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Schoolgirls’ Experience of Menstruation ss Expressed Through Body Mapping in a Quasi-Rural South African Village

Angela Zablotny
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SCHOOLGIRLS’ EXPERIENCE OF MENSTRUATION AS EXPRESSED THROUGH BODY MAPPING IN A QUASI-RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN VILLAGE

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I would like to start by thanking the incredible and brave girls who agreed to talk about such a personal topic with a stranger in their community. The excitement displayed for my project meant the world to me, and I will always remember your smiles, text messages of gratitude and shouts of hello as I walked through the village you helped make my home. None of this would have been possible without the Zama family, who so graciously welcomed me into their home as a sibling and a daughter. I feel so lucky to have lived in the presence of such love and hospitality, and I will carry your laughter with me forever.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this independent study project was to gain an understanding of menstruation as experienced by school aged girls in a quasi-rural village in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. Though a fact of life for roughly half of the world’s population, menstruation continues to be a taboo topic and has implications related to both traditional Zulu beliefs as well as expectations for females in a largely patriarchal society.

The qualitative research method of body mapping was used with teenage girls in an effort to facilitate both reflection and discussion on their lived experiences with their periods. Supplemental interviews with teachers, nurses, sexual health educators and a traditional Zulu healer were also conducted to gain a well-rounded understanding of the education and expectations in place for young females in the community. The findings were compiled and analyzed using secondary research as well as reflections on the personal experiences of the researcher.

Though a lack of education and sanitary resources were not problems encountered in this study, menstruation was still found to be a topic that had both positive and negative effects on the lives of the individuals. Each story was different, some greatly influenced by restrictive traditional beliefs, others focusing on the need to avoid sexual encounters due to fertility, and others emphasizing a sense of pride and excitement in this symbol of maturation. This study resulted in a safe space for females to express their ideas about a largely hushed topic, as well as offered a new perspective on the continuity of attitudes regarding menstruation across cultural boundaries.
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INTRODUCTION

Growing up as a female, menstruation is a fact of life, and though somewhat bothersome and inconvenient, its onset serves as a tangible sign of normal development and fertility. In the United States, my period has never been anything more than a nuisance, sometimes messing with my mood, other times causing me pain and discomfort. When I began to plan my four months studying abroad in South African villages, townships and cities I worried about the facilities and resources that would be available to me to handle my period. This led to my over packing of tampons and pads in an effort to ensure I could maintain the level of comfort I was used to, even while traveling.

Once I arrived in country, this self-centered preoccupation with how to change and dispose of tampons and pads without flush toilets and garbage cans shifted to curiosity. My Western culture and easily accessible and well-maintained toilet facilities, though missing from my life for a few months, still remain the reality to which I will return. Yet for so many South African adolescent girls and women, what is a temporary inconvenience for me is an ongoing reality for them.

My curiosity with this topic was fueled as I heard of accounts of girls missing school due to a lack of sanitary pads, in some cases leading to them dropping out. I also began to encounter individuals expressing traditional beliefs that placed restrictions on activities females can do and participate in while menstruating. Though I was finding secondary resources and a wealth of information I was left wondering how common it is for girls to miss school due to their periods, and how relevant traditional beliefs regarding menstruation are to modern girls. I found myself becoming upset with the idea of an individual being disadvantaged by something that she had absolutely no control over.
This curiosity and the emotions attached to it led me to develop a research project that aimed to explore the lived realities of teenage females dwelling in a quasi-rural South African village. In this particular village, the issue of sanitary resources inhibiting girls from continuing their education was not a problem I encountered. Therefore, what began as a topic focusing on what one may call the ‘logistics’ of menstruation, meaning access to resources and facilities in which to dispose of those resources, shifted towards the implications of menstruation for women in a largely patriarchal and traditional culture. Menstruation is seen as a symbol of a young girl’s development into a woman, and serves as a sign that she is now able to fulfill her duty and responsibilities in the future as a mother and caretaker of the home.

Through the qualitative research method of body mapping, the experiences of teenage females with their periods were expressed both in a creative art form, as well as through a follow-up interview. Interviews were also conducted with local nurses, teachers, sexual health educators and a Sangoma (a traditional Zulu healer) in an effort to gain a well-rounded perspective on the information that is presented to young females regarding menstruation. This was done in an effort to better understand their experiences and opinions. These interviews also offered insight into how society as a whole, and smaller scale communities have been changing and developing since the abolishment of Apartheid in 1994.

While research is available on both the beliefs regarding menstruation in Zulu culture and the availability of resources for various parts of South Africa, I felt that the voice of the young female was missing. Due to the personal nature of this topic, the rationale behind the use of body mapping was to allow females a chance to reflect on this part of their life, and make sense of its further reaching effects. In a society where difficult topics are talked of less freely, and teenage pregnancy and HIV spearhead almost all conversations regarding sexual health, the hope
was that the encouragement of such discussions would be beneficial for participants. This research aimed to gain a greater understanding of the lived realities of its participants and also hoped to create an environment in which females felt they could speak about menstruation in an open and safe manner. The use of body mapping offered a more abstract outlet of expression, and encouraged participants to present their experiences in a personal manner that made the most sense to them.

When planning how I would approach this research my advisor suggested I take on an auto ethnographic approach after explaining how I had initially become interested in the topic. I quickly laughed this off as the thought of writing publicly about my own experiences with such a private thing seemed out of the question. Soon thereafter, while completing a class reading I came across the following quote:

“Why is it acceptable (even positively regarded) for people to share their life experiences with a researcher, when concurrently, it is perceived to be problematic that a researcher examines his or her own life?” (Vickers, 2002, p. 617).

This stuck with me as I began to ask girls questions regarding their periods and I realized that I was asking complete strangers to do and talk about exactly what I had deemed as too personal. As a female, I obviously had personal experiences to draw on, and from those experiences come bias. To ignore this bias and to fail to acknowledge the experiences that have helped to form my opinions both regarding menstruation and the role of women in general seemed a disservice to my research. I also found throughout the study that I began to reflect on my own experiences with my period in a Western culture, and realized just how similar the feelings of shame, embarrassment and the need to hide my period are to those girls with whom I interacted. My
own experiences, both with my period and throughout the process of data collection, will be interjected within the data I present from my field work in an effort to help the reader understand the thought process behind my methodology and analysis, and to further explore the innate interconnectedness between self and other.
METHODOLOGIES

Sample of Convenience

For purposes of research, I moved in with a family in a quasi-rural village in the province of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa for seventeen days. In this time I worked to establish a presence with my neighbors and with students at the local secondary and high schools as I would often spend time just hanging out at school dismissal time. The immersion in the community also offered me the ability to observe day-to-day routine, especially for many of the girls with whom I was interviewing. Teenage female participants were recruited through convenience and word of mouth, starting with my neighbors and stemming out to their friends. The first body mapping workshop consisted of four females, two neighbors and two of their friends. The second body mapping workshop was comprised of five individuals who knew the niece of my homestay Mama, and who agreed to participate through word of mouth. Three female interviewees were found through random introductions and a quick synopsis of my project to individuals I interacted with as they walked home from school each day. They were unable to commit to the time needed to complete body mapping, but were eager to discuss their experiences and thoughts about menstruation.

Additional interviews were conducted with a Sangoma (traditional Zulu healer), two nurses from the local clinic, a Life Orientation teacher and two sexual health educators who worked through a local Non Governmental Organization (NGO). These appointments were set up through phone calls and in-person inquiries at the various facilities.

