

ONE

Introduction

MENSTRUATION IS . . .

KASSIE (age 16): “Makes us stronger, in ways, I guess, like [we] deal with pain better than a lot of people, a lot of guys.”

BRIAN (14): “When girls get really mean and they bleed everywhere.”

JANE (14): “Something to make guys miserable . . . cause they have to put up with the whole PMS and all that.”

ALLY (17): “It’s messy, and it’s gross, and I don’t want to have to deal with it. . . . You have to deal with stupid boys and physics class and algebra 2 and I don’t want more things to deal with.”

From these quotes of mostly white, middle- and working-class teenagers today, we can see that the experience of menstruation, far from being private and secretive, is embedded in social relations. In this book, we will explore the social aspects of menstruation and the body and how adolescent girls today can use their bodies as sources of power in their social interactions with others.

I spent several hours a week volunteering at a local girls club in southern Indiana in the late-1990s. During this time, I was involved in a drug abuse prevention program for the teen girls in the club. One day, our topic of discussion was over-the-counter drugs and how they too can be abused. The girls said that, at school, kids take painkillers such as aspirin and ibuprofen even though the school nurse is supposed to administer all drugs. Students are not even allowed to have them in their bags or lockers. The girls understood the safety concerns behind this policy. However, during this discussion, Sierra, a tall, confident, 13-year-old working-class Black girl, talked openly about subverting school policy by getting some ibuprofen from a friend to soothe her

All respondent names used in this book are pseudonyms.

menstrual cramps. This in itself was not remarkable. What was unusual was how Sierra referred to her menstrual status. She clearly, loudly, and without hesitating a beat said, "When I became a woman" and continued clearly, loudly, and surely with the rest of her story. None of the other girls in the group seemed to notice or be surprised at either her "coming out" about her menstrual status or her choice of words. I, however, was floored. "What?" I thought, "Who in this day and age uses the phrase, 'when I became a woman' to refer to getting her first period?" Even more interesting, at age thirteen, Sierra was remarkably comfortable talking about her growing body and her period in front of the whole group of girls and adult women! Wasn't she embarrassed? Weren't the other girls embarrassed?

I immediately began describing this incident to my adult friends, who, like me, were in their late twenties and early thirties. They thought it was unusual as I did. When we were in our teens, we were highly embarrassed by menstruation, sensitive about our bodies, and would never have discussed menstruation in such a public setting. Sierra brought menstruation easily and seamlessly into public social interaction and the other girls her age were not fazed. This comment indicated several things. Sierra is comfortable with menstruation. Sierra is comfortable with talking about her own menstruation in public. Because of this comfort, Sierra does not see menstruation as a negative thing to hide or as a source of powerlessness and shame. This is social power! Sierra does not submit to dominant cultural norms in the United States, which demand that menstruation be concealed from the public. She has a power over menstruation, her body, and the dominant menstrual discourse.

This led me to an intriguing set of questions about how girls can wield power in their social interactions with others. Are they using their female bodies as a source of pride, rather than shame? Are female bodies not seen as weaker or less powerful as they have been in the past? How do girls interpret and talk about menstruation? If menstruation is now out in the open, then it must enter into cross-gender interactions as well. How do boys interpret and talk about menstruation? Do girls talk about menstruation with boys?

In exploring the body and how teens feel about the body, many writers have examined girls' body images, weight concerns, sexuality, and self-esteem. What is missing are how girls might *use* their bodies in their social interactions, how the body might be a resource for power, and how boys might respond to this power. Studying adolescents' menstrual talk and experiences can shed light on these complex power issues. While menstruation may restrict girls' activities because it can be shameful, bewildering, and disempowering, girls might also use menstruation as a source of power.

