

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

M. A (Research) Psychology Mini Thesis

Title: An exploratory study investigating the construction of university students' perceptions of menstruation and the influence menstrual product advertisements in print media

Student Name: Kulthum Mathews

Student Number: 2838782

Thesis Type: Mini Thesis

Degree: M. A. Psychology (Research)

Department: Psychology

Supervisor: Dr Athena Pedro

Co-Supervisor: Dr Michelle Andipatin



February 2015

Abstract

Menstruation is a quintessential phenomenon unique to females which prepares the body for reproductive functioning. Although this phenomenon is a natural biological process of development, social institutions such as science, socio-cultural factors, religion and the media impact young women's perceptions of menstruation. Media, in particular advertising has been instrumental in conveying specific versions of reality that mirrors Western capitalist and patriarchal ideologies of women and their bodily processes. Media representations of menstruation portrays it as a 'hygiene crisis', rational and in need of symptomatic treatment. Media portrayal of women's bodies highlights the importance of identifying ways in which advertising contributes to young women's perceptions of menstruation. The aims of this study are twofold; firstly this study aims to understand how young women's perceptions of menstruation are constructed. Secondly, this study also aims to explore young women's perceptions of menstrual product advertising in print media. Literature shows that the media often portrays menstruation as a 'hygiene crisis' instead of a maturation process. Improved hygiene seems to be the rationale and modern answer of 'treating' symptoms. Literature also identifies advertising as a pervasive form of media, which is often unconsciously acknowledged, and it is thought to convey specific versions of reality in order to mirror Western capitalist and patriarchal ideology. Taking these factors into consideration shows the importance of identifying ways in which advertising contributes to young women's perceptions of menstruation. Positioned within a social constructionist framework, specifically on macro social constructionism the emphasis is on unpacking power relations and how this exercises social control over women. The use of social constructionism strengthens the study with focusing on the importance of how perceptions are constructed through interactions with our environments. This study utilized a qualitative approach using focus groups as the data collection method. The sample comprised of 16 participants recruited from the female population aged 18-23 years from a University in the Western Cape. Foucauldian discourse

analysis was employed to analyse the data collected. All ethical requirements as stipulated by the University were strictly adhered to. This study will therefore contribute to the dearth of literature in the South African context as literature in this area is very limited and inaccessible. This study in particular contributes to the South African body of knowledge by furthering the understanding of how societal messaging influences and perpetuates power relations and the social control of women.



Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated otherwise in the text, is my original work and that I have not submitted it, or any part thereof, for a degree at another university.



Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty for affording me the opportunity to embark on this journey, for guiding me through all obstacles that made this process sometimes seem impossible to complete.

To my family, your unwavering love and support has been my sole guiding light through my moments of darkness. Mommy, the many cups of coffee, late night talks, and allowing me to bounce ideas off you has made every step easier to take. Rafeeq, I am sorry for spoiling so many of your black t-shirts with all my tears, but no words can explain how eternally grateful I am to you for always catching them when they fall. Thank you for building me up each time I broke down. To my brother Othman, and my sister Kelly, who gave up so much so that I can reach for my dreams without a complaint or wanting anything in return, thank you for your sacrifices. I love you all.

To my classmates, thank you for making such a tough journey so much fun! We've shared as much laughs as we have tears and I would not change a thing about it. Labeeqah, we have been on this journey together since our very first year in academia and I could not have asked for a better partner! Working with you has been amazing, thank you for LITERALLY finishing the sentences I couldn't and for being such an amazing co-researcher.

My 'sisters' Nadia, Ammaarah, Ayesha, Natheefah and Victoria. You have believed in me when I couldn't believe in myself. I thank you for continuing to support, encourage and challenge me throughout my academic career. You ladies inspire me each and every day. I love you all.

To my supervisor Athena, I appreciate you being there academically and personally on what may have been the hardest 2 years of my life. Your patience and understanding has helped me grow, thank you for always lending a hand wherever you can and helping me be the best I could be. Michelle, your input, encouragement and words of support was invaluable. Thank you!

Thank you to all my participants for volunteering to be part of this study and allowing me to draw on your experiences. Thank you for your patience when arranging the focus groups proved to be tough and for not losing interest along the way. This would not have been possible without you.

To the women in my family, this one is for you! I stand on the shoulders of giants!



Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Abstract | ii |
| Declaration | iv |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| Contents | vii |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Background on menstruation | 1 |
| 1.2 Rationale | 3 |
| 1.3 Aims and Objectives | 4 |
| 1.4 Outline of thesis | 5 |
| Chapter 2: Literature review | 6 |
| 2.1 Constructions of menstruation | 6 |
| 2.1.1 Embarrassment and shame | 6 |
| 2.1.2. Stigma, secrecy and concealment. | 7 |
| 2.1.3 Menstrual attitudes and body shame..... | 9 |
| 2.1.4. Menstrual control..... | 10 |
| 2.1.5. Factors informing perceptions | 11 |
| 2.1.6 South African literature | 13 |
| 2.2 Media construction of femininities | 14 |
| 2.2.1 Constructing menstruation in menstrual product advertising. | 17 |
| 2.4 Theoretical Framework..... | 21 |
| 2.4.1 Macro social constructionism | 23 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 2.4.2 The social construction of menstruation..... | 24 |
| 2.4.3 Foucault and surveillance of the human body..... | 25 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology | 26 |
| 3.1 Introduction..... | 26 |
| 3.2 Methodological framework | 26 |
| 3.3 Participants | 27 |
| 3.4 Data collection..... | 28 |
| 3.5 Procedures..... | 30 |
| 3.6 Data analysis..... | 31 |
| Stage one: Discursive constructions..... | 32 |
| Stage two: Discourses..... | 32 |
| Stage three: Action orientation..... | 32 |
| Stage four: Positionings..... | 32 |
| Stage five: Practice..... | 32 |
| Stage six: Subjectivity | 32 |
| 3.7 Reflexivity | 33 |
| 3.8 Trustworthiness and credibility | 34 |
| 3.9 Ethical Considerations | 36 |
| Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion | 37 |
| 4.1 Constructions of menstruation..... | 38 |
| 4.1.1 Menstruation as a hygiene concern..... | 38 |
| 4.1.2 Religious discourses | 39 |



| | |
|---|-----------|
| 4.1.3 Fear: Shame, embarrassment and concealment | 41 |
| 4.1.4 Medical discourse: Menstrual control and the body as machine | 44 |
| 4.2 Constructing menstruation in menstrual product advertising | 47 |
| 4.2.1 Menstruation as a hygiene crisis | 47 |
| 4.2.2 Secrecy (invisibility)..... | 49 |
| 4.2.3 Love your body...or not?..... | 50 |
| 4.2.4 Consumerism: The body as a commodity | 53 |
| 4.3 Male supremacy: Subject positioning..... | 55 |
| 4.4 Conclusion | 58 |
| Chapter 5: Conclusion..... | 62 |
| 5.1 Introduction..... | 62 |
| 5.2 Summary of findings and implications for understanding the social control of women...62 | 62 |
| 5.3 Recommendations and limitations..... | 64 |
| 5.4 Larger relevance | 64 |
| 5.5 Future study | 65 |
| 5.6 Reflections | 66 |
| Reference list | 68 |
| Appendix 1: Information sheet..... | 78 |
| Appendix 2: Consent form..... | 80 |
| Appendix 3: FOCUS GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY BINDING FORM | 81 |
| Appendix 4: Interview schedule | 82 |
| Appendix 5: Demographic Questionnaire | 83 |



Appendix 6: Advertisement one84
Appendix 7: Advertisement two85



Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background on menstruation

Menstruation is a quintessential biological female process, by which the body prepares for reproductive functioning (McMahon et al., 2011). Menstruation typically lasts three to five days, and on average, girls have 13 cycles a year (McMahon et al., 2011). The menstrual fluid is partly blood and partly tissue from inside the uterus which sheds and passes through the vagina if no pregnancy occurs (Demirbag & Gungormus, 2011). Menarche (the first menstrual cycle) signals the start of fertility, and is considered as the transition from girlhood to womanhood in many cultures (Rembeck, Moller & Gunnarsson, 2006). Among the many developmental milestones associated with female adolescence, menarche may be the most important (Shanbhag, 2012). The transition symbolised by menarche may alter a girl's perception of herself and the perceptions that society may hold of her (McMahon et al., 2011). Menstruation is highly valued by some women, yet people do not discuss it openly because it is considered taboo (Aflaq & Jami, 2012).

Although menstruation is a normal biological occurrence, menstrual blood is viewed as dirty and is often perceived by many women to be characterised by shame (McMahon et al., 2011), fear and anxiety (Shanbhag, 2012) with the actual period of menstruation surrounded by feelings of embarrassment and concealment (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). Representations of the menstrual cycle within the medical model draws on discourses that depicts this biological process as being pathological, leading to discomfort, illness and emotional instability (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). These negative messages of menstruation prevail, propagates fear and secrecy which culminates in a fairly restraining view of menstruation (Aflaq & Jami, 2012).

The way in which menstruation is viewed can also be influenced by socio-cultural factors and perceptions reinforced by institutions such as religion, science and the media (Cevirme,

Cevirme, Karaoglu, Ugurlu & Korkmaz, 2010). For example, in Islamic traditions women who menstruate are not permitted to perform certain religious duties such as fasting which is considered compulsory for adults and children during the holy month of Ramadaan (Bajaj et al., 2012). These various socio-cultural factors play a role in impacting the way women and women's bodies are viewed and in turn influences the way women have been constructed as other.

'Othering' is a concept that was introduced in feminist discourse by de Beauvoir's (1949: 2009, translated) *The Second Sex*. According to de Beauvoir (2009, p. 293) "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman...it is civilisation as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an *Other*". The process of 'othering' women occurs throughout the formative years – childhood, adolescence and through sexual initiation.

For all children, the body is the first emission of subjectivity, the instrument that brings about their comprehension of the world: they apprehend the universe through their eyes and hands, and not through their sexual parts (de Beauvoir, 2009). However, the difference between men and women's sexual organs is the basis for which they are socialised so differently; making the body a site of power and therefore a site for social control. While both boys and girls are socialised into prescribed gender roles by the age of five, girls are given special instruction in femininity maintenance at the onset of puberty which stipulates female docility through bodily subordination (Kissling, 2006; Merskin, 1999). This dualistic reasoning existing in patriarchal societies, grants men the ability to profess power to the self as an autonomous subject who can transcend the immanence of the body and enact change on the external world (de Beauvoir 2009; Kissling, 2006). On the other hand, women are not autonomous because they can only be acted on as her experience is defined in direct relation to the absoluteness of man. Women are thus defined through their biology which confines them to the condition of the body, as an

inessential object, as other (de Beauvoir, 2009). This notion is often perpetuated and reinforced through media and advertising.

Although mass media has often been accounted for as a unified entity, it comprises of many different forms including television, magazines, music videos or computer games, each with their own distinct characteristics (Bell & Dittmar, 2011). Advertising is a pervasive form of media which is often unconsciously acknowledged, its social messages are quite subliminal and therefore likely to remain unquestioned (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). It is thought to convey specific versions of reality in order to mirror Western capitalist and patriarchal ideologies of women's bodies which serve to keep her subjugated to forms of social control (Barak- Brandes, 2011). Studies demonstrate that advertisements, among other factors, are unwittingly internalised and may influence the perceptions and management of one's body (Knauss, Paxton & Alsaker, 2008; Patzer, 2008 as cited in Poorani, 2012).). Media representations of menstruation portray it as a 'hygiene crisis', rational and in need of symptomatic treatment (Rembeck et al., 2006). These portrayals may influence young girls' perceptions of menstruation which could contribute to feeling disgraced by this natural developmental process. More specifically, the advertising of menstrual products may serve as powerful agents that promote ideological control of women's bodies and sexuality (Kane, 1990).

1.2 Rationale

Menstruation has been, and currently still is, used as justification for preventing women from fully participating in society, justifying control over them and their sexuality (Merskin, 1999). In a woman's environment, her immediate family and cultural practices have a great impact on her view of menstruation (Marvan & Trujillo, 2010). Many cultures have myths regarding menstruation and these perceptions are carried through generations by mothers, aunts and story tellers (Merskin, 1999). With South Africa being a culture rich country, it could be argued that perceptions held by South African women would differ from culture to culture. However, this

deduction of cultural diversity is unsupported as there is a dearth of published information in South Africa. In addition to socio-cultural factors and religion, the media may also influence one's perceptions of menstruation. Although there is an abundance of academic literature on women's bodies pertaining to their reproduction systems, the overwhelming majority of research has focused on pregnancy, childbirth, contraception and sexuality. Focus on menstruation is currently limited but very much needed in understanding the social control of women.

Among the many informal information sources available which portray menstrual products are magazine advertisements (Simes & Berg, 2001). Studies conducted on menstrual product advertising focused mainly on content analyses of the advertisements (eg. Simes & Berg, 2001; Merskin, 1999). Negative aspects such as fear and secrecy (Merskin, 1999) as well as shame and embarrassment (Simes & Berg, 2001) are the common features of these studies. This study intends to fill an identified gap by exploring the perceptions of the recipients that these advertisements target and will therefore examine the construction of women's perceptions rather than the construction of the contents of advertisements. Having outlined the rationale of this study, the gaps identified lends itself to the formulation of the aims and objectives below.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The aims of this study are twofold: first to explore how university students' understand and perceive menstruation; second to understand how the portrayal of menstrual product advertisements in print media influences young women's perceptions of menstruation. These aims translated into the following objectives:

- To interrogate women's understanding of menstruation and social control
- To determine social institutions that contribute to the social control of women through menstruation

- To explore how the media re(produces) social control mechanisms over women

Given these aims and objectives this study lends itself to a social constructionist framework which contends that there are multiple realities which are mediated through history culture and language (Willig, 2001). Given the aim of exploring the ways menstruation is constructed to exercise social control over women, the study will more specifically draw on macro social constructionism where the power of language is seen as being derived from social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices (Burr, 2003).

1.4 Outline of thesis

This chapter has introduced the central contours of the thesis, contextualised the study and presented the key points of departure for this dissertation. The study is further conceptualised in chapter two, through reviewing current literature about the ways in which menstruation is constructed. This chapter also presents social constructionism as the theory used to frame this study and also discusses the work of Foucault and how some of his ideas influence the current study. The third chapter outlines the methodological considerations made and the processes followed throughout the study.

The analytic section of this thesis is presented in chapter four. This chapter presents the discourses drawn on by the participants. The chapter also discusses the way women position themselves in relation to men based on the discourses that emerged. The chapter proceeds by discussing women's perceptions of menstruation followed by the perceptions elicited with the influence of menstrual product advertisements. The discussion further demonstrates how through advertisements, the media influences the perceptions of menstruation. The final chapter serves as a concluding reflection. This chapter summarises and reiterates the key arguments made, discusses methodological limitations and the significance of studying menstruation in a social context is underlined.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The following section presents a discussion on literature regarding the issues surrounding menstruation. The review will discuss literature concerning the constructions of menstruation, the media's constructions of femininities and the constructions of menstruation in menstrual product advertising.

