2011). Given the hidden nature of menstruation, how, then, do men

experience menstruation when they encounter it? How do they learn about it? Where does their information come from? The purpose of this research is to illuminate how men think about and feel towards the menstrual cycle, where these ideas and feelings come from, and how ideas and feelings about menstruation may impact views of women in western culture.

This study was a qualitative exploration of men's attitudes and perceptions of menstruation. Group interviews were used to gather information about how men think about and perceive menstruation. These data were analyzed using a Grounded Theory method with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of what men know about menstruation, their attitudes toward it, how their experiences are articulated, and how their attitudes toward menstruation may inform their view of women.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Menstruation and Embodiment

There is a large body of literature concerning the role that menstruation plays in girls' and women's lives (e.g., Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Rempel & Baumartner, 2003; Stubbs & Costos, 2004). Young (2005) argued that menstruation could be seen as a type punctuation mark in women's lives that indicates significant life events. For example, menarche symbolizes a girl's transition into womanhood, and acts as a marker of a time before and a time after. The absence of menses is often the first significant indicator of pregnancy for many women, while the first period after birth indicates a new type of beginning. Menopause, or the "great change" (p. 122) is indicative of a transition into a later stage in life in which a great number of women experience both a loss of identity as well as a newfound vigor (Young, 2005). While it is certainly true that not all women menstruate, the majority of women experience menstruation for a significant portion of their lives. For example, a woman with an "average" cycle who menstruates for 5 days a month for thirty years can be expected to menstruate for 1,800 days, or just under 5 full years throughout her lifetime.

Although the actual amount of time that any given woman spends menstruating varies, menstruation remains a frequent process in many women's lives. Because of this, women's experiences with and attitudes toward menstruation hold important implications in the way they perceive and understand both themselves and the world at large. Proponents of the phenomenological approach to the body investigate how individuals experience their body and how they subsequently articulate these experiences (Fingerson, 2005). This approach, commonly called "embodiment" (Fingerson, 2005, p. 92), is focused on the role of the physical

body in social interactions and power dynamics. Embodiment accounts for the corporeal nature of lived experience, and embodiment theorists posit that the body is situated in social contexts. Fingerson (2005) observed that it is through one's body that an individual acts within the world and becomes a subject with a developed identity.

Because bodies grow and change throughout the lifespan, so too does the way that individuals understand and interact with their world. This process has important implications in the way in which power and agency are both perceived and enacted. Foucault (1977) argued that the body acts as a machine that is the site of negotiated power in social contexts. In other words, one's body serves as a canvas that manifests the thoughts, interests, and desires of the self as they are negotiated with the norms and practices of the social sphere in which it presides. Bartky (1989), critiquing Foucault's argument, noted that women's bodies in particular become the site of negotiated power structures in that, as girls grow and mature into women, their bodies became sources of objectification that is both internal and external. As such, bodies at once become *objects* of practice, in which they are considered and evaluated according to social norms and practices, as well as well as *agents* of practice, in which girls and women often internalize and reinforce the social discourse of beauty and the standards of femininity (Lee, 1994). The development of women's attitudes and the discourse they used to express these experiences are shaped by a multitude of systems that pervade both the public and private spheres, with men representing but one of these aspects.

Laws (1990) pointed out that, despite their position of power in society, men are often left out altogether from research on the implications of menstruation in the gender-related power structure. Because it is women who uniquely experience menstruation, men and women come to understand menstruation differently. Historically and cross-culturally, women's bodies and

reproductive capacity have invoked both fear and awe. Historical myths and social taboos have painted women as being at the whim of their reproductive bodies and emotions, which has placed them as inferior to men who are capable of reason and rationality (Ussher, 2006). For example, Plato believed that men who failed to control their emotions were reincarnated as women, and if they still failed to control their emotions in this role, they would be further reduced to being reincarnated as animals (Ussher, 2006). Other taboos include things such as the belief that menstruating women would contaminate crops or cause meat to spoil (Costos, Ackerman, & Paradis, 2002). In Judaism, Orthodox women have traditionally been required to abstain from sex during the week in which they are menstruating and then take a purifying bath, or *mikvah*, after which women were allowed to re-enter the presence of their husbands (Ussher, 2006). Ernster (1975) identified over 125 different euphemisms to refer to menstruation, with the most common expressions indicating a negative association with menstruation, such as “on the rag” or “the curse”. More contemporary taboos related to menstruation include the belief that tampons cause girls to lose their virginity, as well as the still-common belief that women should not have sex while menstruating. Another persistent belief is that the menstruation itself is dirty and/or disgusting due to the presence of blood and the requirement for sanitary products to stay clean (Costos, et al., 2002).

Although many of these taboos may seem irrelevant, disproven, or outdated, Ussher (2006) argued that menstrual-related taboos are still limiting, because they serve as representations of women that reflect and inform what accounts for the reality in which “women become ‘woman’” (Ussher, 2006, p. 3). Discourse reveals the complex web of power dynamics that make up language, and it is the means through which any and all representation occurs (Butler, 1990). Ussher (2006) took this theory and applied it to the fertile female body. She

argued that the dominant discourse in western culture has created a framework that allows specific notions of femininity at each life stage, but have always valued women's reproductive bodies that are controlled, contained, and hidden. This is demonstrated through cultural messages that women should aspire to manage these process through the use of absorbent products, menstrual suppression, etc. Women who fail to exercise this control (e.g. expressions of menstrual pain or not supplementing hormonal changes at menopause) are at risk of being subjected to various forms of social discipline and punishment, which, Ussher (2006) stated, "...masquerade as treatment or rehabilitation to disguise its regulatory intent" (p. 4).

Young (2005) argued that the trouble with our limited discourse related to the menstrual cycle and women's bodies lies with our perception of what constitutes normalcy in western society. According to her conceptualization, the normative human has been framed by a male characteristic and way of being. Although it is relatively common for people in the western world to view women as capable of doing the majority of work that men do, it is still the standard of achievement that *men* have set that women must live up to. The development of this normative way of being does not allow room for the presence or implications of menstruation (Young, 2005). For example, contemporary advertisements for menstrual pads and tampons often promote the idea that the use of their products will open up possibilities for women who would otherwise be limited to inactivity while menstruating. For example, women in such advertisements are commonly depicted in sports and exercise routines, wearing bikinis, dressed in white, etc. The implication is that contemporary women are no longer saddled with the menstrual-related limitations that women have suffered for centuries. The messages garnered from advertisements such as these tell women that it is possible to experience menstruation as a normative process, during which time they can and should participate in activities in the same

way as men. Young, however, argued that another message garnered from these ads is that any evidence of menstruation should be hidden. In order to be perceived as a normal, socially functional being, a woman must hide the fact that she is menstruating.

Menarche

In order to understand the cultural significance of menstruation in a woman's life, it is important to consider how girls learn about and experience the menstrual cycle. Adolescence is a developmental stage in which both girls are in-between childhood and adulthood. In western cultures, girls typically experience menarche, or first menstrual period, between the ages of 10 and 16, with 13 being the average age (Walker, 1997). For many girls, menarche has been seen as a marker of this stage of life (Ussher, 1989), despite the fact that it typically occurs relatively late compared to other indicators of puberty, such as growth spurts and breast bud development (Stubbs & Costos, 2004). Menarche has been viewed as a biological indication of the ability to bear children and a sign of maturity (Ussher, 2006), and typically occurs around the same time as cognitive changes in which girls are able to understand things in a more complex and abstract way. Because of this, the onset of the menstrual cycle is usually accompanied by shifts in perception in regard to how girls views themselves as well as greater consideration of how others view them (Ussher, 1989).

As girls engage in more complex and abstract thought, they begin to become increasingly aware of the ways in which their bodies are objectified (Lee, 1994). Ussher (2006) argued that menarche symbolizes a transformative experience, in which girls are simultaneously congratulated for the newfound reproductive quality and instructed to hide any evidence of their menstruating bodies. Ussher (1989) theorized that the mixed messages that girls receive about menarche encourages a psychological splitting between one's self and her body. Menarche, as

well as subsequent menstrual periods, enables girls to acknowledge and interact with their physical body in new ways (Allen, et al., 2010).

As girls become aware of the social hierarchies between men and women, they begin to become aware of objectification of their bodies (Ussher, 2006). Lee (1994) wrote that in relation to western society menarche “simultaneously signifies both emerging sexual availability and reproductive potential” (p. 344). Menarche can be understood as a symbolic event that indicates the beginning of girls’ transition into a sexualized world. Although western society values the sexualization of their bodies, women’s reproductive capacities are not valued in the same way, and this disparity allows girls to become ambivalent toward their changing bodies (Lee, 1994). Laible, Watson & Koff (2000) supported the theory that menarche signifies a new sexual awareness in girls by analyzing the artwork of twelve adolescent girls to examine psychological changes associated with pubertal development. Laible and colleagues (2000) asked premenarcheal girls to draw pictures of women at regular intervals over a four-year period. Before menarche, girls drew relatively androgynous figures with straight bodies. After menarche, however, girls expressed significant changes in their perception of the human figure, as indicated by more sexualized drawings (e.g. figures were depicted with larger hips and fuller breasts).

Several researchers have described the various ways in which girls experience menarche. Clark & Ruble (1978) found that among a sample of 54 middle-school students, both boys and pre- and post-menarcheal girls associated the menstrual cycle with physical discomfort, mood changes, and heightened experience of emotions. Costos and colleagues (2002) used qualitative methods to invite a sample of 138 women ranging in age from 26-60 in a psychology of women class to reflect on the communication they received from their mothers at menarche. Many women reported remembering menarche as a complete surprise, that their mothers primarily

conveyed information about menstrual management, or that they received little information related to their mothers' personal experiences with menstruation (Costos, et al 2002). Teitelman (2004) conducted in-depth interviews with 22 girls ages 14-18 from diverse backgrounds to determine the connection between girls' attitudes toward their bodies and communication they received about menarche from their family members. Girls who reported not receiving information prior to menarche were found to have more negative attitudes toward menstruation in general, while those that received information before menarche were better able to accept bodily changes associated with menstruation. Fingerson (2005) conducted interviews with 26 girls and 11 boys between the ages of 13-19 years old to investigate power dynamics and agency in regard to menstruation. She found that both boys and girls expressed that girls had access to special type of knowledge about menstruation. When prompted, none of the boys in the study were able to explain menstruation, but would not admit to their lack of knowledge. In addition, many of the girls admitted to experiencing pain and discomfort at various times throughout their cycle, but girls who had more positive experiences of menstruation were able to speak in a way that conveyed aspects of empowerment in regard to menstruation as a whole. For example, some girls indicated that menstruation could be empowering by requiring personal responsibility and providing them with experiential knowledge that males would never have access to. Thus, Fingerson (2005) concluded that girls could simultaneously experience menstruation as a source of power and oppression.

Messages to keep menstruation secret have also been indicated in the research on girls' experiences of menarche. Kissling (1996) conducted extended interviews with eleven adolescent girls between the ages of 12-16 to determine communication strategies that girls use to avoid embarrassment about their menstrual cycle. The girls she interviewed reported feeling

embarrassed about their periods, however their embarrassment was based on anticipating of others finding out they were menstruating, rather than actual interactions. Several girls reported feeling so embarrassed that they did not tell their mothers for days or months afterwards, and went to great lengths to avoid talking about it with their fathers, brothers, or male peers (Kissling, 1996). In addition, in Fingerson's (2005) aforementioned study, many girls discussed how they learned to manage their periods, and expressed anxiety about the possibility of leaking, not having access to menstrual products, and keeping their menstrual status private, particularly from male peers.

Messages about the Menstrual Cycle

Although it is an indication of both reproductive potential and sexual maturity, primary cultural messages in Western society paint the menstrual cycle as an inconvenience in women's lives (Young, 2005). Similarly, there is a large body of literature regarding human sexuality and how menstruation serves as an integral part of reproduction, yet menstruation still persists as a taboo topic (Fingerson, 2005).

Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2011) argued that menstruation reflects all three categories of stigma described by Goffman (1963), as it relates to "abominations of the body" (p. 10), socially undesirable characteristics, and membership of a stigmatized group. Menstrual blood may be understood as an "abomination" (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2007, p. 10), as several studies indicated that it is more negatively regarded than other bodily fluids such as semen (Goldenberg and Roberts, 2004) or breast milk (Bramwell, 2001). Through the stigmatization of the menstrual cycle, women may be experienced as others as mad, bad, ill, crazy, etc. (Ussher, 2006). Chrisler (2011) investigated menstrual product placement in three major drug store chains and found that menstrual products were consistently located in the back

of the store where people not looking for them were less likely to go. Signs identified aisles containing menstrual related products with key words such as “clean, revitalize, cleansing, fresh” (p. 203), and were interpreted to suggest that menstruation is dirty and unclean, a state which can be remedied through the use of certain products.