Searches of academic research and popular literature turned up material on the cultural history of menstruation, girls' and women's individual attitudes towards menstruation, and a small alternative literature on celebrating menstruation, puberty, and womanhood.¹ Most of this research suggests that

girls and women think that menstruation is gross, messy, shameful, and a negative and frustrating experience overall. Previous work has also demonstrated that boys have more power when it comes to body issues such as sexuality and appearance norms.

But menstruation is something that is unique to girls, something that boys do not have personal experience with. How does this special experience play out in cross-gender social interactions? When menstruation is out in the open, is it used as a source of power in social interactions? Are girls still teased about it or do girls turn the tables and tease boys about it?

As a sociologist trained in social psychology, I am interested in issues of social power, the body in interaction, language use, and adolescent peer culture. I conducted this study because I wanted to learn about how this aspect of the body, menstruation, is experienced socially in teens' everyday lives. As power is an underlying aspect of all social relationships, my research questions were fundamentally about power and how girls and boys can use their bodies and menstruation as sources of power in their social interactions.

SALIENT BODY EXPERIENCES

In Judy Blume's widely read book *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970), one of 12-year-old Margaret's major complications in life is her much anticipated menstrual period. She quietly shares this eagerness with her friends, her mom, her grandma, and in her diary in the form of letters to God. When I talk about my research, invariably at least one adult listener will mention this book. Why has this book been a best seller since its 1970 publication?² Why do many of us think of it when we recall adolescence and puberty? Because menstruation is one of the most salient pubertal transitions in adolescence. Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, at a time when menstruation was not discussed openly among adolescents, this book helped us understand what menstruation and puberty are all about.

In junior high and high school, and even in late elementary school, girls' bodies are transformed into women's bodies. For a brief time, menstruation is new and has a great impact on girls' lives. For a brief time, menstruation is salient. By adulthood, women's and men's management of menstruation has become routine. Thus, adults think that menstruation is not relevant to social life because it is not relevant to *adult* social life. However, in order to understand *adolescent* life, we must understand adolescent bodies, and menstruation is a salient experience to them. Adolescent bodies are changing and growing as they make the transition from pre to postpubertal forms. The body and the body's experiences shape human experience and human experience in turn shapes the body. Social researchers have a lot to learn about how our experiences of our bodies are transformed over the life course, especially in adolescence.

Interestingly, key to Margaret's journey through puberty is how and what she learns about menstruation from those peers and adults around her. Even as they are secretive about it, menstruation still enters into their social lives and thus, into their power relations. Today's teens, as I explore, have gone far beyond these tentative social steps.

Menstruation is often seen by dominant adult culture as an individual "woman's issue," not legitimate for sociological study or even appropriate for everyday conversation. Lots of research in girls' studies and women's studies has explored body image, self-esteem, eating disorders, appearance, exercise, and even issues of hair, body modification, and cosmetic surgery. But not menstruation. It is odd that such an integral and routine event in women's lives, which has significant implications for women's health and well-being over the life course, not to mention the salience it holds in adolescence, has generally been ignored in social research. Even though the general public tends to be uncomfortable with the topic of menstruation, researchers are trained to seek out and understand such public squeamishness; but researchers have not yet examined menstruation as relevant to social life or social science. Yet, *all* women, if they menstruate or not, manage menstruation in one form or another. Women who menstruate do so for approximately half of their lives. *All* men who have any interaction with women manage menstruation in one form or another.

Social researchers, including feminists, have a lot to gain from focusing on "essential" or "medicalized" properties of women's bodies. We are not talking heads, but we are all *embodied* actors, as the condition and form of our body affects our interactions. The body is a variable in social interaction. For example, having a cold can make us irritable and grumpy, being in shape can compel us to start up a neighborhood pickup basketball game, and having frozen toes at an outdoor football game can force us to retreat to a heated home before the game is over. Socially, we interact differently with elderly bodies or pregnant bodies or bodies belonging to those of a different race, ethnicity, dis/ability, or gender.

