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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MENARCHE AND CULTURE

by

JUDY LYNN WEISGARBER

A THESIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A Phenomenological Study of Menarche and Culture" submitted by Judy Lynn Weisgarber in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.

Supervisor

Date: November 4, 1987.

ABSTRACT

The attitudes and practices surrounding menstruation have shown a marked difference from culture to culture and from one historical period to another.

This gives rise to the questions I wish to explore: Do the attitudes and practices held by a given community or culture regarding menses and particularly first menstruation, have an effect on the experience of menarche? Do the prevailing attitudes and practices regarding menses have a palpable effect on women's lives? Is menstruation a natural form of initiation into womanhood, and if so, should it receive formal recognition? Are there psychological and spiritual dimensions of menstruation which effect the lives of women?

In an attempt to determine the attitudes and experience of females in Western culture I will interview women from different age groups (50 years and older, 30-50 years) who have not had a formal or common education or initiation into menstruation. I will also interview female Junior High students who in their Grade 6 curriculum have had formal instruction in physiological development, puberty and menstruation.

I will use a phenomenological method of research to explore participants' lived-experience and I will analyze the interview protocols phenomenologically to arrive at a structure of the experience of menarche both within and across age levels.

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INTRODUCTION

A few weeks before Tonya's 13th birthday her family moved to a new home and she had the opportunity to decorate her own room. Never had she liked the color red but suddenly she chose a red phone, red and white shades and a red bedspread. Both parents were struck by what seemed to be a blatant but unconscious change. For her birthday Tonya said that all she really wanted was a miniature cow and she confessed her disappointment at not having received such a figurine when she asked for one at Christmas. She felt an unexplainable affinity for cows.

As Tonya's mother related these events we were struck by the symbolism. Tonya had not yet begun her menstruation, yet her imaginal life reflected ancient symbols that seemed to presage its arrival. Ochre is the oldest lasting pigment approaching the color red (Lederer, 1968), the color of menstrual blood. "Adam" the progenitor of mankind, comes from the feminine "adamah" meaning "bloody clay" which scholars delicately translate "red earth" (Walker, 1983). Menarche, which brings with it the capacity for motherhood, is derived from the Indo-European root "me", meaning to measure or rule (American Heritage Dictionary, 1969). Further derivatives, menses, month, or mensa, are associated with the Moon goddess or "measurer of time" (Walker,1983). Many lunar goddesses wear the horns of a cow on their head (Cirlot, 1962). According to Indian myth, the sacred fluid soma, in Greek "the body", was believed to be secreted by

the Moon-Cow and one of the most common manifestations of the Great Mother as Preserver was the horned Moon-Cow (Walker, 1983). Cows abound in our mythology and come up repeatedly as archetypal expressions of the body nurturing aspect of the feminine principle (Hall, 1980).

When my friend Lydia learned that I was writing about menarche she told a story of her mother's first period. Not only did the older woman experience shock because she had not been prepared; embarrassment and secrecy surrounded her menarche. She was told to keep her menstrual clothes hidden in a bucket in the basement, her brothers teased her, excluded her from their sports and talked about the "curse".

The mystery of menstruation had fascinated me for some time and I wanted to investigate menarche, the onset of menses, in relation to culture. I wondered if and to what extent growing up in a particular society affected a young woman's experience of menarche. The stories of Tonya and Lydia not only confirmed for me the importance of exploring cultural influences they suggested that meaning might to some degree be shaped by ancient vestiges of consciousness and context. Tonya's behavior reflected, it seemed, long standing knowledge and symbols that were connected to universal archetypes and rhythms. Experiences like those of Lydia's mother made me wonder how a given culture comes to embrace particular attitudes, beliefs and practices.

As I continued to read and reflect my orientation became clear. I wanted to know: How have women experienced their first period? Is there a relationship between culture and

the experience of menarche? What are the repercussions for women? What follows is an exploration of menarche undertaken from a phenomenological point of view to allow the experience to unfold and reflect its many dimensions.

CHAPTER 1 : LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Although the material on menarche is very limited, Chapter One provides a review of the literature on four main aspects of the above topic; theoretical issues, natural science research, miscellaneous research, and anthropology. Since culture is the chosen context for this study, it is important to look at and evaluate some of the ideas and beliefs that have influenced Western culture. Thus part of the literature review examines the history of Western consciousness and its particular philosophical and psychological roots. Having acknowledged these influences, the review will outline the significance of phenomenological research in the study of menarche and re-state the purpose of this thesis.

Chapter Two will explore the philosophical assumptions underlying natural science and human science research. Natural science is expressed quantitatively, while human science is expressed qualitatively, often by phenomenological methodology. The presuppositions on which this study is based will be outlined and discussed.

Chapter Three discusses the characteristics of phenomenological methodology and their application to this study. It describes the original rationale and procedure and outlines the evolution of the research through the stages of gathering and analyzing data.

Chapter Four presents the data gathered in interviews, outlines the themes, and discusses the results of the phenomenological analysis.

Chapter Five reflects on the meaning which emerges from the phenomenological exploration of menarche. The results are discussed in relation to natural science research, anthropological perspectives and extant literature on the broader topic of menstruation. Implications for education, society and the role of women are entertained.

Review of Studies

Prelude

Certain transition points in life are imbued with psychological and/or sociocultural significance. The first menstrual period, or menarche, although only one of many female bodily changes, can be most dramatic both physically for the individual and symbolically for the society. Some societies view menarche as a symbol of sexual maturity connected with fertility and womanhood (Washbourn, 1977). Other cultures treat menarche as a minor event, ignore it, or limit it to a hygienic issue (Whisnant, Brett, & Zegans, 1975). Still others consider it as a mystery and a curse surrounded by anxiety and taboo (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1976). Several studies suggest that our culture gives the menarcnal girl counterproductive or mixed messages, leaves her without socially established support and at best shows lack of concern (Clarke & Ruble, 1978: Ruble & Brooks-Gunn,

1982).

Considering that menarche may be experienced as the single most important event of adolescence for girls, very little theoretical literature and even less research exists on the subject. There is a substantial body of material dealing with the broader topic of menstruation, e.g., female roles, symptoms (Slade & Jenner, 1980), anxiety (Awaritife, 1978), personality factors, (Bernstein, 1975) and studies have multiplied in recent years with the recognition and attention given to premenstrual syndrome. However the event of menarche is conspicuous by its absence. The ERIC topic dictionary does not carry the term menarche, the Psychological Abstracts contained but 12 articles directly related to menarche and the University library yielded one book source. In journals, authors repeatedly initiated their articles by saying there is a relative paucity of material and very little is known in the area (Hart & Sarnoff, 1971; Rierdan & Koff, 1980; Stubbs, 1982).

Developmentally, as a normative crisis in girls' lives, menarche is not discussed in the literature. Until 1978 only Offer (1978) had written extensively on the development of normal adolescent boys; no comparable body of data existed for females and his one study of six normal adolescent girls was notable for the absence of any mention of menarche.

Clinical writing draws heavily on reports of girls and women in treatment and psychoanalysis, and in spite of the clinical importance attributed to menarche, knowledge of

girls' actual experience is scarce. Research concerning the young adolescent girl's perception and experience, particularly around the onset of menses, has been limited (Clarke & Ruble, 1978). Until recently no research had examined girls' experience immediatly after menarche. Present trends however, hold promise. Our culture is becoming more aware of the potential meaning and impact of menarchal practices and attitudes, or their absence. The Fourth Interdisciplinary Menstrual Cycle Research Conference (1980) devoted part of its agenda to initial menstruation. Golub's (1983) book, Menarche, contains a collection of papers presented there.

To date, the theoretical literature is primarily editorial and anthropological; while the research is exclusively quantitative. In a recent literature review Greif and Ulman (1982) noted that "a narrow range of variables combined with methodological problems limit the generalizability of the research and leave a number of gaps in our knowledge" (p. 1428). The following literature review which focuses on theoretical issues, natural science research, miscellaneous research and anthropology, outlines the history of menarchal study and provides a context for further investigation into sociocultural elements and the experience of menarche.

Theoretical Issues

Psychoanalytic. In the area of theory, psychoanalysts were the first to pay attention to menarche as a major influence in girls' maturation. Helene Deutsch (1944) suggested that

a menstrual taboo existed in the unconscious of Western cultures which affected girls' reactions and which was tied to a common root of anxiety about adulthood and sexuality. She saw the experience of menarche as inevitably traumatic and the reaction to menstrual blood as reflective of cultural attitudes and primitive unconscious beliefs. Clara Thompson (1942), another psychoanalyst, thought that the cultural denial of menarche could hinder integration and contribute to an adolescent girl's feeling of decreased self-esteem and loss of freedom, power and spontaneity. These ideas are rooted in Freud's view that the female genital, thus menstruation, is a wound (Shainess, 1961). Other psychoanalytically oriented theorists have described menarche as potentially positive. Kestenberg (1961) advances a theory which re-appears in more recent literature, (Comerci, 1981), suggesting that the pubertal girl goes through a stage of disorganization which ends at menarche, this event in turn serves as a reference point from which the girl can organize her experiences. This theory would be confirmed by Koff, Rierdan and Silverstone (1978) who claim that menarche is closely associated with a better defined body image and clearer sexual identification and by Hart and Sarnoff (1971) who see a clearer organization of the ego. Greif and Ulman (1982) concluded that psychologically, menarche was a positive organizing influence which helped define boundaries and led to greater female identity.

Developmental. Developmentalists, in looking at the

biological, psychological and intellectual correlates of menarche, present a smorgasbord of theories. Whisnant and Zegans (1975) note that menarche regularly follows the year of maximum growth spurt, usually after the development of breasts, pubic hair and changes in body contour. In the intellectual sphere there is evidence of clearness of perception (Blos, 1962) and clearer thinking (Hart & Sarnoff, 1971) following menarche. However, theorists see the greatest developmental impact as being psychological. Well's (1980) research claims that menarche is accompanied by a sense of heightened vulnerability and concern about agression. Perhaps, she suggests, the concern is about being an object of aggression. Golub and Catalano (1983) view the event as having an organizing role in adolescent development. Girls begin to separate from parents and focus more on their relations with peers. A recent study comparing age of menarche and onset of sexual activity found that early menarche is consistant with early intercourse; it recommends that initial menstruation be the target age for reinforcing sex education (Soefer, Scholl, Sobel, Tanfer & Levy, 1985). Blos (1962) claims that the experience of menarche can be crucial in determining the nature of the mother-daughter relationship. Several writers agree that the onset of menses is a nodal area of high potential for enhancement or impairment of the self, especially in relation to femininity and the confirmation of womanhood (Brown, 1963; Shainess, 1961; Whisnant & Zegans, 1975).

Anthropological. The richest source of theory may be the

field of anthropology which has studied the role of menarche in various cultures. Margaret Mead (1949) maintains that the psychological effect of menarche is in part determined by its meaning in a particular culture. Both she and Ruth Benedict (Greif & Ulman, 1982) suggest that the experience in our culture is stressful and potentially traumatic because of taboo and the absence of ritual surrounding the event. Margaret Stubbs (1982) illustrates the profound effect of different cultural attitudes and practices. She relates the story of Emma Goldman who, in the Jewish menarchal tradition of the time, received a painful slap across the face from her mother. Having had no preparation or understanding for the action, she was shocked, humiliated and outraged. Logan (1980), when she studied menarchal experience in 23 foreign countries, found it to be a consistently negative experience except in one culture where it was the custom to discuss and acknowledge the event within the whole family. We should, however, question if her study is more a sample of socioeconomic class than one of culture since the sample was composed of well-educated foreign college women studying in America. In exploring the need for a contemporary tradition for menarche Logan, Calder and Cohen (1979) confirm the view of several other researchers regarding the value of ritual. They suggest the need for a message, an activity and a positive attitude at the onset of menstruation (Avery, 1984; Niethammer, 1977; Weideger, 1976). McKeever's (1984) investigation of present day menstrual shame illustrates how euphemisms, the implicit

and explicit messages in commercials, and the pervading social atmosphere surrounding menstruation perpetuate taboos and unhealthy images. By contrast the ritual of a Pacific Coast tribe publically honored the menarchal girl by feasting her before the entire community (Cameron 1981). Among the Navajo and Apache, puberty festivals are still being held almost in their traditional forms. The rite is a time of happiness and sociability and involves an expensive celebration costing as much as six thousand dollars (Niethammer, 1977).

Conclusion. In our society many young girls experience confusion about their bodies and as they turn to the external world they often receive mixed messages. The lack of literature, educational material and ritual provides little cultural context for the experience of menarche. Few books on adolescent or developmental psychology speak to the subject. One notable exception is Lorand and Schneer's (1961) monograph, Adolescents, which contains Kestenberg's much quoted chapter on menarche. Unfortunatly, it focuses on problems and therapy and contains classic stereotypic attitudes of "sick" women. Delaney, Lupton and Toth (1976) give a thorough account of the rites of menarche as part of the cultural history of menstruation but the emphasis is on history. Menarche (1983), a collection of conference articles, addresses many issues and is the only book dealing solely with the subject. Becoming Woman (Washbourn, 1977) and The Wise Wound (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1978) have limited information about the onset of menses but the subject is

presented in a positive, integrative manner. School boards in conjunction with the local Board of Health have developed an information package on puberty which explains the physiological and hygienic aspects of menstruation. Although limited, there are an increasing number of journal articles focusing on various aspects of menarche.

Most writing on the theory of menarche tends to focus on specific aspects of the experience; such as biological impact, social determinism or intrapsychic influence. Ultimately theorists see the experience as one of integration or disruption. Could it not be, rather, a process encompassing both? Only Petersen's (1981) biopsychosocial model attempts to explain the development of females at puberty, by looking at the interactions of biological, social and psychological influences.

A young woman's first discharge of blood is a deeply personal, developmentally pivotal and culturally significant experience. It seems strange that this nexus of fertility on which so much hinges remains neglected and misunderstood. Is it not important to address the conceptual complexity of menarche and find ways to learn about the totality of girls' experience?

Natural Science Research

In the area of research few empirical studies have been designed to test specific theoretical hypotheses. Instead investigators have tended to focus on the relationship between menarche and one or two specific variables. The

research literature is organized into five sections: (a) attitudes of pubertal girls toward menarche, (b) personality characteristics of pubertal girls, (c) womens's memories of menarche, (d) the impact of timing, (e) menarche and cultural influence.

Attitudes. In research focusing on attitudes toward menarche in pubertal girls, the studies of Whisnant and Zegans (1975a), Koff, Rierdan and Jacobson (1981), and Brooks-Gunn and Ruble (1980a) all used pre- and postmenarchal subjects. Only the first authors employed interviews, the remainder used adult menstrually-related questionnaires. Despite differences in measures all the studies concluded that postmenarchal girls had more negative attitudes toward menstruation and experienced more negative emotion than premenarchal girls. It was found that earlier attitudes and knowledge about menses do affect reported menstrual experience. Prior negative attitudes, symptom expectation and learning from male sources were related to more severe symptomatology (Clarke & Ruble, 1978). A second study by Ruble and Brooks-Gunn (1980b) using college men and women and pubertal girls revealed that among those polled, adolescent girls perceive menstruation as more debilitating and they more strongly deny the effects of menses than do the other two groups. In Italy Gainotti and Serra (1983) studied attitudes toward menstruation in adolescents of both sexes. Comparing an urban (Roman) and rural (Sardinian) population, they found that menstruation was considered almost solely a female issue and that urban girls were

usually better informed and had a slightly more positive attitude than did rural females and all males in the study. Maidman (1984) conducted a one-dimensional study over three generations and concluded that modern technology and the sexual revolution have created a more open attitude which permits young women to have a more active life. Petersen (1981) revealed that it is not uncommon to find menarchal girls unwilling to relinquish their childlike bodies so equated with the lean, lithe image which is a symbol of contemporary feminine beauty. A recent study on attitudes of pubertal girls (Havens & Swenson, 1986) showed that the most common attitudes were annoyance at the inconvenience of menarche (89%), surprise (30%), fear (16%), belief that boys should be informed about menstruation (89%), pride (11%), and happiness (11%).

While these studies sketch a beginning picture which reveals that girls' attitudes are primarily positive (pride) or negative (shame, disgust) they are limited to white middle class girls. The development of menstrual attitudes is an intricate interplay of cultural beliefs, socialization factors and actual experience. A more complex and comprehensive model of mixed emotions is needed.

Personality characteristics. A number of researchers have examined differences in personality characteristics or behaviors of pre- and postmenarchal girls to determine the impact of menarche on personality functioning. A variety of tests and tools were used including I.Q. tests, the Body Cathexis test, Draw-a-Person test, the Pressey Interest

Inventory and the Mooney Problem Checklist. All but one of the studies followed a pre-post test model. As a group these findings support the view that postmenarchal girls have heightened awareness of and interest in their femininity, as defined by our culture; that is, they are interested in body adornment and boy-girl relations. Regardless of chronological age postmenarchal girls gave mature responses more frequently than the premenarchal girls on the Pressey Interest test (Stone & Barker, 1937). While Garwood and Allen (1979) found that postmenarchal girls had higher scores on self-concept and had significantly better adjustment, these girls also gave evidence of having more problems such as boy-girl relations and family issues. Smith and Powell (1956) claimed that postmenarchal girls were more insecure. Comparing responses of the same girls before and after the onset of menarche is an excellent way to assess the impact of menarche. The finding (Koff et al., 1978) that same-aged girls produced similar figure drawings only if their menarchal status was the same, and that a girl's drawings changed over a 6-month period only if her menstrual status changed is evidence for the significance of menarche. However, the relation of personality characteristics to menarche remains unclear; since other body changes are occuring simultaneously it is difficult to attribute differences to menarche alone. In future studies it will be important to match subjects on age and time from onset of menses to be more confident that menarchal status is a major differentiating factor.

Memories of menarche. A third area of research deals with memories of menarche. Since I am interested in looking at the structure of the menarchal experience, its possible change over generations and its relation to sociocultural factors, retrospective accounts are important. Six studies, using either questionnaires or semi-structured interviews, polled women from different backgrounds ranging in age from 17 to 58 years. Even though the "first period" was clear in the minds of most women, retrospective accounts can be affected by errors in memory and distortions of events. The validity of self-reports is always questionable. Jaynes (1976) claims that conscious retrospection is not the pure retrieval of images, but rather it is a reworking of the elements of an experience so they fit into rational and plausible patterns. Through narratization one chooses situations which are congruent to the ongoing story: by conciliation objects are made to conform to a learned schema. Generally, adult women recall onset of menstruation as a negative and unpleasant experience. Consistently 25% to 30% of the subjects had either inadequate or no preparation. The majority of women, including those with some foreknowledge, reported being scared, upset, anxious and even fearful. Sixty per-cent of the subjects remembered their mothers as having negative responses to daughters' first menses. A common belief supported by one study (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1980a), holds that negative menarchal experiences were related to negative menstrual attitudes and symptomatology in later life. Woods, Dery and Most (1982)

revealed the opposite: positive recollections of menarche were associated with later menstrual difficulties. Most girls reported trauma when they lacked foreknowledge and 32% felt a loss of status or self-esteem. Cross culturally women remembered adults as being reluctant to discuss menstruation and indicated a lack of social support from their immediate environment (Logan, 1980). At the same time several subjects recalled having mixed reactions, including disgust, pride, and a sense of belonging with other women. Amount of preparation was correlated with more positive menarchal experience (Shainess, 1961). The value of the research on menarchal memories lies in the strength of the large samples used and the suggestions women made for future generations. Weideger (1976) had 558 participants and many of her subjects argued for increased education and social support from the environment. These studies are, however, limited by potential distortions of memories and the absence of any objective data. Nevertheless, the retrospective studies reveal that almost all women remembered their first period and, more importantly, remembered how they felt at the time (Greif & Ulman, 1982). Even if the memories do not match the actual experiences of earlier years, these studies provide valuable information about subject's conceptions. That menarche is remembered by most women testifies to the impact of the event.

Onset of menarche. The onset of menses has been the subject of several studies and early or late menarche appears to have significant impact. Harper and Collins

(1972) and Faust (1960) explored the relationship between menarche and prestige. Jones and Mussen (1958) and Peskin (1973) using longitudinal studies, concentrated on menarche and maturation. Every study revealed that early menarche and maturation caused more trauma and was seen as a disadvantage at the time, however, at age 30 early maturers were more self-possessed and self-directed (Peskin, 1973). Petersen's (1981) study was important in that it discriminated between actual and perceived timing. Girls who "thought" they were not on time, whether early or late, had negative feelings. One of the strongest factors in a girl's adjustment was the attitude of the peer group toward timing.