2.1 Constructions of menstruation

2.1.1 Embarrassment and shame. A study by Burrows and Johnson (2005), aimed to examine how girls construct meaning around menarche and menstruation in social interactions and specific contexts. The focus on the interpretation of this study was on how words and descriptions clustered together to form discourses in the girls stories and also how they were applied to theorising on menstruation. Results showed that girls constructed their accounts of menstruation as embarrassing, shameful and something to be hidden (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). Similarly, Rembeck et al., (2006) conducted a study on Swedish girls aiming to elucidate early adolescent attitudes towards menstruation and their thoughts and feelings toward their bodies and also to ascertain as to whether there were differences in attitudes between premenarcheal (those who have not yet reached their first menstruation) and postmenarcheal (those who have already had their first menstruation) girls. Results of this study reveal that postmenarcheal girls were less positive about menstruation than premenarcheal girls (Rembeck et al., 2006). These findings are further supported by McMahon et al., (2011) who found that feelings of shame were accompanied by feelings of fear, distraction, confusion and powerlessness. Feelings of fear were usually around menstruating at school or in a public area as girls feared being looked at 'differently' by peers. The negative constructions of menstruation and the stigma and attitude that

menstruation is dirty and disgusting, is often paired with a desire to keep menstruation concealed and a secret (Schooler et al., 2005).

2.1.2. Stigma, secrecy and concealment. A contribution to these negative constructions of menstruation could be the view of menstrual blood as a stigmatised substance (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). Oxley (1998 as cited in Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013) asserts that menstruation is a hidden rather than a visible stigma because women go to a great deal of effort to conceal it. An individual who is openly discredited due to visible conditions that may be stigmatised (such as being disabled) may make efforts to repair their damaged identity. An individual can have a hidden stigma, such as a menstruating woman, may be discreditable and may then carefully behave in ways to keep the stigma concealed to avoid being perceived differently (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000).

Kowalski and Chapple (2000) examined the reactions and feelings of stigmatised individuals (menstruating women) when interacting with a non-stigmatised individual who either knew or did not know about the stigmatised condition (whether or not the woman was menstruating). In their study, there were 28 menstruating women and 30 non-menstruating women. Women completed a battery of measures which included: a measure of the dispositional tendency to experience social anxiety, a self-esteem measure, a measure testing perceptions of self-worth as well as a menstrual attitude questionnaire. Once these measures were completed an inventory on health practices were given to the participants where they were informed that a male researcher would interview them to obtain this additional information. The results indicated that the stigma of menstruation remains more of a fact than fiction. When women were tested while aware that the interviewer knows that they are menstruating, these women perceived that the interviewer viewed them less favourably. Furthermore, non-menstruating women thought that they had made a more favourable

impression on the interviewer due to the fact that he knew they were not menstruating (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000).

The study by McMahon et al (2011) supports the idea of menstruation being a hidden stigma in finding that several girls noted an expectation from society to maintain secrecy about menstruation. Usually, it is not possible to know for certain when a woman is menstruating unless she discloses it, or unless menstrual blood leaks through her clothes and exposes her stigmatised condition (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). McMahon et al (2011) found that girls would fear getting stains on their clothes while menstruating at school as they would be stigmatised by peers. Girls would often change the kinds of clothing they wore in order to hide any indication of menstruation (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). In some cases, women would wear tight jeans or more revealing clothing to create a facade that they are not menstruating when they actually are, just to avoid being stigmatised (Kowalski & Capple, 2000).

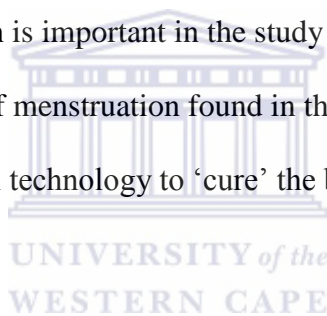
Secrecy does not only involve hiding the visible symptoms (such as leakage) during menstruation. Burrows and Johnson (2005) identified how girls spoke of hiding physical signs of menstruation from other people. No sanitary dispensers were available in the school but girls reported that even if there were they would avoid using them. Some girls would take precautionary measures to prepare for unexpected menstruation. They were always in a state of constant readiness with one girl wearing a pad at all times to be sure not to leak if menstruation occurred unexpectedly (Burrows & Johnson, 2005). Contradictory to this belief of women attempting to conceal menstruation through compensatory self-enhancement, Kowalski and Chapple (2000) found that the awareness of the interviewer did not increase menstruating women's efforts to manage their impressions. It was found that menstruating women who interacted with the interviewer that knew they were menstruating were less motivated to manage the impressions they made on the interviewer than menstruating women

whom the interviewer had no information regarding their menstrual status (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000). However, one of the key discourses that emerge from the literature is that of shame. This leads us to discussing the impact of menstrual attitudes on body shame.

2.1.3 Menstrual attitudes and body shame. Shame about menstruation is often extended to the vagina and surrounding areas, which many women consider to be unpleasant and unspeakable (Schooler et al., 2005). According to Fingerson (2006) we experience our bodies in a fundamentally social way and we experience our world through our bodies. With this perspective in mind, the negative social construction of menstruation could lead to feelings of body shame.

Schooler et al. (2005) examined the role of menstrual attitudes and body shame in predicting sexual decision-making. One of the research questions focused on exploring whether menstrual shame related to a more generalised body shame. Using a sample of 199 female students from an undergraduate psychology class at a large Midwestern university, Schooler et al. (2005) found that women's attitudes toward menstruation were significantly connected with their general level of comfort with their bodies. As girls pass through puberty they learn that the female body is derogated and not as valued as the male body. They often develop feelings of shame about their bodies that are tied to cultural feminine concerns such as weight, attractiveness and cleanliness. This is in contrast to what boys learn during puberty; that their increasingly masculine bodies are sites of power, pride and self-worth (Fingerson, 2006). The different ways in which girls and boys are socialised as indicated above, could account for why women tend to be more self-conscious of their bodies, bodily functions and thus, their menstruation. While girls are groomed to be self-conscious from a young age, boys are groomed to be powerful and proud, boys are simultaneously taught to dominate women.

2.1.4. Menstrual control. Menstruation was always regarded as a force of nature, the menstrual cycle would flow in a regular or irregular rhythm determined by their particular cycle, unless otherwise affected by illness or a temporary change in hormone levels (such as with pregnancy or during breastfeeding). In recent years however, with oral and other contraceptives on the market, women are able to manipulate and even end this natural development process (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). Although the primary function of contraceptives is to prevent pregnancy, contraceptives are often used to suppress menstruation. Women take this oral contraceptive which suppresses their cycle and they menstruate when they stop taking it, every four to six months. The better known contraceptive pill (“the pill”) is used to stop ovulation and menstruation. The idea of menstrual control and suppression is important in the study of menstruation as this line of thought uses the medicalization of menstruation found in the dominant culture to support the extreme position of using medical technology to ‘cure’ the body of menstruation (Fingerson, 2006).



Considering the stigma related to menstruation in most cultures and the ambivalent or negative attitudes toward menstruation, the expectation is for women to have positive attitudes toward menstrual suppression (Johnston-Robledo, Barnack & Wares, 2006). However, Rose, Chrisler and Couture (2008), investigated American women’s attitudes toward menstrual suppression and the effect of priming attitudes toward menstruation on women’s willingness to suppress menstruation and discovered contradictory findings. The positive priming group completed a menstrual joy questionnaire (MJQ) before completing 3 additional menstruation questionnaires while the negative priming group completed the same battery with the MJQ being administered after the 3 additional menstruation questionnaires. The majority of the sample (89%) indicated that they heard of menstrual suppression and supported women’s right to suppress menstruation however, on a 7-point scale, majority of

the women (32%) reported that they were “unwilling” to suppress their own menstrual cycles. It was further found that participants in the positive group and participants in the negative group were similarly hesitant to suppress menstruation (Rose et al., 2008).

While the perceptions held by girls regarding menstruation and menarche is important, another important aspect is related to factors that inform the way these perceptions are constructed.

2.1.5. Factors informing perceptions. This section examines societal and intra – psychic factors which impact on the perceptions of menstruation for young women. The literature focuses on sources of information, appropriateness of knowledge, relationships with parents and the perceptions of those who educate young women about menstruation.

Rembeck et al., (2006) reported a correlation between the degree of openness and the source of information for young girls regarding menstruation and sexuality. In other words, these authors concluded that the greater the degree of openness is correlated with being able to talk about menstruation and sex. Another study by Demirbağ and Güngörmüş (2011), revealed that 70.3% of their female sample of Turkish students did not have appropriate knowledge about menstruation, and that the knowledge they had was inadequate for healthy behaviour during menstruation. In addition it was found that the issue of menstruation is a taboo resulting in the assumption that negative perceptions are embedded within discourses prevalent in their socio-cultural context (Demirbağ & Güngörmüş, 2011). A study conducted in rural Kenya also found that discussion about menstruation was taboo (McMahon et al., 2011). Aflaq and Jami (2012) explored how differences along the sources of information regarding menstruation influenced girls’ attitudes as well as experiences related to menstruation. The study found that girls who get information from their mothers have a more

positive attitude towards menstruation as well as more positive experiences related to menstruation (Aflaq & Jami, 2012).

According to Flaake (2005) focusing solely on social processes and performances when analysing perception of gender and maturation is inadequate due to the exclusion of the intrapsychic effects and sources of these processes. Flaake (2005) attempts filling this gap by focusing on the bodily experiences of girls and young women in adolescence and deals with facets of processes through which bodily perceptions and experiences are formed in the interplay of inner and outer conditions. The study presents the empirical findings of interviews with girls aged 13-19 years, as well as with their mothers, fathers, or stepfathers. The data was psychoanalytically interpreted. The focus of this study is predominantly on familial interactions connected with the bodily changes during puberty and sexuality, and the dynamics and messages which are contained in this interaction (Flaake, 2005).

Psychoanalytic theory emphasises the importance of the relationship between the child and primary caregiver. This relationship is seen as the blueprint of all relationships later in life. It also considered the most important factor for the growth (or lack thereof) of the child (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2008). The study therefore focuses on the father-daughter relationship and the mother-daughter relationship.

The daughter's body is more often subject to a critical rather than a confirming maternal gaze. This is psychoanalytically accounted for the link the mother makes to the life of her daughter: whether the daughter is subjected to the same limitations or allowed more freedom, and whether the mother can give the daughter the inner permission to have a more fulfilling relationship to her body and sexuality than she herself had been able to experience (Flaake, 2005). Results from the interviews demonstrate that the mothers generally had never had a positive reaction to their menarche from their own mothers. The way they handled their daughter's first menstruation was strikingly similar, even though they had the desire to handle

the situation better. The mothers confirmed that the conversation informing their daughters about menstruation centred round the use of sanitary pads and tampons (Flaake, 2005).

This finding is consistent with McMahon et al (2011) who found that mothers and teachers also feel discomfort when discussing menstruation. According to a teacher, menstruation is a topic firmly linked to the topic of sex and sex is only discussed behind closed doors among adults. Demirbağ and Güngörmüş (2011) also found that the combination of culture and Islamic rule in Turkey, prevented the flow of accurate and sufficient information about puberty hygiene as discussing sex education and related issues are restricted via school and mass media. Women received their knowledge of menstruation mainly from their mothers, school teachers, school nurses and friends. But due to these restrictions there was still a lack of sufficient information resulting in some varying perceptions about menstruation and menstrual hygiene among young girls in this country (Demirbağ & Güngörmüş, 2011).

The above section highlights the importance of including both societal and intra-psychic factors in understanding the constructions that contribute to the perceptions of menstruation. Having reviewed the international literature, I will now review the South African literature as this is the context in which the study is based.

2.1.6 South African literature. A South African study conducted by Cronje and Kritzinger (1991), documented the attitude towards and management of menstruation in Afrikaans speaking university students. The study found that women who experienced more severe symptoms during menstruation were more likely not to like menstruating at all. The majority of the women who experienced severe symptoms during menstruation did not seek medical care for the following reasons: the fear of exposing themselves, lack of knowledge of the availability of effective medication to manage these symptoms and for religious and cultural beliefs. All views reported in this study were not negative. Women who experienced

less severe symptoms appeared to be more accepting of menstruation. While the process of acceptance may not have been easy, it was linked to the idea that menstruation is a privilege as it enables child bearing. This notion draws on religious discourses in describing it as part of God's will for women's lives (Cronje & Kritzinger, 1991). The ability to bear children is perceived as blessings for women and consequently, infertility could be construed as a punishment for women.

The above study revealed that perceptions of menstruation within this context was primarily negative and influenced by various religious institutions and social structures. One of the social structures that is instrumental in influencing the constructions of femininity is the media, which will be examined in the ensuing section.

2.2 Media construction of femininities

The mass media acts as one of the agents responsible for the construction of meaning through language and thus contributes towards perpetuating power structures by reproducing identities which lie at the core of existing social relationships (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). The mass media is seen as the single biggest purveyor of 'ideal beauty' through promoting an unrealistic and artificial image of female beauty and femininity that is impossible for the majority of females to achieve (Bell & Dittmar, 2011).

Advertising through media is pervasive and plays a key role in assisting individuals in understanding themselves and how they function in society (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). The social constructs and discursive ideologies are sometimes very 'natural seeming'. Individuals may draw on these very discourses and in doing so perpetuate and maintain these negative prevailing discourses. Advertising through media gives products a social and personal dimension through which individual's aspirations and needs can be realised (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). A study by Zimmerman and Dahlberg

(2008) measured young women's attitudes towards advertising in a sexually objectified manner. The results of the study found that although the participants agreed that the advertisement they were shown was highly sexualised, they did not think it was offensive, extremely irritating or unethical. Even though the advertisement contained high levels of sexual objectification towards women, the participants still found it to be a good, interesting advertisement which was culturally acceptable (Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). The results of this study show how certain ideologies are deeply entrenched and can be natural seeming, thus obscuring the underlying ideological discourses that continue to be oppressive towards women. The social messages are well camouflaged

Lemish (2003) approached studying the media influence on the construction and portrayals of femininities in a very unique way by focussing on a British, female pop group "The Spice Girls". Through music, print and images, the Spice Girls construct a particular idea of femininity, representing models for adoration, inspiring young girls' fantasies, providing legitimisation for various modes of rites of passage into the world of femininity (Lemish, 2003). Lemish (2003) discusses how the five "Spices" suggest five different personality types and five different definitions of femininity. "Baby Spice" is the childish and cute one who often sucks a lollipop and presents a smiling baby face to the camera. "Ginger Spice" is the sexy exhibitionist who wears corsets and has a provocative stare toward the camera. "Scary Spice" is wild and spontaneous portraying an image of the independent, outspoken 'rule-breaker' who is capable of doing whatever is on her mind. "Sporty Spice" represents the 'girl next door' with a genuine interest in sport and fitness. Finally, "Posh Spice" is the elegant and sophisticated 'snob' who conveys a remote coldness, heightened by stories of her aristocratic background (Lemish, 2003). This study depicts the way in which different femininities are constructed and also how various forms of media perpetuate 'acceptable' versions of femininity that young girls may find appealing.

A study conducted by Cann (2012) sought to identify the ways in which femininity and feminine gender roles are constructed within teen magazine advertisements through a semiotic analysis of the adverts themselves. The study found that advertisements marketing different products aimed at teenage girls have the common factor of re(production) of traditional femininity. It is argued that masculine adolescence is defined by independence and autonomy from the family structure while female adolescence is defined as the ability to create close and lasting personal relationships (Cann, 2012). It appears that when advertisements aimed at women are not reinforcing more traditional gender roles, then women are portrayed as victims or sex objects (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008; D'Enbeau, 2011). This shows that when women are portrayed from traditional gender roles, the ideas of women being submissive and nurturing are perpetuated. However, when women are portrayed from a more contemporary perception, they are objectified.

It was identified by Bell and Dittmar (2011) that media plays an important role in girls' perceptions of their bodies and what their perception of the 'ideal' body is. Irrespective of the type of media, and level of exposure, media consumption predicts long term dissatisfaction with the body and its appearance (Bell & Dittmar, 2011). This discussion shows the influential role media plays in constructing perceptions, whether knowingly or unknowingly, and in doing so, shows how media reinforces social control over women's minds and bodies.