All participants who agreed to participate in this study did so upon their own free will, and were informed that all identities and unique identifiers would be excluded or changed for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality. Consent forms (see Appendices 4 and 5) that outlined
the purpose and parameters of the study were given to participants to sign, and any individual
under the age of 18 had it signed and reviewed by a parent or guardian. All forms were collected
outside of the schools, or at individual houses upon the request of the participants. In any case
where a formal consent form could not be obtained with an adult informant, informed verbal
consent was given and noted in my field notes. Contact was made with participants via cell
phone calls and text messages, and my phone number was handed out in an effort to make
myself available should anyone have further questions. For purposes of privacy and
confidentiality, the village in which I lived will be referred to as Coastal Village, the schools and
the clinic will be unnamed, and names of participants have been changed to pseudonyms. The
traditional healer will only be referred to as Sangoma.

**Body Mapping**

The technique of body mapping has been used mainly for the exploration of people’s
experiences with HIV and AIDS, and physical trauma. Using the outline of the individual’s
body on a large sheet of paper, participants are given the opportunity to express their experiences
on the topic, and to reflect on how they have embodied this understanding within their own life.
In her study involving victims of trauma during the apartheid era, Tanja Meyburg stated that she
felt “the artistic medium used in the body maps creates a universal language through which
stories of identity can be told, and mapped within the individual’s experience of history and
created identity” (2006, p. 29). The process of having individuals express their experiences by
utilizing their body form allows for a reflection of body perception not readily achieved through
a stand-alone interview. One opinion is that “representing this information visually can help to
clarify ambiguities and proves a rapid shared reference point” (Cornwall, 1992, p.1).
This qualitative research method has been widely used to explore the experiences of HIV due to barriers of ethics, culture and language that can arise in a formal interview setting (Olmesdahl, 2008, p. 31). It takes the power from the researcher and places it in the hands of the participant as they are able to interpret and express questions in a way that is most fitting given their lived experience. As a white female entering an exclusively Black South African village I saw the implementation of body mapping as an opportunity to break down any cultural barriers that may inhibit participants from sharing their experiences. My hope was that the activity would help participants feel more comfortable with me, and that the environment in which it was completed would offer a safe space for reflection and conversation.

**Follow-up Focus Groups and Interviews**

The body mapping activity allows for self-reflection, while the follow-up interview gives the participant the opportunity to share their experiences as well as their artwork. It was in these conversations that I had hoped to gain a greater understanding of the participants’ perceptions of the impact of their periods on their daily lives and opportunities, if at all. An important aspect I emphasized in the introduction of this study to participants was that they were free to share or withhold any information, and could present in the manner in which they were most comfortable. After the first body mapping workshop the participants expressed a desire to conduct a group interview the following day. All returned for this conversation with the exception of one. In this group interview each individual went through what they had written and drawn on their body map, and explained their own personal experiences with their periods. The three females involved in this process were all close friends, and therefore played off one another in the recounting of their stories. Though this level of comfort is positive, it resulted in very similar, almost identical, body maps and explanations.
After the completion of the artwork at the second body mapping workshop, one individual had to leave before having a chance to discuss her project. The following day we made plans to meet one-on-one in her home, and a formal interview was conducted regarding her body map as well as supplemental information regarding menstruation and her personal beliefs. The other four participants from the second workshop expressed a level of discomfort with openly discussing their body maps. They were given the opportunity to explain in whatever way they felt most comfortable, and all girls opted to write down a paragraph describing their work. Anything that was unclear in their write-ups was clarified in person over the next few days to ensure that I had a full understanding of their written descriptions and body maps.

From a research perspective this limitation of not obtaining interviews inhibited me from gaining a full understanding of each individual’s body map and attitudes regarding menstruation, a fact that was initially disappointing. Upon further reflection I came to terms with the idea that the implementation of body mapping was in hopes that the participants would have a chance to reflect on their personal experiences and express them in a way that made sense to them. Though I have no concrete way of knowing if this was the case for any of the participants, the positive responses I received regarding the activity allowed me to walk away with a sense that I had accomplished a goal of my initial research plan.

Additional Interviews

All additional interviews with teachers, nurses and a Sangoma were conducted at the convenience of the interviewee, and most often occurred at their place of work. These were conducted in an effort to gain an understanding of the information presented to young females in school and in the community. The information provided also offered insight into traditional
beliefs regarding menstruation and the role of women in the community, as well as how these roles and beliefs have changed.

A translator was only used to interview the Sangoma, who knew very limited English. She appointed her eleven-year old granddaughter who was fluent in English, as a translator. At first, this was worrisome as she is quite young and I questioned her ability to fully understand questions regarding a part of growing up that she had yet to experience. In retrospect, the fact that she had yet to start menstruation can be seen as beneficial as it prevents her own experiences and opinions from tainting or influencing those offered by the Sangoma. Her translations were both relevant and useful, and a few times she corrected herself upon further clarification of my questions, letting me know as the researcher that she was fully engaged in her task and the conversation as a whole.

Limitations and Biases

Due to the limited time available to conduct research for this study the data collected and conclusions drawn cannot be seen as representative of Zulu culture or of the community in which I lived as a whole. Each body map and interview must be taken as a personal and individual experience and as a vehicle for giving a female the opportunity to voice her own opinions and attitudes. While body mapping is a beneficial method of collecting data, moving into a new community with few contacts and limited access to facilities led to difficulties conducting the activity in the way I had originally imagined. Teenage females in this community held great responsibilities within their households after school, and staying out after dark was not an option due to the secluded nature of the houses. Many individuals I approached after school did not express an interest in participating, yet the reason for this refusal is unknown. Whether it due to time constraints, discomfort with speaking to a stranger, or possibly discomfort discussing their
periods at all is and will remain unknown. From this perspective, one could argue that any effort to evaluate how taboo or unspoken menstruation is in the community is skewed, as those who agreed to participate obviously have some level of comfort with the conversation. There is a possibility that individuals who are lacking information, resources, or a safe space to discuss their periods declined the invitation to participate due to discomfort.

It is also important to note the language barrier that existed as a factor in every interview and focus group. Though all participants were fluent or near fluent in English, it is still their second language, and therefore many questions and phrases had to be re-worded or repeated for further understanding. This led to a lack of continuity in questioning, as often times my inquiries were interpreted or clarified in different ways.
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Menstruation and Traditional Beliefs

For many women the onset of menstruation not only marks the start of puberty, but also of womanhood and the duties and expectations that it entails. Through secondary research and an interview with a Sangoma, a Traditional Zulu Healer, traditional beliefs and practices were explored in this particular community. Amidst details of practices and beliefs that isolate and restrict women due to the presence of menstrual blood, there is also a great pride in menstruating, as it offers concrete evidence that an individual is in fact becoming a woman. In *Traditional practices and the Constitution: A policy dialogue, Implications for human rights and gender equality* a testimony by an elderly woman describes the practice of ‘ukugonqa’ performed after menarche. Her story recounts her experience being held in isolation for three months, and undergoing tests that ensured her virginity. This belief therefore presented menstruation in a negative and impure light (2009, p. 6). Another traditional practice states, “intercourse with menstruating women had to be avoided, as this was (and still is to some extent) believed to ‘weaken’ a man and cause him to be more prone to illness or other misfortune” (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001, p.541).

In seeking out a Sangoma, the hope was to hear accounts of these traditions first hand, and to assess the relevance of such beliefs in an increasingly modern society. The interview was conducted sitting on reed mats of the floor of her esigodlweni [traditional healing hut], and she appointed her 11-year old granddaughter to serve as a translator for the conversation. Going into this interview I was slightly nervous, as it was the first elderly informant I had approached, and some sort of discomfort with the topic or reluctance to speak openly was anticipated. This
Sangoma, however, was eager to share her beliefs and her pride in her culture and calling to be a healer emanated from her, despite the language barrier that was present between us.