These data point to the importance girls attached to being in step. A problem with these studies is that they all use different criteria to determine early and late maturation and different measures for assessing the impact of timing. None of the studies controlled for the variable of preparation nor did they point out that early maturers were likely to be young and more traumatically affected at the time of menarche. Obviously the onset of menarche and the existing cultural norm are issues we need to clarify and address in future research.

Culture. The complexity of the cultural fabric makes it difficult to study the true influence of culture upon menarche. Clarke and Ruble (1978) and Brooks-Gunn and Ruble (1982) in studying cultural beliefs and menarche used both cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs. The data

suggests that girls introject beliefs they have learned from others and that these beliefs, many of which are negative, can influence them at a young age. Both studies showed that premenarchal girls view the event as being more disruptive and debilitating than do postmenarchal girls. Perhaps fear and apprehension are fostered by attitudes in the culture. The onset of menstruation did not produce increased knowledge, which may again reflect the cultural secretiveness and discomfort surrounding the subject. Most girls perceived their girlfriends and mothers as being negative about menses. McKeever (1984) and Maidman (1984) address the presence of menstrual taboo in our culture and report that 66% of adults sampled believe menstruation should not be discussed socially and 25% felt it should not even be discussed within the family. They make specific suggestions for attitude change, education and ritual development. Paige's (1973) research outlines a relationship between certain religions and particular menstrual attitudes. The most culturally comprehensive study is Logan's (1980) assessment of women from foreign countries. Although many of her findings unearthed negative cultural attitudes (sick 15%, unclean 11%, embarrassment 23%, and fear 15%) there was evidence of some positive feelings (proud 10%, more grown up 24%, more feminine 13%).

Typically, there is difficulty with some of the research designs. Clarke and Ruble's (1978) study is more robust in that they used five different instruments and included males; however, they had only 18 subjects in each of their

groups. Questionaires have been limited to specific variables which automatically restricts the range of cultural information. It is also possible that cultural biases (i.e., the rational biomedical standard) are implicitly built into research designs. The most serious weakness in the research seems to be its catagorical nature and therefore its inability to deal with the complex interplay of cultural beliefs, socialization factors and actual experience.

Miscellaneous Research

There are a few esoteric reports related to menarche as well as some less quoted findings within the traditional literature.

Dreams and fantasy. Hart and Sarnoff (1971) explain that some pubertal girls have prophetic dreams about menarche. In studying the dreams of girls before and after menarche they found that the material reflected premenarchal confusion followed by postmenarchal reorganization and clarification of sex roles. Hertz and Jensen (1975) hypothesized that menstruating women would show significantly more emotional conflict in the manifest dream content than non-menstruating women. Their research suggests that the psychophysiological process of menstruation causes a temporary decrease of the ego-functions and it is this decrease which allows material normally repressed to enter consciousness through the dream time of menstruation. Likewise Nagy's (1981) study revealed

that menstruating women dream more often and with stronger affect. Frequently, at this time, the archetypal figure of a strange man appeared in dreams. Nagy interpreted this as having to do with the relationship of the feminine ego to the unconscious and thus to psychological development. She concluded that affective relatedness must be the key to feminine psychology. The dreams of menarchal girls may reflect their state of psychic development.

According to Kestenberg (1961) fantasies can play a powerful role at the time of menarche. Often, unprepared girls who are shocked by menarche can only rely on fantasies to explain what is happening; even well prepared girls engage in fantasies to imagine the experience. Most commonly those who suffer from menstruation attach fearful fantasies to the pain. Such signs as violent wishes of pregnancy, fantasies of oral impregnation and visions of having a child with one of the parents all play a role in menstrual disturbance and show difficulties in accepting the menarche. Shuttle and Redgrove (1978) two of the most thorough writers on the subject, suggest that the inner life and the techniques for approaching that, and not just the outer life of science and medicine, are a factor in menstruation. Much of the miscellaneous research is based on reports of people in therapy and they are not always statistically sound. Nevertheless, these reports suggest that dreams and fantasies may be a useful source of information about the impact of menarche.

Archetypes. The study of archetypes may also provide some

insight into the psychological effect of menarche. According to Jung archetypes are patterns of readiness of response to age-old elemental human events. They come to us through the primordial images to which they give rise, as well as through ideas and the emotional and behavioral patterns that they influence. As the residue of ancestral emotional life they appear as recurrent motifs in fairy tales, literature, religion and mythology (Hall & Nordby, 1973). The validity of archetypal psychology in terms of phenomenological research will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The ancient stories of Sleeping Beauty and Mother Holle (Grimm's Fairy Tales, 1944) contain archetypes associated with menarche. As was the custom at the time of Sleeping Beauty's birth seers fortold her future and warned that she would be in great danger from a spindle. Her father, the king, banned all spinning wheels from his domain but at puberty his daughter found an old women spinning in a forgotten tower. Enchanted with the spindle, she pricked herself and fell asleep. In Mother Holle the good, but maligned, daughter stuck herself with the spindle while working and when she tried to wash off the blood in the well she dropped the spindle. Despairing, she attempted to retrieve the spindle and fell into the well which became a beautiful meadow. There she met Mother Holle, an old women who initiated her through many female tasks, and sent her home a blessed and mature maiden.

Both young girls stick themselves with a spindle, draw blood and then fall inward to a period of seclusion or

feminine identity. Hall (1979) says that Frau Hulda assists in times of crucial passage and that the girl who follows her despairing heart finds her "huldmoder", her spindle (feminine identity) and her way home. Bettelheim (1977) claims that when Sleeping Beauty is pricked on her pubertal birthday and shows a flow of blood, the sleep is an attempt to isolate her from the world. The central theme of the story shows that despite all attempts on the part of parents to prevent their child's sexual awakening, it will take place nonetheless.

It is fascinating to see these primordial images, the seclusion, the prick and the wise old woman, lived out in a specific cultural context or historical time. Niethammer (1977) after studying puberty rites across the North American continent found that many native societies prohibited a pubescent girl from scratching herself with her fingernails during this time. Grace Swampy (1981), a native woman from Hobbema, in her thesis on the role of women in Cree society related that many contemporary women recall being told not to scratch or touch their hair at the time of menarche. A Fox woman remembers that her menarchal rite involved living in a small seclusion hut with an elderly woman chosen by her mother. There she was instructed in virtue and the practical womanly arts (Weigle, 1982). Anthropologists tell us that one of the most universal traditions of menarche is some form of seclusion, usually to the bleeding house or moon-hut. However esoteric they may be, dreams, fantasies and archetypal images deserve

consideration as part of the mosaic of menarchal study.

It is clear from the foregoing literature review that there exists within cultures definite practices, attitudes and beliefs about menstruation. Why do certain attitudes prevail and where do they come from? Because I want to explore the existential experience of menarche against a sociocultural background it is important to explore our philosophical and psychological roots and trace the history and character of western consciousness. The following exposition will outline the structure of menarchal experience, look at practices across cultures and historic periods and discuss the governing belief processes within western culture.

Historical and Cultural Context

Puberty Rites

Historically many cultures have had formal initiation rites for adolescents, but today these rituals are primarily restricted to indiginous peoples. Although the writing on male puberty rites is more extensive, enough information exists about female initiation and its biological demarcation, menarche, to notice a fairly universal structure in the experience. Usually the appearance of first blood is marked by three basic elements; isolation, education and celebration (Niethammer, 1977; Sanday,1981). The isolation may be solitary, with other girls, or with an

older woman. The instruction often takes place during the isolation which ranges anywhere from 4 days to 4 years. Pubescent girls are usually taught what is expected of them as women in terms of attitudes, roles and practical skills. Essentially the beliefs surrounding menarche and menstruation are dictated by the role and value ascribed to women in their society.

Beliefs

There is a great deal of insight to be gained not only by looking at the similarities and differences in menstrual rites cross-culturally but also in determining their underlying belief systems. Before studying various cultures it is important to consider two universal concepts, those of blood and taboo. Among most peoples blood is a symbol of life and a signal of death. It is a powerful and precarious human substance and a major fertility symbol (Sanday, 1981). Taboo exists to protect human beings from danger and is a prohibition from something due to its sacred and inviolable nature. The word comes from the Polynesian "tupua" meaning sacred, marked or magical and was applied specifically to menstrual blood (Walker, 1983).

Menstrual blood, though considered by most cultures to be powerful, does not have a common meaning world wide: sometimes it is seen as a threat, other times it is perceived as a good omen. Naturally the onset of menses is influenced by the existing attitude toward menstrual blood. Among the Mbute first blood comes as a gift because the

woman is now a potential mother (Turnbull, 1961). Likewise, the Andamanese see a girl's menarche as her blossoming. Sanday (1981) tells of many groups who feel differently. The Bellacoola of Canada fear first blood and subject the young girl to many restrictions. Hazda women of Africa must avoid many articles that would be polluted by their contact and a menarchal Papago is equated with dangerous magic and must undergo elaborate purification.

Isolation. The nature of the seclusion, education and celebration rites also depend on a group's concept of the menses. The greater the fear of the blood the more extreme is the isolation; the greater the acceptance of menstrual blood the more the withdrawl is characterized by graceful education, cultural enrichment, and pampering. Among the most extreme devotees of this practice were the Carrier Indians of British Columbia who caused a girl to live in the wilderness in complete isolation for three to four years believing that even her footsteps would defile a path. The natives of New Ireland kept their girls in cages for the same period of time, there they would get fat and pale according to the tribe's standard of beauty. The Kolash Indians of Alaska confined a pubescent girl in a tiny hut, completely blocked except for one small airhole, for one year during which time she was allowed no fire, no exercise and no company (Delaney et al., 1976). The Ojibwa maiden of southern Ontario was taught that at menarche she was a menace to herself and others and a blight to all living things. Dressed in very old clothes, she had to sit in a

tiny hut in the forest, soot smeared around her eyes and her head always lowered (Niethammer, 1977). Not all peoples secluded their menarchal girls because of fear; another function of the isolation was to provide time "in the womb" as a preparation for rebirth as a fully functioning member of society. During her time apart the Navajo maiden was massaged by older women in the belief that her body was soft again as at birth. They literally molded her body and formed her character (Woodman, 1985). The Cheyenne and many other North American tribes had four days of seclusion for training. Sometimes the emphasis was on instruction while other times it was strictly a period of indulgence and preparation for marriage. When a Mbuti girl entered seclusion she took with her all her friends. They celebrated the happy event together, were taught arts and crafts and learned the songs of adult women (Turnbull, 1961). Whatever form seclusion took it provided the opportunity for girls to emerge with new status having achieved some degree of psychological integration.

Education. Education at menarche centered on taboo, morality and training for adulthood and was always conducted by a female guardian. In some societies girls simply learned the skills to be good wives, others were taught about food and herbs, still others were schooled in beauty. The Flathead Indians did not admire large feet so girls were ordered to pound their feet with rocks. Some societies initiated girls to sexual activity and prepared them for childbirth; this often involved pain and

mutilation. Among some South American peoples incisions, beatings and stinging with ants were administered as forms of purification. In parts of India and Thailand initiation involved an actual or symbolic defloration. Some strongly patriarchal Arab tribes used the occasion of menarche to remove the girl's clitoris to reduce her sexual pleasure and reinforce her dependency on one man (Delaney et al., 1976). The most common taboos had to do with bathing, drinking water, not touching one's hair or scratching the skin, not talking, laughing, looking at men or making contact with them. Cree women, among others, received strict admonitions regarding promiscuity, abortion and their subordinate role to males (Swampy, 1981).

Ritual. The discipline and indoctrination phase of a girl's menarchal rite usually culminated with a public ritual. It could be a final trial or a festive ceremony. Among the Uaupes of Brazil as a finishing preparation for marriage a young girl was brought out naked from her seclusion and beaten with sticks until she fell senseless or dead (Webster, 1942). In other South American tribes the last phase took the form of painful tatooing in which the breasts and stomach were gouged with sharp animal teeth. A practice among some Vancouver Island natives combined trial and feasting. At first menses a girl was taken some distance out in the ocean, undressed and put overboard. She had to swim to shore where the whole community greeted her with bonfires and a great celebration at which she was adorned with new clothes. They said "a girl went out for a

swim and a woman came home" (Cameron, 1981, p. 102). In parts of India a girl emerges from her isolation seated on a little throne. She is washed in ceremonial oil after which she is given a new name and many presents (Delaney et al., 1977). It is common among North American natives to honor the young woman by holding a village-wide feast with singing and dancing. The Haida include a small potlatch (Blackman,1982) while the Apache celebrate most elaborately with great contributions of money, donations of food and the gathering of people from long distances. Essentially people engage in puberty rites as a protection from malignant forces and to present to society a marriageable girl.

Practice and Taboo

Rites of menarche differ as a society's beliefs about menstrual blood differ. Beliefs, in turn, give rise to taboo and practice. What are some of the prevailing ideas and taboos according to anthropologists? Menstrual blood means power, either positive or negative, and first blood is accorded magnified potency. In many societies men believe that their power is weakened or nullified by either contact with or sight of a menstruous woman. Often a magical or divine power was associated with menstrual flow (Frazer, 1953) and the Haida believed it could be detrimental to shamanic power. As a result in some tribes bleeding women were not allowed near medicine bundles, husbands moved out and camped in the woods, they could not join war parties and they risked becoming paralyzed if they made contact with

their wives (Delaney et al., 1977). The Mandans of North Dakota valued the power and solicited the help of menstruating women during eagle trapping. The Ashanti of Africa equated menarche with the power of "killing an elephant" (Sanday, 1981). Several taboos resulted from the fact that menstrual blood was considered dangerous. During their period Navajo women were not allowed near sick people, and their men avoided touching or seeing the blood. Other tribes believed illness or death would follow contact with a menstruous woman. Pomo men guarded against danger by staying indoors with a menstrous wife, caring for and feeding her and avoiding any contact with other men who would have considered it bad luck. The dangerous sexual principle attributed to menstrual blood resulted in intercourse being almost universally forbidden during menses. Those who practised clitorectomy believed that the dangerous female power was diminished through the blood loss of the operation (Delaney et al., 1976). One of the strongest and taboo-producing ideas is that of menstrual blood as foul and polluting. Women could ruin the hunt, contaminate crops and offend the spirits. Chinook women were never to leave the house while menstruating for they would offend the wind who would send thunderstorms. The Lummi men believed that menstrual odors would cling to the body and be detected by the deer, therefore women had to pass downwind of all men. Widespread taboos forbidding the eating of fresh meat by menstruating women were tied to fear of contamination and future unavailability of game. After

each sojourn in the brush hut a Creek woman had to get rid of her foulness by bathing in deep running water even if it meant breaking the ice to get into it (Niethammer, 1977). Not all societies ascribed a malignant influence to menstruation; the Mbuti, for example, had no concept of pollution or danger.

As is evident from this cross-cultural overview, there are a variety of beliefs, taboos and rituals linked with menstrual blood. We are challenged to look at the practices in our own culture and more importantly to investigate the underlying ideas and attitudes that provide the context for our beliefs about menarche.

Western Culture

With the advent of modern science it is believed that the fear and prejudice surrounding menstruation have given way to an acceptance of it as a normal bodily process. However, as previously cited, in this decade McKeever (1984) reported that 66% of people polled believed menstruation should not be discussed in the workplace. As recently as 1982 Brooks-Gunn and Ruble found that menstrual symptomatology reflected culturally induced beliefs, and a 1981 study (Comerci) revealed that pubertal girls tend to lack basic knowledge about internal organs. Ernster (1975) noted that this society's use of menstrual euphemisms reinforces negative imagery and keeps a "natural" phenomenon clothed in secrecy. Almost every serious researcher reports a dearth of literature on the subject. In 1970 Edgar Berman

physician and American Democratic party functionary, announced that he would not like to see a woman in charge of the country at a time of national crisis because her raging hormonal imbalances would threaten the life and safety of us all (Delaney et al., 1976). Finally a 1978 study of adolescents' beliefs disclosed that for most young people menstruation is associated with a set of mostly negative expectations and attitudes (Clarke & Ruble, 1978). Why is this phenomenon, in our culture, marked by selective silence, bias, and neglect and how did we arrive at such a position?

The evolution of human consciousness and the rise of Western culture explain, in part, how we have come to this point. Human consciousness according to Whitmont (1984) has moved from a preverbal, unitary, instinctual level, through a mythological and imaginal stage of increased individuation and separateness to a point of rational abstraction. More specifically, consciousness shifted from an early gynolatric, matriarchal and magical orientation to a later androlatric, masculine one.

Magical in this context implies the sybiotic identity level of existence. This preverbal stage was ruled by the Great Goddess, a holistic concept which incorporates fertility, nurturance, death and decay. In this framework opposites are embraced by a continuum, for from her all proceeds and to her all returns. Feminine consciousness is global, process oriented and expresses the dynamic of instinctual and affect energies in the context of a field of

unitary reality. Basically, subject and object are dovetailed into one another to constitute a systematic whole.

The mythological or imaginal stage of consiousness ending with the Iron Age took us from a oneness with nature to some form of individuation. It was a step into a first sense of inwardness and personal separateness from what is conceived as an outer objective world. When "I" and the world are split apart, the sense of the continuity of life and death is lost. The mythological person recognized the need and presence of death, but the emergent "I" refused to surrender to death, thus developed ritual, an enactment of images by which offerings could be made to the forces. As consciouness evolved further the unitary reality increasingly fragmented into a multiplicity of mutually exclusive opposites: good and evil, subject and object. This tendency toward awareness by means of splitting is inherent in the masculine character, which gained increasing importance. This stage saw the onset of a personal sense of accountability and the development of ego and responsibility. Man, now dominated by mind and ego and given to abstraction, strove to set his strength against nature within and without.

In the most recent stage of consciouness, the mental stage, the rational mind has become the supreme and ultimate gauge. Orientation of the ego, of space-thing consciousness, is toward aggressive competetiveness, manipulative power and willful rule. This system is based

on causation and randomness, characteristics which engender a desire to control and arrange nature to suit one's purpose. Thinking is separated from feeling; sense perception from intuition and imagination. Identity is vested in the thinking and sensing ego and flows from doing rather that being. Essentially reality is framed intellectually, not corporeally, and the feminine qualities associated with fertility and the body are rejected. It is safe to say that consciousness in modern times is equated with "rational" consciousness.

The ontology of the Western world, rooted in Greek thought and based on Aristotelian philosophy, is essentially a polarized view. This body-soul, cause-effect framework has remained part of our mainstream thought due to the influence of Aquinas (13th century), Descartes (16th century), Locke and Kant (17th century). Western psychology is shaped by this dualistic ontology and almost every psychological theory has either been an attempt to explain the interaction of the mind-body, Kantian-Lockean models or else it has allied itself with one pole or the other. Psychology mirrored the development of Western consciousness which became increasingly less contextual and more constitutive.

Integral and parallel to the rise of Western consciousness has been the development of the masculine principle. Jung claims (Storr, 1983) that psychologically the masculine and feminine principle each represent a way of being in the world. He views the masculine principle as more analytic, linear, focused and aggressive, while the feminine principle

is connected to intuition, instinct, the body, the earth and receptivity. Masculine energy is marked by reason and tends to move up and out: feminine energy is concerned with the organic and tends to move down and in (Cook, 1964). Matriarchal timing is qualitative and subjective, experiencing the length of a moment according to feelings. Patriarchal timing is quantitative, measuring space in equal sections. The feminine mode includes nurturence and empathy, but also a willingness to accept the dark side and all stages of nature including suffering, severence and at times the cruel need to inflict these realities (Hall, 1980). In Western culture masculine reality is, and has been, the preferred norm while feminine reality is derivative and secondary.

This culture's view of menstruation has been influenced by the patriarchal values inherent in western consciousness. To further understand the root of these attitudes a look at Jung's concept of the collective psyche may be valuable. He placed the collective psyche, which combined conscious and unconscious features, within the evolutionary process (Rychlak, 1981). The collective unconscious is a reservoir of latent images from the ancestral past, thus, a person inherits predispositions for experiencing and responding to the world (Hall& Nordby, 1973). In speaking about menstrual blood Walker (1983) says:

> From the earliest human cultures, the mysterious, magic of creation was thought to reside in the blood women gave forth in apparent harmony with the moon. Men regarded this blood with holy dread, as life-essence, inexplicably shed without

> pain, wholly foreign to male experience. It carried the spirit of sovereign authority because it assured the life of clan or tribe. p. 635

It is not difficult to understand why a rational culture would need to subdue something as powerful and uncontrollable as monthly blood. Perhaps the historical images of the collective unconscious as well as our conscious values shape our present-day beliefs.

