

MENSTRUATION EDUCATION: CRITICAL READING OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS
TEACHING ABOUT PUBERTY

AS
36
2018
HMSX
.R36

A Written Creative Work submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Human Sexuality Studies

by

Jennifer Ramsey

San Francisco, California

May 2018

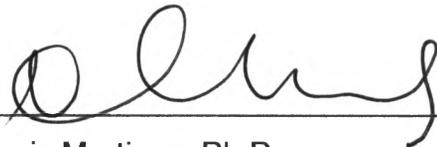
Copyright by
Jennifer Ramsey
2018

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read MENSTRUATION EDUCATION: CRITICAL READING OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS TEACHING ABOUT PUBERTY by Jennifer Ramsey, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Human Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University.



Rita Melendez, Ph.D.
Associate Professor



Alexis Martinez, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

MENSTRUATION EDUCATION: CRITICAL READING OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS
TEACHING ABOUT PUBERTY

Jennifer Ramsey
San Francisco, California
2018

Menarche is a significant milestone in a young girl's development, both biologically and culturally. My project research examines what young girls learn about menstruation from commercially published books. What lessons do books teach that influence the attitudes developed about menstrual bodies and the experience of menarche? Research has shown that a mother is the primary source of menstrual information, however, I opted to analyze books that are commercially printed and available at the public library. Seven children's books, written for pre-pubescent girls, were read and analyzed to determine what biological information, social expectations, and attitudes could be learned from them. There were large gaps in the biological information available to girls in 5 out of 7 books, including the purpose of the menstrual period. Common themes across books include reinforcing beliefs of shame and practices of concealment. My research suggests that it is important to more closely examine educational books to ensure more effective methods for teaching girls about the changes that happen in their body.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this written creative work.



Chair, Thesis Committee

5/23/18
Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This written work is the product of several months of stress but I'm stronger for it and have learned more about menstruation than I ever thought I could. I would like to thank my mentor Rita Melendez for reading my many (many) drafts and for being very patient with my writing process. I would also like to thank Alexis Martinez for serving as my second reader and for being an amazing graduate coordinator. I would also like to thank Kat and Sid for listening to me as I worked through every single thought.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Method.....	12
Content Selection.....	12
Coding	15
Overview of Books Used in Analyses	18
Results.....	32
Inaccuracy	38
Shame and Concealment.....	39
Discussion.....	45
Reference	51

Introduction

The lessons young readers gain from literature comes not only from the facts presented to them but the context of their upbringing and background knowledge (Serafini, 2013). Young girls grow up watching commercials for “feminine hygiene” where advertisers accentuate the ability to hide odors, conceal products, and preserve discretion in the bathroom. When reading educational books that reiterate similar ideas, they will be more receptive to accepting negative attitudes that become a foundation for a lowered self-belief about experiencing menstruation.

Menstruation is experienced both biologically and culturally (Kissling, 1996). If young girls are taught anatomy, physiology, and the biology of menstruation, where are they learning realistic knowledge for current and future experiences? (Kissling, 1996). Where do students learn attitudes and useful information immediately applicable to practice? How can learned information be coordinated with the experience of menarche?

A first period (menarche) can be an influence of the feelings girls will develop about their bodies, sexuality, and identity as a woman, which they may hold for years to follow (Kissling, 1996). However, menstruation also carries

contradictory messages that cause girls to feel confusion, conflict, and “alienated from their bodies” as they are both looking forward to and “dreading the arrival of their first period” (Kissling, 1996). Young girls fear the physical sensations and social stigmas that accompany this change in their biology while also looking forward to the physical (visual) changes that will take place during puberty (such as developing breasts) and ‘becoming a woman’ in the eyes of their society and peers (Kissling, 1996).

In a study focusing on menarche in white, middle-class girls in North America the experience for many was a source of trauma with girls who are prepubescent having higher feelings of positivity towards their periods than those who are post-menarche (Burrows, 2005). Menarche is a part of being a woman, but it is also a time of significant stress marked by anxiety, embarrassment, and self-consciousness (Rierdan, 1983). Rierdan suggests minimizing the significance – putting less emphasis on menarche as a time to transition from child to woman – by instead highlighting how menstruation is a natural part of life; steering attitudes away from “the curse” to turn menstruation into something to be proud of (Rierdan, 1983). It is important to validate the uniqueness and variety of bodies and to acknowledge the fear, discomfort, and embarrassment of young girls to pose menstruation as a positive experience while providing room for each person to have and share their own experiences (Rierdan, 1983).

Much of the information girls receive about menarche is from their mothers, however, other important sources include: sex education classes, educational films, entertainment media, and peers (Kissling, 1996). More is known about the sources of education than the substance of information from each. Research is needed on the content available from informational sources so connections can be made between what information and attitudes parents and educators expect young girls to learn and the knowledge and feelings that they are learning. It's difficult for young girls to know beforehand if they are well prepared for the experience of menarche and often there is some lingering fear and confusion about the practical use of materials and a "curiosity about blood that isn't necessarily being addressed" (Kissling, 1996). It is difficult to assess the difference between being informed and being prepared. Among young girls who were surveyed in the 1950s about their preparation for menarche, 50% said that they "received no advance information about menstruation". That number dropped to 10% by 1970 when it was determined that those who were surprised by their menstruation were generally girls who matured early (Kissling, 1996).

Within the family, discussing menstruation can be a source of anxiety for parents who may delay (or neglect) talking to their daughters about the changes in their body (Kissling, 1996). Girls often look to their mothers for information, which may not be effective if mothers are neither well informed nor comfortable

sharing with their daughters (Rierdan, 1983). It is important that young girls find a confidant with whom they can share their experiences, discuss concerns, and get answers to questions. Having assurance and emotional support is especially important during menarche but for girls who don't have a close or comfortable rapport with their mothers, they may be forced to figure things out for themselves.

School-sponsored puberty education (if/when it is available and lasts longer than an hour) focuses on scientific facts that can be answered in a multiple-choice test to fulfill grading requirements that justify or prove the value of taking time from other lessons. There is a lack of product usage or practice or discussion about choices in products or the benefits of each alternative provides. Teaching for the viewpoint of young, confused, girls instead of from the perspective of an expert or an experienced woman is crucial for effectiveness. Physically experiencing menstruation and viewing it firsthand is very different than reading about it in a textbook so it's important to evaluate the education presented in literature and bridge the gap left by formal education.

Formal educational materials (like textbooks) use technical language and employ abstract representations that young girls have a hard time connecting to (Rierdan, 1983). Young girls are most interested in learning about the experiential and emotional aspects of menstruation. When those interests are ignored, young girls are left to their own abilities to make these discoveries.

Without information modeled by others, they experience an increase in feelings of shame and disgust for their periods (Kissling, 1996).