Menstrual products designed to absorb fluid have typically been marketed as being small enough that they can be carried discretely to the bathroom and do not show through clothing. Advertisements, meanwhile, have played on women’s fears of being discovered as menstruators by advocating for secrecy and cleanliness (Berg & Coutts, 1994). The use of blue fluid instead of red to demonstrate their effectiveness has further reinforced the notion that outward indications of menstruation are inappropriate (Robledo & Chrissler, 2001). That menstrual blood must be managed through products that absorb it, which are then discretely discarded, also indicates that it is undesirable (Young, 2005). Merskin (1999) asserted that advertisements provide important clues about the social construction of menstruation. Advertisements have largely contributed to the secrecy surrounding menstruation, as selling points emphasize discretion, avoiding embarrassment, and disguising odors (Berg & Coutts, 1994; Delaney, et al., 1987; Houppert, 1999). Similarly, a content analysis of educational booklets and pamphlets published between 1932-1997 revealed an emphasis on preparing for negative aspects of menstruation, such as cramps, changes in mood, weight gain, etc., with few positive aspects mentioned (Erchull, et al., 2002).

Several studies indicated that the stigma associated with menstruation has negative consequences for women’s mental and physical health and social status (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2011). Costos and colleagues (2002) performed qualitative interviews with 138 women between the ages of 26-60 and found that the majority of women reported that their mothers

conveyed negative attitudes about menstruation, and only 15% reported having a positive experience of menstruation during their teenage years. Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, & Pyszynski, (2002) performed a controlled study with 65 college students to determine whether outward indications of a woman's menstrual status lead to more negative evaluations of her. Each participant was told a cover story about a false study being performed, and was paired with an unidentified experimenter who would drop either a tampon or hairclip from her purse. After completing the false study, participants were asked to fill out measures related to both their own and their partner's competence and objectification of women. Roberts and colleagues (2002) found that both men and women in the experimental condition evaluated the experimenter who dropped the tampon as having lower competence and was less likable than the experimenter who dropped a hairclip.

Negative attitudes toward menstruation have also been linked to decreased body satisfaction (Schooler, Ward, Meriwether, & Caruthers, 2005). Based on a sample of 199 undergraduate women, the authors used structural equation modeling to determine that women who were less comfortable with their bodies reported having less positive attitudes toward menstruation, and were less assertive when it came to sexual decision-making (Schooler, et al., 2005).

Forbes, Adams-Curtis, White, and Holmgren (2003) asked 244 college students to evaluate both menstruating women and non-menstruating women on Big Five Personality factors, hostile and benevolent sexism, menstrual stereotypes related to emotional states such as "irritable" and "energized" (p. 60), and gender identification. Forbes, et al., (2003) found that both men and women rated menstruating women as having more negative emotions, less attractive and more irritable than non-menstruating women. In addition, Forbes and colleagues

(2003) found a positive correlation between negative attitudes toward menstruating women and the hostile sexism among both men and women.

Young (2005) argued that the stigma of menstruation is limiting for both women and men. She argued that the time and energy that must be devoted to keeping menstruation hidden renders menstruating women as “in the closet” (p. 108). The fear of being discovered or “outed” can have serious consequences on women’s self-esteem, thus the expectation of menstruation being a private event that must be kept hidden perpetuates itself.

Sexuality

A considerable amount of attention has been devoted to studying how people learn about sexuality, however there is comparatively little research related to menstrual education specifically. What’s more, of studies that have focused on how people learn about menstruation, even fewer studies have explicitly explored the knowledge men have regarding menstruation and where this information comes from (e.g. Allen, et al., 2010; Fingerson, 2005; Laws, 1990). Epstein and Ward (2008) suggested that the majority of research on how people learn about sex and sexuality has either focused on educating adolescents in general and girls in particular. They argued that adolescent girls are more often the focus of the sexuality education than boys due to cultural expectations of responsibilities related to pregnancy and sexual communication (Epstein & Ward, 2008). Although menstrual education is a compulsory part of sex education, it is usually framed within a medical/biological model rather than focusing on practical aspects of menstruation. Within this model, menstruation has often been depicted as “failed reproduction” (Walker, 1997, p. 18), in which the menstrual cycle is a complex hormonal system meant to ready the body for pregnancy (Walker, 1997). More practical topics, such as communication

between partners about menstruation or engaging in sexual acts during menstruation, are not commonly addressed in the context of formal education.

Boys have reported learning about the menstrual cycle from a conglomeration of sources, including parents, families, peers, educators, and the media (Allen, et al., 2011). Epstein & Ward (2008) surveyed 286 male college students to determine the amount and content of sex-related communication men received from various sources, including family, peers, and media. More specifically, their findings indicated that parents were less likely to talk with their sons about puberty and sexual development than with daughters, and if it was discussed, it was at a later age for boys than girls (Omar, McElderry, & Zakharia, 2003). When parents did discuss issues of sexuality with their sons, they typically covered topics related to using protection, STDs, and HIV/AIDS. Less commonly discussed topics included dating and sexual behavior and pregnancy (DiIorio & Munro, 1999). In regard to the menstrual cycle more specifically, boys reported receiving relatively little formal education about the menstrual cycle at all (Epstein & Ward, 2008). Epstein and Ward (2008) also found peers to be a main source of information regarding sexual behaviors, with discussion focusing less on problems surrounding sexuality. In addition, their respondents reported learning most of their information about menstruation from the media (Epstein & Ward 2008). However, as Chrisler (2002) pointed out, the media typically portrays menstruating women as tearful, angry, cranky, unstable, easily angered, or violent (Chrisler, 2002).

Although it seems that boys and men receive little information specifically related to menstruation, Allen and Goldberg (2009) found that sexual activity with female partners during menstruation became normalized as men aged. The authors received written narratives from a sample of 108 women and 12 men in a university course related to human sexuality. They found

that respondents indicated that sex during a woman's period was normalized as men entered into committed relationships. Sexually inexperienced men were more averse to sexual activity during a woman's menstrual cycle because it was perceived as "plain nasty" (Allen, et al., 2010, p. 542), unclean, and unpleasant for the woman. Sexually experienced men who were not in committed relationships had similar views, and they reported they would not engage in such sexual activity, or would only engage in sexual activity while their partners were menstruating out of perceived necessity (e.g. within in a long-distance relationship). Participants in serious relationships reported having no problems with sex during menstruation, indicating that having sex during this time was indicative of trust and love between both partners, but many acknowledged that their views had changed over time (Allen, et al., 2010).

Summary

Several gender theorists (e.g. Lee, 1994; Ussher, 2004) have hypothesized that menstruation symbolizes a transformative time in which girls in western cultures enter into a sexualized world. During this time, they are at once valued for their female form while simultaneously told to keep outward indications of menstruation a secret (Ussher, 2006). The way girls experience the conflation of their developing sexuality and reproductive capacity has been a guiding question for numerous studies over several decades (e.g. Clarke & Ruble, 1978; Fingerson, 2005; Kissling, 1996). It has been hypothesized that this "psychological splitting" (Ussher, 1989, p. 26) often leads girls to feel ambivalent and/or distanced from their menstrual periods (Lee, 1994).

Although many women come to experience their menstrual cycle as a relatively routine event as they age, menstruation is still regarded as a taboo subject in western culture (Chrisler, 2009). Despite its normative presence and association with health, Johnson-Robledo and

Chrisler (2007) argued that menstruation persists as a taboo subject because it fulfills the three primary criteria of stigma as outlined by Goffman (1963) in that it relates to “abominations of the body” (p. 10), socially undesirable characteristics, and signifies membership of a stigmatized group. Cultural messages that advocate for keeping menstruation hidden have pervaded advertisements in the media, as indicated by product points that depict women being able to participate in activities they may otherwise be prohibited from, such as swimming or wearing light colored pants. Such advertisements have also commonly played on women’s fears of being found out that they are menstruating by advocating for secrecy and cleanliness through the use of blue fluid to signify blood and product lines that emphasize discretion (Merskin, 1999). In addition, several studies have found that the stigma associated with menstruation has negative effects on women’s self-esteem and social status. For example, Roberts and colleagues (2002) found in a controlled study that outward indicators of menstruation resulted in participants ranking menstruating women as less competent and less likable. Similarly, negative attitudes toward menstruation were linked to low self-esteem and increased sexual risk-taking (Schooler, et al., 2005)

Although previous research has been focused on how girls learn about and experience their menstrual cycles (e.g., Beausang & Razor, 2000; Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Costos, et al., 2002;), only a few studies have been focused on what men know about the menstrual cycle (e.g. Allen, et al., 2010; Fingerson, 2005; Laws, 1990) Allen, et al. (2010) argued that this lack of information has implications on gendered relationships, particularly as they relate to social and cultural expectations. As Allen and Goldberg (2009) demonstrated, dealing with menstrual-related issues became normalized as heterosexual men grew older and thus had more encounters

with it. These finds suggest that exposure to menstruation also normalizes its presence and reduces the stigma surrounding it.

The Current Study

The primary purpose of this study was to gain insight into the way that men perceive menstruation. More specifically, information related to what men know about the menstrual cycle, the origins of this information, and ways in which their attitudes may inform their views of women were investigated.

A qualitative design best fit the research questions and goals of the proposed study, as it allowed for the best opportunity to understand the unique experiences of the participants. Two separate semi-structured interviews were performed with male undergraduate students. . In addition to the interview, participants in both interview settings were given access to several different types of art supplies and asked to create a picture depicting the way that they think about menstruation. One group interview was comprised of students from a fraternity, while the second group was comprised of students from a campus group that focuses on promoting progressive views of masculinity in western society. Performing group interviews provided the same rich insight into participant's experiences with and thoughts about menstruation, while also allowing the opportunity to stimulate thought through sharing ideas. In addition, performing group interviews helped gain a better understanding of where men's knowledge of menstruation comes from and their own personal experiences with menstruation. The semi-structured interview format, meanwhile, allowed for a series of open-ended questions to be utilized with discretion, while also allowing for unique probes and content that arises in the natural course of the interview. Using the same open-ended questions helps ensure that participants spoke to similar topics and areas. The combination of expressive mediums and participant interviews

allowed for a discussion and insight about their perceptions of these topics, as well as the various social forces that influence them.

Research questions:

1. How do young men think about menstruation?
2. Where does their information come from?
3. How do their perceptions of menstruation impact their views of women?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to explore men's attitudes toward and perceptions of the menstrual cycle. Grounded theory method was utilized for multiple reasons, including its popularity in behavioral science research, its emergent design, and reliance on induction (Charmaz, 2000). Grounded theory method allows concepts and theories to emerge in the process of analysis, and allows for adaptation of theories as data are gathered and analyzed. Because it was expected that each participant would have unique experiences and feelings toward menstruation, interviews provided the best forum for generating rich narratives from each participant. The group interview format allowed for incorporation of peer dynamics, which was thought to both increase comfort compared to individual interviews and reveal relevant social processes. The inclusion of an art-based component allowed for the possibility of unique insights into the ways that men think about menstruation.

Participants

In qualitative research, in-depth interviews yield large amounts of data, thus it is common to have a relatively small number of participants/interviews. All participants in the study were male undergraduate students from a public, midwestern university. A total of two group interviews were conducted with a total of 14 men. One group was comprised of eight men from a student interest group that focuses on analyzing representations of masculinity in western culture, and the second group was comprised of six men who are members of a fraternity. Because the purpose of the study was primarily to illuminate men's knowledge and experiences regarding the menstrual cycle, female students were not asked to participate in the study.

Materials

Demographic information. A demographic questionnaire was completed by all participants prior to the interview (see Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of demographic characteristics (e.g., year in school, gender) as well as additional questions about the participant's sexual history (e.g., number of partners, and length of relationships), and family of origin (e.g., identification of primary caregivers in their household, number and gender of siblings).

Interview protocol. Participants were interviewed to more fully understand where their information about the menstrual cycle comes from as well as their personal experiences with it. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). The group interviews helped to illuminate attitudes towards and knowledge about the menstrual cycle in a way that could be fully captured through quantitative data alone. Interview questions included topics regarding origins of knowledge, personal experiences, dialogues about the menstrual cycle, and positive and negative aspects of menstruation. Sample questions included "Has your knowledge about the menstrual cycle changed over time? If so, how?" and "What are your personal experiences with menstruation?" Based on the course of discussion during the first interview, participants in the second interview were asked about their experiences with and attitude toward engaging in sexual intercourse with menstruating partners. Active listening skills, reflection of feelings, challenges to discrepancies, and restatements were used to facilitate the information gained from the interview.

Art protocol. Participants were asked to create an image that depicts the way they perceive menstruation. Each participant was given the choice to use several different types of art materials, such as colored pencils, markers, crayons, and a lead pencil. A written, open-ended

follow-up question form was included to give participants the opportunity describe the elements they included in their picture, why they included them, and if they left anything out (see appendix E). Sample questions included “Please describe your picture. What did you draw? Why?” and “What do you think you expressed in your picture?”

Post interview form. Upon completion of the interview, participants were asked to respond to several open-ended questions regarding how they felt discussing the menstrual cycle and if there was anything that they would like to add that was not addressed (see Appendix F). These questions gathered additional thoughts and information that might emerge in the process of the interview. The answers were transcribed and included in the analysis process.