Western Culture and Menstruation

We have a legacy of beliefs about menstruation. History suggests that the mind and reason, not experience, are considered a more valid way of knowing and being, and that the masculine, intellectual mode is more valued than the feminine bodily mode. The Western ethic tends toward fact and abstraction and away from feeling and context. The world of ideas can allow one to compartmentalize and ultimately control. The world of nature represents a limiting principle to which we must at times submit. Menstruation is of the body and is deeply connected to nature. The monthly appearance of blood is an intrusion beyond our control and at times is accompanied by odor, soiling, discomfort and baffling emotions. In our society nature and body in their "idea"-lized form are valued, but in reality their limitations and uncontrollability are often feared and denied. Television commercials show us slender, attractive people. Menstrual products are associated with flowers and doves. In some cultures, the Umwelt (the body) and its functions are viewed differently. Among the Semang

and Mbuti (Sanday, 1981) blood carries no sense of pollution, in fact for Pygmy girls menarche is "one of the happiest, most joyful occasions in their lives" (Turnbull, 1961).

The movement of consciouness from the instinctual to the mental stage (Whitmont, 1984) was inextricably bound to the Judeo -Christian ethic and is today reflected in some of the attitudes and concepts of Western culture. The position of women in all the books of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is influenced by the rules in the Book of Leviticus. The passage 15:19-33, speaks about the stain of menstruation and the uncleanness of women (Delaney et al.,1976). Today an Orthodox Jewish woman is required to abstain from sex until seven days after her period and after she has immersed herself in the mikveh, or ritual bath. In 1970, the Levitical injunctions were among the arguments used to justify an American Roman Catholic prohibition against women serving in the sanctuary as lectors during Mass. Throughout its formative years, during the development of the great intellectual and doctrinal systems, Christianity clung to the Old Testament belief in the uncleanness of woman and the basically imperfect nature that was a consequence of the menstrual flow.

This view often surfaces in the medical field. Nathanson (1975) reports that although women live longer and seem to have greater resistance to infectious and degenerative disease women report more illness than men because it is culturally more acceptable. Thompson (1950) noted that in

her field of psychoanalysis there was a much discussed thesis which considered female sex organs as inferior to those of males. In a study of menstrual attitudes Brooks-Gunn and Ruble (1980) noted that college men perceived menstruation as more debilitating and severe than did women. Koeske (1983) found medical labelling and loaded terms expressed implicit normative assumptions. Hormonal "deficits" or "excesses", sex-role "conflicts", "empty nests", post-partum "blues" and midcycle "peaks" all serve to communicate both what is expected and what is valued.

The Levitical view of women and the rise of scientific reason changed the mode of healing. Historically women healers were empiricists who used herbs; they relied on their senses and an understanding of nature, not reified doctrine. When medicine became a profession requiring university training in the 13th century a distinction was made between "female" superstition and "male" medicine. Having natural power became associated with witchery and "in the eyes of the Church, all witch's power was derived from her sexuality" (Ehrenreich & English, 1973; p.9). Symbolically, the mystery of blood was exchanged for the mystique of science. Until recently in this society, the doctor was idealized man combining intellect and action, abstract theory and hard-headed pragmatism. Woman's innate spirituality was out of place in the linear world of science (Ehrenreich & English, 1973). These authors claim that the real issue is one of control.

If, as some anthropologists say, there is an inherent fear

of menstrual blood and its concomitant female power (Sanday, 1981), those without the power may feel a need to control it. Eve (woman) brought imperfection. The common view of woman as Eve or mythical Pandora illustrates this. Pandora's curiosity led her to open the box and release evil in the world. It is easy to project humanity's guilt on the proclaimed sinner. But Pandora's box may mean "the power of the female which has been pushed into the unconscious by men throughout history. There it becomes negative and wreaks havoc" (Pascale Petit in Calvert, Morgan & Katz, 1984). The box as the womb can represent power and fear of the unknown. If as Douglas (Sanday, 1981) suggests, the underlying issue is one of fear and power, the modern rational mind may need either to avoid the phenomenon or to impose some system on the untidy and mysterious experience of menstrual blood.

Conclusion

Current Conditions

Having journeyed through history and culture I come full circle and ask: How is menarche experienced and handled in our society today? Educationally there is improvement in that most schools now introduce and deal with the subject. Commercially the fact of menstruation and the use of products is openly displayed and discussed. However, researchers (McKeever, 1984: Whisnant & Zegans, 1975) have found that the materials fail as supportive guides to girls

because of the vagueness and euphemistic quality of the language. Presentations emphasize cognitive understanding, proper use of sanitary products, successful concealing of evidence, and suppression of unpleasant bodily sensations or emotions. In general our culture tends "to ignore the affective importance of menarche and draws attention away from a girl's body, pubertal excitement and anxieties" (Whisnant & Zegans, 1975. p.819). Furthermore, I have found in many people a spontaneous denial and discomfort with the subject: on several occasions when I have said that my thesis topic was "menstruation" they have asked me what kind of "administration". They failed to hear the word menstruation!

Is this behavior reflecting the classic mind-body split and all its associated beliefs? The values fostered by dualistic thinking may well influence ideas about menstruation and the body. A phenomenological interpretation of being-in-the-world is helpful on this point. Valle and King (1978) point out that phenomenologists divide the world into Umwelt (spacial/body), Mitwelt (social) and Eigenwelt (termporal). The Umwelt, the personal sense of self as body in space, having certain possibilities within the framework of limits and necessities, is imbued with a network of meanings that have been acquired throughout life. There is then a dialogal relationship between self and the world, "a kind of dialectical interaction between events precipitated from within" (Valle & King, 1978; p.240). The structures of

space, as structured by the Umwelt, have their counterpart in one's experience of the body. Naturally the Umwelt has a range of possibilities. What are they?

Ways of Understanding Menarche

Do we really know how young women experience menarche and how our culture influences this event? While there is an acute tacit awareness of menarche, we lack explicit social or formal recognition of the changes in a girl. Mead (1969, p.57) says: "We prescribe no ritual, the girl continues on a round of school or work, but she is constantly confronted by a mysterious apprehensiveness on the part of her parents and guardians". Those writing on menarche repeatedly speak of the poverty of research and its almost exclusive natural science dimension. The drawback of this approach has been the inaccessibility to the investigator of the emotional components of the adolescent's experience. Whisnant, Brett and Zegans (1975, p.809) point out that "few reports have been based on interviews with young girls themselves". Two of the same authors claim (1975) that educational literature fails by avoiding controversial and unpleasant topics and by tending to dictate what a girl "should" feel rather than helping her to honestly explore and validate her subjective responses. Koeske (1983) feels that the menstrual cycle has been connected closely with the nineteenth century battle between scientific and experiential conceptions of the body. The result is a dominance of "outsider" views of menstruation over "insider" views, and a preference for

scientific expertise over experience as the arbiter of truth. She calls for a more complex and interactive approach to menstrual study. Hall (1980, p.5) confirms this view by speaking symbolically of an organic way of experiencing.

> To be in the whole world's channel or to feel the rhythm of the universe, one must know the sun consciousness - the phenomenal world revealed in the bright light of reason - and yet keep to the unconscious night realm of the moon in which the spirit world is revealed in shadowy, dreamlike visions.

How a female experiences menarche in this culture raises important ancillary questions. Do girls and women find their esteem and self-worth enhanced or jeopardized? Does the experience effect the relationship between males and females? Is there a spiritual dimension involved? Do the images and attitudes that govern our acceptance or rejection of our bodies and ourselves stem in part from menarche? These are the questions I wish to explore phenomenologically with women and girls. It is important to hear what they have to say from their lived experience.

CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF METHOD

Introduction

In choosing a research method it is important to determine which approach is most suited to answer the research question. I have chosen to do a phenomenological study of menarche because phenomenology embraces the qualitative, holistic nature of feminine being. Before launching the actual study it is necessary to outline the major paradigms in psychological research, understand their presuppositions, and place phenomenology within the broader context of scientific methodology. This chapter compares and contrasts human science and natural science research and their methodologies and elaborates on phenomenology as an appropriate method for this study.

History

Historically the social sciences and their theological antecedents have moved arbitrarily from one concept of human nature to another (Stigliano, 1986) because human beings are in a constant state of self-interpretation (Taylor, 1985). The ontology or accepted view of human nature at any given time in history dictates the paradigm or model for determining the scientific problems, the methodology, and the criteria for successful solutions. The scientific community has for some time adhered to the natural science model and has used its methods when doing research.

Psychology, according to Stigliano (1986), has never hammered out a distinct ontology; instead it has adopted the natural science framework by default.

Today there is considerable disagreement over which paradigm is most appropriate for psychology because existing methodologies stem from conflicting models of human nature. Natural science or quantitative research sees the human person as having "a basic neutral human nature" which follows the same laws and principles as other natural phenomena. This view "either ignore the moral nature of human action or ignores meaning, emotion and purpose" (Stigliano, 1986, p. 34). Human science or qualitative research espouses an ontology which encompasses meaning and purposiveness, and emphasizes the historical and cultural context of human action. Within the scientific world, a revolution or paradigm shift occurs when the existing model can no longer explain anomalies that subvert the tradition of scientific practice (Kuhn, 1962) or when someone in the community advances a different, yet valid, perception of the same phenomena. It is essential to determine, both in theory and in practice, if the natural science method can be adapted to the study of human persons. Until recently natural science was used almost exclusively and was considered "the" research method.

Bacon (1561-1621), Locke (1632-1704) and the British Empiricists anchored the philosophy of natural science with their belief that "knowledge must be based on observable things and events" (Rychlak, 1981, p.11). Locke claimed

that all knowledge comes from sensory experience and contact with the world. According to this framework people are detached spectators looking at matter; there is a gap between consciousness and the world outside oneself. The meaning that comes through the senses is imposed on the blank slate of the mind; simple ideas are the basic building blocks of thought and can only be derived from the outside world. These ideas are demonstrative and are built up from simple to more complex combinations in a unidirectional sense. Therefore, for Locke, it was impossible "to invent or frame one new simple idea in the mind" (Rychlak, 1981, p.12). Such a model naturally gives rise to the subject-object split and Descartes' mind-body dualism. The partners of natural science are materialism and physicalism; they are concerned with the building blocks of matter.

The human science movement, rooted in Kantian philosophy, rejects Locke's approach to the mind and sensory objects. Following the tradition which leans toward greater idealization and abstraction, Kant believed that sense impressions would be unintelligible were it not for the mind's capacity to organize them in a meaningful way. He claimed there was a pre-existing structure of the mind, composed of mental categories and these "categories of reason" made sense of the external world. When the sense impressions seem to "match" the mind's prototype, then the idea is activated and used. Kant presupposed the existence of the noumenal-phenomenal world. The noumenal refers to things that underlie our experience of both the physical

world and our own mental states, in other words, the primordial world. The phenomenal world is that fresh and uncontaminated experience, the pre-reflective state at the root of human consciousness. Kant's emphasis on the active nature of the mind, the importance of the experiencing person, and the danger of over-valuing the sensory world as a source of knowledge, is a forerunner of the principles of human sciences today.

Human Science and Natural Science Research

The differences in the philosophies of natural and human science research become evident in their methodologies. It is Rychlak (1968, 1981) who outlines the dimensions of comparison most clearly.

Each method follows a different process of reasoning. Natural science uses demonstrative reasoning, that is, a premise is stated and it is followed to a logically deduced conclusion. The argument proceeds in one direction and is validated by sense experience. Human science allows for dialectical reasoning and always entertains an alternative. The process proceeds by way of opposition and contradiction, is multidirectional and works toward synthesis.

Each methodology approaches the world either from a realistic or idealistic stance. Realists believe that "the constructs being used are mapped from a reality that truly exists independent of mind" (Rychlak, 1981, p.14). Idealists say that "meanings in life are framed, created or brought about by the intelligence of living organisms"

(Rychlak, 1981, p.14). Meaning for realists is "outside" in the external world, but idealists maintain that it is the inner world of the witnessing person that counts. Listening to several people give a different personal account of the same accident scene illustrates this very point.

The attitude of the researcher is one of extraspection or introspection. Natural science researchers adopt a stance of extrospection: they are observers, who draw their conclusions from the outside looking in. Human science researchers tend to rely more upon an introspective position, that is, they seek to understand the meaning of phenomena in the client's life-world (Becker, 1986). When gathering and synthesizing the data to describe a phenomenon, the researcher's use of description is not based on naive acceptance of verbal data per se (Wertz, 1984). Rather he/she will reflect vigorously on the problems and potentials of a particular research project and employ operations that will express the client's lived experience.

Natural science methodology and human science methodology proceed differently. Natural science uses the experimental method: a hypothesis is stated, variables are determined, controlled experiments are run and a relationship between variables is determined so that the hypothesis is either validated or rejected. Human science employs qualitative methodology; it may be strictly phenomenological but it is always based on some form of description. The natural science method has long been the approved form because the research community accepted it as "the only way in which one

could achieve rigor" (Giorgi, 1975a, p.72) Experimentation and phenomenology are "methods" rooted in different "theories". By recognizing that there are some situations suited to the natural science paradigm and others suited to the human science paradigm we can avoid the tyranny of method over theory (Giorgi, 1975b). For example, if a researcher is interested in studying the relationship between intelligence and exam results the experiemental method is suitable. If the researcher wants to know about the experience of writing an exam a phenomenological study is appropriate.

Validity in natural science is determined by an experiment's success in measuring what it is suppose to measure. Human science achieves validity if the description expresses the whole truth as preverbally lived by the subject. The technical nature of natural science research sets out two prerequisites for validity. Internal validity is achieved if one can demonstrate that the manipulated variable really made the difference in the dependent variable. External validity occurs when a sample is representative or generalizable to a population. Human science research has no formalized procedures, however, validity can be judged on the pervasivness of a personal vision, the illumination and penetration of a description and the extent to which it informs. Validation is a continuous process and the researcher achieves it if there is internal cohesion, that is, if the general formulations encompass any valid description falling within its scope.

Validating methods include use of the hermeneutic circle, returning to the original protocols, engaging in imaginative variation (i.e., mental experimentation) and checking for accuracy. Co-researchers often participate in this process of validation by adding to or modifying and then confirming descriptions. The generalizability of human science research is determined by its existential relevance.

Natural science research is primarily quantitative however qualitative techniques are sometimes used. Morse (1987) is presently conducting a study in which she employed open-ended questionnaires (qualitative) to gather the opinions of pubertal girls regarding menses. She then used these comments to formulate statements for a five-point scale which will be analyzed statistically. Human science research is exclusively qualitative. This thesis is a prime example; all data and analyses are descriptive.

Quantitative and Qualitative Research

The distinction between quantitative (statistical) research and qualitative (descriptive) research can be made in terms of underlying philosophy, purpose, operations and interpretation of results. Bogden and Biklen (1982) provide a clear outline.

Philosophically, quantitative research adheres to natural science values; the most basic of which are realism and materialism. The purpose of quantitative study is to discover truth through facts so as to be able to explain, predict and control. Researchers are interested in

causality, they use laboratory investigation and rely on observation to describe behavior. In this more traditional school researchers assume a subject-object relationship and claim to be objective and unbiased. Quantitative researchers work with numbers, laws and rules; brute data provide the building blocks or particulars from which generalizations are deduced. Relationships between variables are determined through statistics, instrumentation and control and results are based on statistical significance, validity and reliability. Reports are written in standardized language from a position of numerical authority.

Qualitative research has its philosophic base in human science values. One such value, idealism, proposes that primary reality resides in ideas or the spirit, therefore objects are expressions of a primordial substance. Researchers are concerned with process; their field of study is the life-world and they are interested in describing experiences. Establishing a relationship with co-researchers is important. Interviews and conversations form the data base as qualitative researchers work inductively to let themes and patterns emerge through descriptive analysis. Often a structure of experience is outlined through the hermeneutic circle which remains open and attempts to include all parts and particulars. Researchers look for what is illuminating and penetrating and they validate findings by consulting participants. Results are expressed in creative, informal language since

form is considered part of the meaning.

The distinction between natural science and human science is important because some research questions are better addressed by one process than the other. Phenomenology, a specific kind of qualitative research, seems most appropriate for my area of study, menarche and culture, and warrants further discussion.

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research is one of the important methodological developments which has appeared as part of the general shift to a more inclusive paradigm for science. The phenomenological method was advanced by the philosopher Husserl (1859-1938) who defined it as the descriptive analysis of subjective processes (Runes, 1962). At the end of the last century there was a movement among some of the thinkers in the social sciences

> ...against formalism, since they had been convinced that logic, abstraction, deduction, mathematics and mechanics were inadequate to social research and incapable of containing the rich, moving, living current of social life. -M. White, 1947, p.11

Other writers, among them Heidegger (1889-1976) and Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), expanded the phenomenological framework in their attempt to understand lived meanings in the relational and dynamic human world (Becker, 1986). Although phenomenology has grown to include almost any strategy that attempts to see things from the subjective point of view, it has a distinctive approach to the world,

to experience and to methodology.

The phenomenological world-view is contextual, for phenomena are deeply embedded in the mundane world. Human existence and the world are so inextricably involved in one another that persons are considered "of", and not "in" the world (Colaizzi, 1978). By contrast, natural science research sees a discontinuity between man and nature; a dualism is created because human existence is independent of the world. Phenomenology is holistic, man and nature co-exist by defining and influencing each other. This premise leads to the phenomenological notion of intentionality, which states that human existence and the world constitute a unity so vital and basic that either one is inconceivable without the other. Thus the two co-exist by reciprocal implication, not creating or causing the other. Strictly speaking causation is rendered inoperable (Colaizzi, 1978).

In this framework consciousness is not an entity closed in upon itself nor does it function as a "logical machine"(Giorgi,1986). Rather it is an arena in which phenomena show themselves; it is an act of revealing. The process of research is dialectic or co-constitutional. Data does not exist in a vacuum, so two people or the person-world structure create meaning by their interface. A constant dialogal process characterizes the phenomenological world view which is ecological, not causal.

The foundation of phenomenology is experience. Husserl believed that only by "returning to things themselves" to

the essences, could a researcher understand psychological phenomena in a meaningful way (Colaizzi, 1978). Human consciousness and the life-world as it is lived prior to any theoretical explanation are the field of study (Giorgi, 1975b). A person is often faced with describing what has been lived out on a pre-reflective level (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), that is, raw experience devoid of any interpretation, and must try to articulate the essences of phenomena as they are experienced in the everyday world. Since individual experience is of prime importance, persons are considered experts in the sense that it is "their" experience, thus they are approached as co-researchers.

Phenomenological research employs an understanding-descriptive method rather than a technical-experimental one. The aim of data analysis is the explication of the essential structure of the phenomenon inclusive of everything implicated in the original mundane descriptions (Aanstoos, 1986). The method is empirical and discovery oriented; researchers aim to describe not theorize or categorize. Phenomenology is inductive not deductive. Part of the process is to examine biasing preconceptions and pull them into consciousness. These presuppositions are then bracketed (set aside) so that one may see and describe human phenomena freshly (Giorgi, 1986). Even though phenomenological researchers scrutinize their preconceptions, Colaizzi (1978) claims one will never reach a state of absolute disinterest. Phenomenological research demands an attentive listening to description so that themes

and the general psychological structure of a phenomenon can emerge. Meaning is the measure as the researcher allows patterns to unfold.

Phenomenology attempts to understand the whole person, get to the bedrock of human experience, and overcome the Cartesian body-mind split. It is based on the assumption that through the experience of subjects the phenomenon can speak for itself, and that the essential structure, that is, the constituting aspects of a phenomenon which are essential to the understanding of its nature, can thereby be revealed (Montgomery, 1983). Since experimental and phenomenological methodology rest upon distinctly different philosophies, each should be measured only against the standard of its fruitfulness in accomplishing its own aims (Colaizzi, 1978).

Dimensions of Phenomenology

The pluralistic nature of human science research (e.g. phenomenology, phenomenography, hermeneutics, imaginal variation) provides insights and channels of investigation which seem particularly applicable to menstrual study.

The notion of co-constitutionality and being-in-the-world as interpreted by some existential-phenomenologists is most helpful in studying the experience of menarche. Keen (Valle & King, 1978) divides the world into three catagories: the Umwelt, the Mitwelt and the Eigenwelt. The Umwelt is the biological world; it refers to how the physical body defines how we are in our environment. The Mitwelt is our interrelation with others; we confirm who we are through

social interaction. The Eigenwelt is being-a-self-in-time; we look to and are affected by our past while always living towards a future. The interplay of menarche and culture is profoundly affected by these simultaneous modes of being in the world.