It is clear that media plays a great role in influencing the construction of femininities and the ways in which women perceive and react to certain situations and issues. It is important however, to zoom in to specific types of media and specific issues to elicit a better understanding as to how this occurs. The following section will look specifically at menstrual product advertising.

2.2.1 Constructing menstruation in menstrual product advertising. The stigma of menstruation is conveyed to us on a daily basis through a variety of sociocultural mediums (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). For example; Femcare is an industry that profits from the commodification of menstruation and women's bodies and includes menstrual product manufacturers, medical and pharmaceutical companies and advertising firms (Docherty, 2010). It is also an industry that reinforces the stigma of menstruation through various mediums. Advertisements for menstrual products (often referred to as feminine hygiene products) stress their ability to hide menstrual blood to the point where the blood itself is erased in favour of a mysterious blue liquid. In these advertisements, the actual mechanics of menstruation are not addressed, not allowing men and children to understand exactly what menstrual products do (Guthrie, 2007). Kissling (2006) identifies the Femcare industry as an important one to study as these corporations contribute to and profit from, the construction of women as other.

Although the Femcare industries distribute products that assist menstruation management, they are criticised for their underlying ideological agendas. Femcare profits on reinforcing the idea that menstrual blood is dirty and needs to be concealed, regulated and sterilised. Society has treated menstruation as a threat to the modern body, and Femcare has reacted by selling products that cover up the stain (Docherty, 2010). By reinforcing the idea that menstruation needs to be concealed, Kissling (2006) argues that the Femcare industry implies a literal stain on one's femininity when failing to conceal leaks of menstrual blood. Femcare corporations therefore contribute to and profit from the construction and positioning of women as 'other' (Kissling, 2006).

In the study done by Fingerson (2006), many boys and girls said that they learned about menstruation and menstrual products from advertisements they see on television and in magazines. One of the participants, a teenage boy, said that from magazines, he learned that

there are different kinds of pads and tampons and that some women take pills to manipulate menstruation. Another teenage boy described how he learnt about absorbency of pads from television commercial (Fingerson, 2006). He goes on to say “it’s just funny how they depict it in commercials” (Fingerson, 2006, p. 54). As is to be expected, girls also learned about menstruation and menstrual products through advertisements. The teenage girls said that advertisements for menstrual products are ‘everywhere’ on television and in magazines. One girl in particular said that she learned about menstruation through magazine advertisements before her mother informed her about it and what she had learned scared her (Fingerson, 2006).

Barak-Brandes (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with Israeli women examining how they interpret images of women and femininity in television commercials. Results show that a third of the women interviewed mentioned female hygiene products (pads, panty liners and tampons), without it being mentioned by the interviewer and expressed harsh criticisms to the advertising of these products. Women found it hard to contend with the fact that commercials dealt with menstruation so openly. They expressed concern that it might be detrimental to women by causing other members of society to lose respect for them (Barak-Brandes, 2011).

Simes and Berg (2001) analysed contemporary menstrual product advertisements dating from 1985 to the time of the study. Advertisements were collected from women’s magazines and also from those aimed at adolescent girls. Simes and Berg (2001) identified discourses that emerged from the collected advertisements which they assumed would be themes that are internalised by girls reading these advertisements based on their cultural values. Similar to perceptions of menstruation as identified by young girls in other studies (eg. Burrows & Johnson, 2005; Rembeck et al., 2006; Kumar & Kundan, 2011; McMahon et al., 2011) themes of silence, shame and embarrassment emerged from the advertisements, as well as freshness, security and confidence (Simes & Berg, 2001). The advertisements studied by

Simes and Berg (2001) found very little biological or physiological information about menstruation.

Merskin (1999) conducted a similar study in order to answer the question “do advertisements that target girls perpetuate or dispel myths and taboos associated with menstruation” (p. 941). Themes of secrecy were once again explored through the texts of certain advertisements along with fear and uncertainty (Merskin, 1999). However, Merskin (1999) also found that more recent advertisements focused less on discourses such as shame and fear than older advertisements, but continued to warn against a hygiene crisis if the correct products were not used. Erchull, Chrisler, Gorman and Johnston-Robledo (2002) conducted a study using content analysis on 28 educational booklets. Results show that most of the booklets focused solely on menstruation and menstrual hygiene. The majority of the booklets were neutral in their overall tone and few positive aspects were mentioned. The positive aspects were related to ‘growing up’ and ‘becoming a woman’ (Erchull et al., 2002). Raftos et al (1998 as cited in Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013) conducted a content analysis of advertisements in Australian magazines. It was concluded that a powerful message was being sent to readers that leaks of menstrual blood taint women’s femininity because, through the proper choice of products, women *should* have kept the evidence of her menstruation out of sight.

Guthrie (2007) discusses the ways in which magazines and body guides portray information on menstruation and menstrual products. A body guide can be defined as “an instructional manual written by adults for young girls that explains basic body anatomy, body maintenance and answers general questions about puberty” (Guthrie, 2007, p. 23). Both advertisements and body guides stress that disposable products offer freedom of movement and the protection from and concealment of menstrual blood. When analysing the content of advertisements in some teenage magazines, Guthrie (2007) found that no specific mention of menstrual blood is used nor does the advertisement show the way in which the product is

used. Instead it explains the implied effect of using the product. The product is therefore not being marketed for its use, it is being marketed for the effect of the product by playing on the social constructions of menstruation. Guthrie (2007) further found that advertisements and body guides tend to use euphemisms by using words such as ‘leaks’ or ‘liquid’ without implicitly mentioning what they are referring to.

As advertisements do not explicitly mention the purpose of their products because the need for concealment extends to the advertisements themselves, they invent and emphasise other advantages the right menstrual product can offer (Guthrie, 2007). For example, some advertisements depict menstruating women as functioning at an optimal level with no complaints, implying that girls and women who do experience discomfort may believe that their reactions are unusual (Guthrie, 2007). Advertisements often pathologise menstruation; they have constructed a stereotype of menstruating women, and of premenstrual women as violent, irrational, emotionally labile, out-of-control, and physically or mentally ill (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013).

McCartney (2012), discussed the selling of certain feminine hygiene products and the ways in which these products were marketed in terms of the use of the word ‘vagina’. In Australia, Johnson and Johnson’s used this word in a commercial, and it attracted complaints and criticism from viewers. The complaints were dismissed saying that ‘vagina’ is the correct anatomical word and not offensive (McCartney, 2012). If the use of a biologically correct word, relating to a biological organ or body part, attracts complaints and criticism, it is important to understand the underlying factors that contribute to such negative perceptions of a regular phenomenon. Regardless of whether ‘vagina’ as a word is used or not, there should be no shame attached to having a vagina. Yet the message of advertisers seems to infer that there is (McCartney, 2012).

The media is a communication medium that plays a large part in constructing perceptions of menstruation. Most of the attitudes conveyed by the media are negative, even though they may be subtly perceived. Advertisements are cultural artifacts that play an important role in the social construction of meaning (Merskin, 1999). Advertisements for menstrual products have contributed to the communication taboo of menstruation by emphasising secrecy, avoidance of embarrassment, and promoting freshness to deal with the hygiene crisis (Johston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013).

It is evident that media plays an influential role in the constructions of various realities. The above review of literature demonstrates that menstruation is constructed personally and in the media in terms of embarrassment, shame, fear, secrecy and concealment. These constructions seem to influence the attitudes that women hold towards their bodies and are derogated, devalued and seen as secondary to male bodies. It is within this context that women themselves collude to uphold the hegemonic ideologies of patriarchy. While considering both the intra-psychic and societal factors as important processes, this study focuses on one societal mechanism which is the media. The media views are propagated for profits and masks a capitalist ideology. The precariousness of the media's role foregrounds the need to unpack the tacit assumptions about women's bodies. The framework that allows for this engagement is the social constructionist framework which will be discussed below. The next section will look at the theoretical framework used for this study to inform how these constructions are re(produced).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with interpreting the processes by which people come to describe, explain, and account for the world in which they live (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism points out that human experience and perception is

mediated historically, culturally and linguistically. Perceptions and experiences are therefore viewed as not a direct reflection of environmental conditions but rather as a specific reading of these conditions, implying that there is not 'knowledge' but rather 'knowledges' (Willig, 2001). Social constructionism has its foundation in any one or more of the following key assumptions: a critical stance to taken for granted knowledge, historical and cultural specificity, knowledge is sustained by social processes and, knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 2003).

By taking a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, social constructionism asserts the assumption that the nature of the world can be revealed by observation, and that what exists is what we perceive to exist. Categories with which we comprehend the world do not necessarily reflect real divisions. For example, social constructionism bids us to critically question whether the categories 'man' and 'woman' are simple reflections of naturally occurring, distinct types of human beings (Burr, 1995).

Secondly, advocates of social constructionism believe that the terms in which the world is understood are products of historically situated interchanges among people (Gergen, 1985).

The cultural underpinnings of social constructionism simply asserts that a key task is to focus on the world through our ordinary understanding, as we live in it, rather than the world as abstracted and interpreted by science (Hosking & Morley, 2004). Social constructionists also believe that knowledge is sustained by social process; people construct knowledge between themselves, through daily interactions in the course of social life. Social interaction, and language particularly is therefore of great interest to social constructionists (Burr, 2003). It is through language that the perceptions and understanding of individual experience are expressed, and through these communicative relations that new orders of meaning are generated (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). Finally, these negotiated understandings could take a wide variety of forms and therefore numerous possible social constructions of the world may

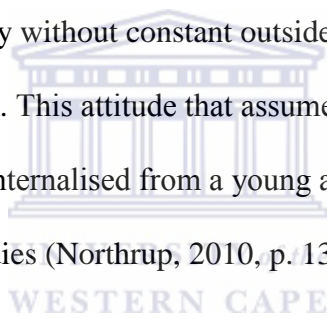
be presented. The various constructions of the world therefore sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others (Burr, 2003).

2.4.1 Macro social constructionism. Macro social constructionism, based largely on the work of Foucault, acknowledges the constructive power of language, but sees this as being derived from social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices. The concept of power is therefore a vital feature of macro social constructionism (Burr, 2003).

Foucault asserts that discipline produces docile bodies; bodies that are skilled and disciplined produced by particular figures of time, space and movement and are therefore able to exercise power within particular discourses (Giles, 2005). Bartky (1990 as cited in Giles, 2005) describes three categories of practices which exist and reproduce conventionally feminine docile bodies: those that aim to produce a body produced of a certain size/configuration; a body of specific gestures, postures and movements; and practices directed at the display of the body as an ornamented surface. Practices developed for the management of menstruation can be viewed as falling in the second category (Giles, 2005).

Foucault (1982, p. 777), discusses the way in which individuals are objectified through 'dividing practices'. The individual is either divided inside himself or divided by others. Foucault (1977) concept of bio-power plays a significant role in macro social constructionism and is an important consideration to be made throughout this study. Bio-power differs from violence which could physically affect the body; it involves making an individual act in a way they would not otherwise act, therefore restricting or altering someone's free will. Bio-power is therefore present in human relationships and penetrates throughout society (Foucault, 1977). This concept significantly speaks to body alteration practices women partake in to be more accepted in society as well as while menstruating.

2.4.2 The social construction of menstruation. The various discourses surrounding menstruation could be accounted for through medicalisation. Medicalisation refers to the social construction of medical knowledge (Conrad & Barker, 2010). Medicalisation refers to a process whereby non - medical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, most commonly in terms of illness or disorders (Conrad, 1992). Everyday human experiences and behaviours have ‘symptoms’ that need to be ‘treated’. Through this process of medicalisation, women’s bodies are placed in the hands of ‘expert’ doctors, who are usually male, rather than valuing women’s own knowledge and care of their bodies. This process takes power away from women (Fingerson, 2006), on both a psychological and physical level. The so-called experts in our society challenge and subordinate our own judgement and in which our ability to stay healthy without constant outside approval is not encouraged or even recognised (Northrup, 2010). This attitude that assumes our bodies are “accidents waiting to happen” appear to be internalised from a young age and sets the stage for women’s future relationships with their bodies (Northrup, 2010, p. 13).



Menstruation has routinely been medicalised (Conrad & Barker, 2010). As described, menstruation is often seen as a ‘hygiene crises’ in need of being ‘managed’ (Schooler et al., 2005). The medicalisation of menstruation generally means that menstruation is defined as an illness with physiological and psychological symptoms (Fingerson, 2006). The physiological symptoms (lower abdominal pain, backache) and psychological symptoms (mood changes, fatigue) associated with menstruation, known as premenstrual syndrome (PMS), has even been a topic of debate regarding whether it should be classified in a certain disease category (Rodin, 1992). This medicalisation stems in part from our cultural history because menstruation was understood as an illness, a curse, and an overall deviation from a ‘normal’ bodily state (Fingerson, 2006).

McMahon et al (2011) discusses how the family dynamics and relationships change with the onset of puberty. When a Luo girl reached menarche, and with each menstruating cycle thereafter, she was not permitted to lay or sit on her mother's bed, nor could she sleep in her parents' house. The menstruating girl would be sent to live with her grandmother. If the girl's father had died, it was implied that the mother was no longer sexually active, only then was the girl permitted to continue living in her parental home (McMahon et al., 2011).

2.4.3 Foucault and surveillance of the human body.

According to Foucault (1979 as cited in Murphy & Jackson, 2011), bodies are knowable in the same way that they are visible, and consequently bodies are docile to the social meanings available around those ways in which those bodies can be known. This leads us to an important concept introduced by Foucault (in conjunction with medicalisation) that impact the current study; the clinical gaze. For Foucault (1977) the clinical gaze assumed power with the rise of biomedical understandings of health positioning the body as distinct from the rest of the person.

Research conducted on women has largely focused on body surveillance due to the societal expectations and pressures put on women to constantly look and act in an acceptable way. This is found across a wide spectrum of research areas including body surveillance regarding weight (Mercurio & Rima, 2011), pregnancy (Rubin & Steinberg, 2011) and negative psychological consequences (Crawford et al., 2009). As identified in literature, women appear to be more body conscious while menstruating for the fear of being stigmatised if 'caught' (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013).

Considering the tenets of social constructionism, the importance of power in macro social constructionism and the concept of self-surveillance, the construction of menstruation will be examined in order to determine the role it plays in exercising social control over women.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aims of this study are twofold: first to explore how university students' understand and perceive menstruation; second to understand how the portrayal of menstrual product advertisements in print media influences young women's perceptions of menstruation. This chapter presents a discussion on the methodological considerations in relation to the research design, participants, data collection method and procedure, data analysis and the ethical principles adhered to in the study. In addition, a reflection on validity and reflexivity will be discussed.

3.2 Methodological framework

This study adopted a qualitative approach in exploring the perceptions held by university students regarding menstruation and the advertising of menstrual products in print media. A qualitative methodology allows a deeper interpretation of phenomena based on the viewpoint of the participants involved in the study (Bowling, 2002). Qualitative research places importance on human experience and the meanings attributed to that experience. Qualitative research is interested in how people experience and perceive life events and what they do in order to cope with personal struggle and social inequalities (Willig, 2001). As with social constructionism, qualitative research acknowledges that there are multiple truths and highlights the importance of the social context that the individual is in (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985).