Schools establish discomfort for young girls if they are taught in a mixed-sex environment with boys who may tease them either maliciously or because of their own discomfort. Although it is important for boys to learn about menstruation, the reality of teasing or hazing initiates alienation and a hostile environment. These early experiences reinforce feelings of shame and embarrassment that construct menstruation as something to be hidden, especially in the school environment (Burrows, 2005). For young girls, menstruation becomes “a weapon” for boys who are looking “to demean them” by attributing menstruation or “PMS” as a cause of valid emotions, dismissing them as irrational because “both women and men have mood swings but only women have theirs packaged into a syndrome” (Burrows, 2005). Attitudes and discourse about PMS teach girls to internalize this and associate their own bad moods or unhappiness with menstruation despite research showing that PMS, as it's viewed colloquially, is socially constructed and has no biological root to justify its ‘popularity’ in culture (Burrows, 2005).

Restrictions on and a fear of communication about menstruation is likely the most powerful enforcement of concealment. Social discourse teaches that menstruation is not something talked about publicly. Most North Americans

believe it is unacceptable to talk about menstruation (especially in mixed company) and many believe it is not appropriate to discuss periods even among family. A third of North Americans believe it is improper to speak with a father about menstruation, and nearly all believe it should not be talked about with boys (Kissling, 1996).

Schools send a clear message by isolating the education of menstruation from other biological functions, teaching sex separated classes, and focusing on biological information at the expense of lived experiences and emotion (Kissling, 1996). Treating menstruation education as a secret reinforces beliefs that women and girls should be kept from public view for a portion of each month (Merskin, 1999).

Culture is ingrained inside the confines of school walls along with the self-conceptualizations that are fostered and then carried into adulthood about menstruation. Attitudes are influenced by the time spent maintaining secrecy, learning to manage menstruation within the school environment (Burrows, 2005). Girls who spend six to eight years learning how to hide their period will not suddenly lose this instinct when they graduate high. Schools have a responsibility to foster and encourage the development of positive attitudes about puberty and menstruation because advertisers exploit these fears and attitudes to sell products.

The importance of concealing menstruation is learned, in part, through the discussions and presentation of menstrual products in advertisements and day to day interactions. Companies that manufacture menstrual products continue to create smaller and more discreet packaging so that products can be hidden in plain sight. Women refer to menstruation in euphemisms to speak without being overheard because of the stigma against menstruating in public, especially in the company of men. Products are advertised for their superior ability to hide menstruation and its symptoms (Roberts, 2002). Advertisements for menstrual products highlight the discretion they can provide, hiding any visual or olfactory evidence that menstruation is taking place through quieter wrapping, smaller packaging, and added fragrance. Advertisers sell shame with their products by neglecting to show or mention either blood or the bathrooms where product use takes place when creating commercials (Kissling, 1996).

The way that a society views or deals with women's menstruation is often a sign of the way society views women, their abilities, and their role in society (Kissling, 1996). Menstruation represents a level of taboo within most societies and although it would be inaccurate to state that all cultures view menstruation with negativity, it is generally agreed that most cultures approach menstruation with some characterization of shame, embarrassment, secrecy, and concealment (Burrows, 2005). An experimental study was carried out in the United States

where a woman was rated on competency and likeability before and after dropping either a tampon or a hair clip from her bag in public. After dropping the tampon, she was rated as less competent and likable than when she dropped a hair clip. These conclusions likely translate to real life experiences that justify women's efforts to conceal their own menstruation having experienced this phenomenon firsthand (Roberts, 2002).

Within the United States, acceptance or disgust targeted towards women's bodies changes based on the potential value and need for women within the workforce (Kissling, 1996). When women fill a labor void, menstruation is a non-issue. During the Second World War and the industrial revolution when men were scarce and industries had a greater need for workers than were available and industries risked a halt in production (Kissling, 1996). During times when women are not needed or wanted in the workforce, (when they are taking jobs from men) menstruation is a sign of weakness. During post-war times when soldiers returned home (and wanted their jobs back), women's ability to reproduce the workforce was emphasized; motherhood (and staying at home) was idealized (Kissling, 1996). Women were discouraged from working or learning and told that they could cause damage to their reproductive organs and lose the ability to reproduce through the pursuit of intellectual activities or employment (Roberts, 2002). This promotes opposing ideas that women are less

competent or valuable because of their biology but also apprizes that same body for its connection to becoming a wife and mother. To accomplish this, we emphasize to girls how important their period is for becoming a woman while also discouraging their pride in the experience, causing it to become a symbol of shame. These expectations have carried across generations through socialization practices that establish shame and concealment.

Emily Martin is quoted by Kissling saying that women may view menstruation as “what happens when the factory that is the woman’s body fails to produce a baby” which plays upon a cultural context of American capitalism and the value placed upon women’s ability to reproduce (Kissling, 1996). Women are faced with developing self-esteem when their value is based in part on their ability to reproduce with opposing ideas that rank women as less valuable and competent for being women while also placing them upon a pedestal for their potential to be a wife and mother or their displayed femininity (Roberts, 2002). Girls are celebrated for entering “womanhood” while that same ability to reproduce becomes a justification for restricting behavior and freedoms out of concern that fertility will be embraced before society deems them for motherhood (i.e. stigmatizing teen, young, or single mothers to prevent other young girls from “earning” those titles or creating rules restricting socializing between boys and girls).

Code words have been cultivated to refer to menstruation including terms with a negative connotation such as “the rag” or “the curse” which presents a woman who is menstruating as “filthy, sick, unbalanced, and ritually impure” as she has been cursed, betrayed, or weakened by her own body (Merskin, 1999). The use of the euphemism “hygiene products” to refer to menstrual products reinforces that menstruation needs to be hygienically controlled and sanitized, encouraging women to experience feelings of shame and secrecy (Roberts, 2002). The colloquial use of codes and euphemisms reveals attitudes about menstruation that are largely negative (Rierdan, 1983). The use of the term “curse” has biblical origins as part of Eves punishment for her original sin (Hoffman, 1995). Various religious teachings forbid or discourage interaction or intercourse with women during menstruation. Leviticus instructs that she should be “put apart seven days” with a warning for any person who interacts or touched her that they will be considered unclean (Roberts, 2002) and when surveyed in 1981, half of all responding Americans believed that women should not engage in sexual activity during their periods (The Tampax Report, 1981). The belief in the need to restrict physical activity, that it is unsafe or unhygienic to swim or bathe, and discouraging participating in sports is a method of enforcing restrictions upon women (Kissling, 1996). In the past, research “proved” scientifically that menstrual blood could kill plants and some cultures norms removed women from their community (i.e. menstrual huts) during their period for

prevention of any perceived ability for contamination (Roberts, 2002).

Menstruation has been a selling point on talk news for barring women from serving politically or within the military, referring to emotional fluctuating, the physical existence of blood, or the need for menstrual products. Women participating in politics, particularly those running for political offices, have been targets for the belief that women have erratic mood swings or PMS that they would be unable to control, causing wars or damaging alliances on a whim of lost rational thought (Roberts, 2002).