Another aspect of phenomenology that may be useful in menarchal research is that of Imaginal Psychology. Aanstoos (1986) explains that this method combines phenomenological, archetypal and depth psychologies and seeks to understand psychological life by going to those sources most pregnant with imaginative potency. Literary, artistic, etymological and especially mythological sources are most carefully culled. A doctoral student studying the meaning of being at home did so by analyzing the significance of the Greek goddess Hestia--the goddess of hearth and home. When Sardello (1982) wanted to understand the meaning of bread, he turned to its etymological root of "gleb" or earth. Analysis in imaginal psychology becomes a task of metaphoring, or imagining: the aim is to evocatively disturb the slumber of taken for granted familiarity. A metaphor opens a perspective on its phenomenon, in other words, "analysis" in imaginal psychology involves a "refiguring". The findings take the form of stories, dramatic tales and fictions which point toward rather than away from reality. For Romanyshyn (1982, p.174) "psychological craft consists in bearing witness for what lies forgotten beneath the literalizing attitudes of daily and scientific life". It would seem that there was some

form of imaginal or archetypal stirring occuring in Tonya's life (mentioned in the Introduction). The stories of Mother Holle and Sleeping Beauty (Chapter One) and their psychological relation to comtemporary native women suggest that "what lies beneath" is phenomenologically significant and does indeed point to a living reality.

The etymology of the word menstruation as found in the American Heritage Dictionary (1969) is the Indo-European root "me" which gives rise to the meanings "measure, rule, moon and month". If the ideas of cosmic rhythm and ruling are associated with women's menstrual blood and lie dormant in our psyche, it could well be that humanity has an inherent fear-reverence for the power of menstruation. Barbara Walker's (1983) study of menstrual blood reveals that most words for menstruation also meant such things as incomprehensible, supernatural, sacred, spirit and deity. Like the Latin "sacer", old Arabian words for "pure" and "impure" both applied to menstrual blood and to that only. The Bible's story of Adam was lifted from an older female-oriented creation myth recounting the creation of man from clay and moonblood. So too was the Koran's creation story, which said that Allah "made man out of flowing blood". The lives of the very gods were dependent on the miraculous power of menstrual blood. In Greece it was euphemistically called "supernatural red wine" (Walker, 1983). Myths and stories surrounding menstrual blood exist in many cultures; journeys into imaginal variations of these archetypes may reveal many layers of phenomenologically

significant meaning.

Human Science Research and Menstrual Study

According to Koeske (1983) menstrual research has suffered from the polarized world-view inherent in natural science research. She claims that "a number of interrelated normative assumptions operate within research on the menstrual cycle, establishing healthy and ill poles of behavior and psychological states" (p. 5). The overemphasis on negative moods and behaviors during menarche and menstruation suggests that these phenomena should be conceptualized and measured neutrally or in a manner which includes both positive and negative experiences (Koeske, 1983). The holistic world view of phenomenology should provide a more integrated picture of menarche.

The menstrual cycle's current biomedical meaning derives from concepts (e.g., biological determinism) and conflicts central to the emergence of modern medicine. Awareness of the larger historical framework alerts researchers to the hidden agenda of the scientific perspective. The inherent assumptions which express the accumulated common experience of membership in Western culture and modern medicine represent biases because they are not explicitly stated (Koeske, 1983). Power differences still exist, we associate healthy states with esteemed roles and implicit comparisons are made with male values (i.e., rationality over emotionality). The phenomenological practice of determining preconceptions and bracketing can be of particular value in

the area of menstrual research.

Koeske (1983) outlines other assumptions involving the meaning and causal significance of variables which underlie menstrual cycle research. She claims that a linear attitude tends to focus on inner factors (biological and psychological) as ultimate causes of present states. Factors like stress and lifestyle, which have a more immediate temporal impact on such states, are often underplayed or ignored. The result is a tendency to speak about traits so as to reify them rather than preserve their process-like qualities and contexts. Stigliano (1986) warns that reified segments of human action turn into neutral data. These states or traits are taken to be causes of behavior, are commonly oversimplified and often directly contradict a woman's own experience. A majority of biomedical researchers prefer laboratory-based investigations which focus on increasingly smaller bits of the full phenomenon by isolating it from its surrounding context. Capturing brief snapshots of time, rather than allowing processes to unfold in context, represents the most common sampling strategy. Common methodological assumptions in menstrual research stem from this reductionistic, ahistorical and atomistic approach to scientific problems.

The foregoing analysis of current menstrual research points to the need for a more contextual, self-aware approach to menstrual study. Feminism (according to Koeske) and phenomenology can offer "insider" perspectives and alternative methods, as well as encourage clients and

researchers to relate on a more equal basis. Phenomenological research should not be a repudiation of other methodologies but rather an attempt to reintegrate the whole person from the jigsaw of parts created by the modern scientific model (Koeske, 1983). In terms of this study it is an attempt to understand the structure of menarche from women's lived-experience.

Conclusion

Although natural science reasearch and human science research provide a different perspective and have a different starting point, they can be complimentary. To this point, all the studies on menarche have been done from an experimental-statistical point of view. We have information about factorial relationships but very little insight into the "human dimensions" of menarche. Due to the nature of my question and the gaps in the present research, I believe the phenomenological method is highly appropriate. It can provide a mapping of what the experience of menarche means as a lived-experience.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Study

Research methodologies can create problems as well as solve them. In the only phenomenological study of the menstrual cycle that I am aware of, Jill Montgomery (1983) in her paper on premenstruum claims that "the fragmenting nature of ... experimental research designs, and the fact that women are usually only asked about distressing aspects ... have made for an inadequate representation of the experience" (p.45). Similarily, in the study of first menses, if the natural science method is used exclusively the whole menarchal phenomenon in its full spectrum is lost. Phenomenological methodology was chosen for this study in order to achieve a more adaquate representaton of the experience; one that is comprehensive and will shed light on all dimensions of the phenomenom. In Polkinghorne's (1979) words, the purpose of the phenomenological method is to deepen our understanding of the structures in experience by describing their parts and the relationships among them.

Phenomenological methodology is not a set of uniform procedures which can be learned and applied, rather it consists of guidelines for engaging with, and understanding, the phenomenon "as it is experienced". Every particular psychological phenomenon in conjunction with the particular objectives of a particular researcher evokes a specific descriptive method. The method used for this study was

adopted from the work of Alapack (1986), Montgomery (1983), and Osborne, Angus and Newton (1987). The process includes: (a) rationale for study (b) orientation and bracketing (c) description of co-researchers (d) interview format (e) protocol analysis, and (f) validation.

Orientation and Bracketing

When undertaking phenomenological research it is important to orient toward the phenomenon being studied. I have long been interested in the ways in which self-worth and identity are developed in individuals. The adolescent rite of passage is often a critical part of this process. Having a fascination for cross-cultural and anthropological studies led me to discover that pubertal initiation has traditionally been more celebrated for males than for females and that it often lacks specific demarcation in Western society. Being involved in counselling has made me aware that certain aspects of the feminine and masculine being have been valued while others have been slighted or suppressed. The suppression seems to be more common for women and girls and often appears to be linked to the body and menstrual blood (Delaney et al., 1976). My interest in identity, adolescent initiation, the feminine principle and cultural beliefs came together naturally in the study of menarche.

A vital part of the phenomenological process is researcher self-reflection. Often, involvement and interest in a topic includes a personal "investment" of attitudes, feelings and values. Thus, a necessary aspect of phenomenology is

bracketing, the process by which expectations, prejudgements, beliefs, hypotheses and hunches (Colaizzi, 1978) are scrutinized, spelled out and consciously suspended so that the researcher can allow "the modes and objects of consciousness to be seen as they are in their original appearance" (Polkinghorne, 1981). For human science researchers bracketing enhances the validity of the research method because it demands an awareness of how one becomes involved, a self-consciousness about the particular cultural context of the research, and an ongoing awareness of preconceptions (Becker, 1986; Salner, 1986).

Why did I choose the phenomenon of menarche?

An essential premise of phenomenological research is that the investigator's personality is not incidental to the topic. My personal journey in recent years was largely motivated by the dissolution of my primary relationship. I began realizing that male-female interaction is complex and that roles, expectations and identities are intricately (and often unconsciously) intertwined. I learned I was not clear about my individuality as a woman and that I often lived the roles into which I was cast. Initially I wanted to study what it was like to grow up as a female in this culture, but realized this topic was too broad. From my work with adolescents, the interests outlined in the Orientation, and my inner stirrings, a focus emerged. There appeared to be a link between a culture's attitude toward menses and its image of women and this ultimately affected male-female

relationships. Since menstrual blood seemed connected to women's image the study of menarche became symbolic of my interest in feminine identity and culture.

What do I believe about menarche and culture?

Knowing that there is value in questioning what I assume to be true, I undertook a process of self-reflection. The following outline describes my findings and points to possible implications.

Menstruation is a female experience. I became aware of certain cultural-religious images of women that operated in my life and seemed to be shared by other women. Generally, when women are nourishing, giving, gentle, receptive, patient, yielding and unselfish they tend to receive approval and reward; there is a strong cultural image of the "good mother". When women appear aggressive, coldly rational , angry, self-gratifying, or ambitious they tend to be discounted or are made to feel guilty. Sexually it is more acceptable for a female to be passive than to be initiative. We still encounter vestiges of the inherent belief in female inferiority. Sometimes implicit in these images are notions of women's fragility, emotional instability and unpredictability. As a result women's experiences are often not understood, taken seriously or allowed their full expression. Menstruation and other natural or "spontaneous" female actions have been judged according to unrealistic stereotypes.

Menstruation is of the body. I discovered that part of my

sensitivity regarding menarche is tied to what I perceive as this culture's attitude toward the body. The body-mind split has resulted in a devaluation of the body and an emphasis on the biomedical model which is atomic and causal. There seems to be a dichotomy as to what we value of the body and what we disparage. There is approval for that which is attractive and healthy: what becomes diseased, aberrant, or by our standards unattractive, is depreciated or denied. Television and magazine commercials attest to this. A paradoxical situation results and women get a double message; attend to the body but only the pretty parts. This mentality becomes a metaphor for Western culture's outlook on life, this is, we prefer fantasy and projection while avoiding the death reality. Judeo-Christian values have traditionally emphasized spirit over the body or the "flesh". This perspective tends to stress symptomatology, the contamination associated with menses, and the need for hygiene, since menstrual blood is often seen as essentially messy. People are encouraged to function from their minds and not their bodies. Women are often expected to deny their cyclic nature, be strong and assure that their monthly period does not interfere with the efficient running of life. There is still considerable negativism and taboo surrounding the menstrual cycle.

The menstrual process and menstrual blood are an anomaly. What is a natural bodily process experienced by half the world's population seems still to be regarded with some mystery and circumspection. Menstruation is not often

openly discussed or else it is spoken about in selective terms such as hygiene. Some anthropologists (Sanday, 1981) claim that menstrual blood is generally feared because it pertains to the otherness of woman. She is self-sufficient and her blood has power for she manages to bleed, transform blood into babies and food into milk. Although my own menarche was not traumatic, I remember adults referring to it as the "sickness" and I certainly did not want my father to know I had it. There is an aura of secrecy and uneasiness about this everyday fact of life.

Menstruation is cyclical. Because menses is part of the larger nature energy which is organic and holistic, it does not fit the natural science paradigm. Our scientific technological age is characterized by a masculine energy which is rational and abstract; it allows one to isolate and define parts and ultimately control. Feminine energy, being contextual and relational, is less given to analysis: it is somewhat illusive and mysterious. The cyclic feminine contains all the energies of nature, including nurturance and destruction. Menstrual blood is rhythmic, powerful and beyond our control. A common response to lack of control is fear and suppression.

Menarche is a natural initiation into puberty. It is an event that has physical, psychological and emotional dimensions. Whether it is acknowledged or not menarche may be felt by some women as a step toward womanhood, greater responsibility, independence and sexual awakening. The implication is that, for individual women and society, at

menarche a female is different; she has the potential for motherhood. The event may be welcomed, rejected or considered a mixed blessing.

The foregoing outline gives rise to certain preconceptions:

Generally, in this culture, menstruation is a sensitive subject.

Menarche is a pivotal experience in a girl's life and sometimes is a traumatic event.

Menarche is a natural initiation or rite of passage into puberty and female identity.

The biological and psychological energies of menstruation and its cyclic nature connect it with something larger than the self and this opens up a spiritual dimension.

Menarche and culture are not independent; they are influenced each by the other.

In Western society the attitude toward the body, the masculine-feminine dichotomy and a disconnection with Nature, reflect an attempt to control what is feared and not understood, namely menstrual blood.

On the basis of the ideas here outlined, I would expect the menarchal research to reflect evidence of secrecy, shame, fear, embarrassment, bodily limitation, female inferiority, and symptomatology. At the same time the experience may also be associated with a sense of maturity, responsibility, pride, new social status, belonging and sexual awareness.

Research Implications

Bracketing is valuable in that it can alert a researcher to biases and potential blind spots. Therefore, I must be aware that:

In studying menarche and culture I may be seeking to confirm my view that western culture has devalued the body, suppressed women, elevated reason and manipulated the human person's connection with Nature. The implication is that I may be less open to reports which contradict this view and I may emphasize those descriptions which substantiate my experience. Ideally, I will make every effort to let the data speak for themselves.

My own spiritual-psychological background leads me to believe in the importance of ritual and this is confirmed by anthropologists. However, I must realize that this may not be true for everyone and that in terms of menarche the nature of ritual is best determined by the needs of the "experiencing" individuals.

I have a sympathy and esteem for the menarchal practices of indigenous peoples who seem to have maintained a more ecological perspective in terms of bodily processes. However, I must be careful not to idealize these values because many of them are also heavily fraught with taboo.

I am partial to psychoanalytic theory particularly of a Jungian nature. When working with co-researchers it is imperative that I give equal consideration to that evidence which both supports and negates my natural framework or

world-view.

These sympathies and presuppositions may be reflected in this research and need to be taken into account in assessing the validity of this study. As a human science researcher I am aware that, unlike natural science psychology, I am not attempting to conduct "value free" research. I am explicitly recognizing the way in which the researcher co-constitutes the larger context of the research project along with the phenomenon of interest.

Description of Co-Reasearchers

Since the purpose of phenomenological research is to increase the understanding of a lived-experience (phenomenon), participants are chosen who have salient experience of the phenomenom in their everyday world. They should not only be very articulate, but willing and able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1981). Since menarche is such a personal subject it was important to choose females with whom I had some relationship so that there would be enhanced trust and openess. They also had to be females who had not heard me discuss my views on menarche so that they would not be biased. Becker (1986) suggests that the number of participants usually falls between one and ten and the researcher must judge how many candidates are needed to achieve the goals of the research.

For this study I decided on a developmental approach, that is, four women from graduated age categories were chosen to

see if there were similarities or differences in the structure of the menarchal experience over time. I was also looking to see if cultural messages and influences were present or had changed. I purposely chose two girls who had recently experienced menarche in an effort to obtain fresh experience less contaminated by recollection (Jaynes, 1976). Danielle had just turned 15, Laura was 17, Sarah, a personal friend, was 36 and Martha, a seasoned school teacher, was just approaching 65. All the women had grown up in Alberta and only Martha had a rural background. Biographical details of the co-researchers are found in Chapter Four.

Interview Format

I made a preliminary telephone contact with each co-researcher at which time I introduced the topic and explained the procedure. Once they consented (see co-researcher form, Appendix B) we met and proceeded with the interviews which were audio taped. Each candidate had one in-depth interview which began with an explanation of phenomenological research. It was emphasized that there were no right answers, that their aim was to be in touch with themselves and their experience, they were not to give an account of what they "thought" I wanted and that as co-researchers they were equal partners and experts because of their lived experience. To conclude I reminded them of the aim of the process by reading a quote from Heidegger (1962): "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself."

In an effort to be non-directive so as not to guide or bias the descriptions I first asked an open-ended question: Could you describe in as much detail as possible your experience of your first period? When this question seemed exhausted I made a second and less open-ended interrogation: Could you describe or explain any attitudes, beliefs or practices regarding menarche or menstruation that you were aware of in your environment when you began menstruating? This format was used in a pilot study with Laura and Sarah, however, for the thesis research I added three specific questions. How did you feel about your body when this was happening? What were the effects, if any, on friendships and relationships? How did you feel about yourself? These questions melded with Keen's phenomenological interpretation of being-in-the-world; Umwelt, Mitwelt and Eigenwelt (Valle & King, 1978) as outlined in Chapter One and Two of this thesis. I asked the participants if they had any final comments and reminded them that if anything relevant surfaced later they were free to call and add to the protocol. To complete the interview each co-researcher chose a pseudonym to be used in the reporting so that anonymity would be preserved.

Protocol Analysis

I listened to the tape of each interview several times to get a "feel" for, and sense of, each person's experience. The co-researchers' actual statements were then transcribed verbatim into protocols and this was followed by a

three-stage process.

Within Protocol Analysis

The raw line-by-line description of each co-researcher was organized according to related meaning units (e.g., orientation, culture, relationships; see Danielle's verbatim interview, Appendix A). The meaning units were then paraphrased and illustrated by individual examples (see Danielle's within-protocol analysis). What emerged was a structural description grounded in the data of a specific co-researcher's experience (Polkinghorne, 1981).

Tabular Summaries

Significant elements from the protocols were arranged in two synthesized tables so that a comparative overview of the data was readily available (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Between Protocol Analysis

The individual protocols and summary tables were studied for common elements and these, in turn, were distilled into summary clusters (e.g., orientation and preparation). Essential elements identified in each participant's description (e.g., previous knowledge, product use, life adjustments) revealed a common structure to the experience of menarche.

Validation

Once the initial analysis was made each co-reasearcher

listened to a reading of her paraphrased protocol to see if her experience was completely and accurately conveyed. Any suggestions, corrections or additions made by co-researchers were incorporated into the analysis. This process is known as "respiralling" (Giorgi, 1975b): the researcher interprets the preliminary findings, incorporates the modifications of co-researchers, and continually modifies the themes until they "fit" the lived experience of the participants. The personal experience of menarche as each co-researcher remembered it was thus confirmed. The co-researchers also studied the tabular summaries. Upon reviewing the more global and comparative outlay of data the participants made some additions. They found that some of the experiences expressed by other females reminded them of similar situations (e.g. Originally Martha had not mentioned euphemisms, but with her memory jogged she remembered menses being called "the curse"). The structure distilled from across the four protocols also "rang true" for each co-reasearcher and was thus validated as representative of the experience of menarche.

CHAPTER 4: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research on menarche as experienced by females in the local community.

According to Van Manen (1984) "...phenomenology is a philosophy of the unique, the personal, the individual which we pursue, against the background of an understanding of the logos of Other, the Whole, or the Communal". (p.ii). Such a philosophy can have no standard methodology, for each unique experience as it is lived in a particular context will dictate a process. When outlining guidelines for methodology Colaizzi (1978) says:

> It must be emphasized that the research procedures of analysis that I employed should be viewed only as typical, and are by no means definitive;... the listed procedures and their sequences should be viewed flexibly and freely by each researcher, so that, depending on his approach and his phenomenon, he can modify them in whatever ways seem appropriate. p.59

It was necessary to find a method that would reflect and express the experience of menarche. To this end I examined the work of several phenomenological researchers (Alapack & Alapack, 1984: Fischer & Wertz, 1978: Osborne, Angus & Newton, 1987) and developed an analytic procedure which follows the paradigm of phenomenography.

The essence of phenomenography is contextual analysis. It begins with descriptions given by subjects in response to questions posed by the researcher. The method is useful as

an access to "person-world relations" which Marton (1984) believes contain societally sedimented conceptions. Procedurally it involves the mapping of distinctive catagories of description; this "lifting out" of the catagories is achieved by a "progressive delimitation, grouping, and description" (Svensson, 1985, p.27). Marton (1984) argues that the findings allow us to see the taken-for-granted conceptions embodied in contemporary society.

The steps used in the data analysis are outlined below. Menarche for the purposes of this study, refers to the context and continuum of events that make up the "coming into menarche". It is not limited to the moment of first blood.

Arranging Raw Data according to Organizational Topics

In the first stage the line by line descriptions of each co-researcher's raw data is transcribed verbatim and grouped into related meaning units (orientation and preparation, experience of menarche, cultural context, the body, relationships, and self-image). These meaning units proved to be the overall emergent structure for the phenomenon of menarche. To present all four verbatim interviews would be too voluminous, therfore, only Danielle's raw data is included as an example of first stage analysis. See Appendix A.