Procedure

It is of vital importance to establish the credibility of qualitative research, thus several strategies were incorporated into this study to ensure an adequate level of trustworthiness (i.e., reliability and validity; Lincoln & Guba; 1985). A number of specific methodological procedures were used throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting stages of the research process to increase study trustworthiness.

Researcher as instrument. Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommended using a research journal to track the process of research and analysis and to maintain awareness of biases. I kept a research journal to write down notes and reactions throughout each stage of the research process to document assumptions, hunches, and hypotheses. This journaling process helped to provide a means of tracking assumptions as I became immersed in the data assumption. The journal was kept at all stages of the study, starting prior to the first interview until the completion of the study. In addition, bracketing was also used to reduce the influence of bias. This process involves identifying biases and putting “brackets” around them in order to acknowledge their

presence (Creswell, 2007). Since I, as the researcher, identify as a woman who menstruates, my biases were discussed through a statement of subjectivity (see Appendix G).

External auditor. Confirmability is a component of trustworthiness, indicating the degree to which results of analysis can be confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability, the thesis chair served as the external auditor. She provided feedback regarding the open- and axial-level coding categories both in terms of content and process. Discrepancies were noted and discussed until a consensus was reached on the meaning and contents of the categories.

Data collection. At the commencement of each interview, participants met in a classroom and were given a packet of materials that included the consent form, demographic questionnaire, instructions for the art protocol (see Appendices A-F), and art supplies. Each participant was given the option of choosing a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. After all of the participants had completed the consent form, demographic form, and art protocol, the participants and I went to another classroom for the semi-structured interview. Before commencing the interview, the group ate pizza, drank soda, and chatted with each other for approximately half an hour. After everyone was finished eating, the semi-structured interview began. Each interview began with an introduction and brief description of the study, during which time the participants were given time to ask questions.

The interview was conducted using the semi-structured protocol. Active listening skills were used to facilitate discussion, and open-ended follow-up questions were used to encourage discussion, exploration of reactions, and sharing of information. Because both interviews took place in a group setting, the majority of the conversation occurred between participants. Thus, my goal was primarily to facilitate discussion between participations rather than serve as an

active member of the group. Morrow and colleagues (2009) indicated that humility and authenticity are qualities that can assist the researcher in establishing rapport with participants. I asked open-ended questions in a curious and nonthreatening manner, assuming the role as learner rather than expert during the interviews (Morrow et al., 2001). After the interview, participants were given the post-interview form to provide feedback about their experience of the interview, as well as address anything that was not covered during the course of the interview.

Data analysis. The interview recordings were transcribed, and the data were analyzed using a Grounded Theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory method allows ideas and themes to emerge from the data naturally by utilizing an organized process of data analysis, coding, and categorizing concepts that are identified by the researcher. Categories and concepts that are identified then serve as building blocks for a developing theory. A Grounded Theory approach requires several stages of data analysis, which includes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Open coding. In the open coding stage of the analysis, different units of information representing similar concepts are sorted together. First, the raw transcribed data were reviewed in order to identify thought units, which are the smallest units of data that convey a single thought (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The interviews yielded 57 double-spaced pages of transcribed data, and a total of 380 thought units. Thought units were conceptualized (i.e., meaning of each unit interpreted) going into the analysis process.

Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), each unit of data was compared with the other thought units to determine the presence of similarities and differences. Units of data that were determined to be conceptually similar were be grouped together under a descriptive concept (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, the participants identified several

sources of information for their knowledge about menstruation. The various sources of knowledge included family members, peers, and teachers, and the nature of the information and manner of presentation from each of those sources could be distinguished on various dimensions (e.g., individual, group, oral, written, visual). Conceptualizing those sources and grouping the related units based on their underlying dimensions, yielded categories of *formal learning about menstruation* and *informal learning about menstruation*.

Throughout the analysis process, I generally kept track of how many participants contributed to each category in order to determine whether or not each category reflected a range of participant responses or was a more idiosyncratic response of just one participant. If only one participant contributed to a particular category, I re-evaluated the information in the category to see whether or not the information belonged with another category. If it was not possible to place a single thought unit into a category, and I wasn't sure whether that unit warranted the development of a new category, I tabled the thought unit, hoping that it would be easier to code as the analysis proceeded. After all of the other thought units were coded, I then re-examined the thought units that had not yet been coded to determine if they fit with the existing categories or whether there were any other emergent categories to be developed using those units. The categories were given final representative labels that reflected the properties' and dimensions of the specific sub-categories (e.g., the open coding category *menstruation as an unreliable phenomenon* included sub-categories related to *difficulty understanding menstruation* and the belief that *menstruation is irrelevant to men's lives*).

Axial Coding. Axial coding is a process in which the researcher organizes categories that emerge from open coding in ways that produce common themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Through this process, data can be reassembled into a coherent whole after the fracturing process

of open coding (Charmaz, 2006). I examined the open-coding categories to look for thoughts and ideas that naturally clustered together, based on shared dimensions and properties (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The process of determining axial-level codes took several steps as several open-coding level categories were interrelated. For example, originally the axial level codes of *attitude toward blood and attitude toward the menstrual cycle* emerged. Though they represent separate categories, both were connected through participants' association with sexual activity, thus it was difficult to separate them beyond a conceptual level. As a result, both of these axial-level categories were re-evaluated in relation to other categories at the open-coding level until a clear distinction between them was able to be determined.

Selective Coding. Selective coding represents the final stage of analysis, and where any grounded theory emerges. In this stage, axial level categories and themes are organized around a core category. The categories are related to the core category by filling in relationships, refining ideas, and developing hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The relationship between the core category and related categories is integrated into the theoretical structure of the analysis, and a theory begins to emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although a thorough analysis of the data was performed, no core category emerged around which to develop a grounded theory. Therefore, analysis at the selective coding level was not conducted, and no grounded theory emerged from these data.

Triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of triangulation to increase the credibility of research findings in qualitative studies. According to Denizen (1978), there are four different modes of triangulation, which include *researcher triangulation, data triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and methodological triangulation*. For this study, data triangulation and researcher triangulation were used to increase the credibility of findings. Researcher

triangulation refers to having much multiple researchers collect and analyze data. For this study, a series of researchers helped increase the credibility of findings. Two undergraduate researchers transcribed the recorded interviews and assisted in the identification of the individual thought units in the preliminary stage of analysis. During this process, they kept notes on their emotional reactions to participants' responses, which were described and discussed in meetings to evaluate the data and begin the open coding process.

Finally, a graduate student also helped with researcher triangulation in the analysis of the artwork participants created. For this thesis, each art piece was conceptualized in terms of the information contained in the art itself, and the conceptualizations were compared with the participants' descriptions of their artwork. We each evaluated the images separately and common elements were identified (e.g. depictions of a woman in pain or the female reproductive system). Participants' written explanation of the elements included in their picture and their interpretation of what they depicted were used as the primary means of coding the ideas, perceptions, and attitudes that were indicated in their artwork. Both analysts took notes on the coding process and emotional reactions were described and discussed. Discrepancies between the researchers' analysis were discussed until a consensus was reached.

Validity. Stiles (1993) identified several types of validity that are important in the process of qualitative research, which include coherence, uncovering or self-evidence, testimonial validity, catalytic validity, consensus among researchers, and reflexive validity. For the purposes of this study, consensus among researchers and catalytic validity were used as indications of validity. Consensus among researchers refers to the extent to which conclusions drawn from data makes sense among researchers who are familiar with the raw data (Stiles, 1993). The use of an external auditor helped to ensure coherence validity and consensus among

researchers by providing consistency to both the analysis and conclusions being drawn from the data. For example, at one point the auditor and I disagreed about the interpretation of the meaning of an axial category related to participants' sense of power in regard to menstruation. Our disagreement prompted a reconsideration of the emergent themes that was more true to the data. Catalytic validity refers to the degree to which the research process moves, re-orient, and energizes the subjects it studies (Stiles, 1993). Catalytic validity was inferred through the many of the participants' outward expression of gratitude for being included in the study and indications of change in attitude toward menstruation during the course of the interview.

CHAPTERS 4

RESULTS

This qualitative study was designed to explore the psychological phenomena surrounding men's perceptions of the menstrual cycle. Profiles for each group will be presented to describe the participants while highlighting their demographic and relevant contextual information. This information can be used for interpreting the various responses from the participants. The results of the study will be presented by highlighting and providing interpretation of the emergent themes, as well as the emergent story line. Summaries of the major themes from the open, axial, and selective coding levels can be found in table 2.

Group Profiles

Group profiles are included in this section, which assists the reader in their interpretation of the ideas and assessment of generalizability of the data and findings by providing contextual information and a brief summary of each the members that make up each group. The purpose of these profiles is to assist the reader with interpreting the results. The profiles include information extracted from the participants' demographic information form, interview transcripts, and observations made throughout the interview process. The actual names of groups the participants came from have been changed, and individual names mentioned are pseudonyms.

Students Examining Gender (SEG)

Students Examining Gender (SEG) is a student organization made up of individuals that are "concerned about traditional gender scripts" (Williams, 2014), particularly in regard to representations of masculinity within mainstream western culture. There were eight total participants from SEG in addition to the observer who was also a member. All participants were

undergraduate students between the ages of 19-22 and self-identified as heterosexual, non-married, and African-American or Black.

During the interview, the majority of participants appeared to be actively involved in both listening and participating in the discussion. They tended to share relatively stereotypical thoughts and ideas about menstruation as it related to a given question. Of the eight participants, two were particularly outspoken, and one member remained silent until the final few minutes. In addition, there were two participants who sat next to each other and appeared to be good friends outside of the group. At several times throughout the interview, they would talk for each other when one felt that he could better explain a point or fill in a missing piece of information. Of these two, one in particular was especially vocal about his feelings of disgust toward menstruation.

Another participant frequently expressed views and opinions that were generally in conflict with the rest of the group's thoughts and attitude toward menstruation. Although he was articulate and expressed more "progressive" views toward menstruation than his fellow group members, he did not appear to be integrated into the group to the same degree as other members. Perhaps as a result of this, his thoughts and ideas were often dismissed except on one particular occasion. In contrast, another group member seemed to be looked upon particularly favorably by his peers: it seemed that any small remark he would make was met with unanimous laughter even in the moments when he did not seem to be trying to make a funny comment. At one point, this group member supported a more controversial idea the aforementioned less-integrated participant made, and he received a more favorable response from his peers despite the fact that he more or less repeated the same idea.

Fraternity

The fraternity brothers who participated in this study were all founding members of their fraternity, with the local chapter of the fraternity chartered in the same semester that this study was conducted. The members were recruited to bring this fraternity to campus by brothers from a different campus chapter because of their progressive views and activity on campus. This fraternity was selected for this study, because it seemed likely to yield valuable information regarding this important gender issue.

There were six total participants from the fraternity in the study in addition to the observer, who was also a member. All participants were undergraduate students between the ages of 20-26. Five participants self-identified as heterosexual, and one participant chose not to answer. All identified as never-married. Four participants self-identified as Caucasian/White, one self-identified as Middle-Eastern, and one self-identified as African-American/Black.

As opposed to SEG, where nearly all participants were actively engaged in dialogue throughout the course of the interview, participation from the fraternity brothers seemed to be more skewed. From the beginning, there was one particular group member who seemed to be particularly outspoken in his views about menstruation. As an outside observer, it seemed that the majority of his peers had a somewhat adverse reaction his contribution to the discussion. This participant seemed to be somewhat concerned with asserting his knowledge about menstruation rather than engaging in a discussion with peers about it. Thus, at times there was uncomfortable silence from his peers, and several of his peers actively argued against the points that he made. To counter him, one of his fraternity brothers was equally outspoken but was softer in both the tone and relatability of his comments. Both of the ethnic minority participants were silent for the

duration of the group interview. Because of their lack of participation throughout the interview, it is difficult to speculate as to whether their discomfort stemmed from the given topic or some other issue.

Qualitative Findings

The three major steps associated with grounded theory method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the open coding stage, thought units were conceptualized, and units representing similar ideas were categorized together. The open level categories were then re-examined at the axial coding level in terms of their dimensions and properties, in order to identify higher-order connections among the findings emerging at the open-coding level. The open-coding level categories that shared similar dimensions were categorized together into more comprehensive categories at the axial level. The subsequent sections are organized around the axial level categories, which one might also call themes. The open coding level categories associated with each axial theme will be discussed, and illustrative examples are provided from the interview transcripts.

Early Experiences with Menstruation: Genesis of Men's Perceptions of Menstruation

Origins of information about menstruation generally refer to the sources from which the participants reported learning about menstruation as children as well as the messages they received in the course of their learning. Some of the participants in this study shared that they learned about menstruation through direct and explicit discussion, such as *formal education*, while all of the participants indicated that they garnered the majority of their information about menstruation through more *informal* means, such as female family members. The messages they received about menstruation were largely bound within mainstream cultural notions of

menstruation (e.g., menstruation should not be talked about, women experience emotional changes around the time of menstruation; c.f. Ussher, 1989).