She started by listing the things a young woman must not do when she has her period:

“She mustn’t come here [esigodlweni], do not touch the muthi [medicine], and let’s say like your grandfather or father, you mustn’t talk to him or bring food to him, or cook food for him. Just cook food for the other ladies….and go to fetch water, but the grandfather mustn’t drink that water” (Interview, 11 Apr 2014).

These details were followed up with the descriptions of males getting sick or having stomach cramps if they were to eat the food or drink the water of a menstruating woman. It was also included that the muthi of a Sangoma would no longer work if a woman on her period were to enter the esigodlweni. When a Sangoma herself is menstruating she must make a special muthi from a plant outside the house and spread it over the floor when she enters in order to ensure the viability of her other healing agents (Sangoma, Interview, 11 Apr 2014).

My conversation with the Sangoma led to me asking the question of ‘Why?’ hoping to find some rationale for every little detail of each ritual and tradition. Instead of an explanation I received the recurring response, “because it is the culture” (Sangoma, Interview, 11 Apr 2014). This idea was perpetuated in various interviews with young teenagers who spoke of not being able to cook or enter the traditional healing hut, or esigodlweni, simply because someone told them so as part of their upbringing (Nomhle, focus group, 6 Apr 2014).

When a young woman experiences her first period, the Sangoma offered details of what must occur, once again with little explanation other than that it is tradition. When asked about ukugonqa as previously referenced in Traditional Practices and the Constitution, she launched into a description and acting out of a young girl remaining inside, covering her head and body with a blanket for seven days when she first receives her period. She must “go to a river, in the
morning so that no one would see her” in order to bathe, and if anyone is to visit her they must offer a 1 or 2 Rand coin. When asked about the issue of schooling, the Sangoma explained that the female may attend school, but not speak with boys, and then when she comes home and on the weekends she is to stay inside for the full seven days (Sangoma, Interview, 11 Apr 2014).

This account of *ukugonqa* shares similarities with that of the one detailed in the article in that it involves isolation upon the onset of menarche. The Sangoma, however seemed to offer a more modern version of this idea, one that acknowledged the importance of a girl to attend school and receive an education.

The secretive aspects of these beliefs support the perspective of menstruation being a taboo and somewhat negative topic, yet the onset of menarche was also described as something to celebrate. The testimony previously presented regarding the elderly woman concludes with the description of a goat being slaughtered in celebration of the start of menstruation at the end of the young girl’s isolation (Traditional Practices and the Constitution, 2009, p.6). When asked if a young girl starting to menstruate is an event to celebrate or something to hide the conversation with the Sangoma proceeded as follows:

“No, you must just shut up [when you get your period]. Maybe just tell your mother or your granny, but not boys…you mustn’t tell the father yourself, your mother will tell the father…the father will be very very happy because if you don’t [start your period] it is bad bad luck” (11 Apr 2014).

This quote demonstrates the two-fold notion of menstruation as believed by this particular individual. The desire to conceal this blatant sign of development into a woman may cause one to think it is a negative event, yet it is also marked by a sense of relief that a girl has started puberty. This idea of ‘bad luck’ if one is to not start her period was expanded on, with a description that the individual will gain weight and start to experience what would medically be
described as seizures. A failure to start menstruation means an inability to have children and according to this Sangoma “it is not right” and she credited it to being bewitched or cursed by someone with the help of a “bad Sangoma” (Interview, 11 Apr 2014).

This interview and the supporting research I found offers a glimpse into the Zulu beliefs surrounding menstruation, yet it is important to note that these are the beliefs of one individual who herself admitted that everyone believes in different things (Interview, 11 Apr 2014). While she insisted that these rituals and customs are still very common, in my research I only encountered a few individuals who admitted to practicing them. Though they may not still be as commonly practiced as I had originally thought, it is still important to be aware of the history, as often old customs play a role in molding modern attitudes, even as the practices themselves become less common.

**Body Mapping Findings**

**Workshop 1 (See Appendix 1 for body maps)**

The first of the two body mapping workshops was held in the garage of my home in the Coastal Village and consisted of four sixteen-year olds. Two of the participants were the granddaughters of the Sangoma previously referenced, and the other two were friends and neighbors. This relationship with a traditional healer was apparent, as they were the only individuals interviewed who referenced believing any of the traditional customs outlined by the Sangoma. The day after the body mapping, three of the four participants returned for a focus group discussion.

In this first session of body mapping the girls were hesitant to get started, and a sense of wanting to present the information and answer the questions for an outside viewer’s benefit was
observed. All four girls chose to write out the answers to the questions, and to depict images of blood using red paint when asked about how they feel physically while menstruating. It was in the answer to this question that I felt they were beginning to loosen up a bit, laughing with one another as they each smeared red paint where they saw appropriate. Every individual started off their reflection on their first period by saying they were shocked or surprised. Nomhle and Avela both followed up this expression of alarm by saying they were too shocked to tell anyone, or just didn’t know who to tell right away (Focus group, 6 Apr 2014). A sense of embarrassment or shame was expressed by Sithanda when she wrote “I feel so sad because I was on my way back home coming from school and it was like everyone was watching me” (Body map, 5 Apr 2014). Avela used the word disgusting while talking about the blood all over her pants, saying how she proceeded to wash them many times (Body map, 5 Apr 2014). Busisiwe wrote down how scared and confused she was on her body map (5 Apr 2014), but in the follow up interview she said that at first she thought that she was sick, but told her mom about it and said, “she told me that I was starting to be a girl now…I was happy” (Focus group, 6 Apr 2014). A positive perspective was also presented by Nomhle when she wrote, “At my first day [with my period] I was shocked and happy at the same time because I knew now I would be able to get pregnant anytime. I like children very much so I was so happy” (Body map, 5 Apr 2014). This sixteen-year old not only demonstrated a grasp on the actual implications of menstruation in this statement, but also a sense of pride in her period, similar to those ideas presented by the Sangoma.

All four participants wrote “I don’t talk with boys” on their body maps in an answer to the question “Is there anything you do differently when you have your period?” Sithanda gave the reasoning for this by saying, “I don’t know, but my parents told me that I must not talk to boys.” After inquiring what would happen if they did speak with boys Sithanda said “sometimes
you bleed” followed by Nomhle who added “you bleed too much” (Focus group, 6 Apr 2014).
The girls also offered that they don’t cook or go into the esigodlweni while menstruating, with Sithanda, one of the Sangoma’s granddaughters expanding on this concept by saying the following:

“We [she and Busisiwe] stay with Gogo and she is a traditional healer. If we are menstruating we don’t go to her room [esigodlweni]…because it’s the place that she talks to the ancestors…I think the ancestors become angry [if a menstruating woman enters] but I don’t know” (Focus group, 6 Apr 2014).

Additional restrictions during menstruation included Nomhle saying that she doesn’t play, and Avela adding that she doesn’t braid anyone’s hair (Body map, 5 Apr 2014).

Despite all of these restrictions these girls expressed no problems with their periods, after getting over the initial shock of the sight of blood. They were unable to offer any concrete reasoning for the activities they must not do while menstruating, but all of them expressed that they abide by these rules laid out by elder members of their family without questioning the given instructions (Focus group, 6 Apr 2014). All four participants reported talking to an older female in their family, whether it their mother, aunt or sister, regarding menstruation, and felt that they had learned enough about puberty in classes at school. Overall, the participants received the activity of body mapping and the follow-up discussion well and cited it as a positive experience (Focus group, 6 Apr 2014).

