



Negative Context, Positive Diagnosis: Women's Experiences of Menstrual Disorder

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The Question

How do women experience abnormal uterine bleeding?

Abnormal uterine bleeding (AUB) is a general term describing menstrual periods that are longer or heavier than normal.



Answering the Question

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:

Women who: were over 20, considered having a hysterectomy for abnormal uterine bleeding since 2000, underwent treatment in the HRM and speak English

Recruitment: advertisements/snowball

Data collection: 9 semi-structured qualitative interviews



The Participants

Age: 24-57

Average age: 43

8 out of 9 had at least some university education

4 out of 9 are low income (as defined by 2005 LICO)

8 out of 9 were diagnosed with a menstrual disorder



The Symptoms and Effects of AUB

“Yes, it was that insane – this chronic insane pain that just breaks your bones. I felt as if every time I had my period, I thought as if my bones had been removed from my whole system. I would be fainting. I would be completely miserable. Miserable, miserable. I don’t even know if miserable really describes the pain I was basically suffering from.”



Negative Context: Confusion, Shame, Silence

“My body going wrong [not an illness]. Just me. Just my body going wrong. And not knowing quite what to do about it. And making excuses month after month, thinking, ‘Oh well, that was a rough month. Probably next month it will be better’.”

“I still felt at the beginning, and again maybe it was because I was younger and less experienced, but I still felt it was my scary, ugly problem, and nothing I wanted to share with girl friends at that point.”



Positive Diagnosis

Finding a Voice and Reaching out for Support

“Well, no [I didn’t ask for support], because at that point [before diagnosis], it just seemed--- I mean I just figured that was a normal period for me. Only after I got the diagnosis of endometriosis did I feel like there was anything different going on that I could possibly get help with.”



Positive Diagnosis

Taking Control and Seeking Treatment

“The doctor doesn’t live inside me. I live inside my skin. Why should the doctor control the knowledge that pertains to me? I have to be the controller of that knowledge. While the doctor has the certificates and everything, guess what, he is also as human as I am.”

Complicating Medicalization





What does this tell us?

Social stigma contributes to situations in which women's illness experiences are initially legitimized by the health care system

While this was empowering for the women in this study, there are reasons to be concerned




What Can I Do?

Ask yourself:

How can I better recognize these complexities in my work?

How do I contribute to, promote or reinforce stigma and taboos in my life? My work?

How do I privilege the health care system and oppress women's voices in my life? My work?



“I think women shouldn’t be afraid to talk about how their cycle is. It’s such a big part of us. I mean it’s something that... if someone is experiencing something, that they should not be afraid to talk about that with their friends. I think if I had been talking to other friends outside of my family, that I probably would have known that this was maybe a little more unnatural. So I think that women should not be afraid to talk and explore with other women.”



THANK YOU QUESTIONS?

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