Formal learning about menstruation. Formal learning about menstruation, as it emerged in this study, refers to instances in which participants reported learning about the menstrual cycle through formal education. The majority of participants in this study shared that they received formal education about the menstrual cycle from *health class* or a *sex education center* in *middle school* between fifth and eighth grades. Consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Epstein & Ward, 2008), participants' reflections about these experiences indicated that the information they received during their formal education was largely biological rather than practical.

Too young to learn about menstruation. When reflecting upon their experiences of sex education in middle school, the majority of participants described the contents as “way too much detail” and information that they otherwise did not want to have. Tietelman (2004) found that girls who learned about menstruation before menarche were better able to accept bodily changes associated with menstruation. However these participants' responses suggest that there may be an opposite effect for boys. These male participants' responses indicated that learning about menstruation in the early years of middle school had an adverse impact on their attitudes toward menstruation as a whole. Many participants asserted that they felt they were “*too young*” for the information that they received, and several participants from SEG indicated that their sex education experiences actually contributed to their present discomfort with menstruation. Steven, a participant from SEG, expressed a particularly strong reaction to his experience of going to a sex education center, stating that his class was given no prior knowledge about the type of subject matter they were going to learn about. He stated, “We were kids still, I was like, ‘I don’t

want to know all of this!’...When we got back on the bus it was just silent.” Steven’s body language at this time appeared to be angry as he spoke in a raised tone about his experience. Danny stated that he was speaking for both himself as well as the person he was sitting next to when he said, “...I feel like just the way that we found out about it... um, it’s uncomfortable. It’s uncomfortable to think about it, it’s uncomfortable to deal with, you know?” The participants’ reflections on their sex education experiences in middle school contrasted with Teitelman’s (2004) findings with girls, as these young men expressed consistently negative reactions to knowing about menstruation at a young age, citing *discomfort* and *embarrassment* about learning the biological aspects of menstruation. During the interview with the fraternity, Matthew reflected on his early experience of learning about the menstrual cycle in school when he stated, “Personally, for me it was just like, I really don’t want to know this... It doesn’t pertain to me. I’m not going through it. Why am I learning it?” Interestingly, none of the participants within either group indicated any awareness that their education in middle school coincided with the age that girls in their classes were beginning to menstruate.

The participants in this study indicated that concurrent education about menstruation before menarche might not be as beneficial for the boys as for their female peers, despite the literature providing clear evidence benefitting girls at that age. Participants across both groups seemed to agree more strongly about the negativity of their middle school sex education experiences than any other topic discussed throughout the interviews. Many of the participants shared that they were not really able to comprehend the information provided to them about menstruation in middle school, and indicated that the knowledge they gained from this early sex education actually contributed to feelings of disgust and desire to distance themselves from knowledge, depictions, discussions, or any other type exposure about menstruation. The feelings

of discomfort, disgust, and lack of understanding, coupled with messages of that menstruation should not be talked about, seemed to have an adverse impact on participant's willingness and ability to talk about menstruation as adults.

Informal learning about menstruation. Although most of the participants reported that they received some formal education about menstruation in school, the majority of participants shared that their practical information about menstruation was derived *covertly*. Many participants indicated that there was a *sense of secrecy* surrounding inquiring about menstruation as they grew up, from which they learned that they were not supposed to talk about menstruation. Through clues from *parents and sisters*, participants indicated that as children they learned to “piece together” information about what menstruation is, how it is managed, and ways in which it affects women.

Piecing together information. In both groups, participants reported that their earliest knowledge about the presence of menstruation came from their sisters or other female family members. From them, the participants were taught about the etiquette surrounding menstruation, namely, that *menstruation should not be discussed and men need not know about it*. For example, during the interview with SEG, Ben reflected that he was taught not to ask about menstruation.

I have two sisters I grew up with, and they pretty much shielded me from it, so even if I was interested in it, or kind of wanted to know what was happening, they'd always be like, 'oh you don't want to know, oh don't worry about it, don't touch my stuff, stay away from here.' My sister said I don't ever need to worry about it, so I never really looked at it.

Although Ben indicated that he had questions about menstruation, being barred from inquiring by his sisters served as a means of reinforcing the taboo and secrecy surrounding menstruation.

Beyond the secrecy, there were messages that menstruation was not something boys should concern themselves with.

I could see bags of tampons lying around the bathroom. I was like, man what are these.... And I looked at the back of them and I was like, 'Aw man, I shouldn't be reading this! This is not for me!' and I put it back. I started piecing it together when I got older (Jovan).

The piecing together of different bits of information seemed to lead many of the participants to feel confused about the impact of menstruation on women. During the interview with the fraternity men, Nolan shared that he picked up messages that women experience *emotional changes* when menstruating, but he could not figure out why:

I personally got the fact that okay, you're not feeling well or you're having these emotions, but I was never told *why*. I've always been told, 'Oh man, I'm on my period. It sucks. I feel so bad,' but I've never been told why. I'm just like 'Okay that must suck. That must feel bad. Don't hurt me!'

Phil, a participant from SEG, was the only participant to state that he engaged in more formal conversation about menstruation with his mother, but reflected other responses in which participants indicated that they learned to associate changes in women's emotional state with menstruation:

It became a problem...My mom would tell me they had different weeks, so it was like each one them would be angry be each week back to back to back, so we would have to figure out which one not to bother... I would come from school and I would get yelled at, and I knew.

The framing of knowledge about menstruation in relation to emotional changes reinforced stereotyped views of changes that women experience during and around the time of menstruation. These examples from Nolan and Phil illustrate how men often come to learn that they must exercise some degree of restraint around menstruating women, lest they be hurt physically or yelled at. An implication to the belief that women experience emotional shifts during menstruation was described by Laws (1990), in which women's expressions of strong emotions are often dismissed under the guise of being the result of menstrual-related mood swings, thereby effectively negating any legitimate causes of anger.

Overall, the participants indicated that they received little, if any, direct education about menstruation as children and adolescents. When conversation about menstruation did occur, it was typically brief and laden with the message that it was not relevant to their lives. The lack of discussion about menstruation with boys within their families was consistent with other findings (e.g. Omar, McElderry, & Zakharia, 2003) that parents were less likely to talk with their sons about sexual development than with their daughters. The participants in the present study supported findings by Kissling (1996), in which adolescent girls went to great lengths to conceal menstruation from males in their lives, including fathers, brothers, and male peers. The participants in the present study did not report talking as children about menstruation with any girls or women outside of their own families. When communication about menstruation did occur within families, the pervasive message that they should not know or talk about menstruation also echoed Kissling's (1996) findings that the taboo surrounding menstruation encompasses silence about the topic. The relegation of menstruation as purely a women's issue led, first and foremost, to participants being forced to piece together practical information about menstruation from a variety of sources. In addition, many of the participants indicated that as

adults they had internalized this message, which had significant implications for the way they think about and engage with women who are menstruating.

Men's Current Perceptions of the Menstrual Cycle

The majority of participants indicated that their childhood experiences with learning about menstruation instilled in them a strong message that menstruation is not a topic that should be discussed. They reflected upon their formal learning experiences about menstruation with a high degree of disdain for the information they were conveyed with at a young age. Taken together, participants absorbed the message that they should not talk about menstruation, while their formal learning experience prevented them from desiring more information. As adults, many of the participants indicated that their perceptions of menstruation remained rooted in their childhood experiences of menstruation, perhaps because they had no inclination to re-examine their views.

This development of a negative attitude toward menstruation as youth had an adverse impact on their understanding of menstruation as young adults. During the course of the interviews, participants described menstruation as a largely *undesirable* experience, and indicated that the experience of menstruation was *unrelatable and irrelevant* to their lives. The only aspect of menstruation that participants indicated that they could relate to was the *presence of blood*, which was met with strong feelings of *disgust*.

Menstruation as an undesirable experience. The men in the study overwhelmingly indicated that they regard menstruation as an event that is associated with negative *emotional and physical changes*. The perception of these aspects of menstruation as negative was found to contribute to the idea that menstruation is an *undesirable experience*. Phil illustrated the general attitude of undesirability of menstruation when he exclaimed, "I wouldn't want to get involved

with it. I'm glad it's not happening to me!" During the interview with the fraternity, Adam described the impact of *emotional* changes that women experience:

For me, I have a lot of friends who identify as women, female, and when they are on their period, the conversation shifts maybe from normal to more hostile. Like, things are more emotionally backed. So when something is bad, it's *bad*. When something is good, it's good!

The belief that women experience emotional shifts was expressed most profoundly through the participant's artwork and explanations as nearly all of them depicted emotional changes in some way. More specifically, the images that participants created most commonly depicted women experiencing an increase in *anger* and *sadness*. Tyler, a participant from SEG, depicted both of these emotions in his image of two doll-like figures, which were interpreted to be women by their long hair. One figure looked to be angry, while the other had tears streaming down her face (see Figure 1). Between them were drops of red blood and a calendar in the background depicting the menstrual cycle. Describing his art piece, Tyler wrote, "I drew symbols and the actual look of [menstruation]. I drew blood and emotions and a calendar because that's what mainly I hear about the topic."

Participants' depiction and subsequent descriptions of emotional changes reflect the stereotyped view that women are more emotionally volatile around the time of menstruation (Chrisler, 2008). Participants also described women as experiencing negative *physical changes* during menstruation. During the interview with SEG, Phil linked menstruation to feelings of pain and discomfort when he asserted that women "get a lot of cramps," and "need a lot of ibuprofen" while menstruating. Perceptions of women experiencing pain were also present in different artworks. Ben (SEG) drew a picture of a woman clutching her abdomen exclaiming the word

“Ugh!” Next to her, he drew a small cylindrical shape that he identified as medicine to relieve the figure’s pain (see Figure 2).

The negative changes that participants described women experiencing during and around the time of menstruation mirrored the findings as described by Roberts and colleagues (2002) when they demonstrated that even the mere reminders of menstruation (e.g. the presence of tampon) led college-aged men to distance themselves socially from menstruating women and rate them as less likable and competent. Forbes and colleagues (2003) investigated the role of benevolent sexism on men and women’s perceptions of menstruating women. As in the present study, the authors found that college-aged men perceived menstruating women as displaying a more negative affect, and described menstruating women as more irritable, angry, and less energized. Robledo-Johnson and Chrisler (2013) argued that associating menstruation with negative emotional changes perpetuates cultural views that menstruating women are “ill, disabled, out-of control, or even crazy” (p. 10). Participants indicated that they perceive menstruation to be a wholly *undesirable event* because of its association with heightened, unpredictable emotions and physical pain.

Menstruation as an unrelatable phenomenon. Participants in this study indicated that, as adults, they had internalized the message they received as children that menstruation is a women’s issue that they do not need to concern themselves with. For example, Gabe asserted, “I guess it’s sort of like an unspoken thing about since it’s just something that women discuss and it’s none of men’s business really.” Many of the participants expressed that women’s experiences of menstruation were *unrelatable* as it went beyond their own lived experience. Nolan illustrated this point when he stated,

It's probably also a subconscious thing where you realize stuff that's supposed to be on the inside is now on the outside. That's *wrong*. It's not supposed to be there! So, when you're confronted with something that you don't see as natural, you are naturally going to be uncomfortable with it.

Because participants could not find a way of relating to the experience of menstruation, the participants in both groups reported that they rarely talked about it, as it was *not relevant to their lives*. Danny stated, "It's something that we don't want to deal with, nor want to know any more about it...It's not affecting us, you know?"

These findings suggest that the participants maintained an emotional distance from engaging in any type of discourse about menstruation. The refrain from conversation with men as well as women effectively perpetuated the systemic silence surrounding communication about menstruation, which also prevented any sort of empathic understanding among the participants. Allen and colleagues revealed similar findings in their investigation into how men learn about menstruation and concluded, "By indicating that it is not [men's] problem and that they do not want to hear or see anything about menstruation...they devalue an essential part of womanhood to something ugly that should be denied and concealed" (p. 152).

As young adults, the participants indicated that they had internalized messages they about menstruation they received in early adolescence (e.g., they should not know or talk about menstruation; menstruation is accompanied by changes in mood and physical pain, etc.). The internalization of these feelings and messages reflect the strength of the societal taboo surrounding menstruation, and they were found to have important ramifications for the way they think about menstruation and interact with menstruating women as adults.

The significance of blood: Relating to the unrelatable. Although participants could not accept menstruation as a normative process, participants within SEG and the fraternity seemed to feel that they *could* understand the process of bleeding as it relates to menstruation, perhaps in part because bleeding is the closest aspect of menstruation to their own lived experience. As previously discussed, many of the participants revealed that they thought of the expulsion of blood during menstruation as the same type of bleeding that is experienced when one cuts a finger or sustains some other type of *bodily injury*. For example, Eric eagerly shared his thoughts about where his aversion to blood came from and spoke for the rest of the group when he stated "...As men we're taught that blood leaving your body is a bad thing...it means you're hurt somewhere, whether it's a nosebleed or if it's a cut on your arm." The likening of the expulsion of menstrual blood with other types of bleeding seemed to be a consistent understanding of the way in which men in the study thought of menstrual bleeding.