**Workshop 2 (See Appendix 2 for body maps)**

The second body mapping session was comprised of three sixteen-year olds and two fifteen-year olds and took place in the living room of a Gogo [grandmother] near where most of the participants lived. This session started off with a similar degree of hesitance as the first, yet these individuals seemed to feed off of one another while starting to work on their body maps.
Due to the restriction on creative expression I observed after asking girls in the first session very specific questions, I opted for a broad prompt in this second workshop, just instructing the girls to reflect on their experience when they first started their period and with menstruation in general. Rather than using markers to write words, in this session the first girl to begin started to paint quite expressively. This encouraged the other girls to follow suit, and it resulted in five very colorful and fully painted, yet very different body maps. The data presented is based off of the body maps themselves, as well as written paragraph descriptions that each individual created to describe their work. Information regarding Fikile’s body map was gathered in a follow-up interview the following day.

Two of the participants, Zandile and Nosipho, expressed a level of confusion regarding their periods, resulting in slightly more negative-looking body maps than the other participants. Zandile wrote “the first time I got my period I felt so stressed because I did not know what happened with my virginity. I saw the blood on my panty and I screamed.” (Body map, 13 Apr 2014). These emotions are clear in her body map, as she depicted her face both with a frown and tears coming from her eyes. In a conversation two days later I asked for some clarification regarding her education on menstruation. She told me that although she had learned about periods in school, that idea wasn’t the first thing that came to her mind when she saw blood in her underwear (pers comm, 15 Apr 2014). Nosipho had a similar confusion upon first seeing the blood writing, “On my first period I was upset because I didn’t know what was happening to me. I told my Mommy and she said it is a sign that I am grown up so she gave me one pad” (Body map, 13 Apr 2014).

This idea of becoming an adult, or maturing into a woman, was also expressed in the following statements made by Luthando, Fikile and Mbembe:
“...I told my mother that I think I’m grown up because now I started my period...the red color under my pants symbolizes that now I’m an ‘enough gal’” (Luthando, Body map, 13 April 2014).

“It was like I was waiting for it [my period] anyway because I had to be mature...it was a positive thing, I was happy because everyone has to have their periods, all my sisters, I was the only one [who had yet to start her period], so I was like so happy” (Fikile, interview, 14 April 2014).

“When I started my periods I was so excited...she [my mom] said it’s a good thing because now I’m becoming an adult...I feel awesome about my menstruation” (Mbembe, body map, 13 April 2014).

These positive perspectives are quite clear in each body map, as they depict smiles on their faces, and vibrant colors and decorations surrounding their bodies. Mbembe even included a word bubble above her head reading: “Thank GOD I’ve Started my Periods” (Body map, 13 April 2014).

It is important to note that only one individual in this workshop referenced any instruction to stay away from boys when starting to menstruate when she wrote, “...she [her mother] tell me I should stay away from boys” (Nosipho, Body map, 13 April 2014). This was in contrast to the opinion offered by Fikile, who talked about getting her first boyfriend after she had started her period. When asked if her family was okay with this she said, “they don’t really care, I’m still the same person.” This notion expressed by Fikile was different than every other participant cited in this study. It is important to note the difference in her upbringing than the other females, in that she spent all of primary and secondary school in a boarding school, therefore living away from her family for much of her life. She had recently moved back to Coastal Village for High School (Interview, 14 April 2014). The greater independence that comes with growing up away from the constant watch of parents and in an environment with a mix of
White, Colored and Indian children could be a factor in this differing opinion that she presented compared with her friends and classmates in the village.

The paragraphs written to describe their body maps are short and offer quite general descriptions of their experiences, mostly with their first periods. Due to the lack of great detail I cannot say for sure whether or not these individuals believe in any traditional practices, or if they simply chose to exclude them from this activity. Either way their exclusion offers insight into the importance and relevance of these traditional beliefs in their lives. Much like in the first workshop, all participants claimed to enjoy the experience. After the first workshop the participants chose to leave their body maps with me to dispose of, yet in this second session all participants requested to keep their artwork to bring home. This desire, in my opinion, suggests a greater sense of pride in both their work and their experience.

Analysis of Findings

While reviewing the body mapping sessions, the idea that each individual experience was unique made it difficult to draw any sweeping conclusions or make any generalizations on girls’ experience with their periods. As a whole, the participants in the first workshop were more reserved regarding discussion of menstruation and also happened to believe in more traditional practices than in the second group. Though one can assume that the hesitation in conversation and the less overtly positive feelings about their periods can be attributed to the presence of traditional beliefs, due to the difference in prompts for each discussion I do not think this claim can be fully supported (See Appendices 1 and 2 for examples of questions).

An identifiable theme in both sessions was a sense of shock and fear when first seeing blood, followed by a sense of acceptance and maturation once learning the proper way to handle
one’s period. Many individuals spoke about not knowing what was happening when they first started their period, yet also said they had received education in school. This discrepancy in information caused me to seek clarification in an interview with a teacher who instructs Life Orientation, a class in which students learn about personal health and well-being. Ms. Zuma, a forty-six-year old teacher at the local Secondary School, teaches classes on menstruation once a year to all of the eighth graders in the school, and clarified that students receive previous education in the Primary schools as well. She detailed how girls are taught about their reproductive organs, the changes in their uterine walls, and hormones that cause the flow of blood. Ms. Zuma also explained that in school the girls are told to tell their mothers who will then advise them on what to do, but she continued to say, “they say mothers don’t talk with them” (Interview, 14 Apr 2014). It is important to note that this claim was not supported by any of the girls interviewed in this study. Every participant cited their mother or aunt as the person they spoke with regarding their menstruation. Whether or not this was just surface level information regarding how to use pads and to be wary of boys or if an in-depth talk about puberty and its accompanying responsibilities occurred is unclear. According to Ms. Zuma a common question asked by schoolgirls is ‘What does menstruation mean?’ She offered the following as her answer to this question: “It means you will be pregnant if you don’t use protection” (Interview, 14 Apr 2014). This immediate focus on pregnancy was also expressed by a community health education nurse, Sister Mthembu, when she said “the blood is a sign that if you do intercourse you will get pregnant” (Interview, 3 Apr 2014).

Though these ideas are fact, the blunt manner in which they were stated was somewhat jarring and had an almost threatening aspect to it. I felt that there was an element of scare tactic at play, one that aimed to keep girls from engaging in sexual activity with the opposite sex.
While walking around the village I interacted with numerous male and female students, all of who seemed to be hanging out and speaking with one another, causing statements such as “I must stay away from boys, not sitting near them” to be a bit confusing (Ntokozo, 9 Apr 2014). One girl clarified these instructions to avoid boys by saying, “not that you can’t talk to boys, you can…but not do such things, all the stuff like kisses because it can lead to sex” (Asanda, 9 Apr 2014). It was in this statement that I began to understand the unequal pressure and responsibility placed on females for avoiding sexual interactions with males. In my opinion, the instruction to young girls that they are better off avoiding boys all together to evade pregnancy suggests a lack of control in the progression of a relationship from something casual to something sexual. This idea speaks to the power dynamics related to gender in this particular community.

Expectations regarding standards of behavior for females were addressed in a conversation with Amanda, a twenty-three year old female who helps to teach sexual health education classes in local schools. She said that her mother told her to “stay away from sexual activity” and that the onset of menstruation was followed up by virginity testing that this individual said “starts at age twelve, or as soon as you get your period” (Pers comm, 14 Apr 2014). In this particular village, virginity testing, which involves the visualization of a female’s vagina by an elder community member to ensure the presence of the hymen, is still widely practiced.