How are women affected by the objectification that is placed upon their bodies and their fertility? Women who have internalized these ideas about their bodies learn to see themselves from a perspective that is externalized by prioritizing the perspective of those who will see them. Young women have learned to view themselves through a “mirror image” of themselves to anticipate the reactions or opinions of others to control and maintain the perspective that others see them through. Women who objectify their own bodies and have aligned themselves with traditional gender roles will perform more “appropriate gender-related behavior,” have a more negative view of their own menstruation, and hold an attitude of greater disgust towards their own menstruation (Roberts, 2002). Women of all ages and backgrounds spend time and money working to attain and then maintain the “idealized” body for their culture which includes time

and money spent on makeup, dieting, fashion, and cosmetic surgery. Women are increasingly using the journey to the idealized, objectified body as a means of avoiding or disassociating from the “inferior biological body” including their own menstruation (Roberts, 2002).

Menstruation has been constructed from many perspectives as an illness, which is produced by and perpetuated by gender-based differences (Burrows, 2005). Both girls and boys who are preadolescent have developed negative attitudes towards menstruation and those feelings are learned early in life from stereotypical representations instead of experiences (Burrows, 2005)

Method

The lack of available research done on educational books written for girls about menstruation has led me to do a content analysis of children’s books looking at their content, themes, and the messages that are sent to young girls about menarche when they read these kinds of books.

Content Selection

To accomplish this, I read and analyzed educational books targeted towards young girls who have not yet experienced menarche and are looking for information about their bodies and the changes that they are going to experience when they begin puberty. Books used for analysis were obtained from the San Francisco Public Library using a library card. Many books have been written for

and about menstruation but it was important to only get books from the library because of the access provided by public libraries because applying for a library card and checking out books is free and available to all. I wanted to have the same level of access to literature as any child or parent who wanted information but may not have money to spend on puberty books.

Content available on the internet was excluded to prioritize information that is commercially published in print and likely more consistently available. School textbooks were excluded because the availability of commercially published books is similar across the country, but the content and availability of textbooks related to health vary depending on the educational standards within individual states, districts, or schools and are dependent upon the level of monetary access to materials within each area.

All books were checked out from the main branch of the San Francisco Public Library located at 100 Larkin St. The main branch is the largest library in San Francisco with a children's wing. To find books I approached a librarian and asked where I would find books for a prepubescent girl to learn about periods and which books they would recommend. All books that were suggested were checked out because if these are the books that the librarians consider relevant to my topic, then these are the books they are suggesting to children also.

In total, I read nine books, listed below:

1. *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System* by Paul Mason

2. *Girl to Girl: Honest Talk About Growing Up and Your Changing Body* by Sarah O'Leary Burningham
3. *Be Healthy! It's a Girl Thing: Food, Fitness, And Feeling Great* by, Lilian W. Y. Cheung
4. *Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You. Questions and Answers About Growing Up* by Nancy Loewen
5. *Period. A Girl's Guide to Menstruation* by JoAnn Loulan
6. *Will Puberty Last My Whole Life?* By Julie Metzger
7. *I've got My Period. So What?* By Clara Henry
8. *The Girls' Guide to Growing up: Choices & Changes in the Tween Years* by Terri Couwenhoven
9. *Helloflo: The Guide, Period* by Naama Bloom

After reviewing the books, two were excluded. *I've Got My Period. So What?* By Clara Henry was excluded because it was written by a 23-year-old Scandinavian YouTube vlogger (video blogger) from the narrative perspective of her own childhood experiences in Sweden, where she discusses the kinds of information that she believes that she should have learned when she was growing up. While her book is a great read, very thorough, and well researched, her writing style and the way that she formats her book is more suitable for older children who have already started their periods and are fulfilling a need for "extra information" or a source of commiseration. She gives young girls someone to

bond with about their experiences. However, it isn't really written for prepubescent children, and it is written from a place of experience in Sweden.

The second book excluded was *The Girls' Guide to Growing up: Choices & Changes in the Tween Years* by Terri Couwenhoven because it was written specifically for children with intellectual disabilities from the perspective of teaching children who have difficulty picking up on social cues. The authors emphasize what the children they write for should (and should not) be sharing with others. It is because of the style of writing and goals of the writers given their context that it was excluded as a source. The author's purpose is to explain an appropriate level of concealment for an audience that may need a lesson in what is and isn't over-sharing, generally.

Coding

While reading through each book notes were taken on the major themes of education, lessons that stood out for being explained either particularly well or poorly, any information that was inaccurate or misleading, and missing or unnecessary information.

Instances where the authors made comments that encouraged or upheld beliefs and practices related to shame or concealment regarding menstrual habits or conversation were noted. Concealment was operationally defined as any lesson or activity where students were encouraged or taught to hide their menstrual products or bodily functions. Shame was operationally defined by

statements that discouraged young girls from talking about their menstruating bodies or emphasized maintaining privacy or comfort of others.

In 1983, research was done by Rierden to determine the information that girls retrospectively believe it was important to know. I used those determinations, added to them, and made modifications to break down categories into more specific categories (to account for books that completed smaller parts but not the category as a whole) to create a list of guidelines for evaluating the quality of information presented in each book. The following list is the specific information that I was reading for:

1. The Biology of Menstruation
2. The Sexual Implications of Menarche (pregnancy)
3. The Relation of Birth control to menstruation
4. The physical sensation of experiencing menstruation (bleeding)
5. The wide variability in experiences from body to body
6. The range of expected blood loss that can be expected
7. The difference in heavy and light days and how to quantify each one

8. An understanding of how exactly the blood left the body and where it comes from
9. The duration and length of a cycle
10. Information about irregularity
11. Cramps, discomfort, and other "side effects"
12. Variability in individual experience or occurrence of "side effects"
13. The possibility of changes and variability in emotions related to menstruation
14. Visual Representations of menstrual products
15. Knowledge of menstrual products
16. Representing all available products.
17. How to use each product represented in the book

This list represents the baseline of information that I was looking to find within each of the books analyzed. For every topic, a book was considered to have fulfilled it if they attempted to provide or explain the information, regardless of the quality or fullness of the explanation. I made this choice because, if the information was attempted or began, it gave a girl reading a starting point to have

a question whereas, without any attempt, she does not know what to be curious about.

Overview of Books used in Analyses

The seven books used for analysis were written by authors of different backgrounds, at different times, and in a wide variety of styles. The books were written for purposes that, while similar, didn't have all the same goals. Some books were attempting to teach biology and others interpersonal skills while a few attempted to tackle both concepts. In this section I will be providing an overview into some of the more specific concepts that each book attempted to teach, focusing on what information was provided, how useful the information was, and how well it was portrayed.

Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System

Five pages address puberty. Two pages (20 & 21) provide an overview of puberty in adolescents and two pages (22 & 23) speak about the female body providing information about menarche and menstruation. There is a single paragraph about menopause (27). Content is not dense in information and the style is designed to be visually appealing and attention-grabbing.

Hormones, "puberty genes", and some "problems" that may come with puberty are introduced. Acne, sweating, and mood changes are presented as

There is no mention of cramps or discomforts connected to menstruation that males do not experience.

There are labeled anatomical diagrams and a graphic representation of the bodies changes throughout the menstrual cycle using anatomic labeling and medical terminology.

Historical background of menstruation is given to compare the menstrual cycle to the modern calendar by sharing that menstrual cycles may have been the rationale for the design. The time frame of how long the period itself lasts or what else happens because of the cycle is neither mentioned nor explained.