Feelings of disgust. The participants' strongest association related to menstruation was the presence of blood, and they further associated menstrual blood with profound feelings of *disgust* and *aversion toward blood*. Many participants used powerful descriptors to convey their feelings (e.g., "gross," "filthy," "disgusting," "nasty"). Eric noted, "I'm just saying, if someone said 'Oh yeah, you're going to bleed out of your penis for one week every month,' I'd be like, *no*." This remark best illustrates the attitude of disgust members of the fraternity expressed toward their association between menstruation and bleeding. Perhaps because of the group format of the interviews, both groups of participants indicated that their feelings of disgust impacted their interactions with women, but in different ways. The fraternity brothers indicated that their disgust toward blood impacted their *communication with women about menstruation*,

while the participants from SEG expressed that their feelings of disgust impacted their *willingness to engage in sexual activities with a partner who is menstruating*.

Managing the context of conversation with women. Many of the men in the fraternity expressed an attitude of *disgust* that extended to even talking, thinking, or hearing about menstruation because of its association with blood. When I asked one participant where he thought his aversion came from, Matthew answered matter-of-factly for him, “A lot of gross words and he doesn’t want to hear them.” Eric agreed, stating, “Exactly. Like, honestly, I don’t want to hear those words, which I mean, kind of sounds immature but I honestly don’t want to hear them.”

In order to avoid their feelings of disgust and discomfort, the fraternity brothers revealed that they employed certain strategies to avoid talking about menstruation directly. Many of the participants stated that they were okay talking about *emotional changes* associated with menstruation as long as they did not have to talk about menstruation itself (e.g., “I would rather talk about psychological than [biological aspects]. If she, like, walked up to me and she was like, ‘Well, all this [biological] stuff is happening,’ I’d be like, ‘You need to be quiet and walk away!’”). It appears that even the actual words that have to do with menstruation can make men uncomfortable:

I would prefer dealing with the emotional aspects... if you’re a guy and you’re hearing all the [biological] stuff, you can only imagine putting yourself in that situation and if you’re a guy, with guy parts, and you hear stuff about bleeding and...all this technical stuff that you have no idea about, it sounds just extremely, like, foreign and *scary* and I guess that’s just what makes most people uncomfortable (Nolan).

As evidenced by their dialogue, the strong feelings of disgust toward knowledge of blood associated with menstruation had important implications for the way in which men approached communication about menstruation with women. By diverting the conversation away from direct dialogue about menstruation, the men from the fraternity revealed that they were able to manage their discomfort in the conversation.

Willingness to negotiate sexual activity with a partner who is menstruating. Similar to the fraternity brother's feelings of disgust about hearing the language associated with menstruation, the members of SEG indicated a strong *aversion toward engaging in most sexual activities with a menstruating partner*. Many of the participants expressed that their feelings of *disgust* were rooted in the presence of blood associated with menstruation. Steven exemplified this particularly strong aversion to encountering menstrual blood directly:

I just don't like the fact that I'm going to get blood on me that's not *from* me, that's the issue... I couldn't even wrap my brain around being sexually involved in somebody else's blood. It'd be different if I was a surgeon; I'm cutting open a heart, cool. I dissected a cat before, no problem. Wasn't sexually involved. I think that would be the issue.

Nearly all of the participants from SEG stated that their feelings of disgust with the presence of blood were strong enough that they would actually *avoid having sex when their partner was menstruating*.

It's like, okay, like if I had known you were on your period I wouldn't have been trying to have sex. And if you were still trying to have sex, I would have said no.... and I would be upset if I was to have sex with a girl while she was on her period, and I look down and see blood and be like, 'You got blood on me!' Now that's just...*ugh* (Danny).

Phil's artwork illustrated participant's general aversion to engaging in sex during menstruation (see Figure 3) in his depiction of a red stoplight a stop sign and a "stale face". Phil wrote that his picture illustrates how he feels when "a girl tells [him] she is on her period." He described the picture itself as, "A stoplight-- don't have sex; a stop sign--- don't have sex; a stale face—I was excited for something but we can't now."

Similar to the fraternity brother's use of strategies to avoid talking about menstruation, the participants from SEG shared that they sought out *sexual alternatives* in order to deal with their feelings of disgust with the possibility of encountering blood during sex with a menstruating partner. Participants described sexual alternatives they would be willing to engage in during the time their partner was menstruating, and included activities such as "rubbing [their] feet," and sexual play "above the waist." Steven suggested, "I mean, you don't have to physically have sex, I mean you could still kiss her and some people do get aroused by that."

Allen and Goldberg (2009) revealed similar findings that sexually inexperienced men expressed more negative views toward menstruation, and their participants used many of the same descriptors as the men in this study (e.g. that blood associated with menstruation is "dirty," or "nasty", p. 542). The university students who served as participants in their study represented a comparatively wide variety of ages and reported more diversity in their degrees of intimate partnership (e.g., single, married, in a long-term, committed relationship, etc.). Allen and colleagues found that as men aged and entered into more committed relationships, sexual activity during menstruation became more normalized. Younger men reported feeling as if menstrual sex was "gross" (p. 542), whereas older men and those in committed relationships felt that sex during menstruation became an indication of their love and bond with their partners as they learned to manage the messiness associated with menstrual sex together.

Some of the participants from SEG indicated some parallel to Allen and Goldberg's (2009) findings in their ability to feel empathy for their partners, but they framed the benefits of menstrual sex as being limited to women rather than both partners. For example, Ben stated, "I think it might help her with her self-esteem and stuff like that. I think it might help her be more open, feel a little more comfortable since it's something that's so private." Although some of the participants conceded increased intimacy as a potential benefit to sex during menstruation, their pervasive disgust toward the presence of blood seemed to prevent them from actually considering such an endeavor as a realistic option. It is possible that the participants from SEG represented some range of sexual maturity (albeit a small one), and extrapolating from Allen and Goldberg's findings, it seems likely that the strong feelings of disgust toward menstruation will dissipate over the coming years.

Interview as intervention: Indications of shifts in attitude. As we wrapped up the interview, an interesting phenomenon occurred. A few of the participants thanked me for including them in my research and shared how talking about menstruation challenged their beliefs. Jovan was eager to share his awareness with the group when he shared,

I guess it's going to help me be more supportive when like a woman I will want to be with, or if I have a daughter, whatever, you know, like before...I use to be like...'I don't want to deal with this, leave me alone!' when I was younger, more ignorant, but then like now I'll say, 'Well if you need anything you know, I'll be there for you, you know if you need me to make a run, something, I'll be there.' Versus me just, 'alright, I'm cool, you ain't gonna see me for a couple.' You know cause it's like I'll be more supportive of her. So this conversation helped me with that versus the basic, 'alright then, you're on your period, I'm not even messing with you then.'

Such remarks indicate that the participants had not given much thought or engaged in conversation about menstruation prior to the interview. Perhaps in part because it is a student interest group comprised of members that are specifically interested in deconstructing representations of gender, it was not altogether surprising that some of the participants were able to recognize gaps in their own knowledge. Ben also indicated a growth in his thinking as he thanked me at the end of the interview by saying, “Hey you helped me, man! I just realized how bogus I am as a progressive man!” Participants across both groups similarly indicated on the post-interview form that the discussion helped them to feel “more sympathetic” to women’s experiences of menstruation, and implied that they would be more open to future discussion. Danny wrote, “[The discussion] made my views a lot more open and receptive to the idea of the menstrual cycle.”

The participants’ outward recognition of growth within their own knowledge and thankfulness offers hope for the ability to effect change in men’s understanding of menstruation. Their gratefulness indicated the pervasiveness of the taboo surrounding the lack of communication about menstruation. Once they began to share about their thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about menstruation out loud and with others, their concrete understanding of menstruation seemed to begin to crumble, and a more productive analysis of the origin of their own views commenced.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Although the literature has provided clear evidence of the benefits of providing girls with education about menstruation before menarche, this study revealed that the same type of education about menstruation might not be as helpful for boys of the same age. Through their reflections on their sex education experiences, many of the participants shared that they were neither ready nor able to comprehend the information provided to them about menstruation in middle school. It seemed that many of the participants regarded their education as an overall quite negative experience, even nearly a decade or more later. It is assumed that, in contrast to the participants' recollections, their educators were most likely *not* trying to scare their students in their teaching about pubertal development and sexual health. Yet, participants' strong adverse reactions to their experiences indicates a significant problem with the type of education boys receive about menstruation at the same time as their female classmates.

Participants collectively reported having a negative experience with learning about pubertal and sexual development in middle school, but they did not indicate the same type of discomfort in the present day with their knowledge about sexual health or their own pubertal development as they did when talking about knowledge of menstruation. While they may have had adverse reactions to learning about their own development and sexual health in adolescence, their lived experience and the passage of time likely lessened some of the negative reactions they might have had as children. Perhaps because of the fundamental inability to experience menstruation, their attitude toward this uniquely female experience seems to have taken a different course. As boys learned from their family members and women in their lives that they should not talk about menstruation, so too did girls of the same age. The difference in their

reactions as adults, however, seems to be rooted in their experiential knowledge about menstruation. Although both boys and girls are subject to negative messages from a variety of sources that menstruation is unclean and something to be kept hidden (Ussher, 2006), girls' experiential knowledge about menstruation allows for it to become a routine experience in their lives (Kissling, 1996). The systemic silence surrounding menstruation seems to have prevented the young men in this study from building a more developmentally appropriate understanding of menstruation. Indeed, the feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, and disgust that the participants described reflected an understanding of menstruation that seemed to be frozen in the developmental stage in which they first learned about it.

Based on their reported ages, it can be assumed that participants were in the concrete-operational stage of development when they received their formal education about pubertal development and sexual health. This stage is characterized by the development of the ability to use logic and reasoning to solve problems. Although children at this stage exhibit growth in the ability to think about abstract concepts, their reasoning is still rooted in concrete conceptualizations (Ginsburg & Opper, 1979). For example, the participants in the present study indicated that they think about blood associated with menstruation as analogous to other types of bleeding they may have encountered, such as the flow of blood that one encounters when cutting a finger. Similarly, participants described menstruation in a way suggesting that they only half-knew about its process. For example, one participant stated that the blood associated with menstruation is "old blood that's being recycled" and "redistributed."

Because their knowledge about menstruation was rooted within a concrete framework, the relevance of the relatability of blood can be understated. Modern cultural messages about blood perpetuate the idea that it can be a vessel of disease and contamination (Chrisler, 2011).

By teaching menstruation to boys at the same time as other aspects of sex education, their concrete way of thinking linked blood to the idea that contact with it could lead to the transmission of stigmatized infections (STIS), life-altering disease (e.g., HIV and AIDS), or unwanted pregnancy (Allen, et al, 2010). Further, unlike sexual intercourse and its associated bodily fluids that may also be vessels of disease, there is no pleasure associated with it. Rather, it is quite the opposite: as the participants suggested, blood is most commonly associated with certain types of bodily injury and pain. Less important but still relevant are other negative associations with blood that it is defiling because it is messy, sticky, staining, and has a distinctive, identifiable odor.

Several negative associations with menstruation (e.g., the fundamental inability to gain experiential knowledge about menstruation, messages that they should not know or talk about menstruation) seem to have come together to not only limit participant's ability to conceptualize menstruation in a more developmentally complex way but also their *desire* to do so. As adults, the participants' attitude of disgust toward the blood associated with menstruation allowed the development of a type of willful ignorance toward learning and knowing about menstruation as adults, which they went to great lengths to avoid coming into contact with directly (e.g., managing the course of conversation about menstruation and abstaining from intercourse when their partner is menstruating).

The silence surrounding menstruation can therefore be understood as a type of vicious cycle. Men are told as children that they should not know or talk about menstruation. This lack of discussion prevented them from gaining some type of empathic knowledge about menstruation as a routine, and a relatively mundane occurrence in the majority of women's lives (Kissling, 1996). Instead, the participants held onto their internalized childhood beliefs that

menstruation is gross, dirty, and disgusting, which, at least in the case of the men in this study, remained unchallenged, as adults. As a result, both men *and* women do not get practice talking about, and therefore learning about, menstruation. Thus, the silence surrounding menstruation is perpetuated.

Attitudes Revealed in This Study. Ultimately, the participants seem to have acquired three primary attitudes in childhood that they carried with them into adulthood: (a) the belief that women have emotional responses from physical changes associated with menstruation, (b) a belief that menstruation is not relatable to their lives, and (c) an emotional aversion, or a feeling of disgust, towards menstruation itself. As we will see in the Implications, these internalized attitudes, when taken together, provide a powerful pretext by which men are able to unilaterally dismiss women's emotional states as illegitimate.