The positives of virginity testing seem to be emphasized and presented by those with deep ties in Zulu culture, clinging onto a practice as the new democratic state imposes new laws. Virginity testing is a long-standing custom that saw resurgence in popularity that coincided with the increase in the occurrence of HIV in 1994. Zulu Traditionalists intended this reintroduction of the practice as commonplace as a vehicle by which to prevent the spread of HIV infection and
teenage pregnancy. This fact lends itself to the argument that the practice is meant to have a
positive impact on the status of health of those females involved and in South Africa as a whole
(J. Hicks, class lecture, 24 Feb 2014). In its original form, it was seen as a way to introduce
young girls to basic life skills and social behavior in an effort to teach young girls to be
responsible for their actions (Traditional Practices and the Constitution, 2009). I would like to
note that the purpose of bringing up the topic of Virginity Testing in this analysis is not to
discuss the ethical implications of such a practice for young girls, but rather to offer insight into a
tradition that continues to be at play and is widely accepted by participants in this community.
To fully assess the details and accompanying positive and negative implications for girls would
be an entire research project in and of itself.

This topic of virginity testing came up with every informant in this research when asked
about the use of tampons, and is another example of females being held to a higher standard of
behavior, as it eliminates any element of secrecy regarding sexual activity. While I inquired
about access to sanitary pads in this particular village, Amanda explained where they were sold,
and then interjected “the tampon issue is totally out.” She continued with “they [young girls]
think if you use tampons you’re not going to be a virgin” (Interview, 14 Apr 2014). Miss Zuma
said that there is a “belief that tampons are not good for kids…maybe it will break their
virginity” (Interview, 14 Apr 2014). The uncertainty that is present in this statement hints that
this is not a belief or topic discussed in schools, an idea supported by one female who said she
had heard of a tampon from other girls, but no one had told her what it is (Thandi, Interview, 14
Apr 2014). While speaking with a Sangoma she made it clear that young girls do not use
tampons due to the issue of virginity testing. Every attempt I made for further explanation
proved futile as she just continued to emphasize that girls only use pads (Sangoma, Interview, 11
Apr 2014). I walked away almost feeling as if enquiring about the use of tampons was something outlandish to even consider, and failed to speak with anyone in the community who had ever used a tampon.

Despite the immense pressure and responsibility for girls that I perceived in this research, the majority response from the participants regarding their period was one of pride in their development. This could potentially be related to the emphasis on women in this culture to have children and raise a family. An article that speaks about proper Zulu girlhood and preparation for womanhood states: “The cultural ideal here is the demure, soft-spoken woman who serves her husband, her children, and her in-laws. In attitude and behavior, the ideals of quiet respect and obedience still apply” (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001, p. 543). This image of the ‘ideal Zulu woman,’ has also been described as having expectations to “uphold the culture, take her place in the kitchen, take care of the children, remain faithful to her husband, and so on…” (de Lange, Mitchell & Bhana, 2012, p.505). Throughout the body mapping and conversations with teenage girls, no one ever voiced one mention or complaint of these expectations, causing me to question if they are widely accepted and embraced by the participants or if they are simply no longer factors as society continues to modernize.

Some individuals even expressed a sort of relief and happiness when starting their period due to its implications for fertility. As previously mentioned, Nomhle specifically cited happiness upon the start of her period because she “knew now I would be able to get pregnant anytime” (Body map, 5 Apr 2014). This positivity regarding menstruation was also presented by fifteen-year old Asanda when she said, “I don’t get upset because it is something that, it is good for us because it cleans us so that we can…everyone wants to get a child when she gets older” (Interview, 9 Apr 2014). This sense of relief and positivity can also be seen as relating back to
the opinion of the Sangoma that the onset of one’s period is something to be celebrated
(Interview, 11 Apr 2014).

Amanda was the only individual to comment on the pressure on women to fall into the
traditional gender roles. After explaining that girls are told to stay away or be cautious of boys
when they begin to menstruate, yet boys are given no such instruction regarding girls she said,
“Lots of pressure is put into women…in a way it suppresses us from being independent…women
are too pressurized.” She continued to describe how society has been changing “because of
democracy…before there was pressure to go to the river and fetch water, but now there are taps.”
These changes in lifestyle, and amenities that make life easier for women are now, in her
opinion, affording them more time and opportunity to pursue dreams outside of the traditional
roles (Amanda, pers comm, 14 Apr 2014).

This change in attitudes was also presented in the conversation with Ms. Zuma, the Life
Orientation teacher. “There has a been a change in culture…the ‘free borns’ after 1994 ask more
questions, are more inquisitive. When I was growing up you didn’t ask the questions they ask
now.” She expressed a certain level of discomfort with the questions being asked as they were
topics that were never previously discussed openly, yet went on to say that she feels this is a
positive thing “because kids need to know why—why is it [menstruation] happening, what will
be the results?” (Zuma, interview, 14 Apr 2014). A possible explanation for this sentiment is
presented in an article that examines sexuality in the context of both pre and post-apartheid
South Africa. “For black youth—particularly women—asserting a sexualized ‘freedom’ may be
a statement of the rupture between the apartheid and post-apartheid generations, as much as a
symptom of erosion of parental authority” (Posel, 2005, p.132). This ‘sexualized freedom’ was
also expressed in Amanda’s view of the decreasing pride attached to maintaining one’s virginity.
“Now it can be seen as missing out or as not cool...[there is] a lot of pressure to be involved sexually” (Amanda, 14 Apr 2014). If this statement by this individual is in fact true, then it places modern teenagers in this community at a crossroads between traditional beliefs and social expectations regarding their development into young women, all marked by the onset of their first period.

Reflection

In her article *Soiled Identity: Memory-Work Narratives of Menstruation*, Glenda Koutroulis explored the two-fold view of menstruation and its affect on women both physically and psychologically when she said:

“On the one hand menstruation was characterized as a nuisance for women, on the other it was assumed to be central to a woman’s existence so that any disturbance in bleeding was anticipated to produce psychological disturbance” (2001, p. 192).

A statement offered by fifteen-year old Asanda presents a similar idea and perspective regarding her own period. When asked if she feels comfortable talking to teachers about menstruation she said, “Yes, yes I feel comfortable because it’s something which is normal.” This is a positive view, yet in a follow-up question asking if the boys know about menstruation she answered, “Ah no, no…it’s a secret. I don’t tell anyone, I try to hide myself if I am in my period I hide myself...like no one knows that I am in period until I’m finished” (Pers comm, 9 Apr 2014). This emphasis on wanting to hide was also expressed in the account of the Sangoma, who spoke of the curse of not starting your period, yet also the need to be hushed and not talk to your father about it (Interview, 11 Apr 2014). These statements support my perception of menstruation as a taboo topic in this community, and seem to offer the view that girls may feel
uncomfortable or even limited by the presence of their periods. This was the attitude with which I approached this study, a mindset that caused me to view the experiences of the females in this coastal village as completely different than my own. However, as I worked to compile all of the data and opinions collected, it became quite clear that even in an area with such rich culture, experience is highly individualized. Reflecting back on the body mapping workshops and conversations with young girls, I began to see my own story interconnected with theirs, despite the vastly different environments in which we were raised.

In the seventh grade when I first started my period I knew what had happened, but I was still so terrified and reluctant to tell my mom. While wearing pads I was always convinced people could see what felt like a diaper through my clothing, and at school I became quite skilled in sneaking a tampon into my pocket or up my sleeve with a quick flick of the wrist. Throughout middle and high school I obviously knew that I wasn’t the only one who had periods, yet I still wished to conceal when exactly I was menstruating. This didn’t seem strange to me at the time, as it was how every girl I knew felt, but why the need to hide something which is completely normal, a mere fact of life?