Within-Protocol Analysis

The second stage involves an analysis of the data within each participant's protocol. The meaning units within subject's protocols are studied for essential components. Redundancies in the raw data are eliminated. For example, Danielle reported; "something like Aids gets publicity, but nobody talks about menstruation...it is not a disease or anything...why don't we talk about it? ....we talk about diabetes and cancer". These quotations are summarized by the statement "She realized that almost everything else gets publicity and wondered why menstruation seemed to be ignored and avoided". Keeping to the structure of the original meaning units the general ideas are presented in narrative form and punctuated with quotations from the protocols to allow the reader to share the "feeling dimension" of the co-researchers' experience. The Within-Protocol Analysis of each of the four participants follows.

Within-Protocol Analyses

Danielle

Danielle reached menarche rather early at age 11. It was 1983 and she was in fifth grade. She knew about "periods" and was somewhat prepared although she was not expecting it so soon. Her parents were separated and there were some difficulties at home. Danielle was selected for the study because of her recent experience with menarche and because, as my counselling client, I had an open relationship with

her.

Meaning Units

Danielle's protocol was read several times to extract its particular structure. The description seemed to fall into six natural meaning units.

1. Orientation and Preparation. Danielle's preparation for the experience of menarche had both a knowledge and feeling component. She "knew" beforehand from advertisements what a period was and what to use (e.g., "I knew I would not think I was dying because I was bleeding"). Her knowledge was not explicit or complete: although there was a presentation at school, her information was gleaned indirectly from television commercials and from the supplies of her mother and older sister (e.g., "nobody told me exactly what happens; I would like to have known more about side effects and cramps; I only remember the school nurse talking about products"). She "felt" embarrassed and shy about menstruation (e.g., "friends made having a period sound like a joke").

2. The Menarchal Event. Some participants, but particularly Danielle, passed through two stages at menarche; initial experience and later integration. She described physical and emotional factors; when Danielle began mensturating at age 11, in grade five, her flow was immediate, not gradual. From the beginning she had a heavy discharge and needed to be well prepared (e.g., "I was afraid the thin pads would not protect me so I used the

thick kind"). It all happened too early. She was too young and felt embarrassed and angry: the boys' jokes, often made generally, intensified her feelings (e.g., "mother nature picked on me awful early; it made me kind of mad....I felt like saying , you should try having a period and see how you like it"). She told few people, especially friends because she felt they would laugh and make fun of her. Furthermore, it was annoying and uncomfortable (e.g., "I felt like I was wearing a diaper"). Having a period demanded vigilance and sometimes limited what she could do and wear. She was very concerned about hygiene; adequate protection was a problem (e.g., "I felt really dirty with the blood coming out: I was glad when ALWAYS invented the 'wings' brand, it was practical and safer"). Reaching menarche at 11 was a mixed experience. On the one hand it was scary (e.g., "I didn't want a lot of responsibility"). On the other hand, Danielle thought it was neat to feel older, be somewhat more responsible and no longer have the anxiety of waiting for menstruation to begin (e.g., "it made me feel more responsible....took away anxiety").

After the initial experience Danielle had such severe cramps for a few years that she wanted menses to cease. At times the pain was so intense she could not sit down, would have to go to the nurse's room, or use Midol (e.g., "I wanted to get rid of it, throw it in the garbage: I had no choice except to keep it"). Danielle sometimes felt older because she had something and her friends did not (e.g., "I felt a lot more experienced; I'm well acquainted"). She was

relieved and more at ease when others began their periods (e.g., "because I had it I could talk about it"). The girls developed an "exclusive" way of communicating (e.g., "we had a code name, 'Santa Claus'; a secret thing if we were needing anything, so everyone would not know").

3. Cultural Context. In Danielle's experience, cultural messages came from three sources; her immediate environment which included family and peers, the media, and health care professionals.

There was no explicit message from her family (e.g., "Mom was not the type to sit down and tell me about it"): there may or may not have been an implicit message in the silence. From the school presentation Danielle "remembers" only the topic of hygienic products. From her peers Danielle knew that menstruation was not the "in" thing, furthermore it was necessary to be guarded about the subject by using the code name. There was a particular message from boys: they joked about it, teased, made fun of products and seemed to take a one-up position because they did not have it (e.g., "they made us feel uncomfortable and embarrassed; they did it to bug us, and asked why we needed the 'stuff'"). The consequence was that boys were lucky and girls had something to hide (e.g., "Its worse when a guy knows; they have it easy, they don't get pregnant").

From her milieu Danielle sensed that menstruation was not an appropriate topic and people did not want to hear about it (e.g., "it seems its not a big accepted thing in Alberta or Canada; it's not dinner conversation"). She realized

that almost everything else gets publicity (AIDS, cancer, diabetes) and wondered why menstruation seemed to be ignored and avoided (e.g., "It really makes you wonder what is wrong with it"). She concluded that the public did not consider it of concern or importance, (e.g., "On the news you hear about murders and robbers but never something like 'Shirley Temple had her first period today'"). She wondered if people simply did not know enough to talk about it, took it for granted or found it too embarrassing (e.g., "It's just a thing you have once a month, here are your tampons, so be it."). Danielle also sensed from her environment an unpleasantness surrounding menstruation. She noticed that people watching product advertisements reacted to "the dumb commercial", they seemed to find it disturbing and upsetting (e.g., "maybe people don't talk becuase they think others faint at the sight of blood, it's not a pretty sight"). As a result, Danielle felt that menstruation was something you kept to yourself or told only to your best friend.

In Danielle's experience, menstruation was not really talked about except in commercials: from this exposure she knew at least that it was not a dangerous thing. However, the media seemed to show it as exclusively a woman's event; teens did not seem to have "it" or did not have to be told. The one ad with adolescent girls was confirming (e.g., "maybe I felt that this was the first step into womanhood").

For Danielle there was a dearth of professional input. From the school nurse she learned only about products (e.g.,

"tampons, pads, thick and thin, that was the presentation"). She really needed information from an authority who had experience with the body (e.g., "it wouldn't hurt to have a doctor tell you what you can do for pain").

As a young woman experiencing menarche in this culture Danielle was left with two queries: "If we have it and guys don't, why can't we have more information to help us?" and "It makes me wonder, why is it not discussed more?"

4. The Body. When Danielle first began menstruating her body felt dirty; menses was uncomfortable and annoying mostly due to the amount of moisture (e.g., "I felt really dirty, there was so much blood, it felt like it was everywhere, like when a baby has to go to the washroom in a diaper"). If she was dry and her body was clean it was fine. She doubly checked during menses and had a daily shower or bath (e.g., "I felt better if I was extra clean"). During her period she felt "gross" and her body felt fatter than any other time.

5. Relationships. The onset of menses led to a heightened differentiation of the sexes (e.g., "it was worse when a guy knew than when a girl knew"). Danielle did not tell about her menarche: to reveal this personal event was a measure of the quality of a peer relationship (e.g., "it was a good test of friendship; to tell if they would understand or make fun"). To have reached menarche made her feel older and put her in a privileged or elevated position (e.g., "It was neat, I felt I could boss in a sense"). In more than one

way Danielle felt older, more mature, in a different league (e.g., "I was more a woman than a little kid, it was a big step having blood"). She found herself taking on new roles and enhanced social status (e.g., "it made me feel I'd be accepted more as an important person: I was a consumer, buying products"). Somehow, being capable of doing something you could never do before, like having the ability to get pregnant, made things different.

6. Self-concept. When she began menstruating, Danielle had mixed feelings about herself. Her biggest problem was that of feeling dirty all the time. At such a young age she also had fear of impending responsibility (e.g., "I was kind of scared at 11"). However, with the change came a sense of womanhood and increased confidence (e.g. "I felt I could set a goal and accomplish it, I could conquer all"). Basically her self-image was enhanced and she felt more responsible (e.g." I was more capable of doing what I wanted to do, I felt good about myself, happy"). She had more security; the anxiety of worrying about menarche was gone.

Laura

Laura first had her period when she was 13. Before menarche she had considerable preparation from her mother and formal instruction at school. Laura's father died of cancer when she was 11 and this had a profound effect on her life. Several times Laura intimated that by trying to remain a child she felt she could somehow hold on to the memories of her father.

Meaning Units

1. Orientation and Preparation. Laura had considerable preparation for menarche. At a young age her mother explained menses and fertility to Laura and her younger brother at a joint session (e.g., "Mom told me when I was young, I knew it was natural, but my connection was that I would be older"). Laura also participated in a Grade Five presentation by the school nurse who used plastic physiological models, books and various sanitary samples (e.g., "the school nurse showed us how to use tampons, it was gross but it did help me to understand and served a purpose"). All her friends, including the "guys", talked about it. Although the nurse's presentation was positive, Laura and the girls "really did not know" and thought menstruation would be a dirty, disgusting thing (e.g., "friends said it was a big event and we'd feel important and proud but we thought it was "yucky"; having tampons in you seemed like an awful, gross thing to do to yourself"). All the ads showed adult women (e.g., "I thought menses happened only to older females").

2. The Menarchal Event. Laura's menarche involved the onset of menstruation, the cessation of blood flow as a result of eating habits and the reappearance of irregular periods. The death of Laura's father two years prior to menarche must be considered; on some level she did not want to grow up.

In Grade 7, at age 13, Laura first noticed a discharge on

her underwear for about four days. She was somewhat shy and took care of things herself (e.g., "I washed out my underwear myself and threw it down the laundry chute"). Finally she approached her mother who introduced her to products, was concerned about her comfort with them, and spoke about this step in a girl's life (e.g., "Mom gave me the stuff to use, gave me a grin and said something about womanhood").

Even though Laura had been well informed she had quite a strong "feeling" reaction at menarche. She vividly recalls the first incident and then there was a lapse in memory. When she first saw blood she did not know if it was normal; (e.g., "I thought I was deformed....I felt awkward and strange, I didn't know if this was really happening; was there something wrong with me?"). She was confused because she had not yet developed breasts yet she alone of her peers was menstruating. She was embarrassed, secretive and unsure (e.g., "Should I tell mom?. I was embarrassed to let her know and I was not sure what to do. At skating I ran away from mom, went in a corner, and didn't want my younger brother to know"). Her first period was intensified because it exactly coincided with the nurse's presentation at school; Laura thought it was terrible (e.g., "It was dirty, awful and gross"). With menarche Laura felt that responsibility and maturity were being thrust upon her. She was the first of her peers to reach menarche and she did not feel ready for it (e.g., "I felt it was only happening to my body, I was not mentally ready. I was frightened and did

not want to grow older. It was not my will, not yet, it was no use to me now, not fair"). Part of the reason Laura did not want to "turn into a lady" and change was that her father had died shortly before; remaining a child was a way of staying close to him (e.g., "I was holding on to feelings of his death, trying to stay in that frame. I wondered; What would dad have thought? What do fathers do? Would he have said something?"). At that point in her life Laura did not want to accept menstruation (e.g., "I wasn't ready, I didn't want this thing to be happening, I wanted to stop it, it was a bother so I programmed myself to stop it"). The whole experience seemed a useless nuisance and burden (e.g., "I thought it was dumb, a waste of time, because of dancing and school I had to use tampons right away, I wondered how to carry them, my friends might be able to tell"). To some degree Laura felt victimized and resentful (e.g., "Why me and not others to do all this? Why should only girls and not males have this? Guys have to do nothing, it is not fair").

In the years following her first period Laura menstruated sporadically; being an avid ballet dancer was a factor. She did not like the mess and bother of blood or the worry of pain, "leaking", or irregularity, so Laura dropped her weight and stopped menstruation. She was worried about the effect of menses on her appearance and performance as a dancer (e.g., "I didn't like the bloated look or the mess; I would rather not have my period for dance performances. I tried to lose weight to delay my period and to look good").

As a result Laura became anorexic (e.g., "I wanted to ignore it so I stopped eating; my hair would fall out and I became feeble, I would be in a haze"). Menarche was a difficult stage for Laura (e.g., "I isolated myself because of Dad, I did not want to grow up and I lived in a foggy, white screen of anorexia"). Finally, frightened by her physical condition she began eating. To this day her period can fluctuate from 14 to 100 days; it is a shock when it appears (e.g., "It still isn't regular because of eating habits. I wish I only got it twice a year; I find it a pain but I am not as self-conscious").

3. Cultural Context. Laura received a range of messages from advertisements, school, peers and family.

In society people did not talk about menstruation much. Laura sensed that it involved big changes and brought maturity (e.g., "I knew I was not as young and I thought I'd have to start going out with boys, wearing make-up and using a bra. It was as though the adults said; 'you are older, come join our club'"). Menses was not really negative but one was expected to make the best of it (e.g., "I felt I had to get on with something that was bothersome and had symptoms"). On occasion Laura heard about bad experiences involving leaking blood and pain. Advertisements were too prolific and conveyed biases. She felt that they were directed to adult women and emphasized symptomatology (e.g., "It seemed they were always older ladies, I felt separated, they were in elegant dresses talking about odor, cramps and headaches"). Recently, when a menstrual ad showed teenage

girls Laura felt personally confirmed and thought it valuable for adolescent girls (e.g., "It is important for girls that age so they see it isn't just older women, I felt ashamed when so little was on T.V. and there was all this emphasis at school"). Laura received mixed messages at school. The nurse's presentation was basically positive and helpful but the girls found the subject gross and worrisome (e.g., "After the presentation we heard these horror stories, it was frightening and we hoped it would never happen. The boys made jokes and goofed around"). From her peers Laura heard a blend of ideas about menarche (e.g., "The girls thought it was a big event, they told me you feel proud and im[redacted] it's so gross and yucky").

From he[redacted]cularly her mother, Laura believed that m[redacted] with womanhood, responsibility, bodily [redacted]y (e.g., "With mom it was O.K., there w[redacted]e I was getting older"). Laura had a po[redacted]perience when a same-age cousin shared, in a proud excited way, her first period (e.g., "It was good ... she was more my age").

4. The Body. Laura felt "bad" about her body when she began menstruating. She felt dirty, bloated and awkward (e.g., "that bloated look was awful"). The bodily change was a bit frightening and scary (e.g., "I was expecting drastic things to happen"). She found the use of tampons disgusting (e.g., "The thought of inserting tampons was gross"). In essence Laura denied her developing body by controlling her weight, thus eliminating menstrual flow.

Being the first one in her group to menstruate, Laura felt so different about her body that she began growing apart from her friends (e.g., "I was not at ease with them. I felt an awkwardness from the rest of the group; it was negative").

5. Relationships. The onset of menarche altered many of Laura's relationships. Her initial embarrassment restrained her from going openly to her mother; the actual day of first flow she kept herself apart from the family (e.g., "I kept away more from mom and at home I hid from my brother"). She was growing away from her mother, partly because of her father's death, and felt awkward about revealing personal things. Her first period created an isolation (e.g., "I felt separated from the older women in the ads and different from my friends. I was alone"). There was an added tension with her peers; she did not want them to know (e.g., "I was worried they would find out, I'd have felt like an alien"). Laura felt distanced and less a part of her group (e.g., "Sometimes I would not go with the usual crowd. I'd make excuses. At swimming they would go off and change and I would not"). Once her friends "knew" their reltionships changed in both a positive and negative way (e.g., " they would run away, form their own little circle and say things ... later they treated me special and put me on a pedestal; they were glorifying it and thought it was real cool"). Laura did not like being treated differently; she felt older yet wanted to be with them. She resented the peer limitation (e.g., "At noon I was the only one to go home for

lunch to change; sometimes I couldn't go to a slumber party"). She felt she could not be as close to the "guys" (e.g., "I hated boys more, If they ever knew about my period it would be disgusting").

6. Self-image. At menarche Laura experienced some very strong feelings about herself. Initially she wondered if there was something wrong with her; she resisted menses, felt "really awful", found it gross, and was very self-conscious (e.g., "I felt like an odd ball, an alien, it was a dirty feeling; I went really skinny to try to stop it, withdrew and felt worthless from the anorexia"). She did not like her appearance (e.g., "I didn't want this bloatedness"). The change created fear and demands; Laura felt inundated (e.g., "I didn't want to turn into a lady, I wasn't ready for it, not the body changes, the responsibility or the pressure of having to do grown up things"). Laura sensed that she was different and separate from her peers; she wanted to be with them yet partly isolated herself so they would not find out (e.g., "I was alone; at dancing when we did stretches I was afraid they would know, it made me feel worse"). Her self-expression was limited and restricted (e.g., "I could not do what I did before"). The anorexia made Laura feel like she was an added problem for her widowed mother (e.g., "I felt bad, I was not taking pressure off my mom, it was a hassle for her"). Laura did confess that the attention she got from her peers for being "first" made her feel good (e.g., "I didn't admit it, but it was neat and cool").

Sarah

Sarah began menstruating when she was 12 and had no instruction beforehand. The year was 1960. She is presently a graduate student in philosophy and is versed in phenomenology.

Meaning Units

The meaning units in Sarah's protocol roughly parallel those of the other co-researchers.

1. Orientation and Preparation. Sarah had very little explicit preparation for menarche. She lacked information and had no explanation or discussion (e.g., "It was a blank area to me, not really clear. At 12 or 13 I had some unspoken sense of it but it was not conceptual"). In Health class at school something was presented but it was nothing explicit and Sarah's mother did not tell her (e.g., "We had mixed classes and there was tittering, laughter and jokes by boys"). Sarah's chief source of information came from talks with girlfriends and from seeing products in stores. As a result she knew a "vague something" but had no sense of the physiological process (e.g., "I knew women had bleeding and that it came at the onset of this strange thing called puberty").

2. The Event of Menarche. Sarah first remembers having a foreign pain in her stomach at age 12; she did not associate it with menstruation (e.g., "I can't remember the actual

first blood, that may have something to do with the fact that we did not talk about it"). When her full flow of blood began it was heavy and Sarah wondered how to practically deal with it so she used washclothes. Although she was close to her mom she did not dare speak to her (e.g., "because of the nature of the subject I didn't discuss this with mom, I was not comfortable about it"). Finally her mother noticed the clothes, did not mention anything, but bought sanitary supplies for Sarah. They had one short discussion about menses in which her mother explained menstrual cramps (e.g., "it was embarrassing for mom, I was abrupt and neither of us wanted to talk about it"). Sarah knew almost nothing about the sanitary apparatus or the meaning of menstruation (e.g., "I never questioned how it happened or had any sense of what it had to do with life").

Menarche was a time of composite feeling for Sarah. She was not comfortable with the experience; it had an air of awkwardness, strangeness, isolation, uncleanliness and weirdness (e.g., "I didn't want to ask about such a sensitive thing; I felt the dilemma of needing sanitary napkins but was afraid to buy them"). This was such a hushed and mixed experience (e.g., "I was not ashamed, but clandestine; I wanted it shrouded in secrecy"). Sarah was curious about her mother's experience but blocked any conversation. She felt she was entering a phase of peer group acceptance, yet as an individual she did not experience menarche as momentous (e.g., "I didn't feel the

magical sense of coming into womanhood or fertility").

In the following months a certain awkwardness and secretiveness continued; there was some bodily limitation and fear of such things as going swimming (e.g., "It was messy and blood was not to be made public; we would use a code and say we had 'our friend'"). Sarah became aware of bodily changes and sex differences (e.g., "I felt more private about my body"). On some level there was a feeling of being accepted as part of a group, of participating in some sort of normal cycle, and being part of what everyone else was doing (e.g., "I was entering a phase of peer-group acceptance").

3. Cultural Context. The cultural messages in Sarah's experience were mostly indirect. When she began menstruating there was an overriding sense of secrecy and privacy. Menses was very personal. People did not want to see it or hear about it. Both men and women referred to it euphemistically and the boys sometimes used derogatory terms (e.g., "we called it our 'friend' and the boys would say we were 'on the rag'"). The attitude toward menses was unwholesome and weighted with taboo (e.g., "there were dirty jokes"). It was a subject for women only (e.g., "We were secretive, especially between men and women"). Sarah had some sense that menarche was a social landmark (e.g., "It was culturally significant, not in a cosmic sense of fitting into a history of women but in a small closed circle like my school peer group"). Having travelled extensively Sarah compared menstruation in our culture with practices in other

societies (India, Bali) and felt that although menarche is significant for us, it is not acknowledged (e.g., "some cultures see it in a bigger sense...,the sense of inclusion here is to a smaller circle; in our culture there is a sense of being excluded rather than included into something"). Basically we hide menstruation while some cultures publically acknowledge and ritualize it.

The facts of life were not discussed in Sarah's family (e.g., "Mom never told me anything; she said her mom never told her anything either; I think mom hoped I understood fertility, we never discussed it"). As a result, menarche was an awkward, sensitive thing that caused embarrassment and became a dilemma to deal with (e.g., "I didn't want to ask about it; I knew about products but I was afraid to buy them and afraid mom would see"). Sarah was curious about her mom's experience but felt that her mother would be embarrassed if they talked. She was sure the subject was so secretive it would not be discussed with the men (e.g., "It never occurred to me that my mom would discuss this with my dad"). Menstration was shrouded with a secretiveness even among the women (e.g., "I discovered later that one of my close girlfriends never menstruated and she never told us").