For most qualitative research the methodological framework is broadly situated within an interpretive framework which resulted in what Henning, Smit and Van Rensburg (2004, p. 19) refer to as the "interpretive turn". This term was used to incorporate both interpretivism and social constructionism as paradigms and signals the start to which language as discourse

became fundamental in the research process. At this stage, researchers were interested in and probing into views that the world is constructed, interpreted and experienced by people in their interactions with other people and in their macro and micro environments (Urin, Robinson, Tolley & McNeill, 2002). Therefore, understanding phenomena is not only concerned with it being objectively identifiable, but it is also concerned with the subjective meanings that people attach to them.

Like interpretivism, social constructionist methods are also qualitative, interpretive and concerned with meaning (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). While those working in an interpretivist framework focus on the subjective perceptions of groups, social constructionists are interested in how these perceptions are derived from larger discourses (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Social constructionists believe that we all possess multiple selves which are socially constituted within boundaries of culture, context and time (Raskin, 2002). Social constructionism approaches therefore view people's thoughts, feelings and experiences as products of systems of meanings that exist at a social rather than individual level, as opposed to the interpretive approaches which view the individual as the origin of their own thoughts, feelings and experiences (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

According to Burrows and Johnson (2005), qualitative research has started emerging in the area of menstruation which gives a more detailed picture of how experiences (or perceptions) are constructed. Given the nature of the topic, this study also implemented an exploratory design as it employed an open, flexible and inductive approach in attempting to uncover new insights into the phenomenon of menstruation (Durrheim, 2006).

3.3 Participants

Three focus group discussions were held comprising a total of 16 females, who are English, Afrikaans and Xhosa speaking university students between the ages of 18 and 23 years.

Focusing on this age group allowed for participants to better recall their experience of menarche, as well as provide a retrospective account of menstruation (Koff, Rierdan & Sheingold, 1982).

This sample was selected from the female population of registered students at a university in the Western Cape. The sample was chosen purposively as the participants fulfilled certain criteria (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) in order to best achieve the aims of the study. The only women excluded from the study were those who did not fit into the age group listed above. Of the 16 participants, 12 of the participants were undergraduate students between first and third year and 4 were postgraduate students completing their honour's degrees.

In terms of race, 4 of the participants identified themselves as ¹african, 2 identified themselves as white, 2 as indian and the remaining 8 identified themselves as coloured. One of the participants that identified herself as coloured also mentioned that she was from Turkish descent. With regard to religion, 5 participants identified themselves as Muslim and 11 of the participants identified themselves as Christian.

3.4 Data collection

A structured questionnaire was used to collect relevant demographic information. This questionnaire elicited biographical information such as age, education, race and religious affiliation (See Appendix 5). An interview schedule was designed as a guide to facilitate the group interview process but I was not limited to asking these questions (See Appendix 4).

The responses of the participants elicited new areas which were further explored in the focus group discussions.

¹ Statistics South Africa continues to classify people into population groups, since moving away from the past apartheid-based discrimination. This classification uses a population group-based classification system that is no longer based on a legal definition, but rather on self-classification (Statistics South Africa, 2011). The use of these population groups in no way displays my condoning reference made to race.

Initially it was intended that the data would be collected by means of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee, where the interviewer has a general plan but not a specific set of questions to follow rigorously (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The in-depth semi-structured format was kept however, focus groups were conducted instead of the individual interviews. This was decided during the recruitment process. Participants were approached in lectures and not many were keen on doing one-on-one interviews. In many cases, participants asked if they could bring a friend along to the interviews, in other cases prospective participants said they were not comfortable speaking about the topic alone. Participants were then approached to partake in focus group discussions. Perhaps this reluctance to participate in individual interviews speaks to the sensitive nature of the topic and it generally being perceived as taboo. By utilising the focus group discussion it allows the researcher to gain access to the inter-subjective experiences of the participants. By gaining access into inter-subjective experiences of the participants I was able to understand the differences and commonalities within the group (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Considering this, I had to be cognisant of the high-talkers and low-talkers within the group and had to find ways of engaging all the participants to express their opinions and ideas. The researcher's role is to facilitate discussion, listen for commonalities and differences and engaging the group to reflect on the extent to which their understanding is homogenous or diverse (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). I therefore also needed to be aware of the personal and interpersonal dynamics at work within the group.

Participants were given advertisements of menstrual products (Appendices 6 and 7) to examine and were asked questions relating to the feelings elicited in relation to the advertisements and their perceptions about menstruation through their interactions with these advertisements. Providing participants with a stimulus to respond to as a way of initiating

discussion can be very helpful as it enriches the discussion facilitating a richer understanding of prevailing discourses of menstruation rather than providing abstract questions (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Furthermore, “good facilitation skills works in a tensional relationship between ‘zooming in’ or ‘focusing’, to concentrate the group on an issue of interest to the researcher and ‘pulling back’ to look at what issues are most compelling to the group” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 306). Facilitating a group discussion requires skill that can balance between initiating and listening therefore, the use of a co-researcher can be very helpful. A co-researcher assisted with the facilitation of the discussions within the three focus groups. I utilised an audio recorder to record the discussions and the co-researcher assisted with the note-taking of the content and the process within the various group discussions. The average time of each of the focus groups were between 60 and 80 minutes. Before and after the discussions and while the audio recorder was switched off, the participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions or voice any concerns they may have had. The focus groups were conducted and transcribed in English to ensure that no value was lost through data translation.

Each focus group was between 50 and 80 minutes long. The focus groups were conducted and transcribed in English to ensure that no value is lost in the data through translation.

3.5 Procedures

Once approval was obtained from the Higher Degrees Committee at the University of the Western Cape the data collection process commenced. Students were accessed at the university. Notices displaying the inclusion criteria were placed on notice boards in various departments across the campus requesting participants to participate in the study. First, second and third year classes in various lecture halls were also approached with the permission of the relevant lecturers. The classes were informed of the study and given details to contact me, the researcher, should they be interested in participating in the study. It was

made clear that participation in the study was completely voluntary and confidentiality was assured. A diverse sample was chosen from the students volunteering to participate. Once participants were selected, they were given information sheets (Appendix 1) outlining the nature of the study ensuring that they were comfortable with the topic being addressed. Consent forms (Appendix 2) were explained and given to the participants who volunteered to participate in the study and were signed. The signed consent forms provided me with the approval to commence with the study. Permission to audio record the focus group discussions and to make use of the co-researcher in the discussions were also obtained as part of the consent form. Once all the focus group discussions were completed the recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions were kept on a password protected computer and only the researcher, co-researcher and project supervisor had access to the protected information. The next step was to analyse the data, interpret the findings and formulate the report.

3.6 Data analysis

Upon completion of the interviews and transcriptions, the data gathered was analysed using Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). FDA is concerned with language as well as the role language plays in the constitution of social and psychological life (Willig, 2008) It is also concerned with the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power (Willig, 2008). Dominant discourses privilege versions of social reality which legitimate power relations causing those discourse to be accepted as ‘common sense’ and then become natural seeming (Willig, 2008).

Willig (2008) identifies six stages to follow which allows the researcher to map some of the discursive resources used in a text. The subject positions they contain are identified, and the implications they have for subjectivity and practice are further explored.

Stage one: Discursive constructions. This stage is concerned with the ways in which discursive objects are constructed. The discursive object we focus on is dependent on our research question.

Stage two: Discourses. In this stage the focus moves to the differences between constructions. The aim here is to locate the various discursive constructions of the object within wider discourses. Utilising focus groups as the means of collecting data helped me in identifying and understanding the inter-subjective commonalities and differences within the groups.

Stage three: Action orientation. More attention is paid to the examination of the discursive contexts within which the different constructions of the object are being deployed. The focus of this stage allows the researcher to gain a clearer understanding of what the various constructions of the discursive object are capable of achieving within the text.

Stage four: Positionings. This refers to looking at the subject positions offered by the various constructions of the discursive object. This allows for positions in networks of meaning that speakers can take up as well as place others within.

Stage five: Practice. This stage requires a systematic exploration of how discursive constructions and subject positions open up and/or close down opportunities for action.

Stage six: Subjectivity. This stage explores the relationship and interaction between discourse and subjectivity. Once having asked questions about what can be said and done from within different discourses in stage five, the concern is now with what can be felt, thought and experienced from within various subject positions.

When applying these stages to this study, it will make sense to first look at how 'menstruation' is constructed through language. The second stage will allow us to locate the

negative or positive construction within wider discourses surrounding menstruation. The attention will then be turned to what influences these perceptions to understand what these discourses are capable of achieving. Once this has been explored, the ways in which these discourses can either oppress or liberate individuals can be identified.

3.7 Reflexivity

When conducting qualitative research it is important to be mindful of how one's biases, assumptions, experiences, values and attitudes can influence the research process whether it be during data collection or the analysis phase (Howitt, 2010). As a qualitative researcher it is imperative to consider one's "culture, age, gender, class, social status, education, family, political praxis, language and values" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 98).

Reflexivity is often understood as involving an on-going self-awareness during the research process as to aid in making the practice and construction of knowledge visible within the research in order to produce more accurate and reliable analyses of our research (Pillow, 2003).

As the researcher, I shared similarities and differences with the participants. As a female and having female participants I was constantly aware of the impact this could have on the research process. Identifying myself as a Muslim and coloured woman, I acknowledge that I am located within a socio-cultural and religious context that has been identified as one within which women are subjugated and socialised to subscribe to the master narrative of nurturers and carers. I found myself questioning the notions of gender prescriptions that dictate to women what they should and should not do, what they should think and should not think, and how they should behave. I was constantly aware of how this could have impacted on the way in which participants would respond to me throughout the focus group discussions.

Acknowledging my views, feelings and perceptions and being able to distinguish my views

from those of the participants was always at the forefront of my mind. I made a conscious effort to listen to, record and report the participant's views as accurately as possible. Being assisted by a co-researcher whose main function was to record (i.e note-taking) the content and process of the group discussions and also utilising an audio-recorder for the group discussions aided in capturing the participants views as accurately as possible. A detailed reflection of the study will be provided in the concluding chapter.

3.8 Trustworthiness and credibility

The terms of reliability and validity are generally associated with a positivist stance and qualitative research has subsequently been critiqued for not adopting sound measures of reliability and validity (Terre Blanch et al., 2006). Qualitative research is often based on a very different set of assumptions and do not disregard the terms of reliability and validity but do strive to ensure trustworthiness, rigour and quality (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Seale, 1999). This can be achieved in various ways; ensuring that the co-created knowledge between the researcher and the participants is an accurate representation of the participant's experience, the researcher engaging in a process of self-reflexivity, the researcher making an effort to equalise the power relations between the themselves and the participants (Boje, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced four concepts of trustworthiness which comprises of four aspects namely; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The concepts were further revised by Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2002), substituting these terms with the parallel concept of trustworthiness. These terms and their parallel concepts are discussed below displaying how it was applied to the study to achieve validity.

The credibility (corresponding to internal validity) of this study was achieved through prolonged engagement with the participants as the focus groups were in-depth. Morrow (2005) suggests that the use of debriefers and peer reviews can further achieve credibility. In

all focus groups, a co-facilitator assisted with note taking to allow the researcher to fully engage with the participants. The same co-researcher was used for peer review in identifying discourses. The co-researcher was also completing her Masters in Research Psychology and co-incidentally conducting research in the same area of study. The participants were frequently provided with opportunities and time to ask questions about anything they may have had concerns about. The project supervisor also confirmed that discourses were sufficiently identified and corresponded to the data collected. This was achieved by revisiting the transcriptions and selected quotes to identify the discourses that were prevalent in the findings and together use these to discuss the impact of these on the current study.

Transferability (corresponding to generalisability) refers to the extent to which the results of the study can be generalised back to the population from which it originally derived from (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse et al., 2002). This is generally achieved by cross-referencing other data sources with the findings of the study, or by directing the study by stringent theories and models. Generalisability was not one of the main aims of this study. However, in order to triangulate the data collected with the existing theory, the literature review was continuously reviewed and not done in silo to the research process. As the data emerged it was continuously triangulated to the existing body of knowledge and where gaps were identified in the literature review it was updated and reviewed accordingly.

Dependability (corresponding to reliability) and confirmability (corresponding to objectivity) was accomplished through keeping an audit trail (Morrow, 2005). The audit trail consists of record, documents and all activities used for this project that contributed to its progression. This includes consent forms, transcriptions and documents drawn up for coding of the themes and discourses identified and the formulation of the discussion of the findings. The audit trail has been examined by the project supervisor and reviewed by the co-researcher who assisted in conducting the focus groups. As qualitative research aims to study the subjective

experience of the participants, objectivity was not a required and the audit trail was used as a means of keeping track of the research process.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The University of the Western Cape predetermined a strict code of ethics which was firmly upheld throughout the process of this study. Clearance was obtained from the ethics committee before the data collection process commenced. Participants were clearly informed about all aspects of the research topic. This ensured the complete awareness of their role in the project, and they were also aware that participation was completely at their own discretion. Once all of the details of the project were clearly explained and understood the participants signed an informed consent form. Only once this form was signed and participants felt comfortable with the proposed procedures did the data collection process commence. Participants were also required to sign a focus group binding form (Appendix 3). It was explained that what was said by other participants is valuable information that should not be spoken about outside of the focus group discussions, especially with people who were not part of the focus groups. The rights to anonymity and confidentiality were clearly explained to all the participants and were entirely respected. This was done through assigning a number or different name to each participant keeping all personal details confidential. All the data that was collected was stored in a safe secure location, where only certain individuals were allowed access. Participants were also informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point if they felt it was necessary with no explanations required. Participants were informed that a counsellor would be made available if they felt that they needed to have access to one due to any sensitivity or distress surrounding the discussions in the focus groups. None of the participants requested access to the counsellor.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Aligned to social constructionism, the present study employed a Foucauldian discourse analysis as espoused by Willig (2008) in order to identify the role discourse plays in wider social processes of legitimation and power (i.e. social control over women). This chapter discusses the discourses that women drew on to explicate their perceptions of menstruation and menstrual product advertisements. Drawing on the guidelines of Foucauldian discourse analysis as described by Willig (2008), I will also explore the way women are positioned within these discourses.

In analysing the data, I was first concerned with identifying the ways in which menstruation is discursively constructed. The main themes that emerged from this were identified. Once identified, these themes were located in wider discourses in order to discern the commonalities and differences within the discourses. As illustrated in the analysis, the action orientation of the discourses is examined. This is done by illustrating how these discourses are deployed and used to exercise social control over women and their bodies in their natural form. This also allows for way in which women position themselves in relation to men to be examined in detail further illustrating how social control mechanisms are internalised and perpetuated.

The analysis of discourses is presented in two parts. The first aim explores the dominant discourses that women draw on to construct their understandings of menstruation. There are four dominant discourses that the participants drew on namely: menstruation as a hygiene concern, religious discourse, shame, embarrassment and concealment and its influence on self-surveillance.

The second part of the analysis explores the hegemonic discourses in menstrual product advertisements. These discourses are: menstruation as a hygiene crisis, secrecy, love your body or not, the ideal women and the body as a commodity. Some of these discourses are the

same as those drawn on in the first section. This overlap reflects the role the media plays in maintaining, perpetuating and (re)producing these dominant discourses. This discussion will be presented in the concluding section of the thesis.

Finally, once all the discourses are presented and discussed, I will look at the subject positionings. The focus here will be to identify and discuss some of the ways the women in this study positioned themselves in relation to men and the influence and contribution this has to the social control of women and their bodies.

4.1 Constructions of menstruation

Discourses reflecting a concern for hygiene, religious influences, constructions that position women's bodies as deficient, as well as medical discourses are discussed in this section.

