

The Abject in Education

Abstract:

This paper will explore Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and its manifestations in society, culture and discourse. It will make specific reference to the effects of social abjection on women with regards to menstruation, but the claims and proposal could very well be adapted to apply to other marginalised members of society. It will use Hillel A. Schiller's suggestion for viewing education as a 'cognitive process' to frame the discussion on embedding discussions of the abject into the curriculum. It will firstly explore and set the foundations for the theory of abjection, as described by Kristeva and explore the 'cognitive process' in relation to social abjection. Finally, it will suggest that an appreciation of an aesthetic educational experience could be viewed as a step towards lessening the effects of social abjection and work towards its reconfiguration.

The Abject in Education

*Sue felt welling disgust as the first dark drops of menstrual blood struck the tile in dime-sized drops. 'For God's sake Carrie, you got your period!' Sue cried. 'Clean yourself up!'*¹

Within the walls of her educational institution, classmates bombard Carrie with feminine hygiene products, chanting 'plug it up!'² as their disgust for her rises. This fictional scene in Stephen King's *Carrie* is cruel, but is perhaps not inconceivable as something which might occur in reality. In this scene, Carrie is dehumanised, animalistic, she has been rejected for her unwilling transgression of accepted social behaviour. Menstrual blood is running down her legs. What makes this scene different to what could conceivably occur in reality, however, is that in this moment Carrie's first menstrual cycle gives her power. Inside Carrie, at this symbolic moment of her departure from girlhood innocence into womanhood, a telekinesis gene is triggered and she begins to 'flex'³ her newly discovered strength. However, gaining power from menstruation is not the reality for most women; for most women it is the moment they cross over into the abject. Within the parameters set by many cultures, they can be seen to become unclean and improper subjects, to be abjected from society, to be plugged up, wiped away and discarded. One way forward, that could offer an opportunity to break down this female association, is through a more open discussion of such perceptions in education. Using the same educational institution in which Carrie is 'permanently thrust aside'⁴, to use Kirstevan terms, to create the environment that enables students to challenge the culturally formed boundaries of the abject.

Education, in the context of public schooling, is the process through which aspects of "proper" social conduct are internalised and, quite often, too little problematized. What is considered normal and approved behaviour is learnt from the early stages of childhood development during the acquisition of the symbolic order, which is the universal structure that encompasses all existence: communication, law, ideologies and social culture. The child's guardians install the symbolic order through language as a tool of communication to classify and frame the world. This socially constructed ruling in language imposes cultural expectations, and, amongst other structures, it sets the boundaries for what is appropriate and what is to be considered "dirty". The setting of the distinction between what is clean and what is dirty becomes a framework on which the child builds their perceptions of the world. This learning process happens throughout their developmental education and it progresses in complexity as the level of study increases. Thereafter, as the level of formal education increases, the more society's assumedly purposeful functioning is interrogated and the nuances of concepts, ideologies and systems are explored. This can be seen in educational settings in the curriculum in class topics that cover ethical and moral issues such as euthanasia, capital punishment and other political debates such as capitalism and communism. There are, however, certain subject matters that are clearly demarcated as the unclean and improper subjects, which are boxed neatly into a physical and figurative space in the curriculum. Sex, menstruation, body hair growth, all of which are locked away and only to be approached as subjects when, protected by its approved spatial status, it can be explored in a scientific matter. It is viewed, after all, as a

subject for science, one that connotes its impurity as a subject, as it necessitates the detachment of rational thinking. Something to be observed at a distance and not personally connected with. However, the spatial and emotional separation to such subjects, marks them as an aspect of human existence that is rejected, abjected, from any who comes into contact with them. It marks them out with red tape as being something to avoid discussing. However, this takes along with it the people who are associated negatively with these aspects of human experience.

This paper will explore these human experiences of abjection to suggest open discussion, outside of the approved spaces, and guided through an aesthetic education of such abject subject matter, could make some way towards re-evaluating these human experiences. It will frame the discussion within what Hillel A. Schiller describes as a ‘cognetic’ education, which will be explored as an effective learning approach that is best suited to the reframing of such taboos, due to its nature as being an educational process that focuses on wider connections and implications of knowledge. A cognetic education will be positioned as a key aspect of interrogating the socially constructed aspects of social abjection, as it seeks to understand and interrogate the wider connections and implications of social abjection. The sex education classroom has its place in the curriculum to ensure learners are educated with the necessary biological information, but this paper will argue how education could also strive towards addressing and repositioning aspects of the human experience that are currently deemed to be abject. This paper will argue how and why there could be seen to be a need to re-evaluate the abject associations with people, in particular those that bring a feeling of shame and are perceived to connote an unclean, polluted human being. Period.