4. The Body. At menarche Sarah knew her body was changed. She felt different and more private about her body (e.g., "something has changed, identified me, so I'm no longer in this pure state"). She felt a strangeness and oddness because menses was not public; there was a sense of

uncleanliness and a reaction to the blood which was messy and difficult to deal with (e.g., "I felt like I wanted to hide the evidence, it was not easy to dispose of"). There was some bodily limitation (e.g., "I had a certain fear about blood flowing down my leg if I went swimming"). However, Sarah had no sense of alienation or rejection of her body or herself (e.g., "I was not turned against my body").

5. Relationships. Menstruation brought only slight alterations to Sarah's relationships. Although she was close to her mother menarche closed part of the communication. It was not talked about in the family (e.g., "Neither of us wanted to talk about this topic; it blocked conversation"). Menarche was significant in peer relations; to begin menstruating was important because it marked another phase of group acceptance. It heralded a move from childhood to a new stage of maturity (e.g., "It was a significant stepping stone, we were leaving childhood, innocence and purity and passing into something that made us part of a group"). It created a bond, it was a common experience and the girls told each other when it happened. Sarah became more reserved and aware of sex differences (e.g., "I felt more private and these bodily changes altered my attitudes toward boys"). On one level Sarah felt included in a smaller circle, "included with women", but in a larger cultural frame there was a sense of exclusion from a much larger circle. Reflecting back at 37 she realizes there was an almost unconscious, implicit, significance or

sense of initiation (e.g., "on some strange level I belonged; I was tapping into something bigger than I understood"). She felt she was not sharing in some magical, mystical event, yet she was part of something secret which altered her life (e.g., "It separated me, especially from men"). Menarche strengthened some relationships and distanced others (e.g., "friends talked about it, mom and my aunts didn't").

6. Self-concept. Menarche, for Sarah, was overshadowed by a larger transition brought about by personal circumstances. She was two years younger than school classmates (e.g., "Adolescence was fraught with frustration on many levels. There were difficult times with changes and anxieties about boys, dating and appearance"). When she got her period she felt she was part of the group and it was a positive, confirming experience (e.g., "Although there was some confusion and negativity, it was fairly positive; things were following along according to some kind of plan and there was the positive reinforcement of getting into the cycle of womanhood"). The whole event seemed to have an impersonal aspect and, on recollection, Sarah felt she may be romanticizing the event (e.g., "I think I am idealizing the past").

Martha

Martha began her menses in 1939 when she was 14. She was a farm girl who had been sent to the city to live with an aunt in order to attend school. She had heard about "periods"

but had not been prepared by anyone and had very vague ideas about what would happen.

Meaning Units

The meaning units in Martha's description are similar to Danielle's except for a more extensive cultural dimension which includes immediate and extended family, peers, school, neighbors and the general environment.

1. Orientation and Preparation. Martha had no formal preparation. Since she lived with a maiden aunt and attended school in the city away from her farm home, she supposed that both her aunt and mother thought the other had prepared her (e.g., "In our family we were told nothing about menstruation, nothing about sex; I was not aware of genital development"). She learned in a vague, indirect way from sharing a room with an older sister (e.g., "I noticed she wore a belt but didn't notice anything else, I thought that must have to do with 'it'"). At age 13 when visiting older cousins she heard talk, but did not really know what "it" was. A few books, women's magazines and articles provided fragmented pieces of information (e.g., "I knew it was called a period, there would be some kind of discharge, but I didn't know it would be blood, that it would be colored, where it would come from, or that there would be pain. I knew there would be something to wear, but where?"). Martha sensed it happened to women at a certain stage and she sort of looked forward to it (e.g., "it sounded fine"). At 14 when she had not begun menses Martha

began wondering why she did not have it; perhaps it happened and she just did not know it. She did not ask but became worried (e.g., "It was important to be normal and one of the group"). When menses did arrive she did not want it.

2. The Event of Menarche. For Martha the initial and later stages of menarche were quite different.

Martha's first period came gradually; at 14 she noticed that for a few days there was staining on her underwear when she came home from school (e.g., "when I had the first bit of flow I didn't know it was that; I didn't pay much attention and I didn't worry, it was just ignorance"). The second time there was a large amount of blood; Martha washed out her undergarment and hung it in the washroom. The next day her kindhearted but austere aunt handed her a box of Kotex and a belt (e.g., "she told me this would be happening to me every month and that I must not go swimming, horseback riding, take P.T. or take a bath"). Because Martha had been busily taking baths since the staining began she was worried that she had done something wrong (e.g., "I was a bit disturbed, it seemed like an unclean thing and I wondered how it would be without taking a bath. I thought I would get pretty unpleasant before it was over"). She was somewhat afraid (e.g., "the sight of blood frightened me").

Subsequent periods were troublesome for Martha (e.g., "for the first while my periods were full of anxiety; it was not a pleasant time of life"). Her periods were irregular, she had a heavy flow and she fainted easily at the sight of blood (e.g., "I slept downstairs and had to go upstairs to

the bathroom; I'd have a hard time making it because of the flow in the morning. I fainted one morning in the bathroom and got up and went to school. One day I felt a fair flow and fainted in church"). This event annoyed her aunt and left her girlfriend shaken. The fainting spells which seemed to be connected to subject matter or certain physical places caused trauma for Martha. A year later in an abnormal psychology class at University she again fainted (e.g., "It took me a long time to be adjusted; I was hearing things I'd never heard before about syphilis and paralysis of the insane; they frightened us a lot about V.D."). She was afraid and embarrassed about the fainting (e.g., "When I was menstruating I felt I could not be in a room full of people unless I was near a door; I'd look to see if there was space in case I passed out"). Later it seems that if she was in control of a situation she would be fine but if she was sitting in a room with no control over what was being said some things would upset her (e.g., "If I was teaching it was alright, but some lectures bothered me"). Martha found her life bounded and limited by menstruation. She got cramps, had to figure out her days, was embarrassed at having to sit out of P.T. and was afraid that the boys would know (e.g., "I resented my long, heavy periods; I was being witheld"). Later, menstruation was just a nuisance, Martha got over the problem of not bathing and learned to carry on in a limited way at school (e.g., "I pretended my period was not there").

Martha remembers menarche as an anxious and emotional

time; she was frightened, embarrassed and overwhelmed. She was bothered by her uneasiness and inability to handle things (e.g., "I felt a sort of guilt that I was not doing better at all this, that I wasn't more realistic about periods and able to take them in stride; it seemed foolish to be fainting"). Her aunt was annoyed and felt that Martha was being very neurotic. She was critical (e.g., "she never tolerated this; it was not considered right not to be strong, healthy and able to handle everything; my aunt was strong and never missed work"). One time when a girl went to the board at school her clothes were stained and Martha was desperately afraid it would happen to her. Increasingly fearful of fainting she seemed bounded and curtailed by menstruation (e.g., "I was suppose to go serenely through the days without being afraid of fainting, I had this feeling that I must sit at the edge of the room and not try to be upset and nervous about it"). There was dread at having to buy supplies (e.g., "I would lurk around a drugstore till there was a woman clerk; I was too embarrassed to buy them from a man"). Martha resented her period and thought it was "rather a gyp" because she was normally so active (e.g., "men have a better deal"). Ultimately the whole experience led to depression, loneliness and a feeling of personal inadequacy (e.g., "all my life I'm going to have this to cope with, having to manage by myself....I was very reserved, feeling very alone, having no one to confide in. I felt my life was always going to be depressed like this"). Martha did not adjust to

menstruation until she was grown and married. She wondered: perhaps if she had been home with her family it would have been entirely different.

3. Cultural Context. For Martha the influence of culture upon menarche was extensive. Living in a close-knit rural community and having sustained contact with her extended family afforded several channels of enculturation.

Alberta in the late 1930's was marked by a cert in social atmosphere. Martha recalls that these were "innocent days": conversations were general, everything went neatly, and one was not supposed to have anything wrong (e.g., "anything to do with the body or health was not discussed in detail; I'd have even been embarrassed to have a broken leg....it was wrong to talk about menstruation"). One's attitude should be modest, retiring and reserved (e.g., "one was never openly a sexual person"). Menstruation was not looked upon as a natural phenomenon, but as something shameful; it naturally had a sort of sexual connection (e.g., "I almost got the feeling that it was something dirty, you were almost ashamed when you went to buy supplies"). Menstruation could cause great public discomfort; the event was kept rather quiet. One day when out riding with her aunt, Martha saw a disposed sanitary napkin and it shocked her (e.g., "I hoped my aunt had not seen it; I remained quiet and felt almost ashamed and embarrassed that I had become a woman"). Most things having to do with the physical or sexual body, particularly if menses was involved, were taboo (e.g., "my girlfriend had to have a medical and was menstruating, she

was petrified and traumatized because there would be a male doctor"). The cultural silence and shame surrounding menstruation may imply that there is something wrong with it.

In Martha's home neither sex nor menstruation were spoken about (e.g., "I think they feared I would get into trouble"). From her extended family, most importantly her guardian aunt, she had almost no information, but certain attitudes were conveyed. Often menses was referred to as "the curse". Martha received the injunctions regarding bathing and physical activity, the expectation that she was to be strong and able to handle everything, and the belief that the body and sex were suspect (e.g., "everyone was proper; my aunt was annoyed when I took a first aid course and had an oral exam by a doctor, she thought it was not quite nice").

In Martha's broader culture (peers, school, neighbors) there was an air of secrecy and taboo about menstruation. Among the girls at school it was rarely mentioned and then only guardedly (e.g., "my closest girlfriends would mention it occasionally, saying they could not take P.T. and that would be the extent of the conversation"). It was highly private and something never shared with boys (e.g., "I had great embarrassment sitting out of P.T.; I feared the boys would know"). Basically girls did not talk about menses and pretended it was not there. (e.g., "I would never have the nerve to ask a teacher at school"). The unspoken understanding was that girls should handle menstruation in a

stoic manner. Martha had no doctor to speak to and felt the subject was too touchy for cross-generational discussion. Adolescent confusion combined with the heavy cultural restrictions of menses resulted in feelings of resentment and depression (e.g., "I felt suppressed and alone. I would walk by myself, feeling nobody cared about it. I would go dramatically to the High Level Bridge and look over thinking that if I jumped over they would be sorry").

4. The Body. At puberty, 12 to 13, Martha's physical development was rapid and mature. Being naturally athletic and active she felt resentful and embarrassed and wished it had not happened (e.g., "I was not proud of my body; I felt uncomfortable with it, ashamed of my large bosom, and unhappy about what was going on"). Menstruation was not singled out but was part of a larger process; Martha tried to hide both menses and breast development. Part of the discomfort was the shame accompanying menstruation (e.g., "It was almost like a bathroom function"). Although she did not like her body, Martha did feel that she was getting "pretty good looking", (e.g., "In that sense I was pleased with myself").

5. Relationships. For Martha menarche had a profound effect on relationships. The changes were both radical and subtle. With the onset of menstruation came a reserve, an aloneness, a secrecy and a need to manage or cope on one's own (e.g., "You had more to hide, to keep from people, you never talked about it"). In Martha's experience this cultural attitude was magnified because of her vulnerability

to fainting (e.g., "After fainting I was afraid to tell anyone....my aunt was annoyed with me"). When having her period she no longer felt comfortable in crowds, closed rooms or places where she was not in control of subject matter which could upset her (e.g., "I became frightened of University classes and would sit near a window or door in a room full of people"). The extent of Martha's social activity and the quality of her relationships were both constrained by menses (e.g., "Menstruation restricted certain social actions like being in crowds or going swimming; my types of games changed and I kept more to myself; I felt more of a sneakiness and less openness, for example, I didn't tell the truth if someone asked me to a movie and I had my period, I would make up some excuse and be evasive"). Martha was petrified to have a medical with a male doctor if she had her period and she often wished things could be easier (e.g., "I wanted things to be the way they were before").

Relationships with peers were the least effected, however, even friends did not talk very freely and girls absolutely never mentioned menstruation with boys (e.g., "there was a definite effect, my friendships were not as close and I felt more alone and isolated: I don't know how boyfriends put up with me"). Mostly it was the relationship with younger friends that became restricted.

Menarche definitely changed Martha's relationships with her family. She felt quite a division from the younger siblings (e.g., "I no longer played such rough and active

games with my younger sisters"). The close friendship she had with her brother and male cousin was altered (e.g., "We didn't do the same things like ride the horse as much. The boys looked on me differently, were not as rough, and had more consideration. I was more reserved and did not play the same way"). Her disposition was different because menstruation cramped her style and curtailed much-loved activities. She was resentful and dissatisfied (e.g., "I wasn't as nice around the house as when I was a kid, not as cheerful. I took it out on my sisters"). As a result Martha felt a change in her parents' attitude toward her: she was not a kid anymore and there was less joy, ease, comradery and friendship (e.g., "I was a bit rebellious and my parents considered me less steady than my older sister: my father became rather strict and imposed early hours and more restrictions. I was becoming another adult, more of a challenge and more their equal"). The one advantage was that soon Martha felt she would get her independence.

6. Self-concept. Menarche presented Martha with conflicting feelings about herself. She experienced shame and embarrassment and did not like her body (e.g., "You were embarrassed that you had become a woman"). Her sensitive reactions caused her to feel silly and inadequate and her strongest feeling against herself was that she "should have coped better". Ultimately she felt alone, overwhelmed and depressed. On the other hand, althogh she was reserved she sensed there was a future for her and it was quite positive (e.g., "I felt optimistic, the future was going to be okay;

I was doing well in school and had friends; I thought I'd look okay, grow up fine and get over these feelings of depression, loneliness and isolation; I was confident about myself and sure that I could make my own way").

Tabular Summary of Themes: Within Protocols

At this stage both raw data and themes extracted from the Within-Protocol Analyses are arranged in tabular form to give the reader a more global understanding of the data. In some instances repetitive material is condensed but essentially the co-researchers' actual words or phrases are used to preserve the personal flavor of the data. Results are presented in Table 1 and commonly follow narrative order.

insert Table 1 about here

Tabular Summary of Themes: Across Protocols

The fourth step of analysis involves two operations, clustering the themes from the individual tabular summaries into meaning units (again according to narrative order) and identifying the themes across all protocols. In keeping with the progressive delimiting and grouping process of phenomenography, singular elements from Table 1 are combined into related themes (e.g., guarded subject, suppressed, undiscussed). Table 2 provides a synthesized and comprehensive view of all the data and clearly outlines the similarities and differences in co-researchers' experience.

Table 1

Tabular Summary of Themes for each Co-researcher

Danielle	Laura	Carol	Martha
no preparation in family	preparation in family	no preparation in family	no preparation
incomplete knowledge	intellectual knowledge	incomplete knowledge	vague, indirect [illegible]
physiological, not psychological preparation	physiological information at school	no sense of physiology or fertility	
	supportive mother		
onset too early	not mentally ready	alone to cope	alone to cope
embarrassed	hid self and first blood	some practical help	extreme anxiety
shy	awkward	dilemma	denied event
humiliated	uneasy	hid evidence	trauma
scared	strange	menstrual pain	cramps
angry	self-conscious	awkward	emotional, anxious time
gross, hygienic concerns	embarrassed	embarrassed	fear of blood
dirty	fearful	strange	feared loss of control
physical pain	isolated, alone	isolated	fainting
fat, bloated	felt alien	unclean, messy	embarrassed
guarded subject	worthless	bodily changes	uneasy in crowds
socially avoided, distasteful	disgusting	bodily limitations	evasive
culturally unimportant	dirty, gross	body more private	depressed
secretive communication	felt deformed	more reserved	lonely, isolated
private	body; dirty, bloated	sense of exclusion	overwhelmed
girls hid menses	tampons disgusting	no longer pure state	ashamed of body
code name	rejected menses	not spontaneous	moody
unpleasant among peers	rejected responsibility and maturity	maturity	rebellious
boys joked and maligned it	rejected womanhood	female self-loathing, bond	unclean, dirty

(table continues)

Tabular Summary of Themes for each Participant

Danielle	Laura	Sarah	Martha
boys were lucky	burden	participation in normal cycle	nuisance
exclusive female topic	nuisance	social landmark	resented menses
bonded female peers	felt victimized	exclusively female subject	secretive
limited activity	unfair	not discussed with men	reserved, private
wanted menses to cease	resentful	distinct sex differences	ashamed of being a woman
fear of pregnancy	denied own development	clandestine	envied men's freedom
distinguished the sexes	disliked personal appearance	sense of initiation	personal inadequacy
relieved anxiety of menses	controlled menses, weight	part of something bigger	guilt at not coping
not dangerous	anorexic	womanhood cycle	constrained relationships
maturity	peer horror stories	created distance from mother	limited activities
more experienced than peers	limited activity	subject socially suppressed	rarely mentioned with girls
felt more responsible	ambivalent with friends	indirect messages	never shared with boys
did not want responsibility	apart from peers	unwholesome attitude	divided from younger people
elevated status	enjoyed peer attention	taboo	no cross-generational discussion
older, privileged	separate, yet honored	derogatory terms	stricter parental control
enhanced self-image	female comradery	euphemisms, code	covert, less open behavior
more security and independence	hated boys		negative injunctions
commercials disturbing	did not discuss with boys		enjoined to be stoic
commercials focused on women	felt older		no professional help
commercials excluded teens	big event		cultural silence
emphasis on products	felt important and proud		taboo
little professional input	pressure and responsibility		shameful event

(table continues)

Tabular Summary of Themes for each Co-researcher

Danielle	Laura	Sarah	Martha
	separated from older women		considered bathroom function
	disliked advertisements		caused social discomfort
	commercials for adults only		more consideration from boys
	mixed messages		more grown up
	boys' jokes		closer to independence
	message of womanhood		pleased with looks and developing body
			future felt optimistic

Table 2

Tabular Summary of Themes: Across Protocols

Themes	Danielle	Laura	Sarah	Martha
1. Orientation and Preparation				
-no preparation in family	x		x	x
-incomplete knowledge	x	x	x	x
-physiological information	x	x		
-Psychological information				
-no professional help	x			x
-onset too early	x	x		
-hid first evidence		x	x	x
-dilemma, alone to cope			x	x
2. The Experience of Menarche				
-physical pain, cramps	x		x	x
-fainting				x
-disgusting		x		
-shameful				x
-unfair, felt victimized		x		
-no longer in pure state		x		
-secretive, private	x	x	x	x
-burden, nuisance	x	x		x
-awkward, anxious		x	x	x
-shy, self-conscious	x	x	x	x
-embarrassed	x	x	x	x
-scared	x	x		x
-trauma				x
-humiliated	x	x		

(table continues)

Tabular Summary of Themes: Across Protocols

Themes	Danielle	Laura	Sarah	Martha
-strange		x	x	
-angry, resentful	x	x		x
-felt worthless		x		
-feared blood, loss of control				x
-fear of pregnancy	x			
-denied or rejected menses		x		x
-wanted menses and responsibility only later	x	x		
-felt pressure		x		
-controlled blood flow, anorexic		x		
-depressed				x
-limited activity	x	x	x	x
-rejected womanhood		x		
-relieved the anxiety of waiting	x			
-not dangerous	x			
-felt older, grown up	x	x	x	x
-more security, closer to independence	x			x
-big event		x	x	
-sense of initiation, womanhood			x	
-bonded with females and peers	x		x	
-part of something bigger, normal cycle			x	
-felt more optimistic				x

(table continues)

Tabular Summary of Themes: Across Protocols

Themes	Danielle	Laura	Cathy	Martha
3. Cultural Context				
-culturally unimportant	x		x	
-subject guarded, suppressed, undiscussed	x	x	x	x
-caused social discomfort		x		x
-considered shameful, hidden	x	x		x
-peer horror stories		x		
-code name, euphemism	x		x	
-boy's jokes, derogatory terms	x	x	x	
-exclusively female subject	x		x	
-indirect and mixed messages		x	x	
-clandestine, cultural silence			x	x
-unwholesome, negative injunctions, taboo			x	x
-enjoined to be stoic				x
-sense of exclusion			x	
-social landmark		x	x	
-disliked advertisements, disturbing	x	x		
-commercials for adults, excluded teens	x	x		
-commercials emphasized products	x			

(table continues)

Tabular Summary of Themes: Across Protocols

Themes	Danielle	Laura	Sarah	Martha
4. The Body				
-hygienic concerns	x	x		x
-gross feeling; fat-bloated body	x	x		
-dirty, unclean, messy	x	x	x	x
-tampons disgusting		x		
-felt deformed, disliked appearance		x		
-ashamed of body		x		x
-bodily changes			x	
-body more private, reserved		x	x	
-pleased with looks and developing body				x
5. Relationships				
-evasive, uneasy behavior in public		x		x
-sexes more distinguished	x	x	x	
-female comradery, bond		x	x	
-separated from older women and peers		x		
-not discussed with boys/males		x	x	x
-envied men's freedom, luck	x	x		
-hated boys		x		
-more consideration from boys				x
-no cross-generational discussion				x
-stricter parental control				x
-status and attention	x	x		
-more experienced than peers not menstruating	x			
-separate, yet honored		x		

(table continued)

Tabular Summary of Themes: Across Protocols

Themes	Danielle	Laura	Sarah	Martha
-divided from younger people				x
-moody, rebellious				x
-created distance from mother			x	
-ambivalent with peers	x	x		
6. Self-Image				
-enhanced self-image	x			
-privileged	x			
-important and proud		x		
-older	x			x
-more mature	x		x	
-more responsible	x			
-inadequacy and guilt of not coping				x
-ashamed of being a woman		x		x
-dirty	x	x		

Some phenomena are unique, while some are shared. Certain elements are characteristic of the younger women (e.g., responsibility) while others are mentioned by the older women (e.g., coping alone). These finding are detailed in the across- protocol analysis and final discussion.

insert Table 2 about here

Structure of the Experience of Menarche: Across Protocols

To this point the analysis of the data has made it possible to outline meaning clusters, determine the essential themes for each co-researcher, and draw some comparisons among participants. An important aim of phenomenological research is to approximate a comprehensive understanding of the experience in question. The final analysis combines and synthesizes the themes from individual women's protocols so that the common structure of "what it is like to experience menarche" can be seen. A narrative of the essential structure of menarche is presented in generic language with verbatim words and phrases interjected to ensure the sense of immediacy and lived-experience.