Implications of These Findings. When conducting the interviews, every one of the participants who contributed to the discussion endorsed the belief that women experience changes in their mood during menstruation. The consequence of this belief is that men may use menstruation as a pretext to explain, and thereby dismiss, women's affective state. Young (2005) described the potential harm that is caused by this way of thinking in her explanation of the difference between emotion and mood. Emotions, she argued, have an object; they are held by a subject and are directed toward some person or thing in the world (e.g., I am happy about X). She described mood, on the other hand, as primordial in that it pervades all aspects of experience while a person is in it (i.e., it acts as a type of lens through which one sees the world during the time in which they are experiencing it). Though these differences may seem semantic, they have important implications in regard to how women are able to express their emotional states. If women are perceived as experiencing affective changes as a result of their menses, then men

gain the pretext to dismiss women's emotional state as a *mere* mood, rather than women's emotional state having some legitimate object or claim. It is particularly important to understand that women's mood, in the case of menstruation, then is not perceived as a source for making legitimate claims.

There are, however, cases where mood can be the source of legitimate claims, such as when the mood accurately matches reality. For example, if one is living in a country with a brutal civil war, one's mood may become depressed, which seems appropriate for the scenario. One may feel depressed because it is in fact the case that everything around oneself is an utterly horrible, depressive situation. While some moods may systematically distort one's perception of the world, there's a clear difference in legitimacy between moods that result from a response to an objective state in the world (e.g., a civil war), and moods that result from a covert influence that one's body or hormones have on one's mind. Moods that result from menstruation are perceived as falling into the latter category. They lack legitimacy because they are understood as not being responses to the objective states of affairs (i.e., reality), and are hence easily dismissed for their lack of accurate reflection of the world. In other words, it is not woman's accurate perception of the world that is making her angry, sad, etc.: it's just her body. Her body is distorting her ability to accurately assess the objective state of affairs that men presumably, as non-menstruating individuals, have access to. She is systematically misidentifying the cause of her beliefs, emotions, etc.

For example, consider a scenario in which a woman feels angry toward her partner and she expresses said anger by yelling at him. If her partner has learned to associate heightened emotions, in this case the voicing of anger through yelling, with menstruation, he may feel that her anger is not actually anger because it is not an appropriate reaction to the state of affairs that

he knows to exist. In other words, the woman's anger is a reaction to a misperceived state of affairs. It is his partner's mood that creates a distorting filter through which she is assessing the world, in this case, his actions. In this way, the man in the scenario has a way of explaining away his partner's affective state without having to take any personal responsibility for the legitimate cause of his partner's anger. Furthermore, he does not even have to ask whether he has any reason to take personal responsibility, the implications of which be explained further below.

In the present study, Adrian's explanation of the picture he created most clearly illustrated the potential problem with linking women's expression of emotion and menstruation. He wrote,

What I expressed is confusion because they confuse the hell out of men making up stuff. Then I expressed crying because they cry a lot. After crying I expressed sort of a mild state because once you think everything is good they just get angry and go insane. Lastly I expressed a straight line because after [menstruating] they are back to normal (see Figure 4).

Beyond the many indications of his sexist attitude toward menstruating women, this explanation is troubling because it almost exactly mirrors the scenario described with the woman and her partner. In his explanation, the crying that he referred to occurred *because* women menstruate rather than because of some other legitimate reason to be upset. Further, his confusion about women's emotions does not refer to some lack on his part about his ability to understand women, but rather because, in his estimation, women "[make] stuff up" when menstruating. This example clearly demonstrates the belief that the menstruating body is reality-distorting in that it does not react to an accurate depiction of the world. Rather, it makes things up in its own image.

The potential harm of this generalized dismissal of women's emotionality as related to menstruation is further complicated by the fact that, except perhaps in extremely rare cases, one cannot typically look at a woman and tell whether or not she is menstruating. Expressions of emotion then become the primary way of identifying women's menstrual status, thus *any* expression of emotion may be subject to dismissal. Men therefore acquire a pretext to dismiss women in every social context, because it is always *possible* that she may be menstruating, and hence expressing views, beliefs, etc. that are fundamentally distorted given their being filtered through a mood that isn't an accurate or legitimate evaluation of the world.

This brings us to the way in which the internalized attitudes of (b) the *unreliability of menstruation* and (c) *disgust*, further contribute to the dismissal of women's affective states. Following from (b) and (c) men lack the impetus or inclination to reconsider, critique, or reassess their dismissal of women, precisely because they have no interest (since it's unrelatable) or desire (since it's disgusting) in seeking more information or opening up discussion. As has already been established, men employ the belief that menstruation is accompanied by negative affective changes as a means for dismissing women. The effect of combining this belief with unreliability and disgust is that the belief has a much higher likelihood of going unquestioned, since there's a lack of reason, desire, or interest in reassessing it. The potential result is the use of an *unquestionable and unquestioned* cognitive tool for infantilizing, denying, dismissing, or subordinating women. Men find themselves with a seemingly definitive explanation of women's behavior. The unrelatable nature of menstruation, coupled with the feelings of disgust towards it, contribute significantly towards the seeming definitiveness of their explanation: menstruating women are overly-emotional, have no grip on reality, and are dismissed as such. This belief is not a candidate for doubt. The incentive for doubt is lacking because it does not even arise as a

possibility given the unrelatability and disgustingness of menstruation. Recall the man in the hypothetical scenario above. He has no further reason to rethink his position on dismissing his partner's anger outright partly because her experience is not relatable to his own and he is disgusted by it. Put simply, he has no interest or desire in giving it any more thought.

To further clarify, as the participants in the present study indicated, their feelings of disgust and aversion to any words, conversation, sexual play or anything else related to menstruation prevents them from having any incentive to question the tool of dismissal they have acquired. In other words, men have already acquired a tool in which they are able to dismiss women's being in the world. This is a powerful tool that they can wield at any given moment to reduce women's way of being in the world to a result of mere mood. The feelings of disgust keep them from reconsidering whether or not the belief that they have committed themselves to.

Implications for women. It seems that the impact men's beliefs have on women is in the public arena (Laws, 1990). It's not that women can't express their emotions; rather it's that whenever they do express their emotions, beliefs, or attitudes (i.e. ways of being in the world), there is the genuine and constant threat that they won't be taken seriously by those in the public, and especially by men. Thus, menstruation puts women in a position where their motives are always questioned, where they are not seen as impartial, and instead are always as a biased party.

In this situation, there's an added burden on women's speech. Women are forced to be more reflective, cautious, self-monitoring, and generally more cognizant than their male counterparts. This is, of course, an unfair burden (Young, 2005). The requirement to do so takes up more mental resources, increases anxiety, and it adds to self-doubt and insecurity. In this sense, women are at least potentially starting out from a compromised position, if men have the internalized attitudes (i.e., women experience negative emotional shifts, menstruation is not

relatable, and blood associated with menstruation is disgusting) about menstruation that the participants in this study suggested they do. Thus, women must learn to conceal their menstrual status in order to ensure that they are taken seriously. A woman's self-monitoring of her emotional expression, in addition to every other physical indication of menstruation, undoubtedly requires an enormous amount of psychic energy that could be spent on more productive endeavors.

To be clear, I do not mean to say that *all* men dismiss *all* women's expressions of emotion as being related to menstruation; to say so would clearly be false. However, this way of thinking is perhaps not as cynical as one would hope. One need only look towards the popular opinion about women serving in public office to see that this type of reductive thinking actually occurs quite frequently. For example, Bill O'Reilly recently suggested that menstruation would prevent a woman from effectively serving as President because of her emotional state (Aravosis, 2014). The worry is that this type of thinking is pervasive among men.

Implications for men. The findings of this study suggest that men, in addition, to women, are subject to the absorption of negative stereotypes about menstruation (Allen, et al., 2010). Although it easiest to see how women bear the brunt of the consequences of the stigma associated with menstruation, the hegemonic power structures surrounding menstruation are undoubtedly harmful to men as well. If men even implicitly internalize the belief that women's emotional state may be tied to menstruation, and thereby rendering their evaluations of the world illegitimate, then men are unlikely to be moved to learn more about the experiences of women in their lives, thus potentially inhibiting their relationships with them. Men may bar themselves from listening to and engaging with women's claims, expressions of emotion, beliefs, and so on *because* they already assume that women's attitudes are often the illegitimate results of their

menstrual cycle. Given that beliefs, emotions, etc. are integral aspects of human life (for both men and women), not engaging with them, for whatever reason, leads to impoverished relations between individuals. In this way, the stigma associated with menstruation has the power to place significant limits on the depths to which men and women are able to know each other.

Implications for clinicians. Because the participants indicated that the way in which they learned about menstruation had enormous implications for the way that they think about it as adults, it appears that a new sex education curriculum is in order for boys, particularly as it relates to menstruation. One obvious place to begin would be in focusing interventions toward adolescents. An essential perspective to take in the development of a new sex education program would be to promote the idea of menstruation as being a *human* experience rather than as an exclusionary phenomenon. Doing so would require reframing menstruation as a bodily activity that human beings undergo. At the present time, menstruation is not seen as a human experience, but as an essentially female experience. Borrowing a thought from de Beauvoir (1952), within the patriarchal society of the West, the essence of woman is simply that she is *not man*; she is the *other* to man. Man, in contrast to woman, is the primordial subject who represents the human being as such. Because only women can experience menstruation, it thereby becomes an essentially othered experience. That is to say, menstruation is only accidentally related to human experience, rather than being an essentially human one. This is the hurdle that needs to be surmounted within educational frameworks, whatever form those might take. Finding ways to surmount this will take more work and exploration than the scope of the present study and analysis allows, however simply recognizing the hurdle is already progress in itself. Nevertheless, here are some preliminary suggestions.

As both practitioners and scholars, counseling psychologists are in a unique position to address these issues given their ability to develop and integrate therapeutic interventions within an educational framework. As clinicians, one possibility for such an intervention could be through psychoeducational group work. Within this setting, counselors could facilitate learning and conversation between both adolescent boys and girls. Because girls are the ones who experience menstruation most directly, their voices would not necessarily be privileged, but they would be prominent. Both boys and girls would likely benefit from having an identifiable space in which they are able to ask questions and gain the practical information they may desire, particularly in regard to giving them space to voice their feelings of embarrassment, disgust, and confusion. In doing so, group members would ideally come to recognize the universality of their questions, concerns, and feelings of embarrassment and confusion surrounding menstruation (Yalom, 2005), and lessen the feelings of disgust toward menstruation that participants reported internalizing from their formal learning experience about menstruation. Such a setting would also ideally promote empathy and compassion for each other's experiences, which could effectively lessen some of the negative beliefs and attitudes that pervade other aspects of mainstream life and cultural perspectives of menstruation.

Summary and Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that the way in which participants learned about menstruation in adolescence had a profound impact on how they think about and understand menstruation as adults. Participants shared that they learned about menstruation through both formal and informal sources in childhood and adolescence. From female family members, they received the message that menstruation is associated with mood change and also not a topic that they need to concern themselves with. Their sex education experience in school, meanwhile, was

met with profound feelings of disgust toward the information that they received. As adults, many of the participants indicated that their profound feelings of disgust toward menstruation in childhood resulted in them avoiding learning about or encountering menstruation in adulthood. Participants reported that they currently employ several strategies in order to avoid encountering menstruation, such as avoiding conversation about it with women and abstaining from sexual intercourse when a partner is menstruating. Because of the great lengths many of the participants reported going to in order to avoid encountering menstruation, their knowledge about and conception of menstruation seemed to be rooted in the developmental stage in which they first encountered it. Thus, participants spoke about menstruation in concrete terms, such as thinking about menstruation as bleeding that is similar to when one cuts a finger.

As adults, the participants indicated that they acquired at least three attitudes toward menstruation: (a) the belief that menstruation is associated with affective changes in women, (b) the belief that menstruation is unrelated to their lives, and (c), the belief that the blood associated with menstruation is disgusting. Taken together, these attitudes provide a power tool for dismissing women, their emotions, their beliefs, and other aspects that incorporate their way of being in the world. The implications of these three principal attitudes are pernicious, or at least potentially so, as they take a toll on women. For example, by significantly complicating the space they are able to take up in public life, using up their psychic energy, and placing them in a overly cautious, self-monitoring position that men themselves do not experience (Laws, 1990). These attitudes also have adverse impacts on the types of relationships that men and women are able to take up with one another. Men are disinclined from trying to understand and make sense of women's emotional states, attitudes, and expressions in women's own terms and instead dismiss them as being mere and often illegitimate indications of their bodily state.

Originally when performing this analysis, I found myself thinking that in order to help men come to a better of understanding of menstruation, and by extension women themselves, the answer was in teaching men about menstruation at a different age or separately from girls in their class. I thought that in doing so, they might be better able to come to their own understanding of menstruation and become more accepting toward its presence. After performing the analysis and coming to a better understanding of the vast implications of men's attitudes towards menstruation, I no longer think that the answer is as clear as I had hoped. Identifying solutions to overcoming the stigma associated with menstruation, and thereby allow women to the opportunity to act as full participants in the world, is difficult. To overcome these problems, practitioners must be capable of overcoming the hurdle that is posed by these three attitudes toward menstruation, and therefore women themselves. One potential way of doing this would be to reframe the experience of menstruation as a fundamentally human experience, as opposed to a merely gendered one. This is tantamount to denying the exclusionary status and treatment that menstruation has commonly been given within educational frameworks (Allen, et al., 2010). Finding concrete ways of implementing such strategies will take additional work.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this qualitative study was that it was conducted using grounded theory methodology, which is a thorough and rigorous approach that is well received in the behavioral sciences. Trustworthiness was established via triangulation and the use of external auditors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), further enhancing the rigor of this study. Conducting two semi-structured, group interviews provided a wealth of information.