By learning about how adolescents experience their bodies and menstruation socially, we can learn about broader aspects of their everyday lives. We can learn about the shifting power in their gendered interactions, the resources from which girls and boys draw power, the ways in which they construct their social worlds, and the ways in which they define each other as gendered beings. Also, how do menstrual interpretations and menstrual talk affect other aspects of teens' lives, such as body politics, the gender order, and health? Rather than focusing only on the hygienic aspects of menstruation, we need to focus on the wide spectrum of experiences and interpretations of menstruation. Many of these connections have been suggested in various popular literatures³ or suggested, but not empirically explored, in some social research work.⁴ Using the example, or case study, of menstruation, this book is about the body and how the body enters the power relations of social life.

By exploring what goes on in teens' own peer groups and in teens' own thoughts through group and individual interviews, we can learn how teens see and experience the world. Menstruation is more relevant to teens' lives than even I thought initially. Through understanding their experiences with menstruation, we can learn about teens' peer interactions and power relations. We can learn what it means to be a girl or a boy at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We can learn how teens seek to assert control in their lives. We can understand how teens talk about the body. On a concrete level, this learning can help parents, community organizers, educators, and policy makers develop strategies to promote safer health and sexual practices, strategies that can take into account teens' own significant knowledge, experience, and agency. These strategies originate in teens' own language and their own culture. This book is based on the premise that academic research can and should be socially relevant and politically responsible.

To explore these questions, we have to ask the teens themselves. We have to learn what they are saying in their own words, with their own friends, and in their own social contexts. Instead of focusing on adult experiences or adult memories and reflections on menstruating in adolescence or at menarche, as much research has done, I will examine adolescents' current experiences.⁵ Children, particularly girls, are an "outsider group" in our society, as they have substantially less power than adults do.⁶ I follow the "new sociology of childhood," which seeks to uncover agency in children's lives and defines children as competent social actors. Children are not just adults-in-the-making, but have their own unique cultures. Childhood, including adolescence, is a permanent structural feature of society⁷ that is intersected by adult-based institutions such as education, work, media, and family.⁸ In recent years, childhood researchers have focused on children's own experiences rather than only on these larger institutions. In this research, I explore teens' collective, as well as individual, interpretations and discussions of menstruation. I explore how teens learn from each other in their peer groups.

What about boys' attitudes towards and experiences with menstruation? We know very little about how menstruation enters boys' lives beyond its relationship to sexuality.⁹ In the interviews, I explore not only how the girls bring menstruation into their social lives, but also how the boys talk about menstruation. We will learn that, rather than being silent, these boys have a lot to say about menstruation and how it affects their relations and power interactions with girls.

As I explore teen menstrual talk, I follow the sociological approach of symbolic interactionism, which contends that people form their realities, beliefs, and interpretations through interaction with others.¹⁰ Thus, an event itself cannot determine how people will understand the event. Instead, there are multiple potential meanings of that event and people assign significance to select meanings through social interaction and social

experience. In short, in order to understand and interpret our world, we talk about it with others. Thus, through teens' social interaction and talk, they learn about, assign meaning to, and develop unique interpretations of menstruation and the body. In other words, our understanding of menstruation is socially constructed.

Following this thinking, William Corsaro (1997) developed the "interpretive reproduction" theoretical approach as a way to understand children's unique cultures. This theory was primarily developed as a response to socialization models (which concentrate on how children are socialized by adults, media, peers, and surroundings), which Corsaro sees as too individualistic and too focused on children as adults-to-be, rather than as an important focus of study in their own right. Central to Corsaro's theory is the importance of collective, collaborative, and communal activities in which children negotiate, create, and share cultures with each other and with adults. This theory is *interpretive* in that children actively interpret their worlds and adult information in creative and innovative ways. The theory is *reproductive* in that children are not viewed simply as the passive recipients of adult socialization and culture, but as actively producing and reproducing their own cultures through their negotiations with adults and with each other.