4.1.1 Menstruation as a hygiene concern

As suggested by literature as well as the views provided by the participants in this study, menstruation is viewed as something that is dirty and in need of management. The participants of this study expressed the view of menstruation as dirty in the following ways:

“Cause its gross! All this blood and you have to work with it and you have to keep yourself clean otherwise you're going to have a stench”(Focus group 2, participant 1)

“you kind of feel dirty and you feel that something down there is not the way its supposed to be”(Focus group 3, participant 3).

“With everybody, it's like, why are you looking at me, I'm dirty”(Focus group 1, participant 4)

The participants express the ways in which they feel unclean while menstruating. The discussions of feeling unclean centred around not being at home while menstruating, making it difficult to manage and causing physical feelings of discomfort. In most cultures, menstruation is viewed as dirty, unpleasant, messy and portrayed as a nuisance (Fingerson,

2005). This depicts one of the many ways that women's bodies are construed in a way that requires it to be disciplined and controlled. Women are socialised to think that their bodies are dirty requiring constant surveillance to keep fresh and clean (Northrup, 2010). Women therefore aspire to discipline their bodies, internalising social control mechanisms.

While literature has looked at certain aspects of hygiene in menstruation research, not much attention has been paid to feelings of 'uncleanliness'. Research has largely focused on hygiene practices and the way media portrays menstruation as a hygiene 'crisis'. It has however, been suggested that many women equate menstruation with being unclean and impure due to cultural and religious beliefs (Aflaq & Jami, 2012). For example, among Orthodox Jews, menstruating women are viewed as spiritually unclean. This belief restricts a Jewish woman who is menstruating from having any physical contact with her husband until her menstrual cycle has ended and she has cleansed herself through ritual bathing known as *mikvah* (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000).

4.1.2 Religious discourses

Participants drew on religious discourses to demonstrate their understandings of menstruation. These religious discourses reflect opposing views. For some participants it was constructed in a positive way whereas for other participants it was constructed in a negative way. One participant was very direct in portraying this positive view.

"I don't think it is gross because I went on a course it's called Daughters are Diamonds it's some Islamic course from the radio 786. Basically they taught us it was very long time ago I was in primary school and I still remember it today. Your menstrual blood is the most purest blood that ever comes out of you so you shouldn't see it as dirt, you should actually see it as a blessing that comes from Allah and that's what we were taught how to appreciate and how to like you can really see the beauty of your menstruation because no other let's say animal in this world gets menstruation they just have sex and have babies whereas our menstrual cycle actually cleans our womb and things like that so we can live longer than them because they don't

have that cleaning cycle in them like we have” (Focus group 3, participant 2).

The participant draws on her religious teachings and sees menstruation as a blessing from God. This is consistent with a South African study conducted by Cronje and Kritzinger (1991) who found that women also described menstruation as a privilege in that it enabled child bearing. Women are socialised through many religions to understand that child bearing is a gift and God’s will for all women’s lives (Cronje & Kritzinger, 1991). Other participant’s shared this view, although it did not always necessarily make direct reference to their religions. One participant displayed this while describing a medical condition she has regarding her menstruation.

“When I went to the doctor and they told me that I have this certain condition, that’s when I became worried, so now I have my period, even if it’s artificially sort of like gotten, I mean, it’s still that I’m getting it, so now it’s more of a blessing...So for me it’s like now my periods come, even with the pain and all that junk, it’s sort of like a blessing now” (Focus group 1, participant 3)

Although this quote does not directly refer to the participant’s religion, it draws on religious discourse in describing menstruation as a blessing. The participant goes on to say that she sees her menstruation as a blessing now because she still has a chance to have children one day, reiterating the findings of Cronje & Kritzinger (1991). While drawing on religious discourses however, not all participants displayed a positive view of menstruation.

“If you had to ask me when I’m on my period then my demeanor about it would have different I would have been very against it. I hate I don’t want it, it’s a sin it’s leave me alone, it’s the devil then I would have been like that” (Focus group 3, participant 4).

Another participant said:

“its like added punishment because not only do you bleed, then you still get pimples...pain, pimples, heightened libido, what else, don’t torture me to the max” (Focus group 3, participant 3)

Discourses of menstruation being seen as a sin, a punishment or a curse has been found in many studies on cultural groups. A study conducted on the Akan people of Ghana (Agyekum, 2002) sees menstruation as a barrier to conception and thus to procreation. Procreation is seen as an important aspect in this culture, and because menstruation is seen as a barrier to procreation it is considered a curse. Menstruation here is perceived as a curse for two reasons; because it is a barrier from intercourse to allow for procreation, and it is also seen as a failed attempt at procreation as menstruation is an indication of a woman not being pregnant (Agyekum, 2002).

4.1.3 Fear: Shame, embarrassment and concealment

The common thread running through all the focus groups highlighted discourses of shame, embarrassment and concealment of menstruation. What became apparent in these discussions was how fear underpinned all of these discourses. These discourses are also prominent in existing literature. A study conducted by Burrows and Johnson (2005) illustrated that girls construct their accounts of menstruation as embarrassing, shameful and something to be hidden. McMahon et al (2011) found that these feelings were linked to fear, usually around menstruating at school or in a public area as the girls feared being looked at 'differently' by peers. This fear was also illustrated by many participants across the focus groups.

“I was going to say like, in some instances it's attached with shame, because like, you are on your period, it's, you can't help it but then like you said, if you spill, people are looking at you, and like, what the hell is wrong with her, as if that's your fault” (Focus group 2, participant 4)

The fear of spilling is also closely related to concealment. As described by one of the participant's, messing on oneself makes menstruation hard to hide.

“Like even if you have say for example white on and you make a doodoo spot you make your own doodoo spot at that spot. You can still say it's dirt, it's mud, but with red you can't wish that away everyone is going to know and everyone will be like she didn't protect

herself and stupid for her because she wore white.”(Focus group 3, participant 3)

The need to keep menstruation a secret seems to be associated with what other people think. It appears that the participants keep menstruation hidden to not be treated differently by others. This is supported by Johnston-Robledo (2013) in describing menstruation as a hidden stigma. Women go through a great deal to keep this stigma hidden in order to avoid being perceived differently (Kowalski & Chapple, 2000). One participant expresses that she conceals her menstruation mostly from her father.

“...just my dad...because to him he still believes I’m small...when I even mention the word period then it’s like malfunction really...like he short circuits”(Focus group 1, participant 6)

Another participant expresses the same need for concealment of her menstruation from her brother.

“But I mean when I have my periods then it is like this kind of thing...then I like close the door most of the time no one must know. My brother, I don’t feel like even going close to my brother. It’s just you don’t want them to know it has to be kept under wraps...”(Focus group 1, participant 3)

Most of the participants agreed that menstruation should be kept secret from men but felt comfortable discussing it with women.

“If there was a guy here I would be more conscious of the way I speak...it’s intimate details that I don’t want him to know about me whereas we all females and we all experience it, so obviously we have a collective understanding what it happening”(Focus group 3, participant 3)

This finding is supported by Jackson and Falmagne (2013) who found that the women in her sample recalled maintaining great fear and anxiety that their menstrual status would be discovered if they failed to manage and conceal it properly, especially from boys and men. Foucault describes the body as a site of control, creating docile bodies, which are also

gendered bodies (Repta & Hurd Clarke, 2011). Classic patriarchal ideology unites these discourses construing women's bodies as docile bodies on which power of men is inscribed, creating women as objects rather than actors (Duits & van Zoonen, 2006).

What is evident throughout these discourses is that they are all linked to feelings of fear. The fear of being embarrassed by being 'caught' menstruating, the fear of being stigmatised for menstruating and the fear of not concealing menstruation well enough. These fears stem from an acculturation of women internalising being less valuable/valued than men. The fear felt by these women is perpetuated by internalising the notion that they need to strive to be an acceptable feminine being.

As suggested by de Beauvoir (2009) boys are socialised into linking their development to power and pleasure while girls are given extra caution about menstruation tainting their femininity, but it is still to be celebrated with motherhood and reproduction being signalled as the purpose of menstruation. Ironically, even though menstruation is associated with reproduction, the onset of puberty finds that in many circumstances girls are subjected to more rules and restrictions to 'protect' their chastity while at the same point of development, boys are encouraged to adopt hegemonic masculinities. As identified by Burrows and Johnson (2005) boys are allowed and encouraged to discuss the changes their bodies go through during puberty while girls are expected to keep it secret.

4.1.3.1 Impact on self-surveillance. Foucauldian theorising about docile bodies has taken on new meaning in the 21st century; modern bodies are encouraged to self-discipline in civilising ways by concealing their impulses, rhythms and fluids in order to maintain composure (Howson, 2004 as cited in Repta & Clarke, 2013). In a related way, women's body alteration practices (such as hair removal) represent a tangible manifestation of how women internalise social control mechanisms (Fahs, 2011). Concealing women's natural

bodily processes, and their bodies in a natural form is not only found in literature on menstruation. The concept of ‘invisibility’ is prominent in a vast amount of literature regarding gendered expectations of women and its link to social control and is found across disciplines (e.g. Lewis, Lang, McKay, 2008; Mirza, 2012 Oresekes, 1996). Women may undergo a variety of bodily modifications, procedures, grooming habits and maintain certain behaviours to disguise or conceal their bodies in a natural form. For example, Fahs (2011) describes how women’s hair removal practices represent an important marker of gendered social control. The removal of body hair is construed as a way to keep the body pure and clean which speaks to the way in which society would find women’s bodies tolerable and acceptable. While Fahs and Delgado (2011 as cited in Fahs, 2011) suggest that hair removal may seem trivial, it in fact masks the ideology of social control as women inadvertently adopt these ideas of idealised femininity without fully understanding the ramifications of those ideologies of social control and accompanying practices. Since docile bodies are gendered bodies, women’s health and beauty routines may be viewed as social practices which serve to maintain hierarchical power relations, subjugating women in the process (Bartky, 1988).

One of the agents of social control, particularly menstrual control is the medicalisation of women’s bodies. Medicalisation and control of women’s biological processes are intricately rooted within patriarchy (Andipatin, 2013). The following section will discuss how the processes of menstrual control and the body as a machine function.

4.1.4 Medical discourse: Menstrual control and the body as machine

Medical discourse is prominent in menstruation literature, especially regarding menstrual suppression (Foucault’s concept of the clinical gaze and medicalisation are particularly important considerations as menstrual suppression originated within medical circles and continues to be promoted by medical researchers and practitioners (Repta & Clark, 2013).

4.1.4.1 Menstrual control. Menstrual control is usually discussed in literature in the form of menstrual suppression (e.g. Johnston-Robledo et al, 2006; Kissling, 2006; Repta & Clark, 2013). Although oral and other forms of contraception serve the primary function of preventing pregnancy, it is often also used as a way to control menstruation (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). The idea of menstrual control is in line with ideas of medicalisation found in the dominant culture to support the extreme position of using medical technology to ‘cure’ the body from menstruation (Fingerson, 2006). This reinforces the idea of women’s bodies needing to be corrected through constant disciplining. As uncovered in the focus groups though, medical technology is not only used to suppress menstruation, but also to create it.

“When I went to the doctor and they told me that I have this certain condition, that’s when I became worried, so now I have my period, even if it’s artificially sort of like gotten, I mean, it’s still that I’m getting it, so now it’s more of a blessing because I know there’s a chance that I am going to be able to reproduce in the future.” (Focus group 1, participant 5)

The participant discusses a medical condition that caused her to not menstruate for a certain period of time. Literature regarding controlling menstruation through the use of contraception and other medications most prominently discusses suppressing menstruation (Johnston-Robledo et al., 2006; Repta & Clarke, 2013). However, as seen in the case of this participant, contraception was used to control menstruation in a way that actually creates menstruation rather than eliminates it. However, menstruation is still manipulated in a way that it can be controlled. Considering the negative construction of menstruation which is adopted and reiterated from the participants, the recent medical trend toward menstrual suppression has become appealing as an option for menstrual control (Jackson & Falmange, 2013). The concept of menstrual control is directly in line with Foucault’s self-surveillance in controlling and disciplining the body. Whether using contraceptives to regulate menstruation or to rid the

body of the menstrual process entirely, women continue to find ways to control their bodies, or discipline it in a way that may not cause ‘offence’ to others.

4.1.4.2 The body as machine. The idea of the body as a machine is prominent in medical discourse surrounding women’s bodies. It also considers Foucault’s idea around the clinical gaze in medical discourse. Participants’ drew on this discourse in the following way:

“...maybe it’s cleansing, its something like, something’s happening, I’m going to have more kids...an egg produces” (Focus group 1, participant 6)

“...I won’t use the word ashamed, because you cannot be ashamed of menstruating it’s a natural process that all women go through...” (Focus group 2, participant 4)

“Because it means things are working (laughs from other participants), it means my body is healthy, ja...” (Focus group 2, participant 1)

Foucault’s concept of the clinical gaze assumed power when biomedical understandings of health began positioning bodies as separate or distinct from the rest of the person, and illnesses as localised entities within the body (Repta & Clark, 2013).

Martin (1992 as cited in Agyekum, 2002) makes an analogy between menstruation and a factory. He says, “menstruation not only carries with it the connotation of a productive system that has failed to produce, it also carries the idea of production gone awry, making products of no use, not to specification, unsalable, wasted, scrap”.

“I went through so much medical treatment throughout my life because I also have like a horrible condition, and that’s why I will never ever, look at periods in a wonderful way. I don’t care about the whole, because my condition renders me infertile, and in my mind I’m always thinking, like ok whats the point of having periods... what I have I will always have my problem, always, despite having periods, or not having periods, it will go like throughout my whole life and in the end, in the long run, I’m going to have to take out everything out, so I always think, what’s the point of having it. Now that’s my perception of periods, I will always, always loath it, always.” (Focus group 1, participant 4)

By focusing menstruation on the ultimate goal of child bearing, there was a sense of erasing the subjectivity of the individual woman and her experience of menstruating. This is apparent for both medical discourses drawn on by the participants, but applies in different ways. As suggested by de Beauvoir (2009) boys are socialised into linking their development to power and pleasure while girls are given extra caution about menstruation tainting their femininity, but it is still to be celebrated with motherhood and reproduction being signalled as the sole purpose of menstruation. Through understanding menstruation as a prescription of reproduction, women are subjectively made sexual objects for male pleasure, and constructed as a mother of men's children making women subordinate in the gender sexual hierarchy (Agnew, 2012). Menstruation is thus constructed as a gateway to motherhood, the goal all women are expected to aspire to.

4.2 Constructing menstruation in menstrual product advertising

Discourses as based on menstrual product advertisements are discussed in the following section. These include discourses of menstruation as a hygiene crisis, the perpetuation of the secrecy discourse already discussed, the influence on body image and also discourses which construct body as a commodity. The interest of the media in constructing women's bodies in this way is to ensure that the status quo is maintained and in this way products are sold and profits are made.

4.2.1 Menstruation as a hygiene crisis

The discourse of menstruation as a hygiene concern was a prominent discourse that emerged as the participants perceptions of menstruation. However, when relating to the advertisements that were shown, this hygiene *concern* evolved into a hygiene *crisis*.

“...whatever pad you are wearing, like the pad could be the best pad ever, but inside, like the way you feel about yourself during

menstruation, it's not going to change just because you have the best protection out there. I think like how you feel when you're on your period, I don't even think it doesn't, because I mean, when you go buy pads, you're not going to buy something that you think won't protect you. By the mere fact that you're buying protection, it means you want something to protect you, but that doesn't change the fact that you still feel like you have to watch yourself or to look at yourself..."(Focus group 2, participant 4)

The use of the words 'protection' and 'protect' constructs menstrual blood as something to be feared or 'guarded against'. The use of these words don't just construct menstruation as something that is dirty, but rather something that is dangerously dirty, turning a hygiene concern into a hygiene crisis. This is supported by Merskin (1999) who found that recent advertisements focus less on discourses such as shame and fear, but continue to warn against a hygiene crisis if the correct products are not used.