The findings included excerpts of the detailed interviews that highlighted participants' perceptions of and attitudes toward menstruation. Doing so enhanced the reader's ability to judge

and understand the development of these views in the context in which they were developed (Creswell, 1998). One major limitation of the study, however, was that no core category emerged through the analysis (Morrow, 2011).

The demographic makeup of the study sample can be considered both a strength and limitation. Participants represented a heterogeneous sample in regard to race, which enhances the generalizability of these results to other groups within the African American and White communities. A limitation of the demographics makeup of the group was that all participants were college-aged. Although some indicated that they were in dating relationships with women, none of them reported being in a long-term, committed relationship. Thus, the participants' attitudes toward and beliefs about menstruation may be indicative of the life stage they were in at the time of the interview and likely to change over the coming years.

Given the group nature of the interviews, social desirability may have impacted participants and therefore be a limitation. The men in this study participated in the interviews exclusively with other members of their student groups, thus participants may not have felt as comfortable sharing their views on aspects of menstruation if they perceived that they may be rejected by their peers for doing so (e.g., the disgust the participants expressed towards engaging in sexual intercourse during menstruation may have limited some participant's willingness to admit that they have done so or were not actually disgusted by it). Likewise, given the nature of peer dynamics, certain men's voices may have been more privileged than others. It is possible that conducting these interviews with a group of strangers or on an individual basis may have yielded different results.

Future Directions

The perceptions of menstruation among men in this study are contextually rich and emotionally laden. These men revealed that their experiences with learning about menstruation during childhood resulted in them internalizing implicit messages that menstruation is a taboo subject and a stigmatized condition that should be kept hidden. This study supports previous research suggesting menstruating women are perceived as less competent and likeable, and that the association between menstruation and blood has a distancing effect on others (Roberts, et al., 2002). Because these negative perceptions of menstruating women persist, it is imperative that we continue to examine the role of men in internalizing and perpetuating the stigma associated with menstruation. Research examining men's perceptions associated with menstruation should continue to be developed. In the future, using a larger, more representative sample of men with respect to age, sexual orientation, and relationship commitment may be useful to enhance the generalizability of the findings. In addition, investigating men's perceptions and beliefs relative to menstruation on a one-on-one basis could lessen the potential of men responding in a socially desirable way. Researchers and practitioners should continue to educate themselves about the pervasiveness of the stigma associated with menstruation, and remain cognizant of ways in which beliefs about women may implicitly be related to menstruation. Critical awareness of the ways in which menstruation may be used to dismiss and limit women's self-expression and determination is an important first step to fighting against oppression.

That the participants were able to ultimately to recognize that there was something potentially wrong about their beliefs and attitudes towards menstruation provides hope and incentive for addressing these issues in the future, even if it's not quite clear to the participants where the wrongness lies. Their shift in awareness at the end of the interview implies that the

participants no longer took their explanations, understanding, or treatment of menstruation to be definitive. This means that doubts have been raised. If we recall, this doubt was supposed to be eliminated as an option through the disincentivizing combination of (b) lack of interest (not relatable) and (c) lack of desire (disgust), then the fact that participants came away thinking that there *might* be something wrong about their views on menstruation is a reason for hope.

The findings of this study thus also support previous research suggesting that men may be capable of taking a more accepting stance on women's experiences of menstruation. Although Allen and Goldberg (2010) similarly found that men came to a more empathic place of understanding about women's experiences of menstruation with age, their findings were limited to men who had entered into heterosexual, committed romantic relationships. The findings of this study are particularly important because they suggest that men may be able to reach this understanding at a much younger age and do not necessarily have to enter into committed, heterosexual relationships in order to do so.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographic Information

Participant Characteristics	N	Family Characteristics	N
Race/Ethnicity		Siblings	
African American/ Black	9	Number of sisters	
Caucasian/ White	4	0	1
Middle Eastern	1	1	5
		2	3
Year in school		3	1
Freshman	8	4	2
Sophomore	2		
Junior	3	Number of brothers	
Senior	1	0	6
		1	3
Sexual Orientation		2	2
Heterosexual/ straight	13	3	1
Not reported	1		
		Did not indicate gender	2
Major		Parent's marital status	
Automotive	1	Single	1
Architecture	2	Married	4
Biology	2	Divorced	5
Communications	2	Widowed (Father)	2
Engineering	1	Not reported	2
Fashion Communication	1		
Political Science	1	Father's Occupation	
Sociology	1	Counselor	1
Undecided	3	Doctor	1
		Engineer	1
Number of sexual partners		Illinois State	1
1	2	Insurance	1
2	2	Not reported	1
3	1	Postal Worker	1
6	2	Rehabilitation advisor	1
7	2	Unemployed	5
12	1	Warehouse worker	1
15	1		
Not reported	3	Mother's Occupation:	
		Academic advisor	1
Longest Relationship		Cashier	1
5 months or less	2	Counselor	1
6 months – 1 year	3	CPA	1
2 – 3 years	4	Homemaker	1
4+ years	1	Management	1
Not reported	4	Not reported	3
		Post Master	2
		Teacher	1
		Occupational therapist	1
		Warehouse plant	1

Table 2

Summary of Axial and Open Coding Level Categories

Axial Coding Categories	Open Coding Categories	Open Coding Sub-Categories
Genesis of perceptions of menstruation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal learning about menstruation • Informal learning about menstruation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal sources of information • Too young to learn about menstruation • Informal sources of information • Piecing together information about menstruation
Current perceptions of the menstruation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menstruation as an undesirable phenomenon • Menstruation as an unrelatable phenomenon • The significance of blood: relating to the unrelatable • Interview as intervention: change in attitude toward menstruation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of emotional changes • Negative associations with blood • Difficulty understanding menstruation • Irrelevant to men's lives • Disgust <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implications for communication with women ○ Implications for sexual activity