Fundamental to all social interaction is power. Power is both the ability to influence behavior and the capacity to use resources to achieve desired ends. For example, the teens use power to influence others' views, to control conversation, and to increase their social statuses. Teens use resources such as social status, their bodies, and their knowledge to achieve their interactional goals. I follow Michel Foucault's (1977) view of power as fluid in interaction, in contrast to the idea of one group or gender always having power and control over another. Power is indirect social control exercised over others in social interaction. Power is a process that people continually negotiate through relationships and language.¹¹ Power is a fundamental aspect of all social interaction and we can understand the processes and effects of power by studying social interaction.¹² Throughout the teens' narratives, we will see how girls and boys use menstruation and the body as power resources and how menstruation and the body affect girls' and boys' power negotiations.

In this book, I connect the related approaches of the sociology of childhood (childhood studies and the new developments in "girls' studies"), embodiment, and gender. While there is a large body of research that explores childhood in terms of gender, far less research has explored childhood and the body.¹³ Children's bodies are constantly shifting and changing through growth and puberty. I strive to empirically and theoretically envision an embodied childhood as it is continually subject to power negotiations. Just as embodiment theorists argue that women and men are all embodied social actors, so too are children embodied social actors. In my research, I explore how important the body is in teens' experiences and social lives.

THE TEEN PARTICIPANTS

In this book, we will explore adolescent talk on menstruation and the body through an analysis of group and individual interviews with mostly white, high school age girls and boys living in southern and central Indiana. Although observational methods can access teens' "naturally occurring" talk, conducting an in-depth ethnography of adolescent everyday talk is not feasible given the relative sparseness of menstrual-related talk in everyday conversations that are readily witnessed by researchers. Published ethnographies note that menstruation issues come up in teens' talk; however, the occurrence of such talk, albeit important, is relatively infrequent.¹⁴ Interview-based research can access issues that are highly salient to children and adolescents' lives, yet are not frequently talked about informally in settings accessible to researchers.¹⁵

Doing individual interviews allowed me to investigate each teen's own understanding of and experiences with menstruation. Following feminist research models, I was able to learn about their worlds listening to their own words and their own language.¹⁶ It is vital to understand their individual histories in order to more effectively interpret the collective and collaborative discussions in which the adolescents engage with their peer groups.¹⁷

Group interviews grow directly out of peer culture where teens hang out and develop their views in collaboration with their friends. Many of the adolescent beliefs about life including the body and menstruation are culturally based and transmitted through social discourse. Adolescents learn and form opinions about the mechanics and experience of menstruation from each other through talk, storytelling, and jokes. In group talk, participants bring their own views, their own experiences, and their own understandings of the social phenomena under investigation to the interaction. In group interviews, teens build upon each other's talk and discuss a wider range of experiences and opinions than may develop in individual interviews. For example, one person tells a story that reminds another of a story and so on. As Mayall notes, participants can "follow on each other's leads, pick up points and confirm, comment or move on" (2000:123). Also, it is through talk that researchers can explore how power is displayed. Talk is a resource all people use for communicating power dynamics.

Importantly, the individual and group interviews were with both girls and boys. Teens live in a mixed-gender world and their bodies enter into their interactions with those of the other sex to a significant extent. In order to understand gender, we must include both girls and boys in our research. We cannot depend only on what girls say about boys; we have to ask boys themselves. In my interviews, for example, the girls made many claims about how boys respond when girls bring up menstruation. Although this is important in understanding the girls' own interpretations of the boys, the strength of interviewing boys is also that we can hear from the boys themselves how they respond. We can get both sides of the gender power plays.