1. Orientation and Preparation. The approach to menarche had for all the co-researchers both a feeling and knowledge component. None of the women felt fully prepared. Only Laura had "an explanation with a book" from her mother. Danielle and Laura received input at school about the "physiology" and "sanitary products", Sarah heard some

"inexplicit reference" in Health class. Each of the young women "picked up" attitudes, feelings and bits of information from advertisements (Danielle, Laura), friends (Sarah), siblings (Martha), and the environment (e.g., "we saw products in stores ... articles in women's magazines"). The emotional, psychological and social dimensions of menstruation were not addressed; Danielle and Martha both felt a need to know more from health professionals. All the co-researchers had mixed feelings and some anxiety. Danielle was "shy and embarrassed" about menses, Laura had a sense of both "pride and disgust", Sarah felt "vague about it", and Martha "became worried, but looked forward to her period".

2. The Event of Menarche - Initial Trauma. At the first appearance of blood most of the young women were confused about what was happening. Laura wondered if it was "normal" and Martha did not know that "the staining" was her menses. All but one woman hid the evidence and tried to cope alone by washing soiled undergarments. Sarah resorted to secretly using washclothes until it was discovered by her mother. There was some anxiety about products: Laura worried about "leaking" and Danielle was concerned about "lack of protection with thin pads" and the discomfort at feeling like she was "wearing a diaper".

Emotional Ambiguity. The onset of menses released a host of emotions which ultimately affected the women's way of being in the world. Each of them felt awkward, embarrassed, and fearful. Martha was afraid of "blood, fainting, and

loss of control", Danielle feared pregnancy. They referred to a sense of strangeness, shame and isolation. Laura felt like an "alien" and Sarah was "no longer in a pure state". Each of the women felt her period was dirty , unclean or messy. With menstruation each of the participants in some way became private, secretive and reserved. They resorted to using code names (e.g., "my friend....Santa Clause"). All four of the co-researchers curtailed their activities and experienced bodily limitation. Sarah and Martha refrained from swimming; Martha reported "I could not be in a room full of people unless I was near a door". The monthly appearance of blood became a nuisance and burden which led to resentment. Laura felt "victimized", Martha thought she may have to "cope with it all through life". For some women there was emotional trauma, in Martha's case it reached the point of "depression". With the exception of Sarah each participant reported anger and resentment , particularly toward boys whom they envied for their "luck and freedom". Both Laura and Martha denied menses and ultimately Laura eliminated her period (e.g., "I dropped my weight and became anorexic, my periods stopped"). Some of the participants did not feel ready for menses (e.g., "I was too young ... not mentally ready"). As a result the two youngest women rejected what they felt was the imposition of womanhood and maturity accompanying menarche. Nevertheless, having one's period made the girls feel older and more responsible. The event brought with it "peer group acceptance" and a "bond with other females". Laura felt "proud". Sarah knew it was

a "big event", she had a sense of "initiation" and reported feeling "part of something bigger". In some way menstruation was participation in a "normal cycle". For some women the onset of menses brought with it new security and optimism. Martha reported feeling "closer to independence" while Danielle felt "more confident".

3. Cultural Context. In the 44 year span between Martha's menarche (1939) and Danielle's (1983) the local communtity seems to have come to a more open and informative position about menstruation. All the co-reasearchers, however, reported that menses in this culture is a subject that is generally guarded and suppressed. Danielle felt that menarche was "culturally unimportant". All the participants were at some time aware that menstruation was considered shameful and distasteful. Martha sensed a "cultural silence" and Sarah felt something "clandestine". In general there was an unwholesome attitude about menstruation which gave rise to social discomfort and taboo. Most of the women recalled boy's jokes and derogatory terms. Sarah remembers being asked if she was "on the rag", Laura reported "peer horror stories". All four women experienced menarche as something hidden and not shared with boys; Martha even recalls that periods were "rarely mentioned by girls". Although one participant remembers her first period as a "social landmark" , each women felt that in her mileau the messages were mixed and indirect. Some women received negative injunctions (e.g., "do not swim, take P.T. or have a bath"); Martha was expected to be "stoic" and Sarah felt a

"sense of exclusion". The two women who began menstruating in the 1980's found the advertisements disturbing. There were "too many", they were "for adults only", they excluded "teens", and "emphasized products". Some of the women experienced a sense of enhanced social status, female belonging and initiation to "womanhood" at the time of menarche.

4. The Body. Menarche brought about bodily changes. All the co-researchers experienced their bodies as dirty, unclean and messy. All but one woman had intense concern about hygiene. Danielle reported "bathing more often" and needing to "keep dry"; Martha worried about becoming "unpleasant" from lack of bathing. For the two youngest women the menstrual process was "gross"; Laura thought "inserting tampons was a disgusting thing to do to your body". In addition they both felt "fat and bloated". Once they began menstruating the women commonly felt less wholesome in their bodies. Individuals reported being in a "less pure state", "ashamed of the body", and feeling "deformed". Martha equated menstruation with "a bathroom function". Generally the women were more private and reserved with ther bodies. Some of the participants also had positive images. Sarah did not turn against her body and Martha was actually pleased with her looks and developing body.

5. Relationships. All the participants found that their relationships were effected by the onset of menses. The most noticeable change was with males in that none of the

women shared or discussed the experience with boys or men. The sexes were more distinguished from each other. Sarah felt "separated from men", while other women "envied" or "hated" men's freedom. Only Martha sensed "more consideration from boys". Interaction with other women was also altered. Some of the girls found they could not discuss the issue with the other generations; as a result they felt "separated from older women". At the same time they felt a more firm bond and "sense of comradery" with females. One women felt very cut off from younger people. When menstruating she became "uneasy in crowds" and resorted to "covert, evasive behavior" to protect her vulnerability. Other participants were "ambivalent with friends" and "somewhat apart from peers". They faced the dilemma of feeling "separate yet honored" and they were afforded "elevated status and attention" in their group. Danielle felt she had "more experience" than her friends who were not yet menstruating. For one women getting her period created distance with her mother. In Martha's case menses infuenced family harmony and evoked stricter parental control (e.g., "I was moody and rebellious when I began menstruating"). All the women experienced some form of constraint in their relationships.

6. Self-Image. At menarche the self-image of each co-researcher was altered; there were simultaneous conflicting images. Most of the women experienced some kind of negativity. Often they felt "dirty"; Martha experienced guilt, personal inadequacy and was "ashamed of being a

woman". Laura felt "worthless". Each woman experienced personal restriction. At the same time, participants found that self-image was enhanced to some degree. Some women felt older and more mature. Individually they felt privileged, important or proud. Danielle and Martha both had a clear sense of increased confidence and optimism (e.g., "I could conquer all....I was sure I could make my own way"). Altogether it was a mixed experience.

Final Analysis

In an effort to understand the experience of menarche in all its dimensions it is important to note the elements which are common to all participants as well as those that appear sporadically. Since this study looks at the phenomenon of "girls' first period" over a span of 44 years (Martha, 1939 to Danielle, 1983) the themes expressed by the two younger women and those exclusive to the older females need particular attention for they may point to changes in cultural beliefs and attitudes.

1. Orientation and Preparation. The fact that the girls who reached menarche in the 1980's received instruction and information at school points to a more open handling of the subject in society. Twenty to thirty years before, Sarah and Martha experienced much more of a dilemma; much less was said and they were left to cope on their own. Despite the trend toward a more liberal handling of the subject all the participants felt they had incomplete knowledge and three of

them instinctively hid the evidence of their first menstrual blood. It is worth noting that in this age of open menstrual advertisements the younger women both felt that the onset of menses was too early; this was not expressed by the older women.

2. The Experience of Menarche. Reaching menarche, whether one was an adolescent in the 1930's or 1980's, brought with it embarrassment and some form of limitation for all the participants. Essentially it was a disconcerting and negative experience. All the women talked about being shy and self-conscious. Interestingly, only the menarchal girls of the 1980's felt that they wanted to delay both menses and its accompanying responsibility until later. The younger girls also felt humiliated with their first period. Only 25% (nine of 37 themes) could be construed as positive. Individually, negative responses included shame, depression, worthlessness, pressure, fear of fainting and pregnancy, and anorexic behavior. Of the nine positive responses (see Table 2) seven were mentioned but once. Coming to a sense of womanhood, being part of a bigger, natural cycle and feeling optimistic and relieved were singular responses. For some of the women the landmark of menses afforded more security and independence; they felt older and more grown up. Essentially the onset of menstruation for a young girl in this community has been, and seems to be, personally and socially, uncomfortable.

3. Cultural Context. The present study suggests that menarche in this society is understood, but not overtly

acknowledged, as a social landmark. In some way women sense it as an exclusively female event. Culturally, menarche is not important; it has consistently evoked mixed messages. The common themes that emerge from the co-researchers show that this community, over the years, has avoided dealing openly with menses, has surrounded it with silence and even interpreted it as somewhat shameful and unwholesome. All the women felt the subject was guarded and suppressed. Boy's jokes and derogatory terms reinforced these attitudes. Martha (1939) and Sarah (1960) experienced more negative instruction, taboo and clandestine activity than did the younger women. A survey of their responses (shame, trauma, impurity, fear of blood, depression) suggests that a greater degree of stigma and moral constraint were present in the culture at that time. However, Danielle and Laura both found the prolific advertisements of the 1980's disturbing in that they romanticize and gloss over the real experience and exclude teenage girls. These same girls felt confusion and rejection because the subject was presented at school but denied as an adolescent reality in the larger society. In general the women found the cultural atmosphere negative.

4. The Body. For all the women, dealing with menstrual blood in this society was dirty and/or messy and there was a great deal of concern about hygiene. In addition, they perceived that menstruation was a bodily function one did not speak of with men or boys. The girls in the 1980's seemed much more concerned with their body image, describing

themselves as fat, bloated and gross. Although not all the participants expressed the same nuance of feeling, each of them in some way reflected displeasure with the body because of menses. Only one woman had the positive reaction of being pleased with her newly developing body.

5. Relationships. The demarcation of menarche in this society clearly means that a woman's relationships are no longer the same. Simultaneously she feels drawn to some people and distanced from others. Generally, but not universally, the women felt more connected to peers and other females while the differentiation of the sexes was more acute. To have begun bleeding meant more distance and shyness with males; the older women particularly attested to this. For some women menses brought new status and attention, honor or ambivalence from peers (especially in the 1980's), a sense of division from other age groups, and different expectations and restrictions from parents. In extreme cases social behavior became covert, crowds induced dis-ease, and relationships were strained.

6. Self-Image. Although the onset of menses created, for the women, conflicting views of themselves, several of the images were affirming. At menarche some of the participants felt less positive about themselves because of the dirt, guilt and shame associated with menstrual blood. However, they also felt older and had a solid sense of maturity. This landmark in female adolescence brought with it responsibility, privilege and pride. Despite the overriding negativity of menarche, self-image seems somewhat enhanced.

Cross-Structural Themes

Often the same theme emerges across structural clusters, therefore, a second phase of analysis is needed. In phenomenography this stage of analysis seeks the invariant (e.g., shame) in the set of varying conceptions or catagories (e.g., the body, relationships) (Aanstoos, 1986). To deal with all the underlying themes is not feasible, therefore, this study is focusing on those which come through most strongly. These deeply intrinsic themes further elucidate the lived-experience of menarche.

Ambivalence. In repeated instances the women speak of mixed feelings and mixed messages. Their conflicts simultaneously combine maturity with childhood, disgust with pride, depression with optimism, isolation with feelings of specialness, and expectations of control and strength with vulnerability. Whether dealing with body, relationship or image issues menarche consistently constellates ambivalence.

Shame and Bodily Disgust. Many related concepts are tied to this theme. The women report feeling embarrassed, self-conscious, humiliated and worthless. In terms of body, relationships and social setting, concern about hygiene, products, bodily limitation and general dis-ease surfaced.

Secrecy. Menarche is overtly and covertly concealed. Only certain aspects of the experience are acknowledged (i.e., products, fertility). Schools deal with physiology but rarely address emotions; therefore, society pretends about

and avoids certain aspects of menses.

Burden. In several situations (i.e., relationships, first period, activity) females report feeling resentful and victimized. The stigma and physical limitation seem unfair and women often dislike their position and envy that of males.

Menstrual Blood. Although the sense of fertility and potential motherhood accompanying menstrual blood is often welcomed this rather aesthetic dimension is not fully realized by young women. Instead they report their annoyance and repulsion with the mess, dirt and impurity of monthly blood.

The contextual nature of phenomenology reveals a constant overlapping of motifs; many more concepts could be mapped as themes. The key issues are outlined above and they will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Women's experience of menarche in this culture cannot be neatly "pinned-down" and dissected; the phenomenon is too complex. No one methodology can capture the intricacies of a woman's experience, let alone telescope the whole picture. Nevertheless, this phenomenological study attempts to give a more holistic view, one that exposes some deeper dimensions of the experience and the taken-for-granted concepts in society. A wider range of feelings and attitudes, which may not be reflected in statistical methodology, is expressed through the phenomenological

stream-of-consciousness.

My concern with the feminine principle and the image of women in this society made this personal, co-constituted approach very meaningful for me. The women involved were interested, grateful and relieved to talk about their experience of menarche. When they read the analyses participants were amazed at how intensely and completely they were able to re-live the experience - "oh yes, this is the way it was". They found, in the validation stage, that they could also claim some of the other women's descriptions in Table 2.

This phenomenological study begins to map the lived-experience of menarche. Any of the above themes and many more menarchal concepts (e.g., sexuality, male attitudes, education) could be explored by human science research. What co-researchers share and report in the spontaneous dialogue of interviews reflects a multi-dimensional lived-experience. The stages of phenomenological analysis discern and articulate patterns in the midst of complexity.

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Relationship of the Present Study to the Field of Menarchal Research

Menarche as Physical

Menarche initiates physiological processes and may effect one's body image. The present study reveals that the physical appearance of first blood was problematic: the girls attempted to hide the evidence. Participants also had concerns about handling the discharge: they worried about embarrassing sights, the reliability of products, and the fact that other people might know they were menstruating (e.g., "I was afraid of leaking. I feared the boys would know"). Some degree of physical limitation seemed to accompany the onset of menses; it was often considered debilitating (e.g., "I could not go swimming or horseback riding"). Symptomatology was common. It is worth noting that only the menarchal woman of the 1930's was expected to endure physical pain stoically (e.g., "I fainted one morning....and got up and went to school"). The contemporary attitude encourages the use of medicine to eliminate discomfort:

According to this study, unlike women in earlier decades menarchal girls in the 1980's have a definite sensitivity to body image; they worried about being "fat and bloated". We might ask if this is influenced by the "slender is beautiful" image in modern day advertising. Koff, Reirdan

and Silverstone (1978) reported that postmenarchal girls displayed a better defined body image and clearer sexual identification. Again, in this study females reported feeling a clearer demarcation between boys and girls. It would be important, in future research, to determine if this is primarily a physical or psychological change.

The girls of the 1980's are much more knowledgeable about development, physiology and products. Such information is an improvement over the former silence about menstruation, however, the girls of the 1980's stressed that knowledge about the body and products was not sufficient. All the females had serious concerns about hygiene but even the younger, better informed females felt a need for more knowledge, professional input and support in regard to what was happening to their bodies, their emotions and their role as females (e.g., "I was not mentally ready. Information should come from a professional who knows about the body").

Most menarchal women experienced some degree of bodily repulsion; they reported feeling deformed, unclean or personally inadequate. Statistical studies (Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1980; Havens & Swenson, 1985) reveal that young women often feel their bodies are sick, unclean or polluted at menarche. From the present study it would seem that there is a heightened sense of bodily shame and privacy (e.g., "I felt less pure....somewhat apart from peers").

The physical experiences accompanying menarche tend to be disconcerting and primarily negative. Girls seemed ashamed and uncomfortable with the blood, odor and discharge (e.g.,

"It seemed like an unclean thing....I was shocked at the sight of a used napkin"). This may be in part due to the thesis put forth earlier in this work, that is, that this culture values mind over body. The preoccupation with hygiene underscores our preference for an abstract, idealized image of the body: some of the less-controlled aspects of our physicality are denegrated and denied. Is this not a metaphor of our propensity for fantasy over reality? Perhaps we have separated ourselves too far from nature to appreciate the total experience and wisdom of the body. Is this a further reflection of twentieth century self-alienation? In true phenomenological form one must, at the same time, hold in consciousness the reports which testify to the sense of anticipation felt at menarche. Some females also experienced their bodies as participating in a normal biological cycle and they were quite pleased with their maturing looks and developing body.

Menarche as Psychological

Originally psyche referred to the principle of life; it is equivalent to mind or soul (Drever, 1952). Menarche is recognized as a time of psychological stirring; how, and in what manner, the energy is channeled or blocked can influence personal integration and development.

The common view that menstruation is purely a biological process is challenged by Shuttle and Redgrove (1978) who suggest that "perhaps the inner life is concerned" (p. 14). They question the view that menstruation is not a factor in

normal mental life and note that there is no systematic account of what women normally experience in their minds. The present study reflects evidence of a mental and/or soul energy at menarche. The influence of unconscious archetypal forces was present in Tonya's experience as cited in the Introduction. She became fascinated with the color red (blood) and cow images (moon-cow and fertility). Certain "ideas" and attitudes about menstruation (i.e., secretiveness) did influence participants' experience of menses (e.g., "You never talked about it ... sometimes I fainted....I was alone and had to cope on my own").

From a psychological point of view it is interesting to note that in the qualitative protocols some of the females' remembrances of menstruation after menarche were blank; this fact does not appear in the quantitative literature. Does this suggest that some women suppress the experience? It this fractious to personality development? This issue is worth future investigation.

Participants in this study reported both distance and closeness with peers, personal integration (confidence, optimism) and loosening of family ties especially with parents. They expressed concern about being in step with everyone else; being early (Danielle, Laura) or late (Martha) caused anxiety. Danielle and Laura both reached menses before their peers, both reported distress at that point but felt more secure and experienced later. Several quantitative studies confirmed this experience (Jones & Mussen, 1958; Peskin, 1973). Peskin's (1973) research

claimed that girls who menstruated early experienced more trauma and were at a disadvantage at the time, however, in later years they displayed more self-possessed behavior. A girl's age at menarche seems psychologically significant in terms of personal and peer adjustment.

After the onset of menses Martha often slipped from consciousness, fainted and feared loss of control during her period. According to Klein (1975) at the time of menarche there are mental upheavals. If a female is in an environment, especially family, which discounts her existence as a woman or engages in emotional pretense then the "moment of truth" or her true feelings burst through. The Exorcist exemplifies this dynamic; a Cypriot women who saw the movie was not at all shocked noting that little girls growing up in Cyprus often behaved like that at puberty if they were under strain (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1978). This dynamic may, in part, explain Martha's psycho-physical experience. Her environment was particularly silent about menstruation and sexuality.