FIGURE 1

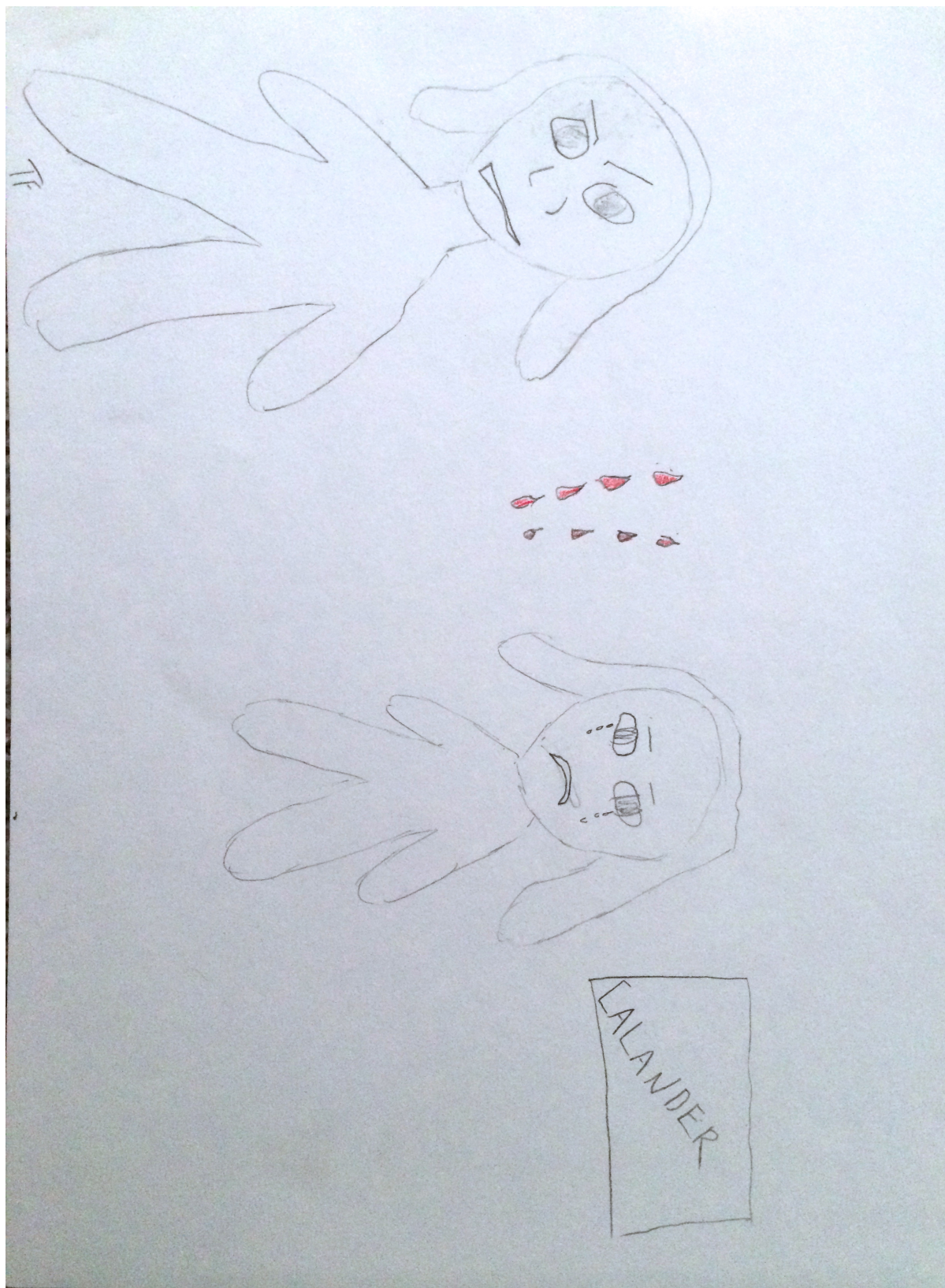


FIGURE 2

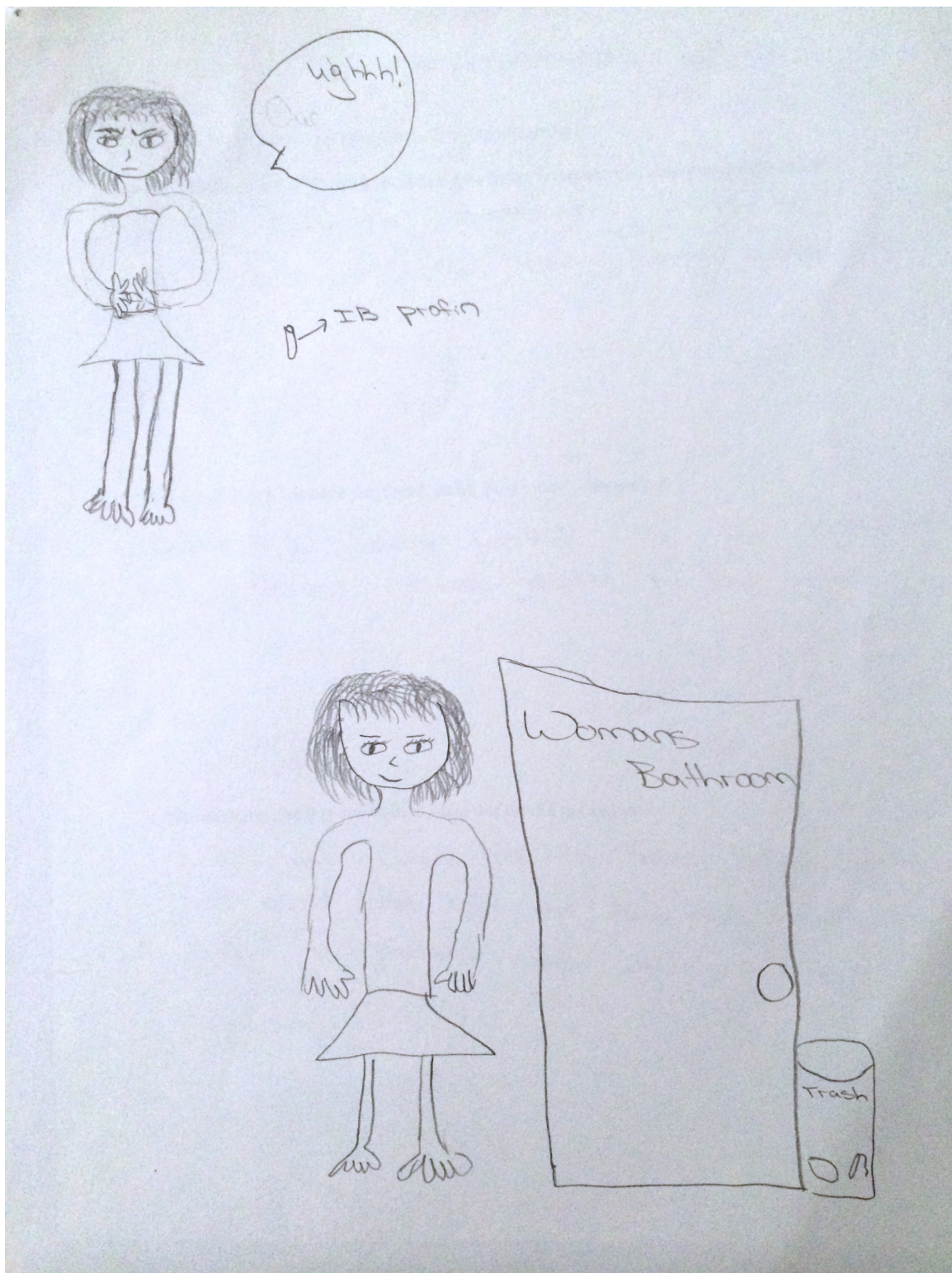


FIGURE 3

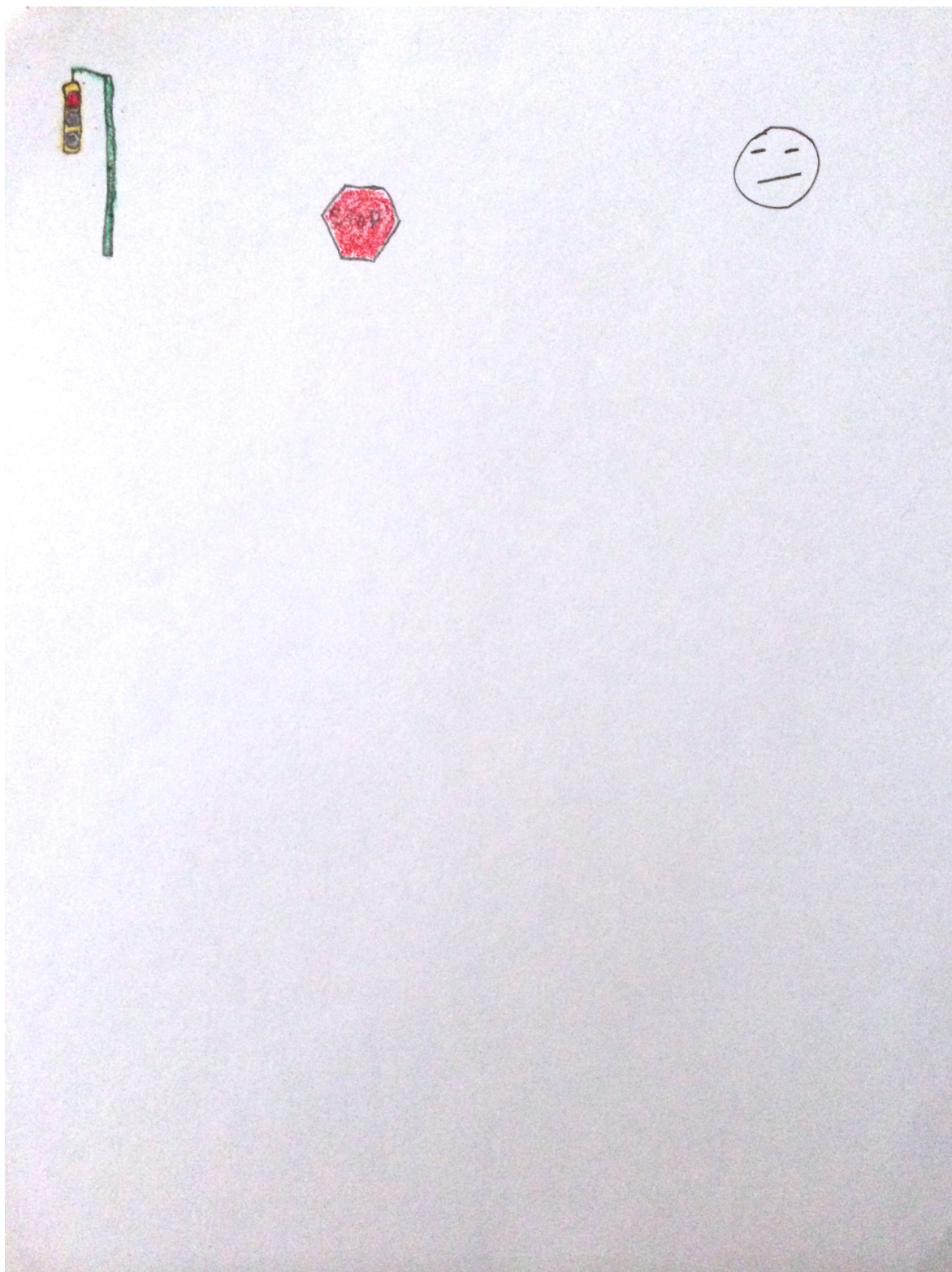


FIGURE 4



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A CONSENT FORM

My name is Katherine Fishman and I am a graduate student in Counseling Psychology at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. I am asking you to participate in my research study. The purpose of my study is to investigate how men think about and understand the menstrual cycle.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, it will take approximately 1 to 2 hours of your time. To fulfill the requirements of participation the following criteria must be met: (a) self-identify as male; (b) 18 years of age or older, (b) current SIU student or employee; (c) speak English. You may be asked to reflect on your experiences with menstruation, describe when and how you learned about it, ways in which your views may or may not have changed over time. You will also be asked to create and describe a picture depicting the way that you think about menstruation. You will also be asked to provide examples of situations, and possibly your thoughts and/or feelings about various situations.

All your responses will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. The interviewer is a mandated reporter and thus is required to report any suspected ongoing child or elderly abuse, threats to harm self or others or if required by court order. Your responses to questions will be videotaped, and these tapes will be transcribed/stored and kept until the completion of the study in a locked file cabinet. Only those directly involved with this project will have access to the data.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me or the faculty chair:
Katherine Fishman, B.A. (412) 629-1875 / kfishman@siu.edu
Kathleen Chwalisz, Ph.D. (618) 453-3541

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity and know my responses will be tape recorded. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers.

I _____, agree to participate in this research project conducted by Katherine Fishman, B.A., graduate student in Counseling Psychology.

“I agree _____ I disagree _____ to have my responses recorded on audio tape.”

“I agree _____ I disagree _____ that Katherine Fishman may quote me in her paper”

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B
LETTER OF RECRUITMENT

January 13th, 201

Students,

My name is Katherine Fishman, and I am a graduate student in Counseling Psychology at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. I am asking you to participate in my research study. The purpose of my study is to investigate men's perceptions of the menstrual cycle. The study will consist of a art-based project and an group interview with other students in your group. You will be asked to create and describe an image depicting the way you think about menstruation. In addition, you will be asked to participate in a group interview investigating your experiences and attitudes toward menstruation, how you talk about menstruation, and how these views may have changed over time.

If you are interested, please sign the sheet with your preferred contact information.

You may also contact me directly:

Kate Fishman: 412-628-1975 / kfishman@siu.edu

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, it will take approximately 2 hours of your time. To fulfill the requirements of participation the following criteria must be met: (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) self-identify as male, (c) currently a student or employee of SIU, (d) speak English.

Thank you for your consideration,
Katherine Fishman

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Please fill out the following information:

- Preferred Name/Pseudonym:
- Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Sexual orientation:
- Year in school:
- Major:
- Number of sexual partners:
- Length of longest romantic relationship:
- Parent's marital status (married, divorced, etc.):
- Father's occupation:
- Mother's occupation:
- Number and gender of siblings:

APPENDIX D
QUESTIONS USED FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

- What do you know about the menstrual cycle?
 - How old were you when you first heard about it?
 - Where did you learn it?
 - Who did you learn about the menstrual cycle from?
- Has your knowledge about the menstrual cycle changed over time? If so, how?
- What are your personal experiences with menstruation?
- Do you ever talk about the menstrual cycle with anyone in your life?
- What is positive about the menstrual cycle? What is more negative?
- What do you wish you knew about menstruation?

APPENDIX E
ART PROTOCOL

Please create a picture of how you perceive the menstrual cycle on the provided paper. You may use any combination of the oil pastels, colored pencils, graphite pencils, or crayons provided. Take about 15 minutes to complete this activity.

Please describe your picture. What did you draw? Why?

What do you think you expressed in your picture?

Is there anything that you left out?

APPENDIX F
POST-INTERVIEW FORM

Please feel free to use the reverse side of this page to answer.

How might the information or ideas shared here today influence your views on menstruation?

What thoughts or ideas have you found useful from today's discussion?

Is there anything else that you wish to share that we did not address?

APPENDIX G
STATEMENT OF SUBJECTIVITY

I first became interested in researching the menstrual cycle during my undergraduate education. I attended a small woman's college and majored in women's studies. Because of the extremely small student body (less than 500 students in the undergraduate college), I was able to become close with my advisor and mentor. As a women's studies major, I have always had a particular interest in women's experiences of embodiment, but it was not until I took Psychology of Women that I truly became interested in studying menstruation in an academic way. My advisor, who taught the course, was the co-president of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research, thus a large portion of the course was devoted to learning about menstruation. Taking this class at a women's college allowed conversation to flow a bit differently than I think would have been possible had men been present. We were a relatively large class of about 15 women, and much of the class was devoted to critically exploring the taboo surrounding menstruation, promoting ways of improving girls' and women's experiences with menstruation, as well as sharing our own experiences. My attitude toward my own period has always been relatively neutral, however listening to my friends and classmates share their experiences made me realize how integral menstruation is to many women's lived experiences and their relationship with their bodies. That we don't talk about it seemed quite curious to me, and thus the class became a catalyst for my research interest.

As I read and learned more about the topic, I became especially interested in the nature of the taboo surrounding menstruation, particularly how it is maintained. One of my primary research interests, particularly in college when I was a women's studies major, was in studying the phenomenology of the body. I have always been fascinated with learning about how discourse and other large and often invisible social structures come to shape our experiences of

the world. Considering that women uniquely experience menstruation, and women hold less power in the world, it seemed like a natural progression to investigate how individuals who hold more power (i.e., men) might implicitly inform women's experiences of menstruation. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that that I think that men are always the actors in the development and perpetuation of the stigma surrounding menstruation; I merely mean to say that as non-menstruating individuals, men necessarily have a different experience of it, and that difference is likely important.

My own experience with menstruation has always been relatively mundane. Growing up, I cannot recall ever receiving any formal education about menstruation in school or elsewhere. I attended a private, Catholic institution throughout elementary and middle school, and as far as I can recall there was no formal sex education. In high school, I attended the compulsory two-semester health class where all of the information that was presented was in relation to biological aspects of menstruation, which was dull and not particularly relevant to my lived experience of menstruation.

I also did not receive any formal information about menstruation from my family. I was very shy in elementary and middle school to the point where I refused to talk about menstruation or any other aspects of sexual development with anyone. My mother tried several times to sit me down and have "the talk" with me, but I insisted that we do it later each time. Eventually, my mother gave up and left a stack of books about pubertal development geared towards girls in my age group in my room. Although I did not want to talk about it with my mother, I was actually quite curious and read each book carefully.

Because of the books that my mother had left for me, I knew that my period would eventually come. I do not recall waiting for it with any sense of anticipation or dread, and when

it did eventually come, I reacted with total indifference. As I recall, I found some sort of pad in the linen closet and went about my day. This sense of neutrality toward my period has been consistent since. I have always experienced my period as a somewhat mild inconvenience, but overall have had few problems that other women have faced. Although my mother may disagree, I do not remember experiencing particularly strong mood swings that so many people associate with menstruation, nor have I ever experienced anything beyond mild pain associated with my menstrual cycle.

In the course of everyday conversation, I have told umpteen people about my interest in exploring men's perceptions of menstruation. Overall, the reactions have been positive and almost always accompanied with a degree of surprise. Particularly when men would ask me what my research topic was, I would find that I sometimes could not keep myself from smiling somewhat embarrassedly as I told them. My own embarrassment was most often directed towards the men, because I expected *them* to be embarrassed. Other times I felt that I would not be taken seriously, as if my topic was too radical and I had to justify my interest in some way. The most difficult experiences were when people would ask why I was interested in researching a topic with a tone of disbelief and what I perceived as disgust. Depending on my relationship and to the person and their gender, I would sometimes try to engage them in a discussion about why men's perceptions of menstruation have important implications for the way that women experience menstruation, and other times I would let it go and change the subject.

My ultimate hope for this study is to better understand the nature of the menstrual taboo, specifically how and why there is such secrecy and silence surrounding it. My goal in interviewing men is to uncover some of the social power structures that inform the way both men and women understand menstruation. Because men are not the targets of the stigma surrounding

menstruation and because they are not able to menstruate, their lack of lived experience might make the social and cultural messages about nature of menstruation itself clearer, as well as shed light on how it absorbed and subsequently perpetuated within larger social structures.

VITA
Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Katherine M. Fishman

kfishman@siu.edu

Chatham University

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology and Women's studies, December 2011

Thesis Title:

Putting men back into the menstrual cycle: A qualitative analysis of men's perceptions of menstruation

Major Professor: Kathleen Chwalisz, PhD