Another participant described the message she took out of the advertisement.

"That the product will help you remain pure, even despite the uncleanliness of your period, and no one would be able to tell that you're on it which, still, I don't understand why you have to hide it, you know"(Focus group 3, participant 4)

The participant describes menstruation as something that makes women impure and that the use of the sanitary product will protect you against the impurity of menstruation. This description reinforces the way in which menstrual product advertisements emphasise the idea of menstruation being dangerously unclean and impure. Northrup (2010) discusses how medical discourse describes our bodies as war zones rather than natural homeostatic systems. Military metaphors are used throughout medical discourse with diseases or tumours referred to as the "enemy" needing to be "eliminated at all costs" (Northrup, 2010, p. 10). Menstrual product advertisements add to this by reinforcing the notion that our bodies are self-destructing and needing to be corrected.

4.2.2 Secrecy (invisibility)

The shame of having your menstruation known to others, and the pressure to keep it a secret and put of sight from others is a discourse that was strongly expressed by the participants.

When shown the advertisements, participants identified how the advertisements perpetuate these ideas.

“The choice of words where they say how you choose to stand out, I feel like they’re relating it to how you stand out if your period was showing, so now, your period won’t show, so then, it’s up to you, as if you would choose” (Focus group 2, participant 4)

This was stated regarding the slogan of the advertisement which reads “How you choose to stand out is up to you” (See Appendix 6)

“And when you use tampax, it’s going to be invisible” (Focus group 1, participant 6)

“No, you can’t see. I think the bottom one shows two pads, the one with the dot on and the one, it just shows that it’s actually invisible” (Focus group 1, participant 1)

The participant in the above quote refers to the advert using blue liquid as a representation of blood. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2013) discuss how advertisements of menstrual products emphasises secrecy, avoidance of embarrassment and freshness, and thus contribute to the communication taboo. The use of flowers and hearts, and blue rather than red liquid are euphemistically used to promote secrecy and delicacy. Besides promoting secrecy, promoting this delicacy construes women as soft, nurturing, pure beings. Displaying actual menstrual blood would not construct women as sexual objects, making women less desirable to men.

Simes and Berg (2001) conducted a content analysis on over 200 menstrual product advertisements. Shame and silence was one of the themes that emerged from these advertisements. The pervasive emphasis on concealment produced by advertisements reinforces the shame and silence associated with menstruation. Silence and shame engender feelings of embarrassment associated with menstruation. To prevent embarrassment, women


need to diligently prevent discovery of themselves as menstruators (Simes & Berg, 2001).

The need to prevent exposure as encouraged through advertisements, maintain and perpetuate the social construction of menstruation as negative.

In a content analysis, Erchull et al (2002) also analysed the vocabulary used in educational booklets and advertisements of menstrual products. They found that even the word menstruation was not used often in the booklets and advertisements further perpetuating the need for secrecy.

4.2.3 Love your body...or not?

Although the perceptions of the advertisements were mostly negative, participants felt there was a shift in how advertisers were trying to send a positive message to women regarding their bodies and menstruation.



“Be brave that’s what that advert is saying wear white, be brave, try and challenge yourself don’t just think because you grew up with a certain way of thinking, try and see that maybe you could be wrong put yourself to a test I think that is what these advertisers are saying take a chance and take a leap of faith” (Focus group 3, participant 2)

“I think they also trying to celebrate womanhood like they want you to see that it’s not something to be grossed out about it’s that we are women and it makes us different to males – it makes us powerful it makes us the bearer of kids right? So I think they are trying to convey a positive message” (Focus group 3, participant 3)

The above quote is the response of a participant regarding the kind of messages that are sent through the advertisements. Cronje & Kritzinger (1991) have shown that one of the most common positive associations with menstruation is that it is a sign of fertility. Del Saz Rubio and Pennock-Speck (2009) also found that advertisements do not focus on the advantages of the product, but rather they are constructed as a celebration of femininity or womanhood. The same authors go on to say that these advertisements appeal to the emotional side of women instead of the practicality of the product, by showing them in a more positive light through

images of women being in control of their lives and relationships with men. Raftos et al. (1998) found conflicting messages concerning the portrayal of women, but positive representations included women being depicted as powerful, successful, independent, vivacious and energetic.

“I think the dress like shows like a form of freedom like girls must be free and comfortable and be yourself when you have your period” (Focus group 3, participant 5)

The freedom spoken about by this participant is in some way consistent with findings from Saz Rubio and Pennock-Speck (2009). The authors discuss the ways in which old taboos are turned inside out in implying that the burden of menstruation for modern women is solved by the products. Women are instead encouraged to join the modern breed of women with the advertisements aiming to convey a message that women these days are confident and in control of their lives (Saz Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). In a content analysis conducted by Raftos et al. (1998) found that young girls and women may equate control and sophistication with images in advertisements being straight forward (i.e. the inviting and defiant stances of models used in images). The female viewers may relate success with uninhibited signs of power to a model that appears to be addressing them directly (Raftos et al., 1998).

The positive messages the participants took from the advertisements corresponds to what Murphy and Jackson (2011) identify as the ‘love your body’ discourse. The same authors discuss this as a relatively new feature in contemporary young women’s magazines which has emerged after years of criticism about the way in which magazines portrayed the ideal woman’s body. What Murphy and Jackson (2011) refer to however, is the way the idea of the ‘ideal’ body is changing and expanding to include women that are not fully made up, that have ‘fuller figures’ and images that are not edited (as much as before) before being published. However, are the images of the menstruating women depicting the same messages? Kissling (2006) refers to this as a paradoxical understanding of what it means to

become a menstruating woman. On the one hand menstruation is a taboo, while on the other hand it is a celebration of sexual maturity (Kissling, 2006).

4.2.3.1 The ‘ideal’ woman. Although some of the participant’s felt that the misrepresentation of what menstruation in the advertisements were designed to empower them, many also felt that it was just a reinforcement of what the ideal woman should be.

“I also think the reason why they wouldn’t want to show things like menstruation on TV or anywhere else in the media, is that it would completely do away with this idea that woman are Barbie dolls, you know, it forces you to see that this is a real person, you know, real things happen inside this body that you see in front of you, it’s not just an image for you to just objectify, it’s not a object.”(Focus group 1, participant 2)

“...it’s very double standard, considering the media, like it’s surrounding us, because woman’s bodies are all over, you know, but only in certain ways are they acceptable, not, the rest of it is not.”(Focus group 1, participant 2)

A study by Raftos, Jackson and Mannix (1998) found that menstruation is a threat to ‘acceptable’ and expected femininity because it does not conform to commonly held stereotypes of ideal women.

“It’s not respecting what the process is doing to individual people, it’s coming and imposing it’s own idea of what it should do”(Focus group 1, participant 3)

“Yes they must have like a grumpy old woman who was like a cigarette and short hair and then I will be like I will buy that pad”(Focus group 3, participant 2)

The quotes above also refer to the way the media misrepresents reality in order to sell the idea of the ideal woman. Feminists have studied the sexualised woman in the media for many years and the premise of women’s bodies being objectified could not be disputed (Morris, Goldenberg & Heflick, 2014). In a content analysis of the portrayal of gender roles in the media Collins (2011) found that women are underrepresented in the media. However, when they are visible, they are most commonly portrayed in sexualised or subordinate roles.

“...for the most part I feel I have to, I had to make that shift in my head because I feel like we are raised and socialized to think about periods and of our bodies as women, as somehow defective, as dirty, as needing to be corrected, so I refuse to think that way...”(Focus group 1, participant 2)

The participant explicitly states that she had to consciously make the decision to challenge ideas of gender expectations and roles. Although this shift made is positive, the quote displays how even when women refuse to think of themselves as inferior to men, they are powerless to carry this into society because of their inferiority status. Patriarchy demands that women ignore their hopes and dreams in deference to men and the demands of their families. Although women may attempt to challenge this ideology, they internalise the belief that they are not worthy or smart enough to live lives of freedom, joy and fulfilment (Northrup, 2010).

4.2.4 Consumerism: The body as a commodity

The study of the body as a commodity is hardly a new proposition, given that the body in its entirety or fragmented form has long been an object of economic, social and symbolic use in a host of societies (Sharp, 2000). Much research discusses the ways in which women’s bodies have been objectified for commodification (Kissling, 2006; Merskin, 1999). These examples illustrate ideas around the ‘ideal women’, which of course, does not include the impurity of menstruation. However, as revealed in the focus groups, it appears that women’s bodies in their natural form are also being used as a commodity.

The consumerism discourse was one that was evident throughout all focus groups. All the participants believed that the main aim of the advertisements were just to sell the products.

“The ads are only selling the products, it’s not actually showing what we are going through... But on the TV it’s just selling the product, the radio, it’s just selling the product, it’s not saying anything with regards to what we feeling, how we’re going through our daily you know, whatever you suppose to do on your daily routine, you’re going to work and you having your period.”(Focus group 2, participant 1)

While reinforcing the idea that menstruation is something that is dangerous and menstrual products aids in protecting women from their menstruation, another participant also felt that menstrual product advertisements were only a means of selling the product.

“...so I think woman during menstruation are always self-conscious, no matter what protection they're getting and products are just products, people are just advertising to sell the product, I don't think the aim is to capture the reality of it” (Focus group 2, participant 4)

Another participant more blatantly says that the point of menstrual product advertisements is just a means of generating income for the Femcare industry. She says:

“I also know that it is a clever marketing strategy the industries compared to the biggest I know there is a certain amount of females in the population so they going to make a lot of money from all of us. So they need to make advertisements really pretty or appeal to a certain like I would say that the colourful one appeals to my nature I'm attracted to it” (Focus group 3, participant 3)

As stated by Sharp (2000, p. 293) commodification insists upon objectification in some form, transforming individuals and their bodies from a human category into objects of economic desire. Menstruation is not socially seen as pure, sexy, or any other aspects that make up the 'ideal woman', but it is objectified and manipulated into a commodity as to somehow make it 'useful'.

The commodification of menstruation has led to the establishment of a billion dollar a year industry commonly referred to as Femcare (Kissling, 2006). The Femcare industry includes menstrual product manufacturers, medical and pharmaceutical companies as well as advertising firms (Docherty, 2010). Kissling (2006) identifies Femcare as an industry that not only profits from, but also contributes to the construction of women as other. The consumerism discourse (as well as the others discussed) which emerged in the focus groups illustrates a way this is portrayed through advertising. It is however, not only through the

advertising of sanitary products that does this, but also in the marketing of other menstrual-related products.

In conclusion, the analysis highlights that the constructions of menstruation are premised on a particular view of the female body that is considered as an abnormal or defective version of the male prototype (Andipatin, 2013). Discourses around menstrual processes depict it as dirty, shameful, in need of sanitation and constant self-regulation in maintaining a pure, clean, sanitised body. The media has a vested interest in perpetuating and (re)producing this view for the sole purpose of selling their products and ensuring huge profit margins. Thus, it is imperative to understand the ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy in order to fully comprehend the constructions of menstruation. Both these systems are based on the ideology of male supremacy.

4.3 Male supremacy: Subject positioning

An important component of FDA in discussing the social control of a group of individuals is found in the way the group positions themselves in relation to another group of individuals. In this case, it is important to discuss the way women positioned themselves in society in relation to men with regard to menstruation. This discussion will be largely linked to the idea of patriarchy. Patriarchy is an ideology embedded in Western and African cultures (Coetzee, 2001). It is in a patriarchal ideal that men are afforded certain privileges and entitlements that are not afforded to women. Likewise, the same ideal influences women to respond in defined ways which often accommodates and defers to male interests (Dickerson, 2013). For the purpose of this discussion ideology is referred to in terms of a (false) belief or value system in a society, where one social group (men) exercises some form of domination over another (women) (Coetzee, 2001).

The following contributions from participants illustrated the way women position themselves in relation to men, in physical and social aspects.

“I don't know like, menstruation, doesn't seem like it's something that happens to a normal person” (Focus group 1, participant 1)

The participant starts her sentence off in a manner that depicts ambivalence, but continues in a way that suggests men are normal and women are not. Since men do not menstruate, this statement implies that men are normal when compared to women. Menstruation is a phenomenon that only occurs in women, suggesting that women are not normal, and possibly in need of being corrected. As stated by Hare-Mustin (2004), whether gender differences are emphasised or minimised in a study (or in social life and interactions), both biases take the male as the standard of comparison. Due to the patriarchal ideology we find ourselves living up to, the male is the dominant person and the dominant person always serves as the referent. The question is therefore, whether women are equal to, the same as, or different from men, and thus, deficient (Hare-Mustin, 2004). By continuing to question differences and marginalising similarities the value of one over the other is sustained. The objective of adhering to socially prescribed gender roles, expectations and performances is to differentiate the superiority of the male body from the inferior bodies tainted by femininity.

“But I mean when I have my periods then it is like this kind of thing...then I like close the door most of the time no one must know. My brother, I don't feel like even going close to my brother” (Focus group 1, participant 3)

In this case the participant physically keeps a distance from her brother. This action, the woman keeping away from the man, further perpetuates the idea of the menstruating woman being unclean and therefore inferior to the man. Due to dominant discourses surrounding menstruation, which stress the importance of quietly and secretly controlling and managing their menstruating bodies, women are deprived of a potential connection with one another

and may even distance themselves from other menstruating women (Jackson & Falmange, 2013).

“And also because the only time my husband doesn’t want to be close to me is when I have my period because he’s like ‘dude get away’ because it’s gross you kind of really feel gross and then it’s you know, affirmed that it is something that is not the best.”(Focus group 3, participant 3)

The above quote also depicts physical distance created between the menstruating woman and a man which concurs with the previous statement. In this case however, it is the man who is keeping away from the woman. The woman is physically outcast, a milder extension of some cultural rituals where it is believed that no contact should be made with a menstruating woman (Umero & Egwuata, 2008).

In addition, the participant finds affirmation of menstruation being ‘gross’ in the opinion of her male partner. This displays a social inequality suggesting that the male opinion holds superiority over that of the female. The participant describes menstruation as ‘gross’ but suggests that this becomes even more concrete when the actions of her male partner suggest the same thing. The only ‘acceptable’ voice for women in a society based on the patriarchal ideology, is a vice that does not directly express anger and aggression towards men (Hare-Mustin, 2004).

“I think guys wouldn’t agree with the whole white, with it being pure, because if I say, ok, this month is now out and my boyfriend’s like eww, stay away, you know, and they think you’re dirty and then here you have this pure picture, you’re clean and you’re, I think they will disagree to that”(Focus group 2, participant 2)

This quote further reinforces the superiority of the male opinion. A male disagreeing with the purity of women while menstruating perpetuates the discourse of menstruation as a hygiene crisis. According to Coetzee (2001) normal communication between men and women is often obstructed by forms of sexism, which finds expression in subtle gestures and use of language.

These subtle gestures combined with the idea of the male opinion being superior create an atmosphere where women subconsciously position themselves as inferior to men. Women thus perpetuate social control by falling into the 'norm', not realising that they are oppressing themselves in doing so. Coetzee (2001) also identifies narrativisation as a strategy which justifies the exercise of power by those who have it, but also serves to reconcile women to the fact that they do not have power.

4.4 Conclusion

What emerged as dominant constructs, influencing women's perceptions of menstruation, were the concern for hygiene, secrecy and fear of being 'caught' menstruating. This is consistent with the vast amount of international studies done on menstruation. The equally important yet slightly less dominant religious and medical discourses are also consistent with literature but have not previously been comprehensively studied in relation to menstruation.