I recruited the research participants from several ongoing teen groups in central and southern Indiana, including community groups, girls' clubs, boys' clubs, and teen councils. By drawing from existing groups, the teens in each group interview knew each other and had a shared history of experiences. Thus, the collective talk in the interviews was easier to generate and more "natural." We conducted the individual and group interviews with each group over one or two days. Sometimes these days were one or two weeks apart. The teens' opinions about menstruation (and most everything else) are constantly shifting, and these interviews reflect their feelings on those particular days of interviewing. We conducted the interviews in the first four months of the year 2000. The girls and boys completed both individual and group interviews. We first discussed how teens feel about their bodies, weight, strength, and athleticism. Then we explored how they feel about menstruation, what they know about menstruation, and their experiences with menstruation.

Twenty-six girls participated in this research in seven group interviews and twenty-three individual interviews. Eleven boys participated in two group interviews and eleven individual interviews. The size of the group interviews ranged from two to nine participants. The teens ranged from age 13 to 19. The teens were all in high school at the time of the interviews except two girls who had dropped out that year, their senior year. I wanted to focus on high school age adolescents because, while they have had experiences with menstruation, they are still learning how to deal with it in their daily lives. Menstruation is still somewhat new for them, but they are comfortable enough with it to discuss it. The different girls' groups were fairly homogenous by age and the boys' had a larger in-group variation. Even with the relatively wide age range (of 13 through 19), the older and younger research participants did not differ remarkably in their interpretations of menstruation and the body.

As the teens themselves acknowledge in the interviews, differences in interpretation would abound if we were to compare high school menstrual talk with that of middle school menstrual talk, when menarche¹⁸ is so new and recent. Leslie, in her individual interview, said that her attitude about menstruation has definitely changed since she first started her period: "I'm more open about it, like, in there. Like, if I was in sixth grade and you would have come in [to her group] none of us would have said anything." The teens in our interviews, especially the girls, were amazingly forthcoming and comfortable with the talk about menstruation.

For example, at the end of the individual interviews, we interviewers would say that we were done with the questions and would ask the teens if they had any other comments about menstruation or anything else they wanted to say about it. Two of the girls in particular had a lot more to say about their own menstrual experiences. Sylvia took the opportunity to tell me how she experiences her own menstrual cycle. Jennifer ended up telling

stories about when her period started, her nightmares about her periods, the experience of her period, her exercising, and even a story she read about an African girl getting her period. These added comments comprised over one-quarter of her entire individual interview. In one of the girls' group interviews, as well, the girls took the opportunity to talk about their own periods and their experiences after my questions were over. Overall, almost all of the girls were very forthcoming and comfortable talking about their menstrual experiences. Even the boys were generally very forthcoming, as I will show in this book. Although most had no questions or comments at the end of the interview, one group of boys launched into an extended sequence about why menstruants crave certain foods, like chocolate.

To compare, my friend's daughter, who just reached menarche at age ten, would not tell any of her close friends about it until she knew that they too had gotten their periods. She did not want to stand out or be different (although, someone has to be the first to admit menarche). As many women readers of this book will understand, this girl also spent a good deal of time checking her backside in the mirror to be sure the "giant" pad did not show through her pants. Another friend's daughter, who also got her period at age ten, was convinced her male classroom teacher knew she had gotten her first period because she needed to use the bathroom more often and she brought her purse. Every time she needed to use the restroom, she worried that her teacher would be looking at her knowingly. Once adolescents have reached high school, their interactions around menstruation have somewhat stabilized because menarche is in the past.

My sample is nonrandom and from a specific community in Indiana. All but three of the teens were white. One girl and one boy were biracial (white and Black) and one girl was a Korean immigrant. (Sierra, mentioned earlier, was not in my sample.) The girls' groups were exclusively either working or middle class and the boys' groups had some crossover, although most participants in each group were one socioeconomic class or the other. Appendix A provides a detailed list of the participants with their ages, grades, and social classes. The teens lived in homes representing a wide variety of family structures including two parent, single parent, biological parent, stepparent, and grandparent. The teens had brothers, sisters, step-siblings, and some were only children.