THE ABJECT

Julia Kristeva’s seminal 1982 text *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* builds on the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Kristeva situates the feeling of horror and revulsion induced through the abject, as being an experience perpetually confronted in moments where one feels as though their body, as they perceive it to be, has been contaminated with something that they at once recognise as being part of them but also reject considering it to be so. The primary experience of abjection occurs in the stages of infancy where the baby believes itself to be in a state of oneness with the mother. The primary abject moment occurs when the child abjects the mother in order to create its own subjectivity – this is both a liberating and traumatic event to which all abject experiences thereafter harken back. For example, rotting food brings to the attention of the viewer their own body’s corporeality, fleshliness and inevitable decay, it reminds the subject of the time before their own subjectivity and as such is abject. Kristeva suggests the abject is not contained within an object specifically, but possible in anything that exposes and draws the subject into the space, or lack thereof, between “I” and Other. It is a space where the cultural and psychological meanings, borders and boundaries collapse. The abject, as Kristeva notes, is ‘what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.’⁵ It is an experience that highlights and brings to attention the fleshly nature of the human body as not contained and pure, and as such it must be thrust aside so that one may continue to exist in ignorance to these realities. She provides examples of abjection, but emphasises it is not the object which is abject per se, but it is what is implicated by the encounter; the display of unstable boundaries and, with the psychological figuration of a now-contaminated self, the abjection of “I”. Blood, pus and decay provide visceral examples of what one recognises as self but also not; ‘death infecting life’⁶. It reminds one of the very nature of

their corporeal, and therefore finite, existence, which must be abjected in order to stabilise the ego's perception of self. It is something the body removes from its borders of self which cannot be fully removed due to its recognition as being also a part of self. It is, as Kristeva notes, the 'in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'⁷ It is both not of the subject and also 'does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*.'⁸ The only commonality between the abject and the object per se, is the quality of its status as not being "I".

The abject lies outside the borders of that which is acceptable and agreeable to the superego, the psychological location of cultural rules, and as such, is 'ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable'.⁹ It is located in experiences that disturb one's psychologically and socially constructed identity and cultural concepts. Such moments can be described as those encounters in which one confronts one's corporeal reality, or where the distinction between "I" and other blends. It is an encounter with "something" that I do not recognise as a thing,¹⁰ which is 'not me. Not that. But not nothing, either.'¹¹ In the abject, one is forced to recognise its existence and its overlap with the subject. Such an experience is described in *The Powers of Horror* as being aligned with that of *jouissance*, in the Lacanian sense, which is a pleasure that is so intense that, in its concentrated excess, is painful to bear. The abject draws the subject 'toward the place where meaning collapses',¹² as it destabilises all that has been constructed as "other" and what is not "I". Before the contaminator is fully acknowledged, it must be ejected, abjected, and separated from the subject's sense of self, before they are annihilated by the weight of identification with the abject. This is the process through which one (re)builds the borders of self that protect against the sense, repressed though that may be, of one's corporeal finitude.

For Kristeva, the abject is summed up to be that which disturbs, and highlights the fragility of, identity, system and order, and that which 'does not respect borders, positions, rules.'¹³ Such a statement in summation of the abject, extends the definition to be inclusive of more than the perhaps more immediately discomfiting, bodily fluids and death-signifying objects. Kristeva emphasises the role of the abject in a wide range of experiences and social perceptions, giving the examples of, 'The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour [...] premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility.'¹⁴ It is present in the transgression of the idealised identity, both of the person and society, which is both personally and socially constructed. That which is abject is thrust aside and expelled to protect the subject, inclusive here also of society, from identification with it. It is what "I" am not and what "I" cannot be, and yet, what I also know that "I" am.

The abject, however, due to its social manifestations, also further materialises in acts of ostracisation, discrimination and disgust towards what is not the normative and safeguarded "I". It is important to note here, what constitutes as socially abject, and therefore in receipt of this treatment, differentiates significantly between culturally received notions of the abject, which can be evidenced in the work of Mary Douglas. The assumed universal subject and experience in *The Powers of Horror* is a particular aspect of the concept that is often critiqued.¹⁵ In Douglas' *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* she highlights examples where what is considered "impure" or "polluting" for the subject changes depending on the cultural associations. In highlighting these moments of inconsistency she states, 'In some, menstrual pollution is feared as a lethal danger; in others not at all. In some, death pollution is a daily preoccupation; in others not at all. In some excreta is dangerous, in others it is only a joke.'¹⁶ Hardly universal, the malleability of the formations and constitutions

of the abject expose its culturally bound limitations, emphasising the possibility of these associations being critically interrogated and reconfigured.