A glossary defines all bolded terms within the book and suggests books for additional reading, places to visit, and websites for research.

Girl to Girl: Honest Talk About Growing Up and Your Changing Body

Chapter 4 titled “Let’s Talk, Period: What you need to know about Menstruation” is twenty pages (77 - 97) related to menstruation. Pregnancy and the placement of menstruation within the reproductive cycle are clearly outlined.

Period frames the signs leading up to puberty and gives ideas about what to expect to see leading up to the beginning of puberty, including the growth of

pubic hair and experiencing discharge, that may help to predict when menarche will take place.

Pads, pantyliners, and tampons are shared. The information provided on pads only provides enough instructions to that pads have tape that will stick into the underwear. Readers are encouraged to practice using a pad. Choosing an absorbency and how frequently to change based on flow is outlined. There are suggestions about what to do if a pad isn't available (using folded toilet paper). Advice is given about responding to blood stains in clothes with practical advice about how to clean or rinse blood. *Girl to Girl* addresses the little trash cans that are found in restroom stalls and that menstrual products shouldn't be disposed of in the toilet.

Tampons are presented across several pages with visual representations of tampons using plastic and cardboard applicators or without an applicator at all. Different sizes of absorbency and what flow to use them for is explained. Step by step instructions on how to insert a tampon correctly are provided for girls to practice before menarche.

Toxic Shock Syndrome is explained thoroughly for what it is, what causes it, the common symptoms, and what to do if the symptoms are experienced.

Cramps, moodiness, and bloating, in addition to other common experiences (breast tenderness, headaches, backaches, acne, and anxiety) are explained as a natural part of the cycle with some methods of diminishing these experiences. Special attention is given to the experience of cramps and there are diagrams for stretches that can relieve or prevent pain. Dealing with blood that may leak and how to wash it out of clothes and sheets is covered.

The menstruation section ends with a “Mythbuster” about swimming during menstruation, informing that swimming is safe but suggesting a tampon for keeping blood from becoming visible.

Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You. Questions and Answers About Growing Up

Tangles is formatted in a question and answer format where youth are writing letters to an advice columnist. The book is not factual and most of the answers read as if they are the writers’ opinions. Many answers were contradictory to themselves or to other answers. For example, in one questions how to deal with boys teasing them about wearing a bra responds by saying that the boys are probably dealing with their own discomfort and to try to ignore their behavior and; in another question, a girl who is asking about why her friend

hasn't started wearing a bra, for which they suggest telling their friend that they should start wearing a bra to avoid being teased for *not* wearing a bra.

Be Healthy! It's a Girl Thing: Food, Fitness, and Feeling Great

A 5-paragraph section (less than one page) gives a broad biological overview (like a "refresher") of menstruation to introduce the books context. This is not meant to be an educational section to teach young girls about menstruation. The purpose is to explain why iron is important for menstruating bodies and to suggest how to maintain a healthy iron level. Menstruation is mentioned solely in this context.

Period. A Girl's Guide

Period is a book that is entirely about menstruation. The book is written for what happens before, during, and after. This book is organized by chapters because of the quantity of chapters that make up the book. The entirety of *Period* was used for analysis.

"So Many Changes" starts conversations about body image, the variety of bodies that exist and how each is different is highlighted, specifically including disability. Self-love is emphasized and the authors ask readers to reflect positively on themselves and their strengths.

“So Many Parts” provides anatomical diagrams (17) and presents the body parts involved in the menstrual cycle and the body changes from a young child to an adult. There is an emphasis that diagrams are not fully representative of how all bodies look and that there is a spectrum of when and how each body will change. The hymen is mentioned in a list of body parts and definitions but there is no grounding about its purpose in the body nor is it included in any diagrams. The clitoris is introduced, defined, and included in diagrams with mention of its sensitivity but there is no connection to its ability to produce pleasure. The term “lips” (inner, outer) are used instead of labia despite anatomical names for other body parts being used.

“Menstruation” explains the cycle of ovulation and how it begins the menstrual cycle. Pregnancy is linked to its place in menstruation with a discussion about the uterus, its purpose, and how it changes throughout ovulation and the menstrual cycle. *Period* introduces the term “dribbling” (16) to describe the physical sensation of blood leaving the body. Discharge, the different colors, consistencies, and smells are explained along with when the discharge experienced might be a sign of infection and when to see a doctor.

“Pads or Tampons” gives a history of pads and tampons creation and evolution over time, including realistic drawings and descriptions of extinct products (29) next to current products. However, the “stick applicator” tampon is

shown (34) which is no longer available for purchase and for which I found no evidence of its availability either during writing or in the decade preceding making the information inaccurate. There is a diagram (35) of the tampons placement inside the body stressing the importance of remembering to remove the tampon to avoid toxic shock syndrome, for which symptoms are shared.

Both thickness and style of products are introduced, the purpose of each, and when they should be used regarding flow.

Other products, (36) such as menstrual cups, are briefly mentioned but with no instructions, or encouragement to explore using them.

“I have a question about that” discusses the variety of experience with menstruation and how individuals are influenced by the people around when developing opinions about what they are feeling. Menarche and the variation in onset based on age is discussed in addition to irregularity and the average cycle. The authors suggest using (and provide) a calendar to use for charting the cycle for the first couple years. *Period* uses the term “clumps” to describe blood.

Cramps and advice for coping with and treating them is provided (44) alongside the common tips that are expected they share that “pain studies show that starting pain relief before the discomfort begins can be even more effective than waiting until you “need” it” (45) encouraging use of medication to prevent

pain. In addition, they tell the reader that “whining to others may make you feel better - but probably not” (46).

“Why do I feel this way” is a series of short first-person narratives told by young girls. These stories are provided to give girls a source that they can bond with.

“What is a Pelvic Exam?” talks about the experience of a pelvic exam and pap smear. The authors explain what a gynecologist is and the importance of regular pelvic exams for preventative care. There is an in-depth description of what happens during a pelvic exam, breast exam, and pap smear. The authors explain the what, why and how of the pap smear and they emphasize that “it’s your body, and you have every right to learn as much as you want about it” (68).

The book also includes a guide to teach parents how to have “growing up” conversations that take place over a lifetime instead of one or two conversations. The parent guide emphasizes that anyone can contribute to the conversation and that it’s important to start conversations before puberty but that it is always the right time to talk when a child starts asking questions. The importance of communication between parents is emphasized so they are on the same page; they also encourage talking to sons about menstruation so that it isn’t a mystery to them.

Will Puberty Last My Whole Life?

Will Puberty Last My Whole Life? has one chapter about menstruation (Ch 7) titled “What if I have my period for the first time at school? ... and other questions about periods” (27) in the form of Q&A with questions from the perspectives of pre-teens and that are answered by a first person (“I”) author. Questions are addressed on topics of biology, puberty, socialization, the cycle, and products.

The authors explain the placement, size, and purpose of the uterus and internal organs giving context for their place in the menstrual cycle. The etymology of the word menstruation is given along with an explanation of its meaning and a breakdown of what period blood is composed of. There are several questions about pre-puberty and the bodily changes before puberty that could predict when menarche will happen.