These teens come from a midwestern culture that other teens in the United States may not share. The way these teens speak of menstruation and their bodies might seem conservative or liberal to other teens. At the same time, from my experience I believe that these teens represent most teens from "middle America," a group from the "heartland," which plays a dominant role in U.S. identity and culture. Regardless, the goal of qualitative research such as this is not to generalize to the rest of the population, but rather to explore the theory, or explanations, of the data, and to think about how these explanations

extend to other populations, other circumstances, and other contexts for social interaction. As such, the overall goal in this book is not to focus on these particular teens' experiences with menstruation, but rather on what these experiences can say about gender, power, and embodiment.

All interviews were audio-recorded, and during the group interviews I also ran a video recorder (to make transcription of the group interviews easier). I conducted all of the girls' individual and group interviews, and I hired a male research assistant, Paul Namaste Ruggerio, to conduct the boys' individual and group interviews. Paul's help was invaluable, as he was able to connect with the boys on the issues of body and menstruation in a way that I, as a female, never could. Other female researchers have interviewed both boys and girls on issues of the body, sexuality, and puberty, but I believe that the conversations the boys had with Paul were much more reflective of their "natural" talk than they would have been had I been the one conducting the interviews. (Appendix B provides more detail on the interview guides used). For more detail on methods of individual and group interviewing as used in this project, please see Fingerson (2005b).

THE INTERVIEWERS

In any social interaction, the participants involved negotiate and develop their interpretations of that interaction and respond accordingly. In interviews, the participants are not only the teen respondents, but also Paul and I, as we also contribute to creating the conversation.¹⁹ It is thus important to examine our own roles in the research. First, interviewers, as with most researchers, have more power than the respondents because researchers control the conditions and topics of the interaction. They also control the interpretation and distribution of the research findings. Although group interviews help reduce power differences between adult researchers and child respondents because of the high child-adult ratio, the interviewer still has the power of an adult.²⁰ Second, the researcher's own preconceptions and prejudices can influence the interview. Thinking reflexively about this research, it is important to recognize that Paul's and my self-presentations and backgrounds influence the data.

I am a tall, white woman who at the time was 25 years old, average weight and not particularly athletic, although I lettered in varsity sports in high school and played intramural sports in graduate school. During the months of interviewing, I began a fitness program of healthy eating and exercise. This made me acutely aware of and sensitive to not only my own body, but also to the girls' bodies and their attitudes towards their bodies in our discussions of weight and athleticism. I was born to and raised by professional parents in the Minneapolis-St. Paul suburbs. My undergraduate degree in Sociology and Anthropology is from the University of Minnesota. I am

straight, married, and my wedding rings were visible on my hands. The teen participants knew I was in graduate school in Sociology at Indiana University and that this project was for my Ph.D. dissertation. They knew that my hope was to turn the data collected into a book that they could some day read. I felt I connected well with the girls because I was able to relate to them on several levels, such as dating, relationships with friends, and dealing with parents, not just as a fellow menstruating woman who has issues with her body. My previous work as a girls' club volunteer and a summer camp counselor allowed me to easily enter into their way of talking.

At the time, Paul Namaste Ruggerio was a second year graduate student. I selected Paul as my research assistant because of his extensive experience with youth, his rapport with teens, his interest in education, and his enthusiasm for this particular project and life in general. He was also involved in research on women's experiences of infertility so I knew he was familiar with issues of the body. Paul is also very "cool" according to the teens that he regularly works with. He is young (age 31 at the time of the interviews), white, slightly balding, and has a Van Dyke (facial hair). He describes himself as heterosexual, of average male height, and has an athletic build with a bit extra around the middle. He is from the Boston area and participated in varsity sports in both high school and college. In addition, he is very comfortable with his body. Paul connected with the boys on many different levels, which significantly increased his rapport with them. For example, the boys would mention their hobbies or outside interests, such as the Boy Scouts, drama, fencing, and baseball, and Paul was able to share some of his own experiences in those areas.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The interview data, both audio and video-recorded, were transcribed in full. Each utterance in the interviews was transcribed, including fillers such as "uh," "like," "you know," and "mm." Following DeVault (1999), it is important to include the "inelegant" features in these adolescents' talk rather than editing out seemingly extraneous words. Rather than being unnecessary, as some researchers have argued, these words highlight the structure and distinctiveness of adolescent talk about the body and menstruation. In addition, such fillers can indicate uncertainty and/or discomfort with a particular topic.