One of the advances the phenomenological method brings to the research world is that it allows for the co-existence of diversity in human experience. According to this study menarche is not a negative or positive event but one that is quite veriegated (honor, shame). Quantitative researchers exploring the psychological dimensions of menarche have focused on specific variables; self-concept (Garwood & Allen, 1979), identity (Greif & Ulman, 1982), insecurity (Smith & Powell, 1956). Some of these statistical studies

(Smith & Powell, 1956 and Stone & Barker, 1979) drew opposing conclusions. What seems important from a psychological point of view are the differences expressed between the decades. The earlier part of the century evidenced more taboo. The 1980's are apparently less secretive, yet it is in this era that women seem more intent on delaying or denying the experience especially as it is tied to femininity, maturity and womanhood (e.g., "I didn't want to turn into a lady"). Could it be that in the justifiable move toward increased male-female equality the feminine way-of-being has been sacrificed? The phenomenological research suggests that menarche is a time of psychological fear and favor (e.g., "Would I always be depressed? There was more consideration from the boys"). One of our challenges is to foster an attitude and context which will permit girls to own and integrate the various energies accompanying menarche.

Menarche as Spiritual

Perhaps the menstrual process, linked as it is to the cyclic nature of fertility and the earth, has spiritual potential. Washbourn (1977) sees menarche as a symbol of the power of women's bodies to enrich their lives sexually and spiritually. She states "the potential procreativity of our bodies is not a personal power but the linking of ourselves to the creative power of nature and the creative aspect of all human relationships" (p. 17). Sarah may have sensed this spiritual energy when she said that she felt "part of

something bigger". If a woman is in touch with her body and the larger cycle of nature she has the chance each month for a conscious going-with instinctual happenings, and therefore a conscious drawing up of instinctual powers and renewal (Harding, 1955). Washbourn's transpersonal image of the body could be of great value to menarchal girls who so often, in this society, are faced with body images that are exploited and pornographic.

Final Comments and Speculation

Before concluding this study I am offering a speculative postscript containing my thoughts and reactions to the phenomenon of menarche and the extant literature.

Social Recognition

According to this study, young girls approaching menarche face a time of potential crisis. They receive little or no social acknowledgement (e.g., "I sensed a cultural silence"). Ignoring the importance of menarche leaves individuals alone with their fears and feelings and provides no means for their expression. Washbourn (1977) claims that a girl in our culture has two contradictory and psychologically limiting possibilities: she either identifies her new self with her body in its negative or positive aspects, or she tries to ignore the body completely by adopting a business-as-usual attitude toward it. The co-researchers in this study tended to choose one or the other of these options, most commonly the last one (e.g., "I

pretended my period was not there....I was suppose to go serenely through the days without being afraid of fainting").

Perhaps the most tragic part of menarche for a girl in this culture is our failure to facilitate this important life passage. There is no ritual and her "wise wound" is not attended to. We could learn from some of the indiginous cultures who have an innate wisdom concerning the implications of first menstruation. They "recognize" and celebrate the occasion in such a way that the girl is supplied with a symbolic interpretive framework within which to find resources for her questions of meaning. Her identity as a woman can be worked out within the context of the community; her crisis is not a fragmented, solitary struggle (e.g., "I hid the first evidence"). In a mobile society like ours it is difficult to carry on the practices that are transmitted naturally through oral literature and extended families (Nandwa, 1987). Schools have Puberty Units but they do not provide the rich experience of the African grandmothers. As the younger participants in this study pointed out, intellectual knowledge does not constitute emotional support. Even after exposure to the curriculum units Laura still felt like on "alien".

To emerge gracefully from the crisis of menarche, according to Washbourn (1977), a young girl must own both the negative and positive aspects of her body. A girl will be unable to integrate the experience of menstruation unless the family and community provide a context within which the

graceful and demonic elements of the life-crisis may be expressed and her new identity as a woman celebrated. The co-researchers who fainted, hid, became anorexic, or avoided menses showed repressive, denying behavior. We are left with a serious question: Is it possible for a female in this culture to explore the various energies of menarche and integrate them?

Spiritual Recognition

And what of the spiritual dimension? Some indiginous peoples and a few contemporary writers view menstruation, and particularly menarche, as a spiritual time; a time for introspection, aloneness and recontacting inner depths. We know that in some cultures women secluded themselves to take advantage of a "moment of truth" in their bodies (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1978), for during menses the forces of the abyss, the inner world, can become elements of creativity. Neumann (1955) concluded that "monthly segregation was a movement of women into a sacred female precinct which focused around the life giving power of woman" (p. 290). There is a wisdom in stopping once a month to rest and meditate.

Menarche, in particular, has been recognized as a time of spiritual sensitivity. Laing (1976) in describing a pubertal girl who at menses appeared schizophrenic, pointed out that she was by nature descending inwards. There is evidently an "emotional moment" among young Western women that more primitive societies have met with social and religious rituals. These practices teach a woman to enter

deep within herself; this time is for her benefit, her growth, the meaning of her life. According to Laing (1976) the twentieth-century maenad, in searching for an appropriate celebration of the arrival of her new sexual personality, finds there are no liturgies or festivals, only doctors. By neglecting menarche and the rhythm of menstruation we may be neglecting an important spiritual source, one that is of value not only to women but to the world.

Historical-Cultural Recognition

Several of the issues raised in earlier chapters surfaced in the phenomenological analysis.

Sexuality. Western society has been, in recent history, more liberal. Compared to other centuries sexuality, and particularly women's sexuality, is more openly discussed and expressed. In terms of menstruation, schools include the topic in pubertal study units and the media carries a proliferation of ads. Despite the increased exposure the data of this study suggests that menarche is not seen as a natural sexual transition and girls experience an absence of emotional, psychological and professional information and support in this area of their sexuality.

The silence. Menarche is still covered with a pall of silence. In most families the topic was not discussed and the girls chose to hide the initial evidence. Socially and culturally, there seems to be a norm about the unacceptability of this topic; free discussion of menses is

avoided and suppressed. The silence itself carries a message; often it is one of fear and disdain.

Status of women. Women in our society, are experiencing increased equality and status. For all the talk about female acceptance and self-expression it is interesting to note that in the area of menstruation, the participants still found a need to be secretive about the event, ensure it did not interfere with daily life and even denied it as part of their female being. At the present time menarche is sometimes acknowledged but rarely ritualized or celebrated. Is it possible for a woman to have dignity and self-expression when an integral part of her identity is essentially ignored? In some respects the derogatory remarks and jokes about menses suggest that the female body and, therefore, the woman and her abilities are inferior.

Menstrual beliefs and taboo. This culture, like all others, carries certain beliefs about menstruation. Even with our scientific-technological emphasis the co-researchers reported feeling shame, embarrassment, fear and, in some cases, a sense of pollution at menarche. Blood and bodily discharge are equated with uncleanliness. Advertisements subtly underscore the taboo and among peers, although there is a sense of momentousness at menarche, the common feeling is one of restraint. Even with sophisticated rational and medical explanations, this society has a strong, and often negative, emotional reaction to menstruation. Perhaps menses is too much a reminder of the power of blood in life and the limitation of our life-cycle

and ultimate death.

Power and control. Ethnographers (Daly, 1927: Douglas, 1975: Sanday, 1981) often speak about the power and mystery of menstrual blood in terms of magic, fertility, life and death. Mythological and cultural tales account for the polarized expression of feminine energy. In a Celtic tale the hag's blood is a female symbol of deepest wisdom and a knowledge of opposites (Layard, 1975). The Indian goddess, Kali, satisfies herself by the killing of men and animals (Neumann, 1955) while the Virgin Mary is a perpetual symbol of the nurturing mother. Women can always express either pole of the energy and many men fear the unknown side of woman, her dark monthly place (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1978). The same authors conclude that the ferocious, dark behavior is a result of unacknowledged energy, sexuality and frustrated bleeding.

The "facts" are that there is monthly blood, it is associated with the moon and tides, and menses may be a time of low spirits, sudden changes in energy, personality alterations and sexual feeling. There are monthly changes but how are they interpreted? These are womanly matters of great moment and unacknowledged power which are not talked about or commonly described in a society where the chief powers and consciousness are kept by men (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1978). Often the fluctuation is seen as a weakness instead of a sensitive, emotional time of openness that accompanies the flow of blood. It would seem that part of what the participants experienced with the derogatory

remarks, the feelings of inadequacy, secrecy and denial of menses was the need for this society, and men in particular, to keep in control the blood-powers of women. Men may be unconsciously reacting to the fact that the etymological root of the word menstruation means "to rule" (see Introduction).

Further Concerns

Both the literature review and the results of the phenomenological study point to the need for increased research and education in every facet of the menarchal experience.

Education. In terms of education girls in the 1980's said that the technical information in school presentations was helpful but it was not sufficient to allay fears. It did not provide an interpretive framework for a meaningful passage through this major female life experience. A moral question is raised. Who has the main responsibility in preparing girls for menarche? Most studies, including this one, reveal that both family and society provide little or no orientation. It is possible to create teaching units and write literature based on anecdotes, cross-cultural rituals and phenomenological descriptions of the menstrual experience that would address the various aspects of menarche. If this task falls to public education, what values and interpretation does the school system give to the experience?

Research. Considering the magnitude of the event of

menarche in the lives of women and its cultural repercussions there have been surprisingly few studies. In addition, large gaps exist in the body of research: there are very few longitudinal studies and little follow-through to look at the effect of menarche in later life, no study looks at the repercussions for sexual life, there is sparce information about ethnic groups and lower income populations. Neither teachers' nor mothers' reactions to girls' menarche have been pooled and the role of the father and that of the family system remains uninvestigated. Men's attitudes and reactions have rarely been sought. Some studies, those dealing with early and late menarche, have produced opposing results. Most significantly, however, for such a personal and sensitive subject as menarche it seems important to ask girls and teens about their experience. We need a variety of subjective responses from their lived-world. The present study may be the only phenomenological investigation of menarche. The recent work of Doan and Morse (1985) is encouraging. They used some qualitative data (in the form of sentence completion) obtained from pubertal girls to write a handbook on menstruation.

Methodological concerns. Phenomenological researchers hold to the tenet that the general resides in the particular, therefore, sample size can be small. In this study a slightly larger sample may have been valuable. The fact that all the females had to recall their menarchal experience could have resulted in a somewhat processed,

narrative account. Menarche is a multi-dimensional experience, therefore, differential emphasis and forgetfulness may be involved. By the same token, in Natural Science research categorical questions can bias and characterize the nature of the data. Open ended interviews like the ones used in this study provide volumes of data; it is simply not feasible to deal with everything so there are layers and themes which have not been fully explored. Statistical researchers, however, forfeit entire pockets of information and shades of meaning when using graduated scales to classify data. I am aware that interpretation took place as I lifted themes from the data, but I am also aware that statistical researchers put their data into categories. In this study the themes or clusters were not preconceived, they surfaced. The guiding principle was to always have participants speak about the experiences that came to their consciousness.

CONCLUSION

The descriptions given by the co-researchers indicate that in this culture not only is menarche poorly handled and not valued, the reality of the phenomenon is avoided. Although menstruation is now mentioned socially, particularly through the media, a subtle and sophisticated taboo prevails. The younger participants point to the use of wispy images, romanticized language, up-beat clothing and "super" women in advertisements. Menses inhabits the realm of fantasy; anything that may be negative, limiting, uncomfortable or

messy is glossed over. The meaning and reality of menstruation in its totality is denied.

This study contributes to the understanding of menarche by describing the many facets and nuances of the event, thus giving a spectrum and a richness of integration not possible in statistical research. Phenomenology provides a contextual picture; the co-existence of isolation, shame, fear and wonder are concretized. A menstrual behavior such as emotional fluctuation is not seen as a dysfunction but rather as a natural movement in the ebb and flow of a much larger cycle. We are able to sense the innuendoes, the emotional complexity, and the conflicting dimensions of this life event. Silence, embarrassment, sexual descrimination, power and control, pride and feminine identity are intimately connected to menses. Finally, a sense of the experience of menarche emerges from the common themes. The phenomenological perspective provides insight, broadens the base of interpretation and points to our need to address menarchal study and women's issues from a more holistic framework.

At the conclusion of this study my deepest concerns revolve around the lack of preparation, the still-present taboo, and the attitudes of the society which face the menarchal girl. In future study of the subject let it be hoped that we will come to acknowledge the inherent value of this mystery-experience and its place in the lives of both women and men. More specifically, can we move toward a more sensitive and comprehensive understanding of menarche so

that it will be a meaningful life-passage for young women?

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APPENDIX A

Verbatim Interview: Danielle

Orientation and Preparation

Foreknowledge

-knew what "period" was beforehand

-Grade five presentation: types of tampons

-I was 11 and had it already; others said they were not going to have it for a few years yet and I thought "Oh yeah".

-Mom was not the type to sit down and tell me about it, I learned mostly by watching t.v.

-I knew from commercials what it was like and knew I would not think I was dying because I was bleeding.

-Mom and older sister had supplies, each had her own and I could pick.

-Not really talked about except in commercials; we only knew it happens and when and what to use. Nobody told me exactly what happens. I don't feel I know enough.

-The school nurse told us about tampons, pads. That was the presentation, hygiene; I only remember the products.

-I would like to have known more about side-effects and cramps. I didn't know.

Feelings and attitude

-I was embarrassed to tell I already had it. I was shy.

-friends didn't have it and made having a period sound like a joke.

-jokes and teasing about type of tampons; too thick, too thin.

Experience of Menarche

Initial experience

-saw blood, knew I had to get something.

-got my own supply, afraid thin kind would not protect me so used thick kind.

-period was a lot heavier at first, changed pad more

often; just keep myself clean, have sanitary supplies.

-I thought 11 years old was rather young.

-I didn't like to tell people because I was really embarrassed.

-it was not something I wanted to tell the media.

-I didn't say anything because I thought they would laugh and make fun of me.

-I felt like I was wearing a little diaper; it was kind of uncomfortable.

-It was kind of a pain to have it every month, to have to know what day and be prepared. The embarrassment was a big thing. It was not the "in" thing.

-getting my period early made me kind of mad. Why me and not my friends?

-mother nature picked on me awful early. Inside I said, "Hey, I have it, I'm well acquainted with it".

-It is a pain to check if you have it or not, then you might not have any supplies. What do you do if you are wearing white pants at work or school?

-I was glad when they invented WINGS brand, then you just drop them around your panties and fly away. It is about time someone invented something like that. It is practical and safer and better to have an extra layer. It keeps your skirt and clothes clean. Good idea.

-I felt dirty when I had my period and the blood was coming out.

-the boys seem to have a joke about it; I felt like saying "you guys try having a period and see how you like it".

-It also made me feel more responsible. It was a neat experience to feel older. It was kind of scary at age 11, I didn't want a lot of responsibility but I was glad I started menstruating so I would not have to worry about getting it. It took away the anxiety.

-when friends started to get their period we used a code name "Santa Claus". It was a secret thing if we were needing anything, so everyone would not know.

-I'd get cramps the first few years and they were painful. I would bend over in pain and I wanted to get rid of the whole thing and throw it in the garbage. I had no choice but to keep it.

-I would get so sick I'd have to go to the nurse's room. It was so sore that I could not sit down so I had to use Midol to help control the pain.

-I was relieved after I found out my friends started. I felt a lot more experienced. I felt like saying "Hey I got it, I'm well acquainted with it".

-Later because I had started early I felt I could talk about it and sometimes I felt I was older because I had it and they did not.

-We (girls) don't need to be reminded its our time of the month, we'd rather forget.

-guys don't know what it is like to go through, they have it easy. They don't get pregnant or anything.

Culture

Environment

-not the "in" thing.

-guys like to say things and make jokes about maxi-pads.

-the boys made us feel uncomfortable and embarrassed and bugged us. We got mad and they stopped.

-at 12 or 13 you are embarrassed and don't want to hear that it is your time of the month.

-it is worse when a guy knows than when a girl knows.

-guys don't know what it is like to go through; they have it easy, they don't get pregnant or anything.

-people don't really want to hear about girls having a period. It isn't dinner conversation. It is something you keep to yourself; you don't tell a lot of people about it because it is not something they want to hear.

-you keep it to yourself or only tell your best friend.

-It seems it is not a big accepted thing in Alberta or Canada.

-people watching commercials react by saying "what a dumb commercial".

-On the news you hear about murders, robbers but not something like "Shirley Temple had her first period today". It is not a big concern for people.

-Maybe people don't know enough to talk about it, people don't like to know about it. Maybe they think others faint.

at the sight of blood. It is not a pretty sight.

-It is not really talked about except in commercials. Maybe they don't know it or it is too embarrassing.

-Today something like Aids gets publicity but nobody talks about menstruation. Why? It is there, everything else gets talked about. It really makes you wonder what is wrong with it.

-Menstruation is not a disease or anything. Maybe they feel its just a thing you have once a month and you will have a long time, it is under control, there are things to help with it. People can handle it, it is their problem. Here are your tampons, so be it!

-We talk about Aids, Diabetes or Cancer. It makes me wonder why we don't talk about menstruation.

-If we have a period and guys don't, why can't we have more information to help us?

-the school nurse told us about tampons and pads, that was the presentation. I only remember the products.

Media

-from commercials I knew what it was like and I knew I would not die.

-In commercials you always only see women involved, teens don't seem to have it, you don't have to tell them.

-Maybe I felt I was more a woman than a little kid; this was the first step into womanhood.

-everything was based around women.

Professional

-It wouldn't hurt to have a doctor tell you what you can do for pain and discomfort. Information should come from an authority who knows and has experience about the body.

The Body

-I felt really dirty when I had my period and the blood was coming out. There was so much blood, it felt like it was everywhere.

-It was really uncomfortable for me. I felt better when I had a bath or shower every day.

-It was dirty, not dry with a lot of moisture. It felt like when a baby has to go to the washroom in a diaper.

-it was uncomfortable and annoying; I felt dirty when I was wet. As long as my body was clean I was fine. I felt better if I was extra clean and I would doubly check during my period.

-I felt like I was fatter than at any other time; it felt gross, I don't know why but it did.

Relationships

-boys made us feel uncomfortable and embarrassed.

-It was worse when a guy knew than when a girl knew.

-It was a good test of friendship; if you told them they would either understand or make fun.

-I didn't tell anyone, I was shy. I knew it was my body and my decision to tell or not.

-Sometimes I felt I was older because I had it and the others didn't.

-It was kind of neat, I felt I could sort of be boss in a sense. Some of the others seemed immature.

-It made me feel I was more a woman than a little kid.

-I always felt like I was more mature than others; this made me more so.

-Having my period finally made me feel that maybe I would be more accepted, more an important person.

-I was a consumer now, buying supplies.

-It was a big step having blood after not having it. When I first had it, there was something new and it was a novelty.

Self-Concept

-It made me feel dirty all the time, that was my biggest problem.

-I felt that this was the first big step into womanhood (there was only one commercial with teens). They based everything around women.

-I was capable of doing something I could not do before, including getting pregnant.

-I felt older, it was nice.

-It made me feel more responsible, more capable of doing what I wanted to do.

-I felt like I could conquer all, that is, set a goal and accomplish it.

-It was a neat experience to feel older, yet kind of scary at 11. I didn't want a lot of responsibility.

-It made me feel good about myself, happy.

-I was glad I didn't have to worry about getting my period. It took away the anxiety.

APPENDIX B

Study Description to Research Participants

I am a Masters student in the counselling program at the University of Alberta, Department of Educational Psychology. For my thesis I am doing a descriptive study of Menarche, women's first experience of menstruation. I plan to interview a number of women from different age groups.

I hope to interview you to increase my understanding of your experience of menarche. Part of my interest stems from the fact that very little information or research exists in this area. I plan to compare and incorporate your experience with the experience of other women.

Participation in the study will involve one to three interviews, the heart of which will be the description of your experience of menarche in as explicit a form as possible. It is important to know that there are no right or wrong responses, I simply wish to learn of your experience. An interview may be about two hours and will be audio-taped if you are willing. There may be second and third interviews to examine and verify my understanding of your experience.

All information will be kept confidential. I will ask you to make up a name which will be used on all your material and in my thesis. I will be the only person who will know your real name and I will not use any information in my thesis which could identify you. I will also erase any

tapes after transcribing them.

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your agreement to be interviewed will be seen as your consent to participate. Therefore, a signed consent will not be necessary. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all information about you will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss anything with me, please feel free to contact me at my home number 468-2916.

Judy Weisgarber

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