The authors provide the range and averages for the onset of menarche and length of a period. Young readers are encouraged to turn any embarrassment of being first in their class to have a period into a positive of being the “pioneer” with experience who can guide peers into puberty while comforting those who haven’t experienced menarche yet that everyone starts on their own time. The physical sensation of how it feels to bleed is explained. There

are labeled diagrams for both internal and external organs (31). The authors introduce and explain each of the three holes (Vagina, Urethra, and Anus).

The products introduced are pads and tampons. There are cutesy doodles of both pads and tampons decorating the margins of the chapter but there are no educational pictures or diagrams to match the explanations. Pads are explained with an overview of how to place them inside underwear, the different styles available (long, short, thin, thick), and the availability as both disposable and reusable. Tampons (32) are represented by sizes and applicator styles and there is 'how to' for insert a tampon explaining how the tampon is inserted and the angles related to the body (33). There is troubleshooting for how deep the tampon should when it is inserted correctly. However, the authors explain that, for some girls, they will have difficulty inserting a tampon because of "a thin membrane covering the opening of her vagina called a hymen that can sometimes make trying a tampon more challenging. Your hymen can be stretched or torn from day-to-day activities like riding a bike or having period fluid come out. But if your hymen has not been stretched or broken, the tampon might meet resistance" (33).

Toxic Shock Syndrome is introduced and explained as the result of bacteria growth caused by wearing a tampon for too long. The advice provided

for when to remove a tampon is that “you will know” when to remove it or to remove it “every time you go to the bathroom” (35).

The authors give advice about how to deal with surprise periods and hide leaks. There is a discussion about the fear of having a period, not feeling prepared, and of people being able to sense it, which they address by saying “generally, unless you draw attention to your challenging moment, other people are not looking for periods on people” (35). The authors speak about menstruation as something that is both important and healthy –working to counter the stigma that menstruation is a sign of illness.

The “icky” feelings that come along with puberty such as a headache, backache, upset stomach, sensitive breasts, and uterine cramps learning tips for dealing with “icky” are presented.

This book is unique in acknowledging to young girls that they need to have patience with their mothers who may be just as uncomfortable talking about puberty and bodies as their daughters are (38). Thought is given to how and what women and girls across time and geography do or have done either to celebrate the change in their bodies or day to day management of their periods (39). They emphasize that menstruation does not change personality, impact abilities, or diminish accomplishments.

Helloflo. The Guide, Period.

Helloflo is entirely about puberty for young girls, however, because it covers (in-depth) more aspects about puberty than just menstruation so I have chosen to use only the second half of the book for analysis.

Chapter 5, "Shark Week", (77 - 94) is about the experience and biology of menstruation. The author of *Helloflo* emphasizes the healthfulness, normality, and naturalness of menstruation and that it is something to grow into and learn to be comfortable with. There is an introduction to the anatomy of the female body, menstruation as a cycle, the relation of menstruation to fertility, and the role of the uterus as a womb. *Helloflo* creates a direct connection between menstruation and fertility by acknowledging a missed period as a symptom of pregnancy.

Helloflo dispels the myths that period blood can attract sharks or bears and acknowledges the science behind women who are living together whose cycles sync to ovulate and menstruate together.

There is an explanation of what is going on inside the body at each stage of the cycle and how the lining builds up and sheds. Counting the cycle, that it may be inconsistent for the first few years, and that it becomes easier over time to understand the body and periods is described. There is a visual diagram of the menstrual cycle included (82). There are examples of what happens in the body

leading up to menarche and the changes that help predict the onset. Statistics about the onset of menarche, frequency of menstruation, the length of the average period, and the flow or expected quantity of blood loss are provided. Discharge, its purpose, and its normalcy is explained. Cramps are introduced (86) as an acknowledgment that there may be some pain associated with periods. What happens, and why, is explained along with ways that pain or discomfort can be treated. Regular exercise is given as a means of relieving discomfort but the authors also acknowledge that young women don't want to believe doctors when they suggest this. Swimming and walking are given as the most effective exercises with an acknowledgment that, if those are not effective, ibuprofen or waiting it out should work. Cramps should get better over time but if cramps are severe, see a doctor.

Keeping count of the menstrual cycle is connected to the calendar and given a historical context for using the cycles of the moon as a means of tracking and predicting menstruation before the use of current calendars or the apps that are available today. *Helloflo* is the only book I examined that mentions the existence of technology to use for tracking the cycle and acknowledges how technology affects our lives and our relationship to menstruation.

Hormones are also introduced in a way that no other book accomplished. Not only are names and purposes provided but there are explanations of what

exactly each hormone does and how each hormone affects the body and menstruation, including a graph charting the level of hormones present at each stage of the cycle.

Chapter five ends with a Q&A style section with answers from a doctor answering questions about topics like discharge, blood clots or chunks, and when to see a doctor. There is a playful use of euphemisms used alongside medical and colloquial terms that do not detract from the use of regular terms. AskFlo uses stories and memories to humanize the author and their experiences.

Chapter 6 “Managing the Mess” talks about the technical aspects of blood collection and containment. Throughout the chapter, readers are introduced to pads, tampons, liners, cups, sea sponges, period underwear, and washable pads acknowledging which are disposable and which are reusable and how the cost of each may affect which product to choose. Readers learn that products have different sizes and shapes that may benefit us differently over time or in varying places in the menstrual cycle. AskFlo takes the time to advocate for refusing to be uncomfortable when purchasing or acquiring products.

Before explaining each product, a detailed history of menstrual products is provided, including how and when pads and tampons each came to be and how they evolved into what they are now. There is an overview of all the products that

are currently available on the market with a basic description of what each is and how it is used however an in-depth explanation is only provided for how to use a tampon. The authors introduce toxic shock syndrome, what causes it, possible symptoms, and what to do if you think you may have contracted it. *Helloflo* addresses the myth of lost virginity using tampons and explains that it is not true.

Hormones are presented again (124 - 129) in relation to emotional or mood fluctuations related to PMS or the menstrual cycle. This conversation is also linked to the myth that women should not be able to hold positions of power because of menstruation and hormones but the author reinforces that women's abilities are not held back by their period and they are just as capable all year round. *Helloflo* also enters the realm of social activism in a section where they discuss the girls around the world who regularly miss school because of a lack of access to necessary products or bathrooms.

Results

Analysis was complex because many of the books had incomplete information on topics that *were* introduced and none of the books fully fulfilled the desired information that Rierdan determined girls wanted to know. Out of the seventeen specific examples of information that I was looking to find in each book, I found fulfillment for the highest quantity of examples in *Helloflo* and

Period. Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You and Be Healthy! scored the worst, answering none of the interests. Below, I will discuss the more notable examples of how books fulfilled each category (or didn't) in the Rierden list – including topics covering biology, product knowledge, and reproductive implications – and the implications of the information presented.