My thematic analysis followed a grounded theory approach using constant comparison. I read and reread the transcripts many times and marked passages that followed themes and patterns. These themes and patterns developed from the data themselves (such as the theme of agency) or they came from previous literature (such as the theme of negative attitudes towards menstruation). At each rereading, I would go back and find more

examples of themes, shift some of the thematic categories, or rethink some themes entirely. It was a constant, and exciting, process of illumination and exploration.

Sociolinguistics is the study of language structure and use. Not only was I interested in what the teens were saying about menstruation, but also *how* they were saying it. In particular, sociolinguistics explores language within its social and cultural context and as it is embedded in larger discourse. It views language as a social resource and examines language in its larger social context. With my data, for example, in using sociolinguistic analyses I find that adolescents use language in their talk as a way of providing several types of feedback to their peers such as support, contradiction, and humor.

Sociolinguistics is also interested in how social-cultural competence and evaluative orientations are achieved through talk.²¹ I examine how the teens collectively and collaboratively construct the body and menstruation through their talk and use this talk as resources of power. Through sociolinguistic analysis, we can explore what the adolescent talk represents, such as how it fits into gendered power relations, structures of resistance, and concepts of agency. By using sociolinguistic methods, we can understand the structure of the collaborative talk in the group interviews on a more general level beyond the specific issue of menstruation. Older children have been neglected in the study of sociolinguistics,²² as the focus has traditionally been on infants and young children and their language acquisition and early use.²³ Sociolinguistic analyses of group talk are peppered throughout this book.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The central issues that came up again and again in the interviews were first, how teen girls and boys exert power in their social interactions, and second, how teens' social experiences are embodied. These two theoretical threads, gendered power and embodiment, weave throughout the interviews and analysis in this book.

In chapter 2, I start out with interview data on how the girls and boys show both negative and ambivalent interpretations and experiences of menstruation. Girls do a lot of management work to conceal and hide menstruation, are very concerned about leaking, worry about boys finding out about their periods, and are often uncomfortable with tampons. On the surface, girls and boys take certain aspects of larger cultural views on menstruation and integrate them into their own culture and their own social experiences. In chapter 3, I explore the cultural contexts in which teens learn about menstruation. I first look at historical advice books written for girls and their parents. These books encourage concealment, worries about hygiene, taboos, and a feeling of powerless due to their medicalization of the female body. Then, I explore the roles of schools, family, and media in influencing the teens' men-

strual constructions. In chapter 4, I delve into issues of medicalization, gender politics, and the female body and how power is a component of gendered interaction on the body. Based on these dominant norms of menstruation, gender, and the female body, we would expect a reduction of power that girls experience in their interactions, as we will see in these first chapters.

However, as I explore in chapter 5, I find that at the same time, girls use menstruation as a source of power in their social interactions with each other and with boys and men. Menstruation can be a source of power because it is unique to girls and because, among today's teens, it has turned into a social event, rather than a secretive event. The girls are truly living in an embodied social world as they use their bodies as a tool in their social interactions. In chapter 6, I turn to how boys respond to this increased power. From dominant gender norms and their own past experiences, boys are used to having more power in social interactions with girls. When confronted with reduced power, because they do not personally experience menstruation, the boys develop and use several strategies to deal with this reduced power. In chapter 7, I conclude by discussing the common threads of gender, power, and embodiment that interweave the interviews, reflecting on the methods of inquiry I used and furthering our theoretical and analytical thinking on an embodied understanding of social life.