The dominant discourses highlight the ways in which menstruation is approached as a negative aspect which taints ideal femininity. The focus is on the women's body, creating a desire to constantly manage, maintain and keep their bodies under surveillance. This creates a desire in women to acquiesce the obtaining the required goal of the 'ideal' woman, producing docile bodies.

All the discourse that emerged appears to be part of a larger construct of femininity, the ideal that all women are expected to aspire to in order to be the best that they can be. In various ways, by drawing on all the discourses that emerged, the participants constructed menstruating women as somewhat 'less than' non-menstruating women, and even 'less than' men. The women appeared to assign less value to themselves when they were menstruating; perpetuating the idea that menstruation is something that taints the female body. The common

thread through the discourses is the constant need for self-surveillance leading to the management and control of the body's impulses and rhythms.

Due to the dearth of South African literature on it not possible to determine whether these findings are specific to this context. However, the findings are consistent with international literature. In line with the theme of the study to reveal ways in which menstruation is used as a form of social control of women, what is striking is that some of the discourses that have emerged are strongly linked to discourses found in other constructionist and feminist work in the area. Discourses of fear, secrecy and shame for example, are also dominant in issues such as domestic violence.

The second half of the analysis specifically looked at menstrual product advertisements. The discourses that emerged in this area were menstruation as a hygiene crisis, secrecy, love your body discourse, and consumerism.

The hygiene crisis discourse is one of the most dominant discourses in literature regarding menstrual product advertisements. Advertisements play on the known concern for hygiene and perpetuate it into a crisis. While some women may consider menstruation dirty, advertisements imply that they are dangerously dirty and women should be protected from this.

The secrecy discourse is also perpetuated through advertisements as identified by the participants. The use of words, phrases and story lines promote keeping menstruation hidden. Furthermore, the use of the 'magical blue liquid' instead of a red liquid which more accurately represents menstrual blood, once again reinforces the idea that menstruation should be kept hidden from a wider society.

The only perception that appeared to be positive was found in the perceived messages of the advertisements. While some participants complained that the advertisements were not an accurate representation of reality, there was an overall sense that the purpose of this was to encourage women to be brave and remind them that menstruation gives them a form of power. Participants felt that the advertisements represented a sense of freedom for women. At the same time however, it was also felt that menstruating women were represented in this way to not taint men's ideas of the 'ideal' woman. The participants expressed that this was true through some of their personal experiences.

The consumerism discourse was the most dominant discourse regarding the advertisements. The participants all agreed that the main point of the advertisement was to promote and sell their products. Although this discourse is relatively new in the field as studies have previously not considered women's perceptions of menstrual product advertisements, it has been implied that advertising is indeed, a pervasive form of media. Marketing strategies are designed and used with the end goal of selling the product being advertised. However, the target market is not always consciously aware of the hidden messages which they internalise, influencing their perceptions of certain phenomena.

As previously posited, studies looking at menstrual product advertisements have been content analyses. By obtaining the perceptions of the individuals that these advertisements are targeted at, this study elucidates the findings of previously conducted content analyses. In terms of the advertisements, it is evident that menstrual product advertisements perpetuate existing negative constructs of menstruation and continue to promote ideas of the ideal woman and continue to influence women to find ways to discipline and control their bodies.

Overall, the results of this study illustrates that menstruation has been socially constructed as a medium to exercise social control over women. The way menstruation has been constructed

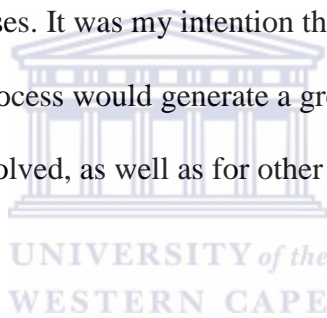
over time, and perpetuated through advertisements, has influenced women to assign less value to themselves. Few would dispute that women are objectified, this study however, elucidates how the construction of menstruation has played an significant role in the self-objectification of women by re(producing) the idea that women's bodies in their natural forms need to be controlled and disciplined in order to be acceptable to wider society.



Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

My intention in doing this study was to consider and raise awareness about the prevailing discursive constructs that position women within dominant ideologies that construct menstruation as something that taints women's femininity and to explore how women make sense of and construct meaning regarding the social rather than biological aspects of menstruation. I was interested in the discursive constructs that women drew on to describe their perceptions of menstruation. I was also interested in understanding how women use these discourses to position themselves in relation to men to uncover power imbalances embedded in society. My aim was to highlight the forces that contribute to the development and perpetuation of these discourses. It was my intention that through exploring discursive constructs of menstruation, the process would generate a greater sense of agency and empowerment for the women involved, as well as for other women who locate these findings as meaningful in their own lives.



5.2 Summary of findings and implications for understanding the social control of women

After engaging Foucauldian discourse analysis as a means of reflecting the discourses presented by the women in the focus group discussions, a synopsis of what emerged was a sense of the women positioning themselves within a patriarchal ideology; attributing less value to themselves as opposed to men. This was clear in the variety of related discourses presented which perpetuated gendered roles and expectations which continue to oppress women in wider society.

Upon reaching menarche, girls are often told that they are now women, or are on the road to becoming women. They thus begin to identify themselves in compliance with, or resistance to, discourses of gender roles and expectations in a society that continues to devalue women

(Jackson & Falmange, 2013). In terms of morality, patriarchy suggests that men and women ought to demonstrate different (fixed) characteristics, in terms of which masculine values are viewed as appropriate to the public sphere (of social power) and feminine values relate to the private sphere (of domestic interchange) (Coetzee, 2001).

The discourses of menstruation as revealed in this study, displays ways in which these patriarchal values are not only imposed through prescribed gender roles and the performance of gender, but also through the perceptions of women's natural bodies. The fear discourse (comprised of shame, embarrassment and concealment) could be associated with the morality suggested by patriarchy. Feminine values are related to the private sphere (Coetzee, 2001), to not be seen in society as men are. Menstruation too should be hidden, kept in the private sphere. Women are taught to be ashamed of what makes them different from men in the fear of women being powerful in their own way, or *more* powerful than men.

While progress has been made in liberating women from remaining in the private sphere, which is seen in more women entering the workplace and being more visible to the public eye, the analysis of the advertisements have shown that women's visibility is still largely associated with sexuality and using the female body as a commodity. Vaginas, like breasts, are typically seen as sexual objects rather than the functional objects they are intended to be (Morris, Goldenberg & Heflick, 2014). Considering this, it is clear that although women are more visible in public, they are only visible in ways that maintain their desirability to men. Women's natural, biological processes pose a threat to this desirability and are therefore the publicity of such processes are minimised, desensitising men to what women actually experience when menstruating. Women's bodies are used as a means of marketing, allowing society to capitalise on the 'curse' of menstruation while reinforcing ideas of the ideal women.

5.3 Recommendations and limitations

The majority of the women who participated in this study were from the Coloured community. Through accessing the participants through a university it was hoped that a diverse group of participants would be part of the study. Although Black-African and White communities were not completely excluded from the study, it would have been desirable to have a more equal split of the population groups. It is my recommendation that further studies have a more balanced sample across population groups. This may allow for different cultural influences to also be considered.

Focusing on a population of university students could also pose as a limitation to this study. The majority of the participants majored in social sciences where they are taught to think more critically than the layperson. This may have contributed to the participants perceiving the advertisements more critically than the layperson would. It is my recommendation that further studies be conducted using either a younger sample, or sample the same aged participants from a different population where they may look at the advertisements in a less critical way.

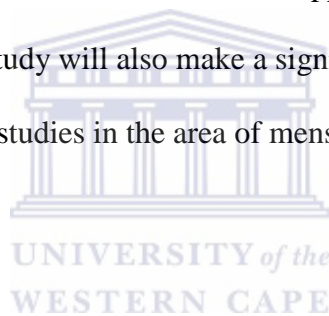
When looking for advertisements, I consulted women's magazines for almost every month from 2010 to 2013 and only three print advertisements were found for this time period. The advertisements used for the study were print advertisements found online. It is recommended that future studies should consider the more regular ways in which menstrual products are advertised.

5.4 Larger relevance

Stamp (1991 as cited in James, 1998) argues that women in third world countries are often treated as passive targets of oppressive practices and discriminatory structures which collude with sexist ideologies that construct women as naturally passive, inferior and consigned to a

private world. By internalising the messages conveyed through religious and cultural restrictions, expectations of what is deemed feminine and the media, women assign less value to themselves and position themselves as 'less than' men.

The findings of this paper will therefore be important to researchers as print media advertising has become a key agent of socialisation for many women and girls (Merskin, 1999). The use of a social constructionism framework provides insight into how print media influences the construction of perceptions. In understanding how young women's perceptions of menstruation and menstrual product advertisements in print media are constructed, more insight can be provided. Through publication, the results of this study could inform interventions promoting a more positive women-centred approach towards issues like menstruation. Furthermore, this study will also make a significant contribution to the South African literature as documented studies in the area of menstruation in South Africa are very limited and inaccessible.



5.5 Future study

In the process of doing this study, I came across potential areas for consideration for future studies. The discourses that emerged in the study are perceptions that have been deeply embedded in the participants through years of exposure to negative constructions of menstruation and ideals of femininity that many women continue to strive for. I feel that future studies should explore sex education programs in both public and private schools and elucidate the constructions of menstruation that are relayed through these programs.

In addition, upon discovery of the dearth of advertisements printed in magazines, I think it would be beneficial to the field to investigate why magazines, especially women's magazines choose to not advertise menstrual products. When considering the role of media in the social

study of menstruation, it would also be beneficial to determine which modes of media are used to advertise menstrual product and why these are preferred.

5.6 Reflections

As a way of locating myself in the research and concluding what has been a long and thoughtful process for me, I include here some of my reflections on the elements that I feel I brought to the research process. As a woman, I considered myself an insider sharing the experience of this phenomenon with the participants of the study. I feel that this allowed for the participants to feel comfortable in discussing the topic as openly and honestly as possible. This similarity influenced the ways the focus groups unfolded. In many instances, the participant's acknowledged this commonality when expressing certain views. The assumptions that followed from this, the possible expectation from the participant's that I should just know what they mean, details and information may have been left unsaid in the focus groups.

As a Muslim woman, I was aware that influences of religion would be discussed by some of the participants. I was constantly aware that religion is experienced subjectively, and the influence Islam has had on my perception of menstruation were not always the same as the views expressed by the participants. Some participant's mentioned some restrictions experienced while menstruating – not being allowed to fast, not being allowed to make Salaah (pray), however, these were sometimes only mentioned in discussions once the recorder was turned off and the floor was opened for any questions or concerns. The participants might not have felt completely comfortable as these restrictions are often perceived as negative.

At the time I was collecting data, I experienced some medical issues regarding my menstrual cycle and reproductive health. The medication I was given caused me to have a longer than

usual cycle for one month, and kept my cycle away completely for two. This experience allowed me to empathise with the participants that expressed having similar medical conditions. I had to however, be consciously aware of the impact my condition had on my perception of menstruation at the time. This feeling was twofold: the month of menstruating for longer than usual caused me to feel a sort of resentment towards my body, yet at the same time, not menstruating for two months made me yearn to have a normal cycle once again. The emotions I felt with these experiences made me more aware of the ways in menstruation was constructed for me as I was growing up.

A number of times, I felt myself experiencing some of the very discourses that emerged outside of the research process. On numerous occasions, while being out with my fiancé and his colleagues I was asked about my progress in my masters course. When asked about the topic of my thesis I would (even if it was just for a split second) feel slightly uncomfortable saying “it’s about menstruation” to a room full of men. However, I found describing the reasons for my study easy to discuss. I found it quite interesting that the men I spoke to were firstly interested in how menstruation relates to social science when it is such a ‘biological’ topic. Even more surprising, were the reactions I got when explaining the stance I was taking, and the agreement of its importance from those I told.

The research process started with me positioning myself as an academic. Only as the research process progressed, did I realise the impact the research has had on my perceptions of menstruation. I appreciate the willingness of the women who volunteered to involve themselves in an invaluable experience for me. While working through the emergent discourses, I found myself starting to live what I hope this research will encourage in wider society. I now find myself constantly challenging negative perceptions of menstruation and women’s bodies in their natural form.

Reference list

- Aflaq, F. & Jami, H. (2012). Experiences and attitudes related to menstruation among female students. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 27(2), 201-224
- Agnew, C. S. (2012). *The discursive construction of menstruation within puberty education*. Unpublished Masters thesis. University of Otago College of Education, New Zealand
- Agyekum, K. (2002). Menstruation as a verbal taboo among the Akan of Ghana. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 58(3), 367-387
- Andipatin, M. (2013). *Understanding HELLP Syndrome in the South African context: A feminist study*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of the Western Cape, South Africa
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. (2001). *The practice of social research*. Oxford University Press: Cape Town
- Bajaj, S., Khan, A., Fathima, F. N., Jaleel, M. A., Sheikh, A., Azad, K., Fatima, J. & Mohsin, F. (2012). South Asian consensus statement on women's health and ramadan. *Indian Journal of Endocrinology & Metabolism*, 16(4), 508-511. doi: 10.4103/2230-8210.97995
- Barak-Brandes, S. (2011). Internalizing the Taboo: Israeli women respond to commercials for feminine hygiene products. *Observatorio Journal*, 5(4), 49-68
- Bartky, S. L. (1988). Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power. In I. Diamond & L. Quinby (Eds.), *Femininity and Foucault: Reflection of resistance* (pp. 93–111). Boston: Northeastern University Press
- Bell, B. T. & Dittmar, H. (2011). Does media type matter? The role of identification in adolescent girls' media consumption and the impact on different thin-ideal media on body image. *Sex Roles*, 65, 478-490
- Boje, D. M. (2000). Using narrative and telling stories. *Management and Language*, 41-53

- Bowling, A. (2002). *Research methods in health: Investigating health and health services 2nd edition*. United Kingdom: Open University Press
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101
- Burgess, M. C. R., Stermer, S. P. & Burgess, S. R. (2007). Sex, lies and video games: The portrayal of male and female characters on video game covers. *Sex Roles*, 57, 419-433
- Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism (2nd ed.)*. New York: Routledge.
- Burrows, A., & Johnson, S. (2005). Girls' experiences of menarche and menstruation. *Journal of Reproductive & Infant Psychology*, 23(3), 235-249.
- Cann, V. (2012). Competing femininities: the construction of teen femininities in magazine adverts. *Networking Knowledge*, 5(1)
- Çevirme, A. S., Çevirme, H., Karaoglu, L., Ugurlu, N., & Korkmaz, Y. (2010). The perception of menarche and menstruation among Turkish married women: Attitudes, experiences, and behaviors. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 38(3), 381-393.
- Coetzee, D. (2001). South African education and the ideology of patriarchy. *South African Journal of Education*, 21(4)
- Collins, R. L. (2011). Content analysis of gender roles in media: Where are we now and where should we go?. *Sex Roles*, 64, 290-298
- Conrad, P. (1992). Medicalization and social control. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 209-232
- Conrad, P. & Barker, K. K. (2010). The social construction of illness: Key insights and policy implications. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 51, 67-79