So yes, I feel that my Western culture places less pressure on me to fulfill traditional gender roles, I do not feel restricted by my period in terms of whom I talk to or where I go and someone checking for my virginity was never a factor in my decision to use tampons instead of pads. Yet my period by no means has ever been something I have proudly proclaimed or have wanted other people to know about. I do not believe that my father or brother will become ill if I speak with or cook for them while menstruating, but I have also never had an open conversation with them regarding my period. In her book *The Curse, Confronting the Last Unmentionable*.
Taboo: Menstruation, Karen Houppert analyzes the messages sent by brands such as Tampax and Kotex. She described them by saying:

“Forget the natural dismay of discovering you’ve bled through your skivvies to your skirt: these ads zeroed in on women’s fear of exposure, promoting a whole culture of concealment. Tapping into that taboo, ads reinforced the idea that any sign you were menstruating, even purchasing menstrual products, was cause for embarrassment” (1999).

This Western perspective, focusing on advertisements for feminine products so prominent in my own life, shares obvious similarities with the data I have collected for purposes of this study. What started as an interest in the possibility of menstruation being a hindrance to young girls’ access to education evolved into a study with an aim of giving a voice to young females regarding a very personal and individualized part of their lives. Though there are deeply rooted cultural beliefs at play in the community in which I was living and my data collection has given me a glimpse into these ideals, I do not feel I am in a position to comment on whether or not these traditions and practices personally hinder females in any way. I can, however, note that the process of body mapping and the subsequent conversations regarding menstruation proved to be worthwhile and well received by all those who chose to participate. It was in the laughter and words of gratitude from the girls that I was able to see a safe space created, one in which talking and painting about the monthly appearance of blood in their underwear, was not only accepted, but encouraged. It is within the voices of these individuals that I too have been able to redefine my own. As a researcher I was encouraging young girls to express their attitudes and beliefs, with a stranger nonetheless, but would I have been able to do the same at their age? The overall view of menstruation as something people would rather just avoid talking about has been relevant in my own upbringing as well, something I came to realize throughout this journey.
As I sat with the Sangoma on the floor of her esigodlweni laughing with her at my attempts to speak Zulu and as I swapped stories with teenage girls about the worry of bleeding through our clothing while at school, suddenly our differences in background and upbringing became irrelevant. We were females, and therefore we shared the common experience of menstruation, something that has been a largely unspoken and uncomfortable topic, both in this community in South Africa and in my own experience in the United States. Pullen and Rhodes (2008, 243) have written in support of texts that are “…open-ended, incomplete, and uncertain,” texts that defy the “…utopian pursuit of conceptual clarity, linear argument and knock-down conclusions.” It is with this degree of uncertainty that I will hold onto the information gained from this research, and use it to move forward and ask questions of ‘Why?’ regarding the taboo nature of menstruation, a fact of life for half of the world’s population.
LITERATURE REVIEW

For purposes of this study relevant data and quotes from secondary sources have been implemented throughout the write-up in an effort to provide further depth and understanding of the findings. At this time, I feel that it is important to call to attention a newsletter released by a South African Non-Governmental Organization, Dignity Dreams, which played a large part in sparking my interest in the study. Though the findings presented in this document did not end up being relevant to the particular community in which I was immersed, they offer a broad perspective on the reality of menstruation for women in South Africa on a larger scale.

This newsletter from Dignity Dreams, a new NGO as of July 2013, offers statistics regarding the effects of a lack of menstrual resources for women in South Africa. “There are 2.1 million young girls, between the ages of 12 and 18 years, who have to resort to using old clothes, rags, newspapers, leaves, bark and grass because they cannot afford sanitary towels” (2014, p.1). This newsletter goes on to detail how this lack of resource leads to girls missing days of school, which can lead to their eventual dropping out with further negative implications for their future opportunities. This organization has offered a sanitary solution in which girls are offered reusable sanitary pads at a low cost, which are both effective and environmentally friendly (2014, p.1). The hope is that these resources, along with the opportunity and confidence that can come from their use, empower young women to move forward with their education and better their lives.
CONCLUSIONS

Though a topic that largely goes unspoken, menstruation plays a key role in the life of every woman. Full of a history of taboo and traditional beliefs, how females in an increasingly modern society are presented with information and education regarding their periods, and how this shapes their own beliefs was explored in a quasi-rural South African village. The creative and individualistic approach of body mapping allowed for each participant to interpret and express answers to questions in a way that she felt was most representative of herself. The reflective nature of this qualitative research tool coupled with supplemental interviews with health professionals and educators in the community offered a glimpse of how females have interpreted the information with which they have been presented. The purpose of this study was not to draw any huge conclusions on the traditional beliefs or to pass any judgments on a culture so different than my own when exploring the topic of menstruation. Rather, it offered females an opportunity and space in which speaking openly about such a personal topic is accepted and encouraged. The information gathered helped to emphasize the individualistic nature of menstruation, even within a community so rich in a mutual culture. Inquiring about menstruation also opened up conversation regarding expectations for women in this society, exemplifying how large of a role this maturation plays in a young girl’s life. It is through these conversations and my own self-reflection that I too have benefitted and have gained a new perspective on how I view my own period and how it has been shaped by Western culture. Though I feel this project is lacking the ability to draw grand conclusion on the experiences and attitudes of menstruation for females in this community, it has the potential to start conversation and reflection about just how similar culture and experience can be, even across very distinct traditional and situational differences.
RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Due to the time limitations present with this study, the data collected represents a very small portion of experiences and beliefs of females in South Africa. Research that was originally aimed at evaluating the veracity behind the claim that girls were missing school due to their periods, quickly became a discussion of gender and more general experiences with menstruation in this particular village. In order to evaluate a lack of resources or a lack of education regarding menstruation more fully, it is suggested that a similar study be conducted in a more rural area. One informant indicated that this particular village was too close to town (about 20 minutes by taxi) for girls to be at a loss for sanitary pad resources, yet she knew of more rural places in which this was a reality (Amanda, pers comm, 14 April 2014).

This study focused mainly on teenage girls, with the majority of informants being around sixteen years of age. The supplemental interviews were all conducted with people over the age of thirty, with the exception of one twenty-three year old. While evaluating the data collected it became clear that the twenty-three year old had a very different perspective on menstruation, and a woman’s role in the community than the body mapping participants did. If a similar study were to be conducted it would be suggested to focus on girls who had already completed high school. There is the possibility that older females would have more perspective on how their experiences with menstruation were and continue to be shaped by societal norms. An article offering a positive and proud perspective on woman’s menstrual cycle states the following:

“In your 20s you get used to it in a funny sort of way. You begin to find out what you can and cannot do on a monthly basis: the wonderful excuse for eating copious amounts of chocolate; the moody times; the hyperactive times (with no chocolate), the body odour changes….And sometimes it actually began to feel like a plus—you have one up on the opposite sex. Your body changes naturally every so often and that is something most of them don’t understand” (Sesay, 2005, p. 26-27).
This particular female offers a more mature view on the topic of menstruation, one that is valid and relevant to females who have overcome the initial shock of the change. By focusing on older individuals, a similar study could have the ability to offer perspective on how one’s attitude and experiences change as both they and society changes and matures. Reflecting on my own experiences I can see the disgrace and embarrassment with my period has changed as I have grown up and developed into an adult. It is still by no means something I flaunt around—but another supplemental study could be interesting to see if young women in Zulu communities also feel this level of comfort and openness with their periods as they develop. It is in this question that I see a possibility of divergence in experience, especially if girls continue to hold onto the more traditional beliefs.
REFERENCES


LIST OF PRIMARY SOURCES


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traditional practices and gender equality. *Classroom lecture.* Lecture conducted from SIT Community Health and Social Policy, Durban.


APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Body Maps and accompanying descriptions
Workshop #1
April 5, 2014

The following are the body maps produced by four females as part of the first body mapping workshop. The accompanying italicized descriptions are the transcriptions of the phrases written on each body map, and have been corrected for spelling. All names have been changed in an effort to protect the identities of the participants.