All but two books (*Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You and Be Healthy!*), included a sufficient understanding of the biological functions that take place during a period or the menstrual cycle. *Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You* neglected to answer questions about biology, suggesting visiting a library or asking an adult in place of providing information. *Be Healthy!* barely references menstruation at all; however, the librarian suggested it based on my interests, and it includes menstruation in its index but the information provided was only for discussing the importance of iron in the body. *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System* includes anatomical names for body parts but has little explanation of the structure or purpose of each.

Providing biological information is the most basic milestone that should be taught, and that information should be comprehensive within *each* book. If more than one book needs to be read just for the basic biology, then that is a failure by the author. Understanding the physical changes that will take place is the first need for girls before they can start learning about the related social information. Without

an understanding of the biological changes, the rest of the information doesn't provide a complete picture.

Only 4 of the books mentioned pregnancy and made a direct connection to menstruation. *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System*, *Period*, *Will Puberty Last My Whole Life?*, and *Helloflo* each place the menstrual cycle as a part of the reproductive cycle. In *Period*, there is a direct relation pregnancy explaining ovulation and the purpose of the uterus for reproduction but *Helloflo* connects them best and goes so far as to reference a missed period as an early sign of pregnancy. Menstruation is directly related to reproduction and pregnancy but most of the books neglect to make that connection. Additionally, no book introduces birth control in its relation to menstruation even though using birth control influences both menstruation and reproduction, with a potential alter or disrupt them entirely, and not sharing this information neglects something that is a part of life for many women. Why do authors not want to share this information with girls before puberty? The experience of menstruation carries with it the responsibility of being able to get pregnant, but instead of introducing them at the same time, girls are taught about menstruation and reproduction at different times.

The physical sensation of bleeding is introduced in *Period*, *Will Puberty Last My Whole Life*, and *Helloflo*. In *Period* the term "dribbling" is used to describe blood

leaving the body which is a more fitting description than “flow” or many other terms commonly used which don’t give the most accurate description of what it feels like. *Period* also introduces clumps to explain the texture of blood. There is no explanation of where the blood comes from or how it exits the body in *Girl to Girl*, *Tangles*, *Growth Spurts*, and *Being You*, and *Be Healthy!*.

These topics speak to the questions that girls have about what they’re going to experience and what it’s going to feel like. It’s difficult to describe the physical sensations to someone who hasn’t felt them, but it’s important to try so that girls don’t feel like they must wait for a mystery to be revealed.

The range of expected blood loss that can be expected and the difference in heavy and light days are also very important biological topics. *Girl to Girl*, *Period*, and *Helloflo* each discuss the quantity of blood loss. *Girl to Girl* covers the topic about halfway in a discussion of how long a pad or tampon lasts and when to change it. *Helloflo* provides statistics about the range of blood loss that can be expected throughout each day of the period. *Girl*, *Tangles*, *Growth Spurts*, and *Being You*, and *Be Healthy!* are the only two books that do not give an overview of the menstrual cycle, what happens at each step, and how long each cycle lasts. Information about the irregularity of the cycle either overall or in the first few years is not available within *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System*, *Tangles*, *Growth Spurts*, and *Being You*, and *Be Healthy!*. Only *Period*, *Will*

Puberty Last My Whole Life, and Helloflo explain that there is an overall variability in experiences instead of presenting information as one size fits all.

There is a wide variability in experiences from body to body that needs to be addressed to comfort girls that they don't have to experience menstruation in the same way that their peers or family members do. It's easy for girls to become self-conscious about their bodies, the timing, and the means of how they experience menstruation, especially when compared to their peers. The range of experiences and the unique experience of each person is important to highlight to calm the fear girls have that they are re not in the right place in their development.

Along with information about what can be biologically expected, the experience of cramps, discomfort, and other 'side effects' (such as bloating or acne) are necessary to understand and expect. There are inadequate or missing discussions of topics including cramps, pains, acne, bloating, and similar side effects in *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System*, *Tangles*, *Growth Spurts*, and *Being You*, and *Be Healthy!*. There is also a wide variability in which discomforts each girl feels, and to what extent. *Period* and *Helloflo* are the only books that build on the information about cramps and side effects and emphasize that each person has an individual experience and that there is not an exact experience.

In addition to the physical experience of menstruation, the possibility of changes and variability in emotions related to menstruation should be explained alongside. The possible variability in emotions caused by hormonal fluctuations (generally known as PMS) is not introduced in *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System*, *Tangles*, *Growth Spurts*, and *Being You, Be Healthy!*, and *Will Puberty Last My Whole Life?*. In *Helloflo* the myth that PMS affects the ability to be reasonable is debunked in addition to reinforcement that capabilities are not affected by the period. This conversation is important when girls are also being presented with negative messages about their capabilities and value through advertisements, mythology, and social practices.

There isn't any information given about menstrual products, the available options, or how to use them within *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System*, *Tangles*, *Growth Spurts*, and *Growing up*, and *Be Healthy!*. *Helloflo* is the only book that introduces all the menstrual products currently available, however, given the variety that it does cover, it could have done more to explain some of the lesser known, such as the sea sponge or period underwear, which are less widely available. Based solely on the products each book represents, the only books that do not explain at least something about how to use every product they introduce are *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System* and *Be Healthy!* – neither introduce products. In addition to

any written discussion about menstrual products, there are visual representations or pictures in *Girl to Girl*, *Period*, and *Helloflo*. However, *Helloflo* is the only book to have a picture of all the products that are currently available in stores. When images of menstrual products are not included or instructions are incomplete or unclear, girls don't learn what they need to know about collecting blood and preventing stains.

Inaccuracy

While questionable advice exists throughout the books, there are two instances of information that are inaccurate or misleading. *Period* includes inaccurate information about a nonexistent stick applicator tampon despite this product being out of use when the book was first written and obsolete for the most recent "revision". This is an oversight since it is presented without comment about no longer being available even though the pads section includes information about historical products.

Will Puberty Last My Whole Life? includes the hymen in a misleading, if not inaccurate, way. Difficulty using tampon is attributed to the hymen being "in the way" as if it is a solid barrier the tampon must pass through. The hymen is introduced without the shame (related to a loss of virginity) that is generally attributed to it, but there is no follow up explaining what it is or why it exists.

Shame and Concealment

The primary attitude that I was looking for within the books were shame & concealment and how they are reinforced through learned behaviors. I've combined the two into one attitude because of the difficulty in separating them since one can lead to the other. A behavior that is clearly an example of concealment could be acted out because of internalized shame or and the shame could have been learned through the practice of concealment behaviors. Eventually, it becomes impossible to tell which came first or separate exactly how to categorize something as only one or the other.

I'm interested in the ways that books can teach or contribute to young girls' internalization of either of these feelings and the externalized ways that they might express these feelings through behaviors taught or suggested by the book's authors. Throughout the seven books, there were various examples of both deliberately taught or internalized expressions of shame or concealment.

While not every book included examples of shame & concealment, some books were teaching them ambiguously, and others clearly.

Shame or concealment are not found within *Helloflo* without either speaking directly to the way that a behavior is an example of where we learn and reinforce shame and concealment, or explaining how to alleviate the discomfort

caused by shaming from others. *Helloflo* attempts to counter the stigma and encourages feeling shameless about bodies when making a choice about what or when to share any information instead of doing what feels encouraged or status quo.