- Cronje, H. S. & Kritzinger, I. E. (1991). Menstruation: symptoms, management and attitudes in university students. *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, 35, 147-150
- Crawford, M., Lee, I. C., Portnoy, G., Gurung, A., Khati, D., Jha, P. & Regmi, A. C. (2009). Objectified body consciousness in a developing country: A comparison of mothers and daughters in the US and Nepal. *Sex Roles*, 60(3-4), 174-185
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *Le deuxième sexe*. Editions Gallimard: Paris
- De Beauvoir, S. (2009). *The Second Sex*. Vintage-books: London
- D'Enbeau, S. (2011). Sex, feminism, and advertising: The politics of advertising feminism in a competitive marketplace. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 35(1), 53-69
- Danziger, K. (1997). The varieties of social construction. *Theory & Psychology*, 7(3), 399-416.
- Del Saz-Rubio, M. M. & Pennock-Speck. (2009). Constructing female identities through feminine hygiene TV commercials. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41, 2535-2556
- Demirbağ, B. C., & Güngörmüş, Z. (2011). An investigation into the knowledge about the menstruation period among the female university students at eastern black sea region of turkey. *Healthmed*, 5(6), 1643-1646
- Dickerson, V. (2013). Patriarchy, power and privilege: A narrative/poststructural view of work with couples. *Family Process* 52(1), 102-114
- Durrheim, K. (2006). Research design. In M. Terre Blanche, K. Durrheim & D. Paniter (Eds.), *Research in Practice: Applied methods for the social sciences* (pp. 33-59). Rondebosch, Cape Town: UCT Press
- Docherty, S. (2010). Smear it on your face, rub it on your body, it's time to start a menstrual party!. *CTSJ: Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 1(1)

- Duits, L. & van Zoonen, L. (2006). Headscarves and porno-chic: Disciplining girls' bodies in the European multicultural society. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(2), 103-117
- Eisenberg, L. (1995). The Social Construction of the Human Brain. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 152(11), 1563-1575
- Erchull, M. J., Chrisler, J. C., Gorman, J. A. & Johnston-Robledo, I. (2002). Education and advertising: A content analysis of commercially produced booklets about menstruation. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 22(4), 455-474
- Fahs, B. (2011). Dreaded "otherness": Heteronormative patrolling in women's body hair rebellions. *Gender & Society*, 25(4), 451-472
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Power/knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795
- Fingerson, L. (2005). Agency and the body in adolescent menstrual talk. *Childhood*, 12(1)
- Fingerson, L. (2006). *Girls in power. Gender, body, and menstruation in adolescence*. USA: State University of New York Press
- Flaake, K. (2005). Girls, adolescence and the impact of bodily changes. Family dynamics and social definitions of the female body. *European Journal of Women's studies*, 12(2), 201-212
- Gergen, K. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40(3), 226-275
- Gergen, K. J. & Gergen, M. (1997). Toward a Cultural Constructionist Psychology. *Theory and Psychology*, 7, 31-36

- Giles, A. (2005). A Foucaultian approach to menstrual practices in the Dehcho region, Northwest Territories, Canada. *Arctic Anthropology*, 42(2), 9-21
- Guthrie, M. (2007). The process of becoming a woman's body: Menstruation and the containment of femininity. *MP: An Online Feminist Journal*, 1(5)
- Hare-Mustin, R. T. (2004). Can we demystify theory? Examining masculinity discourses and feminist postmodern theory. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 24(1), 14-29
- Henning, E., van Rensburg, W. & Smit, B. (2006). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik
- Hosking, D. M. & Morley, I. E. (2004). Social Constructionism in Community and Applied Social Psychology. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 14, 1-14
- Howitt, D. (2010). *Introduction to qualitative methods in Psychology*. England: Pearson Education Limited
- Jackson, T. E. & Falmagne, R. J. (2013). Women wearing white: Discourses of menstruation and the experience of menarche. *Feminism and Psychology*, 23(3), 379-398
- James, S. M. (1998). Shades of othering: Reflections on female circumcision/genital mutilation. *Signs*, 23(4), 1031-1048
- Johnston-Robledo, I., Barnack, J. & Wares, S. (2006). "Kiss your period good-bye": Menstrual suppression in the popular press. *Sex Roles*, 54, 353-360
- Johnston-Robledo, I. & Chrisler, J. C. (2013). The menstrual mark: Menstruation as social stigma. *Sex Roles*, 68, 9-18

- Kane, K. (1990). The ideology of freshness in feminine hygiene commercials. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 14(82)
- Kissling, E. A. (2006). *Capitalising on the curse. The business of menstruation*. USA: Lynne Rienner publishers
- Knauss, C., Paxton, S. J. & Alsaker, F. D. (2008). Body dissatisfaction in adolescent boys and girls: Objectified body consciousness, internalization of the media body ideal and perceived pressure from the media. *Sex Roles*, 59, 633-643
- Koff, E., Rierdan, J. & Sheingold, K. (1982). Memories of menarche: Age, preparation, and prior knowledge as determinants of initial menstrual experience. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 11(1)
- Kowalski, R. M. & Chapple, T. (2000). The social stigma of menstruation: Fact or fiction? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 24, 74-80
- Kumar, G. M. & Kundan, M. (2011). Psycho-social behavior of urban Indian adolescent girls during menstruation. *Australasian Medical Journal*, 4(1), 49-52
- Lemish, D. (2003). Spice world: Constructing femininity the popular way. *Popular Music and Society*, 26(1)
- Lewis, S., Lang, C. & McKay, J. (2008). An inconvenient truth: The invisibility of women in ICT. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, 15(1)
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. California: Sage
- Marvan, M. L., & Trujillo, P. (2010). Menstrual socialization, beliefs, and attitudes concerning menstruation in rural and urban Mexican women. *Health Care for Women International*, 31(1), 53-67.

- McCartney, M. (2012). The V word: Selling genital hygiene products to women. *British Medical Journal*, 345
- McMahon, S. A., Winch, P. J., Caruso, B. A., Obure, A. F., Ogotu, E. A., Ochari, I. A., & Rheingans, R. D. (2011). 'The girl with her period is the one to hang her head' reflections on menstrual management among schoolgirls in rural Kenya. *BMC International Health & Human Rights*, 11(1), 7-16.
- Mercurio, A. & Rima, B. (2011). Watching my weight: Self-weighing, body surveillance, and body dissatisfaction. *Sex Roles*, 65, 47-55
- Merriam, S. B. (1995). What Can You Tell From An N of 1?: Issues of Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 4, 51-60
- Merskin, D. (1999). Adolescence, advertising, and the ideology of menstruation. *Sex Roles*, 40 (11/12), 941-957
- Meyer, W. F., Moore, C. & Viljoen, H. G. (2008). *Personology from individual to ecosystem*. South Africa: Heinemann
- Miller, M. K. & Summers, A. (2007). Gender differences in video game characters' roles, appearances, and attire as portrayed in video game magazines. *Sex Roles*, 57, 733-742
- Mirza, H. S. (2012). Multiculturalism and the gender gap: The visibility and invisibility of Muslim women in Britain. *Britain's Muslims, Muslim Britain: Making social and political space for Muslims*. London: Routledge
- Morris, K. L., Goldenberg, J. L. & Heflick, N. A. (2014). Trio of terror (Pregnancy, menstruation and breastfeeding): An existential function of literal self-objectification among women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 107(1), 181-198
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260

- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K. & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13-22
- Northrup, C. (2010). *Women's bodies, women's wisdom: The complete guide to women's health and wellbeing*. USA: Hay House Inc
- Oresek, N. (1996). Objectivity or heroism? On the invisibility of women in science. *Osiris*, 87-113
- Patil, R., Agarwal, L., Khan, M. I., Gupta, S. K., V., D.R., Raghavia, M., & Mittal, A. (2011). Beliefs about menstruation: A study from rural pondicherry. *Indian Journal of Medical Specialities*, 2(1), 23-26.
- Pillow, W. S. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), 175-196
- Poorani, A. (2012). Who determines the ideal body? A summary of research findings on body image. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 2,
- Raftos, M., Jackson, D. & Mannix, J. (1998). Idealised versus tainted femininity: Discourses of the menstrual experience in Australian magazines that target young women. *Nursing Inquiry*, 5, 174-186
- Raskin, J. D. (2002). Constructivism in psychology: Personal construct psychology, radical constructivism, and social constructionism. *American Communication Journal*, 5(3)
- Rembeck, G., Möller, M., & Gunnarsson, R. (2006). Attitudes and feelings towards menstruation and womanhood in girls at menarche. *Acta Paediatrica*, 95(6), 707-714.
- Repta, R. & Clark, L. H. (2013). "Am I going to be natural or what?": Canadian Women's perceptions and experiences of menstrual suppression. *Sex Roles*, 68, 91-106

- Rodin, M. (1992). The social construction of premenstrual syndrome. *Social Science and Medicine*, 35(1), 49-56
- Rose, J. G., Chrisler, J. C. & Couture, S. (2008). Young women's attitudes toward continuous use of oral contraceptives: The effect of priming positive attitudes toward menstruation on women's willingness to suppress menstruation. *Health Care for Women International*, 29, 688-701
- Rubin, L. R. & Steinberg, J. R. (2011). Self-objectification and pregnancy: Are bodily functionality dimensions protective?. *Sex Roles*, 65, 606-618
- Schooler, D., Ward, L. M., Merriwether, A., & Caruthers, A. S. (2005). Cycles of shame: Menstrual shame, body shame, and sexual decision-making. *Journal of Sex Research*, 42(4), 324-334.
- Seale, C. (1999). *The quality of qualitative research*. London: Sage
- Shanbhag, D., Shilpa, R., D'Souza, N., Josephine, P., Singh, J., & Goud, B. R. (2012). Perceptions regarding menstruation and practices during menstrual cycles among high school going adolescent girls in resource limited settings around bangalore city, karnataka, india. *International Journal of Collaborative Research on Internal Medicine & Public Health (IJCRIMPH)*, 4(7), 1353-1362.
- Sharp, L. A. (2000). The commodification of the body and its parts. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29, 287-328
- Simes, M. R. & Berg, D. H. (2001). Surreptitious learning: Menarche and menstrual product advertisements. *Health Care for Women International*, 22, 455-469
- Stankiewicz, J. M. & Rosselli, F. (2008). Women as sex objects and victims in print advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 58, 579-589
- Statistics South Africa (2011). *Mid-year population estimates, 2011 (Statistical release P0100)* Retrieved from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022011.pdf2>
- Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. (Eds). (2006). *Research in practice. Applied methods for the social sciences*. SA: University of Cape Town Press

- Ulin, P., Robinson, E., Tolly, E. & McNeill, E. (2002). *Qualitative methods: A field guide for applied research in sexual and reproductive health*. Research Triangle Park: Family Health International
- Umero, O. U. T. & Egwuata. (2008). Menstruation in rural Igbo women of South East Nigeria: Attitudes, beliefs and practices. *Journal of Reproductive Health/La Revue Africaine de la Sante*, 12(1), 109-115
- Waller, D. S., Fam, K. & Erdogan (2005). Advertising of controversial products: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(1), 6-13
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Open University Press: USA
- Willig, C. (2008). Discourse analysis. In, J. A. Smith. *Qualitative psychology. A practical guide to research methods*. Sage: London
- Zimmerman, A. & Dahlberg, J. (2008). The sexual objectification of women in advertising: A contemporary cultural perspective. *Journal of Advertising Research*



UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa, Telephone: (021) 959-2283/2453

Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6661

Appendix 1: Information sheet

This information sheet provides a brief description of the project you will be a part of. If you have any further questions, please contact Kulthum Mathews on the contact details given below

Title: An exploratory study investigating the construction of university students' perceptions of menstruation and the influence menstrual product advertisements in print media

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Kulthum Mathews at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because as a woman you have first hand experience of the topic of this study. By participating you can contribute a great deal of knowledge to this area of study. The purpose of this research project is to understand how perceptions of menstruation are socially constructed and to determine if menstruation is used as a form of social control.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to answer questions in an interview regarding your perceptions of menstruation and menstrual product advertisements. During the interview, you will be given an advertisement for menstrual products and asked questions in relation to the advertisement. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The study will be conducted on the campus grounds.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality your name will not be used in relation to any information provided. The data collected in your interviews will be audio recorded and the recordings will be kept in a password protected safe that only I will have access to. The transcriptions of your interviews will be kept on a password protected computer and only myself and supervisor will have access to this information. Your name will not be used in the transcriptions. Each interview will be assigned a number to ensure that no names are revealed throughout the process.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. The nature of the topic might cause feelings of some embarrassment and the length of the interviews may cause some fatigue.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about how perceptions of menstruation are socially constructed through the media. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how the media influences social control over women's bodies.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

If the nature of the interviews makes you feel uncomfortable in any way or elicit feelings that may negatively affect you, counselling will be made available to you if you feel the need to do so.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Kulthum Mathews from the psychology department at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Kulthum at: Room 2.428 in the Psychology Department. Alternately you can send an email to 2838782@uwc.ac.za

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department: Dr M. Andipatin

Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences: Prof Frantz

Tel: (021) 959 2163

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.



UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa, Telephone: (021) 959-2283/2453

Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6661

Appendix 2: Consent form

Title: An exploratory study investigating the construction of university students' perceptions of menstruation and the influence menstrual product advertisements in print media

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Witness.....

Date.....

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator's Name: Kulthum Mathews

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Belville 7535

Cell: 0827397463

Email: 2838782@uwc.ac.za



UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa, Telephone: (021) 959-2283/2453

Fax: (021) 959-3515 Telex: 52 6661

Appendix 3: FOCUS GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY BINDING FORM

Title: An exploratory study investigating the construction of university students' perceptions of menstruation and the influence menstrual product advertisements in print media

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way. I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in the study. I also agree not to disclose any information that was discussed during the group discussion.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Witness's name.....

Witness's signature.....

Date.....

Appendix 4: Interview schedule

Title: An exploratory study investigating the construction of university students' perceptions of menstruation and menstrual product advertisements in print media

Perceptions of menstruation:

1. How do you view menstruation?
2. How do you feel about menstruation?
3. Why do you feel this way about menstruation?
4. Do feel you can speak openly about menstruation? Why or why not?
5. What terms or words do you use when referring to menstruation? Why?

Media construction of femininities:

1. Do you think the media influences the ways in which women's bodies are seen by others?
2. Do you think women are portrayed to be a certain way through the media? How so?

Menstrual product advertisement:

1. What stands out most to you in these advertisements?
2. What do you think the messages are in these advertisements?
3. How do you feel about your menstrual cycle when you look at this advert?
4. What do you think this advert is saying about menstruation?
5. What do you think this advert is saying about women who menstruate?
6. Do you think there are specific messages aimed at women in this advertisement?
What are they?
7. Are these messages blatant or subtle? Why?

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Appendix 5: Demographic Questionnaire

Title: An exploratory study investigating the construction of university students' perceptions of menstruation and the influence menstrual product advertisements in print media

Name:

Age:

Religion:

Residential area:

Home language:

Year level:



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Appendix 6: Advertisement one

NEW
TAMPAX[®] RADIANT™
HELPS KEEP YOUR
PERIOD INVISIBLE.
HOW YOU CHOOSE
TO STAND OUT
IS UP TO YOU.

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

KATIE SOKOLER STREET ARTIST
colormekatie.blogspot.com

LEAKGUARD[™] TECHNOLOGY + DISCREET RESEALABLE WRAPPERS = INVISIBLE PROTECTION RADIANT YOU.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT KATIE AT [FACEBOOK.COM/TAMPAX](https://www.facebook.com/TAMPAX)

New!
TAMPAX[®] Radiant™
REGULAR

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Appendix 7: Advertisement two



Works like Magic

Go on. Be a contortionist. With Always Infinity's revolutionary material, you won't find a more flexible Ultra. So your days of bunches and leaks are virtually TA-DA! no more. Just like magic. *Try it free at always.com*

Now you see it. Now you don't!*

Have a happy period. Guaranteed.



*See pack for details. **5 ml, 10 minutes elapsed time. ©2009 P&G