Prompts for body mapping:

- Think back to the first time you got your period. What happened? How did you react? What did you do?
- Mark on your body where you feel differently when you have your period
- Next to one of your hands, draw/paint someone who has given you information about your period, or who you may ask questions about menstruation.
- What do you use to soak up the blood when you have your period?
- If you have pain during your period, what do you do?
- Is there anything you do differently when you have your period? Different people you talk to? Different activities you do or don’t participate in?
- Do you have any traditional beliefs regarding menstruation?
- What questions, if any, do you have about your period?
Busisiwe, 16 years old

When I my menstruation I just saw the blood. And the worst thing is that I was so shocked. I was so scared and tell my mom, so that she could help me. She told me that I must take bath, then I take bath. She gave me pads. I didn’t know what was happening to myself. I used a wet towel to remove the blood. Then I used a pad so that the blood must not pass through my thighs. I feel so much pain. The blood was all over my thigh. I told my mom. I don’t enter to esigodlweni [traditional healing hut]. When I am in my menstruation I don’t talk to boys.

Avela, 16 years old

When I started menstruation I was shocked to told anyone cause I don’t knew what was happening, this thing begin to happen day and a day three time. I first tell my oldest sister cause maybe she knew about it. When I told my brother they laugh at me and I try all over the pillow for this period ends, cause they were washing my pants where I first saw blood in the pants I through it cause it was disgusting and I recurring wash them although they were disgusting. I told my sister. The blood was all over my thigh and it begin to my dress. Asgeni esigodlweni uma sikuma period [I do not enter the traditional healing place during my period]. I used a tissue to preventing blood touches thigh. I don’t braid anyone, cook at home, talk to boys, date anyone.
SITHANDA, 16 years old
When I started menstruation I was surprised because I didn’t know what happen coz I just see blood on my panty. I tell my aunt about what happened and she give me pads and taught me how to wear it. I feel so sad because I was on my way back to home coming from school and it was like everyone is watching me. I don’t go to traditional healer’s house (esigodlweni). I use medicine to prevent the pain. I feel pain here (written in abdomen) called isiulimo. When I’m in my periods I feel so tired and sick. The blood was all over my thigh. When I’m in my period I don’t cook and I don’t talk with boys. My aunt that give me information (next to drawing of her aunt). I used wipes to get ride of the blood that was all over my thigh. I used pads that my aunt give it to me to prevent the blood to touches my thigh.

NOMHLE, 16 years old
When I was starting menstruation I was at school I felt shocked and I don’t know who to tell. My mother was the first person I told because she taught me that I have to tell her first. At my first day I was shocked and happy at the same time because I knew now I would be able to get pregnant anytime. I like children very much so I was so happy. I do not go to esigodlweni were there is traditional medicines. The blood was all over my thigh. When I am in my period time I feel so tired and sicky. That is my mother who gave me information about menstruation (next to drawing of her mother). I used tissue with water to get rid of the blood that was all over my thigh and I used pad to get rid of the blood to do not touches my thigh. When I’m in my period I do not talk with boys and I don’t cook I also don’t play
APPENDIX 2
Body Maps and accompanying descriptions
Workshop #2
April 13, 2014

The following are the body maps produced by five females as part of the second body mapping workshop. The accompanying italicized descriptions are the direct transcriptions of paragraphs the participants wrote to describe their individual body maps and general experience with menstruation. After each direct transcription is a translation to allow for easier comprehension of the description. All names have been changed in an effort to protect the identities of the participants.

Prompts for body mapping:

- Think about your overall experience when you first got your period. Using the paints, markers and pastels express any aspect of this experience (ex: how you felt or reacted, what you did) in a way that is meaningful to you.

  *This was intended to be the first of many prompts for the body mapping, yet participants chose to use their overall experience with menstruation, with a focus on their first period, to complete the entire project.*

- Reflect on who you talk to regarding menstruation and represent this relationship on your body map.
The first time I got my period I felt so stressed because I did not know what happened with my virginity. I saw the blood on my panty and I screamed. My mother asked me what happened, I was scared to tell her so I said ‘nothing, everything is okay just relax.’ And I told my mother I saw the blood in my panty. She said ‘My daughter just relax, you are in a stage now that is called menstruation.’ I felt so confused and stressed because I did not know the information about menstruation.
Mbembe, 15 years old

“When I started my periods I was so excited. I was in my bedroom and saw blood on my legs and I shouted for my mom. She came running and saw what I was going through. She said it’s a good thing because I am becoming an adult. She taught me about pads and how to use them and now everything is cool!!!! I feel awesome about my menstruation.”

Word bubble above head: “THANK GOD I’VE Started my Periods”

When I started my periods I was so excited. I was in my bedroom and saw blood on my legs and I shouted for my mom. She came running and saw what I was going through. She said it’s a good thing because I am becoming an adult. She taught me about pads and how to use them and now everything is cool!!!! I feel awesome about my menstruation.
Luthando, 16 years old

“The red color under my pant it symbolized that now is start my periods. The day that I started my periods it was 23 March 2012 and I was doing grade 9 at [name of school omitted] Junior Secondary School. When I go back home I told my mother that today is the day that I think I’m grow up now because I started my period. Then she gave me R20.00 to buy pads. And I can’t use another type of pads without using Stayfree because Always make me sore. I was happy that why I didn’t cry because I started my periods. The red color under my pant symbolize that now I’m a enough gal.”

The red color under my pants symbolizes that now I started my periods. The day I started my periods was 23 March 2012 and I was in grade 9 at a Junior Secondary School. When I went back home I told my mother that I think I’m grown up now because I started my period. Then she gave me R20.00 to buy pads. I only use Stayfree pads because Always makes me sore. I was happy and that’s why I didn’t cry because I started my periods. The red color under my pants symbolizes that now I’m an ‘enough gal.’
Nosipho, 16 years old

“On my first period I was upset because I didn’t know what was happen to me so I tell my Mommy she say it sign that I grow up so she gave me one pad and tell me. I had to bathe first before I use it and also was my clothes that was pasted with blood. After that she tell I should stay away from boys neh!! Indeed it start when I was at home so I don’t get umberise like that.”

The first time I got my period I was upset because I didn’t know what was happening to me. I told my Mommy and she said it is a sign that I am grown up so she gave me one pad. She told me I had to bathe first before I used it and also wash my clothes that were pasted with blood. After that she told me I should stay away from boys. It started when I was at home so I didn’t get embarrassed like that.
*This individual had to leave before having the chance to write the paragraph reflection on her body map. A follow-up interview in her home was conducted the following day (14 April 2014). Accompanying her body map are direct quotes that she said in an effort to describe her artwork and her experience with menstruation.

**Fikile, 15 years old**

“I was parting my hair and I didn’t feel okay, and I had cramps and I went home and I went to the toilet, I had to pee, and then ‘oh God!’ Then I call my mom and then we talked about it. Yea that’s it. Well it wasn’t that bad. It was like I was waiting for it anyway because I had to be mature. And after it I just had few days that’s it, wasn’t that bad though and I’m okay with that.”

“It [the colors] represents how I had different emotions. It was sometimes so emotional, sometimes not, sometimes happy. I just had different emotions, mixed emotions, all kinds of things. Nothing bad though.”

“…and then my friends my family, the names… who I talk to.”