The malleability of what is considered to be abject is of particular importance, as the concept, and its articulation from Kristeva, has caused much dispute because the effects of social abjection are made manifest in discriminatory attitudes such as misogyny, racism and homophobia. In response to this, there has been a critical focus on the abject's association with people and the detrimental effects this has for them. For example, feminist scholar Imogen Tyler, in her article 'Against Abjection', evidences the social experience of abjection through the experiences of pregnant women who have suffered physical and mental abuse due to their maternal body being associated with that of the abject. She asserts, 'the deeply engrained psychosocial association between the maternal and the abject is an historical condition and not an unchangeable fact.'¹⁷ It is not an irrevocable association, but one that can and should be addressed, because, as Imogen Tyler asserts, '[a]bjection has real effects on real bodies; abjection hurts.'¹⁸ The harrowing tales from the women in this study speak to the real effects on people after abjection. For Tyler, the abject is not just found in the seemingly harmless rejection of the skin on milk as Kristeva describes – although this milk is also suggestive of images of the breast milk from the mother - it has detrimental real life effects to people for which the abject is their culturally conceived association. Tyler therefore advocates for the discourse to shift away from women as abject. Such studies are also to be found for other social justice movements, which evidence and exemplify the need to shift the discourse away from the people considered abject based on their gender, age, race, class, ethnicity and ability.¹⁹

SOCIAL ABJECTION AND EDUCATIONAL COGNITIVE PROCESSES

Hillel A. Schiller opens his Chapter, 'Steps to a Process Curriculum', by asserting his view that education is 'humanity's most influential formative process'.²⁰ In this chapter Schiller is advocating for the importance of stimulating imagination and curiosity in learners, but his understanding of the process of education provides the foundation for this paper's claim that there is an opportunity to use education to reconsider culturally received notions of social abjection. His essay covers many aspects to his understanding of education, but the two key ideas for this paper are his concepts of 'cognitive education' and 'contextual perceiving'. The thrust of his chapter centres on his notion of teaching as a 'cognitive process', which he describes as being the educational approach through which students acquire new knowledge and look to make connections with existing knowledge, their thoughts and the thoughts of other people. In the cognitive process classroom, students are assisted to make connections and build continuities of knowledge. They are encouraged to realise the interconnected nature of everything they learn and its relationship with the world around them. This approach fosters a mind-set that relishes in the discoveries of connections between subjects and holds no information in isolation. In viewing education in this light he asserts that the role of education as the 'conditioner of civilization'²¹ comes with a heavy responsibility, one that 'must be taken more seriously than our culture approaches it presently.'²² This paper echoes these sentiments and suggests education is a formative process through which the effects of social abjection could be alleviated.

Through Schiller's positioning of education as a cognitive process, a process of connecting knowledge and thoughts, he suggests that content must, therefore, always be considered contextually and in relation to a world of systems, structures and ecosystems. He describes this

methodological approach to teaching as ‘contextual perceiving’. Schiller states, ‘contextual perceiving calls for the refocusing of acts of instruction so that the student develops a new perceptual set, and observes no thing or contemplates no idea without remaining curious to see or to search for the conditions and contexts that created it – contexts that affect it and that it affects.’²³ This understanding of connectivity is valuable in offering a method of teaching the effects of social abjection, as it is the lived experience - ‘[a]bjection has real effects on real bodies; abjection hurts’²⁴ – that needs consideration, discussion and connected thinking. Any received knowledge, any observation, would be encouraged to be questioned and explored in relation to the wider implications that are affected by it, or that it affects. Through utilising a cognitive education and encouraging contextual perceiving from the early educational stages, students would be minded to think more deeply about the culturally-formed notions too often taken for granted as unchangeable facts, which are too little considered in relation to the world and people that it affects.

In positioning educational practice as a cognitive process of contextual perceiving, it has the potential to reframe the discourse of social abjection from a grassroots exposure to the issues of certain abject associations and it has the means to go some way towards questioning and reconfiguring the boundaries of what is considered socially abject. Students accessing Higher Education are encouraged to engage with this form of cognitive process, such as through using critical thinking about ideological implications of received knowledge, but this is usually equally bound by the discipline and modular modes of study. The current UK Higher Education experience finds it difficult enough to get students to think about their studies at a programme level, not to mention the larger scale of contextual perceiving advocated in this paper. As such this practice would be best encouraged from the beginning of formative education, so it becomes a natural process of thinking. The boundaries, systems and order that discriminate against people are evidenced to be socially constructed and it is important to consider addressing them through education as a facilitator for these discussions, in order to undermine and reconsider their appropriateness for contemporary society. Through taking a cognitive approach to engaging with social abjection in education, students will be encouraged to make connections between what, and who, is thought to be abject and what, therefore, are the consequences and lived experiences of such culturally internalised perceptions. Echoing Schiller’s argument that it is important that the student ‘observes no thing or contemplates no idea without remaining curious to see or to search for the conditions and contexts that created it – contexts that affect it and that it affects.’²⁵ An aesthetic education could provide one such approach to engaging students with these issues and consider the contexts from which social abjection has been generated. Engaging students with artistic forms offers the material with which students can utilise their skills of contextual perceiving to explore social abjection, which could shift the discourse to more deeply considering the effects of the experience of people after their abjection from society.