When relating menstruation to the overall experience of puberty, body odor is often discussed as part of the changes that precede menarche. A discussion of body odor begins the puberty section of *Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You* by focusing on potential bodily smells and how to control or conceal them to avoid personal embarrassment and discomfort *for others*. This emphasis on hygienic aspects of puberty treats them as embarrassing and reminds readers that the body is something that needs to be maintained to certain standards for social acceptance. The authors go further and suggest carrying around a travel size deodorant as a second defense to cover up smells. This focus on smells, how to stop them before they happen, and the emphasis on the opinions of others reinforces the need to conceal bodily functions and that the body is something that is being judged by others.

Girls are taught to use a “cute pencil case” or other discreet means of hiding pads or tampons when moving around in public. Examples of how to conceal products relating to periods showcases how girls interpret their periods, as something to hide, not make known to others, and potentially of being

stigmatized for having a period. All these messages bring shame to young girl's experiences and make their periods something that reflects society's views about women rather than a normal biological function. These suggestions teach young premenarcheal girls that they need to worry about allowing other people to see their products and that to be seen carrying around products is embarrassing (*Girl to Girl*). Emphasis is placed on the importance of being able to hide, conceal, or be discreet about moving around spaces with menstrual products by providing tips & tricks on how or where to hide products so that others don't see or discover them. (*Period*)

In the book *Period*, a statement is made about how to properly discard of period products. The authors explain that not only should young girls dispose them in a way that makes them feel comfortable, but that they should not "bother or offend anyone else," letting the reader know it is important to be worried about how others feel about their bodily functions and seeing menstrual products. Autonomy is taken away from young girls by telling them that they must prioritize other people's feelings and biases into their own bodily functions.

Learning how to effectively keep track of the timing of the menstrual cycle is important for an overall understanding of the body and for predicting the onset of menstruation. However, when methods of tracking introduce using codes or symbols to hide their cycle, encourages maintaining absolute secrecy (*Girl to*

Girl). This teaches girls that they should want to hide even the vague existence of the cycle so others cannot determine when menstruation takes place.

Cramps are represented in multiple ways, often contributing to internalized concealment. When discussing cramps in *Period*, the authors state that “whining to others may make you feel better - but probably not” teaching young girls that they will need to learn to hide their pain and deal with it privately. This prevents sharing among peers or confiding in trusted adults, potentially preventing diagnosis or treatment of serious medical issues (such as endometriosis) that pain may be a symptom of. The authors go on to suggest treating pain before it starts which, combined with being told not to “whine”, will lead young girls to hide their pain while pre-medicating to avoid it. (*Period*)

Another theme that develops alongside shame and concealment is viewing menstruation as illness. Menstruation is learned as an illness or public health issue when instructing that it is not “appropriate” to swim without a tampon for “sanitary reasons” teaching that even menstrual blood could contaminate water (*Period*). Illness is also underscored through a recommendation that girls shouldn’t use their bath towel on the “area between your legs” after showering and should instead use toilet paper to dry themselves (*Period*). Additionally, using words like “protect”, when talking about the possibility of period stains (on clothes, towels, or sheets), implies that girls need to protect themselves from

blood which furthers the idea of blood as dirty, unsafe, or unsanitary (*Will Puberty Last My Whole Life?*).

The importance of preventing leaks or dressing for periods is another common theme. Women work hard and feel stress about “protecting” clothes from stains that can be washed out. Not getting stains in the first place is overemphasized even though *everyone* will eventually experience a leak no matter how hard they try or what products they use. Both girls who are still learning about their bodies and older women with years of knowledge experience leaks, so why not normalize that leaks and stains happen instead of emphasizing the ability to hide or protect leaks through superior products and extreme caution?

Books teach ways to hide or disguise products instead of communicating about the features, differences, or preferences of each potential product. Why did I leave middle school knowing how to discreetly get a pad from my backpack into the sleeve of my sweater instead of gossiping about the benefits and drawbacks of wings vs. no wings? If my goal is genuinely to conceal menstruation and prevent leaks shouldn't we be sharing information and swapping products until we each determine what worked best with our bodies?

Limitations

My book selection was limited by my choice to check out books from the library and to trust the librarian's suggestions about what I should read. By trusting in the librarian, I didn't get a full picture of what books were available and lost the opportunity to browse the shelves and skim to decide which books to read. Relying on a public library also confined my choices to what was immediately available at that location at that time. In conversations with others about what I was studying I received a lot of suggestions for books to read that were not included in the books I found but because they were not available at the library on the day that I went, I couldn't include them. However, despite the way that my methodology limited me, I think that it was important because a kid may not go back to the library more than once to find different books or may give up if the book(s) they check out are disappointing and don't answer their questions. A young child is unlikely to even realize that they are missing out on information.

If I could repeat this project, I would like to read more books and visit more libraries so that I can have a greater understanding of what is available. Visiting elementary and middle school libraries and seeing which books they have available on their own campuses would also be ideal. Kids read a lot of books at school either in the classroom, on the playground, or in the library and it would be nice to see what is immediately available to them if they think of a question during the school day and want to do research.

If I were to move on from here to continue working, I would like to consider reviewing curriculum and textbooks or attending the classes that schools offer to observe and get the full experience of what kinds of information is being shared. I am also interested in hearing the stories that older women have about their own sources of education and how they felt about their transition into puberty.

Discussion

Throughout the seven books, there is an insight into the information that is modeled to young readers about the onset and experience of menarche and, although a lot of important information is presented, there are instances where the messages have the potential to suggest or reproduce feelings of shame that young girls can internalize and carry with them through a fundamental step in their bodily and social development.

Helloflo was very clearly the most effective, informative, and caring book. The authors proactively attempt to counter any shame or stigma, they offer compassionate advice. Although *Helloflo* does use some euphemisms to discuss menstruation, they are used alongside the anatomical and biological terms and are always playful and constructive. The most thorough (and current) information comes from *Helloflo* and it is a very good educational tool.

Period also includes a range of topics and provides a lot of useful information. The authors start with ideas of body image, encouraging positive body image, which are repeated and reinforced throughout in different ways. The book gives substantial explanations of what, why, and how of the menstrual cycle. The information provided by *Period* is very thorough, however, I wouldn't recommend giving it to children to read without a parent reading along with them. The book was originally written in 1979 and although there are claims that it has been updated and revised as recently as 2001, it seems like the only updates were the authors' last names and a single paragraph about menstrual cups on page 36. There are subtle attitudes and judgments throughout the book including presenting menstrual cups as a superfluous option with no information provided.

Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You provides little useful information about puberty or menstruation. The book can be summed up with two of the provided answers: 1. ask your parents or a trusted adult for the answer and 2. go to the library to do research on your own. Both answers were included almost verbatim for multiple questions both separately and together.