“It [getting my period] was a positive thing, it was happy because everyone has to have their periods, all my sisters, I was the only one [who had yet to start her period], so I was like so happy”
APPENDIX 3
Examples of Interview Questions for Teachers and Nurses

Sample Interview Questions for Teachers

- Are you directly involved in the sexual health education of your students?
  - If not, who is responsible for the presentation of this information?
- Do you feel most female students are given education on menstruation before or after they have their first period?
- Are you involved in the handing-out of sanitary pads during school?
  - If yes:
    - Where do you get these pads?
    - Who pays for them?
    - Do girls ask you for them regularly?
    - Have you ever run out of pads? What happens then?
    - (If an individual states that he/she has used his/her own money to provide pads) Has this outside use of money had any implications for you?
- Do you ever receive questions from students about their periods?
  - If yes:
    - What are some of the most common ones?
    - Do you feel you are able to answer them?
- Are you able to offer any observations about how the experience of menstruation may impact student’s presence and/or participation in school?
  - (Ex: absence, less socialization or participation in classes/activities)
- In your opinion, is the topic of menstruation something people are open and willing to talk about?
- Is the information presented to learners different than what you learned when in school?
  - In what ways?
- Do you have any concerns regarding this topic? Either for yourself as an educator, or for your students?

Sample Interview Questions for Nurses

- Can you please offer some background on your role in the health education of learners in Coastal Village?
  - How many schools do you visit?
  - What ages do you speak with?
  - How often do you make visits?
  - In general, what topics do you cover with the learners?
  - What does a typical lesson plan look like?
- How is the topic of menstruation presented in the classrooms?
  - Are females and males separated?
  - What information is presented to the students about menstruation?
- What are some questions you receive from students about menstruation (if any)?
- In your opinion, is the topic of menstruation something people are open and willing to talk about?
- Do you offer any assistance with the provision of sanitary pads to students?
• Is the information you present to learners different than what you learned when in school?
  o In what ways?
• Do you ever get individuals coming to the clinic with questions or concerns about menstruation?
  o Lack of period? Heavy bleeding? Excessive pain?
  o How are these treated?
1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how school-aged females in Coastal Village learn about and experience menstruation. Participants will be asked to take part in an activity known as body mapping that will involve them expressing their attitudes, emotions, access to information and overall experience with their periods through drawing, painting and writing. Following this activity, participants will explain and talk about what they have included on their body map in small focus groups and one-on-one interviews. All data will be compiled into a report that compares and contrasts the experiences of participants.

2. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

a. Privacy - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.

b. Anonymity - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless you choose otherwise.

c. Confidentiality - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to you.

By signing this form I am agreeing to:
- the participation in the body mapping activity and follow up discussion
- the audio recording of the follow up discussion and interview

I understand that I will receive or no gift or direct benefit for participating in the study.

I confirm that the learner has given me the address of the nearest School for International Training Study Abroad Office should I wish to go there for information. (404 Cowey Park, Cowey Rd, Durban).

I know that if I have any questions or complaints about this study that I can contact anonymously, if I wish, the Director/s of the SIT South Africa Community Health Program (Zed McGladdery 0846834982 ).

Participant’s name printed __________________________________________________________________________
Angela Zablotny

Interviewer’s name printed ______________________________________________________________________

I can read English. (If not, but can read Zulu or Afrikaans, please supply). If participant cannot read, the onus is on the researcher to ensure that the quality of consent is nonetheless without reproach.
APPENDIX 5

CONSENT FORM

1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how school-aged females in Coastal Village learn about and experience menstruation. Participants will be asked questions regarding the education they give regarding menstruation. Participants are encouraged to share observations and stories about how menstruation affects females in the school setting. All questions asked will be done so in an effort to understand the information and resources available in the community.

2. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

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_________________________                                 _____________________________
Participant’s name printed                                         Your signature and date

Angela Zablotny

Interviewer’s name printed

Interviewer’s signature and date

I can read English. (If not, but can read Zulu or Afrikaans, please supply). If participant cannot read, the onus is on the researcher to ensure that the quality of consent is nonetheless without reproach.
ETHICAL CLEARANCE FORMS

SIT Study Abroad
a program of World Learning

Statement of Ethics
(adapted from the American Anthropological Association)

In the course of field study, complex relationships, misunderstandings, conflicts, and the need to make choices among apparently incompatible values are constantly generated. The fundamental responsibility of students is to anticipate such difficulties to the best of their ability and to resolve them in ways that are compatible with the principles stated here. If a student feels such resolution is impossible, or is unsure how to proceed, s/he should consult as immediately as possible with the Academic Director (AD) and/or Independent Study Project (ISP) Advisor and discontinue the field study until some resolution has been achieved. Failure to consult in cases which, in the opinion of the AD and ISP Advisor, could clearly have been anticipated, can result in disciplinary action as delineated in the “failure to comply” section of this document.

Students must respect, protect, and promote the rights and the welfare of all those affected by their work. The following general principles and guidelines are fundamental to ethical field study:

I. Responsibility to people whose lives and cultures are studied
Students' first responsibility is to those whose lives and cultures they study. Should conflicts of interest arise, the interests of these people take precedence over other considerations, including the success of the Independent Study Project (ISP) itself. Students must do everything in their power to protect the dignity and privacy of the people with whom they conduct field study.

The rights, interests, safety, and sensitivities of those who entrust information to students must be safeguarded. The right of those providing information to students either to remain anonymous or to receive recognition is to be respected and defended. It is the responsibility of students to make every effort to determine the preferences of those providing information and to comply with their wishes. It should be made clear to anyone providing information that despite the students' best intentions and efforts, anonymity may be compromised or recognition fail to materialize. Students should not reveal the identity of groups or persons whose anonymity is protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Students must be candid from the outset in the communities where they work that they are students. The aims of their Independent Study Projects should be clearly communicated to those among whom they work.

Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive. They must recognize their obligation to reciprocate in appropriate ways.

To the best of their ability, students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. They should inform individuals and groups likely to be affected of any possible consequences relevant to them that they anticipate.

Students must take into account and, where relevant and to the best of their ability, make explicit the extent to which their own personal and cultural values affect their field study.

Students must not represent as their own work, either in speaking or writing, materials or ideas directly taken from other sources. They must give full credit in speaking or writing to all those who have contributed to their work.

II. Responsibilities to Hosts
Students should be honest and candid in all dealings with their own institutions and with host institutions. They should ascertain that they will not be required to compromise either their responsibilities or ethics as a condition of permission to engage in field study. They will return a copy of their study to the institution sponsoring them and to the community that hosted them at the discretion of the institution(s) and/or community involved.

III. Failure to comply
When SIT Study Abroad determines that a student has violated SIT's statement of ethics, the student will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the program.

I, [Name], have read the above Statement of Ethics and agree to make every effort to comply with its provisions.

Date: 3/23/14
### Human Subjects Review
#### LRB/IRB ACTION FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Student:</th>
<th>ANGIE ZABLOTNY</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISP Title:</td>
<td>EXPERIENCES OF MENSTRUATION EXRESSED THROUGH BODY MAPPING IN A QUASI-RURAL AFRICAN VILLAGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date Submitted:</td>
<td>3/29/14</td>
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<td>Program:</td>
<td>SIT COMMUNITY HEALTH &amp; SOCIAL POLICY</td>
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<td>Type of review:</td>
<td>Expedited</td>
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**Institution:** World Learning Inc.  
IRB organization number: IORG0004408  
IRB registration number: IRB00000319  
Expires: 22 December 2014

**LRB members (print names):**  
Mr. John McGladdery  
Dr. Angela James  
Mr. Clive Bruzas

#### LRB REVIEW BOARD ACTION:

- [ ] Approved as submitted  
- [X] Approved pending changes  
- [ ] Requires full IRB review in Vermont  
- [ ] Disapproved  

**LRB Chair Signature:**  
Date: 04/01/2014

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*Form below for IRB Vermont use only:*

**Research requiring full IRB review. ACTION TAKEN:**

- [ ] approved as submitted  
- [ ] approved pending submission or revisions  
- [ ] disapproved

**IRB Chairperson’s Signature**  
(Date)