It is important to note here, readjustment is the proposed action in this paper because certain abject associations do not require amendments, such as those detailed by Kristeva as ‘the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour [...] premeditated crime, cunning murder’.²⁶ A person who falls under these descriptions, ‘lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game.’²⁷ Such people are socially abjected for more legitimate reasons of acts of harm to other human beings. However, an example of where a body that is culturally conceived as abject and could be readjusted through education is explored in work of Breanne Fahs, in ‘Transformational Pedagogies of the Abject Body: An

Argument for Radical Fat Pedagogies'. She calls for the inclusion of 'fat studies' in education, in order to unpick and undermine the pejorative associative qualities of 'fatness' in society. She offers possible methods to integrate fat studies into pedagogy, which include approaches such as, assigning activist projects to students, weaving anti-assimilation rhetoric into the classroom through discussing the fat people they admire and connecting the fat studies with other identity studies.²⁸ For Fahs, it is the human body in its different human forms that needs to be accepted and not seen as abject. Western culture can be seen to have lost its sight of the beauty in the differences in human bodies through abjection, as it rejects all that transgresses the idealised self, the preserved self, the self that society demands it must be – one that sits above any association with its animal or biological reality. Fahs's work to bring the abject fat body into pedagogy is a step into the abject abyss. It is an uncomfortable experience to discuss that which is rejected through the cultural boundaries that determine what is acceptable, but one that can potentially have great influence. Fahs argues, 'radical fat studies could result in better mental health for fat people (particularly women) when they stop trying to emulate thin (or patriarchal) culture'.²⁹ She argues that to welcome what is considered to be an abject body in education is to liberate the people who are seen as abject from oppressive structures, be they ideological, physical, or mental. Seen in this way, the consequences for keeping human beings imprisoned in the cycle of rejection for their own bodies, condemns them to be perpetually locked in a state of ambivalence towards themselves. Of the subject experiencing abjection Kristeva notes, 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself*'.³⁰ There is, however, the potential for such exposure to draw further negative attention from students. This could be mitigated through using Schiller's notion of contextual perceiving, emphasising and evidencing how their responses are constructed through culture and the significant effects this has for the people who are experiencing social abjection. Any response is worthy of discussion, as it is the discussions born from these responses that has the potential to enable cognitive education through debate, critical interrogation and further the understanding of how such reactions to people culturally conceived to be abject, are indeed cultural, not biological, and are an example of the behaviours that perpetuate harmful social abjection.

THE ABJECT FEMALE

The female body is abjected in many forms, as it too easily breaks the socially constructed borders, positions and rules. An example of this is manifest in the description of menstruation as *that time of the month* or other 'it-ifying'³¹ avoidance language examples. It is a time of the month that is not named in society because to speak the words out loud is to come into contact mentally with the taboo and abject female body. This time of the month can be seen as abject because it can be perceived as the biological signifier of death, through its literal and physical signification of being "no life made here" and through its life-giving leaking liquid leaving what is a bordered self. The abject 'beseches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, never the less, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects.'³² The menstrual cycle is perceived to be sickening in many cultures and thus the female is rejected, as Jackson and Falmange state, 'Currently within a range of societies, menstruation is a particularly mysterious phenomenon, viewed through a simultaneously reverent and fearful eye, shrouded in language of concealment and ambivalence'.³³ An example of where abject adjustments in this area are being proposed can be seen in the recent focus from feminist campaigns in the Free Bleeding Movement and the educational programme Period Talk, which