I took issue with the question from the young girl who was asking about being embarrassed by the teasing she was receiving about her developing body from boys in her class; the author started the answer by instructing "Don't be embarrassed". This answer implies that girls not only can but should adjust their

own emotional responses for the benefit of others and then ends with “ignore them” until it gets too much to deal with at which point the young girl who is being bullied should tell a parent or trusted adult. Girls are taught starting from a young age that they will learn to put up with the behaviors of others to the detriment of their own comfort and self-esteem. But for what reason do they do this? To be happy? To be well-liked?

Breast development is explored further by *Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You* by discussing of a friend’s body, suggesting proactively questioning peers about their bodies to suggest that those with developing breasts should start wearing a bra before they have made that decision for themselves. This compounds upon the bad of advice they have for the young girls being teased because they are wearing a bra. Encouraging this type of behavior among peers may lead to teasing and bullying among female peers related to body development. This may be a way to encourage communication between young girls, but it may also cause discomfort for the young girl who is the focus of the reader’s attention and may transition into bullying behaviors. (*Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You*)

Additionally, the responsibility of dealing with the shaming behaviors of other is placed onto the victim without genuine interpersonal advice provided to the reader. Young boy’s behavior is attributed to their own insecurities with no

acknowledgment that they are creating insecurities and discomfort for the young girls they tease. (*Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You*)

Will Puberty Last My Whole Life gives advice about changing pads and tampons where they instruct that a good time to change them is anytime you go to the bathroom. While I don't want to categorize this as bad advice, I consider it sloppy because it makes assumptions of not only how often a reader can or does go to the bathroom, but many young girls who are new to their periods will go to the bathroom more often when they are on their period. Fear that they are leaking which may cause them to change their tampon too often, which could cause both discomfort and waste. This advice also does not account for flow rate or tampon absorbency and girls who take this advice confidently but would normally only go to the bathroom a couple times a day they may leave the tampon in too long causing a leak, or contract TSS. (*Will Puberty Last My Whole Life?*)

In *Girl to Girl*, there are instructions for practicing with a tampon. These instructions start by emphasizing the importance of washing hands to discourage the spread of bacteria, which is advice not given in many other books. However, despite a strong start, the instructions do not clearly instruct to remove the tampon after practicing and the next paragraph starts by stating that tampons should be removed after 4 - 6 hours. This is not a clear enough transition from

practice to practical and this lack of clarity could be potentially dangerous for a young girl practicing on their own. Without someone to ensure that the tampon is removed afterward, they could risk contracting Toxic Shock Syndrome.

More than one book took time to discuss body odor, from multiple perspectives (*Tangles, Growth Spurts, and Being You, Period, Helloflo, Will Puberty Last My Whole Life*). While some include casual mentions just to let girls know it is a part of life and what causes it, others place more emphasis on avoidance or covering smells up. Teaching the importance of maintaining a body that is “fresh” (a term regularly used in advertising) and odor neutral influences their relationship with their own body and creates a discomfort around natural bodily functions that produce smells, includes sweating. If girls are afraid that sweating will make them smell bad, they will avoid activities that induce sweating. This influences the physical activity levels of young girls, discouraging them from participation in athletics or an active lifestyle. This, coupled with the pervasive idea that physique is part of beauty, can lead to unhealthy lifestyle choices, or unsafe means of altering the body to attain social status.

Fear of odor also makes girls and women dependent upon products (such as deodorant or body sprays) to prevent or mask odors that occur naturally. These fears are exacerbated by the style and prevalence of advertising for commercials. Deodorants are marketed as necessities for everyday life to avoid

personal discomfort, shame, and embarrassment from others being able to smell. Advertisers target not only athletics and sweat, but stress, vaginal odor, and daily life. Deodorants, feminine sprays, and douches are marketed for everyday use despite no proven health benefits or biological purposes. Girls learn that it's a part of the responsibility of being a woman to be pleasant smelling, internalize this expectation, and spend time and money maintaining their bodies sterility. Because of the pervasiveness of shame and concealment, women have perfected hiding the menstrual cycle and all its symptoms to avoid stigma. Deodorant and perfumes can cover body odor, douches can mask vaginal odors, makeup covers acne, and painkillers prevent cramps.

However, one "symptom" that cannot be prevented or avoided is PMS. Even without any evidence of menstruation, women face the stigma of PMS – which is a socially constructed means of punishing women for any emotional changes that they have (and blaming it on their periods). Women can have their rational emotional responses or any instance of disagreeability at any time of the month credited to PMS. Because of the implications of PMS, women dread how others will react or change assessments of them if faced with the reality "that time of the month".

References

- Bloom, N. (2017). *Helloflo: The Guide, Period*. New York, NY: Dutton Childrens Books.
- Burningham, S. O. (2013). *Girl to Girl: Honest Talk About Growing Up and Your Changing Body*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Burrows, A., & Johnson, S. (2005). Girls' Experiences of Menarche and Menstruation. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 23(3), 235-249.
- Cheung, L. W., & Jukes, M. (2003). *Be Healthy! Its A Girl Thing: Food, Fitness, and Feeling Great*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Hoffman, E. (1995). *Our Health, Our Lives*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Kissling, E. A. (1996). Bleeding Out Loud: Communication About Menstruation. *Feminism & Psychology*, 6(4), 481-504.
- Kissling, E. A. (1996). "That's Just a Basic Teen-age Rule": Girls' Linguistic Strategies for Managing the Menstrual Communication Taboo. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 24, 292-309.

- Loewen, N., & Skelley, P. (2015). *Tangles, Growth spurts, and Being You: Questions and Answers About Growing Up*. North Mankato, MN: Snap Books, a Capstone imprint.
- Loulan, J., & Worthen, B. (2001). *Period. A Girls Guide*. Minnetonka, MN: Book Peddlers.
- Mason, P. (2015). *Your Growing Body and Remarkable Reproductive System*. Catharines, Ontario: Crabtree Publishing Company.
- Merskin, D. (1999). Adolescence, Advertising, and the Ideology of Menstruation. *Sex Roles.*, 40(11/12), 941-57.
- Metzger, J., & Lehman, R. (2012). *Will Puberty Last My Whole Life?: Real Answers to Real Questions From Preteens About Body Changes, Sex, and Other Growing-Up Stuff*. Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books.
- Rierdan, Koff, & Flaherty. (1983). Guidelines for Preparing Girls for Menstruation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 22(5), 480-486.
- Roberts, T., Goldenberg, J. L., Power, C., & Pyszczynski, T. (2002). "Feminine Protection": The Effects of Menstruation on Attitudes Towards Women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 26(2), 131-139. doi:10.1111/1471-6402.00051

Serafini, F. (2013). Close Readings and Children's Literature. *Reading Teacher*, 67(4), 299-301. doi:10.1002/trtr.1213

Tampax Report, The. (1981). New York, NY: Ruder, Finn, & Rotman.

Webster, S. B. (2017). *The History of the Curse: A Comparative Look at The Religious and Social Taboos of Menstruation and the Influence They Have on American Society Today* (Order No. 10274798). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (1896120604).

Zurbriggen, E., & Roberts, T. (2013). *The Sexualization of Girls and Girlhood: Causes, Consequences, and Resistance*. New York: Oxford University Press.