seek to bring the narrative of menstruation into conversation more openly.³⁴ The infamous blue liquid replacement for advertising feminine hygiene products protects the sensibilities of society from visual contact with the death-signifying blood, but through the use of euphemisms³⁵ it also works to reinforce its negative connotations and, therefore, strengthen its abject association. It becomes that which cannot be discussed or seen; it is abjected from normal, clean, social conduct.³⁶ The knock-on effects of this can be seen in the horror, dread and embarrassment that is therefore associated with menarche³⁷ and, thereafter, the positioning of menstruation as something to be concealed, shameful and polluting.³⁸ However, as Tyler asserts, ‘abjection has real effects on real bodies; abjection hurts’³⁹ and we are now seeing the deeply concerning statistics of the number of young girls avoiding school due to embarrassment and the effect this has on their education and their future.⁴⁰ Research has also shown how imperative the relationship is between menarche and subsequent menstrual attitudes,⁴¹ which emphasises the need for positive reframing of menstruation so menarche is not perceived as a negative experience whereby the individual abjects themselves. The proposal of this paper is to bring to the forefront examples of abject adjustments that could offer a way forward to reconstitute the borders of what is acceptable, or agreeable, in society and what should be excluded as not “I”. This paper focuses on the female body as abject, but could be justly discussed with a view to other marginalised groups. Abject boundaries and borders are culturally constructed, as Douglas discussed above has evidenced and could, therefore, be reconstituted.

As shown, the female body as abject is embedded within discourse in many cultures in differing ways, with damaging and gravely disconcerting effects. Narratives of the culturally conceived abject aspects of the female body are often suppressed in popular culture, through representing experiences in an unrealistic way, or, removing them all together.⁴² An example of this can be the refusal to show the realities of pregnancy in popular culture and representing motherhood more generally in a light more tasteful to society. There is growing frustration with this in western culture and there have been recent movements towards exposing the realities of these experiences.⁴³ Too often, however, exposure to such reframed narratives happens too late and by this point one has already been immersed in the rhetoric that shapes the abject boundaries of culture, or worse, has been exposed to the abject associations reproduced in popular culture that further embed these ideas. Barbara Creed explores the reproduction of abject associations in her work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Creed highlights how the female body and functions associated with it, such as pregnancy and menstruation, have become features in horror films due to their abject associations. She emphasises that it is not the female body that is abject per se, but the signifying system in which the female body exists.⁴⁴ She refers to the films, *Alien*, *Psycho*, *The Exorcist*, amongst others, to exemplify how this materialises in horror films. Julia Kristeva surmises this cultural framing of abjection, ‘There, abject and abjection, are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.’⁴⁵ This is where early exposure to topics considered abject through cognitive education could provide a useful intervention, before the primers of culture are set. Creed’s work exemplifies how artwork, film and literature provide aesthetic examples with which students can engage. If society made movements towards removing the associations with what is considered abject about women - their blood, their reproductive system, their body hair and even signs of aging - it could have the potential to alleviate the patriarchal imprisonment of striving to be something they never can be.

ABJECT AESTHETIC EDUCATION

In approaching education through a cognetic process, and employing the aspects of contextual perceiving suggested by Schiller, the effects of social abjection hope to be better understood and alleviated through fostering environments that connect it with its wider implications. Furthermore, this paper proposes that through utilising an aesthetic educational approach the abject social taboos can be discussed with more ease. As shown in the discussion in the previous section, there is considerable hesitation and discomfort associated with discussions around menstruation. This is a sociocultural barrier that shapes society's connotative relationship with the topic, and one through which an aesthetic education could hope to provide a more accessible format for discussion. Aesthetic education will thus be positioned as the means by which a cognetic process can effectively make the connections with the negative consequences of social abjection. Aesthetic texts that address social abjection come in various forms. Those most acutely approaching subjects of abjection include artworks addressing aspects of social injustice such as the works of Cindy Sherman, Louise Bourgeois, and Carolee Schneemann. Marit Dewhurst teaches social justice art education and describes it as 'a commitment to create art that draws attention to, mobilizes action toward or attempts to intervene in systems of inequality or injustice.'⁴⁶ The same is true of social justice texts more broadly, as they directly state their purpose of highlighting the maltreatment of people. For example, Annie Ernaux's *Les années* explicitly details her experience of seeking an abortion and the social abjection she receives from those around her. A text such as Ernaux's, though weighty in its ethical, political and moral content, offers one such example of where aesthetic education can be used to discuss the larger implications of social abjection. It is through contextually perceiving *Les années* that the wider implications of the form of social abjection Ernaux experiences can be emphasised. In reading a text such as this, it is difficult not to respond to her experience of social abjection, and abjection of the self, in a manner that is both emotive and discursive.

Using this same approach to inspire a cognetic process with regards to the social abjection experienced by women due to their reproductive cycles, a text such as the epigraph in this essay provides a key example. Stephen King's *Carrie* is a well-known literary text that is reasonably embedded within popular culture. However, it also carries a significance with regards to aspects of social abjection and in particular in relation to the social ideals of cleanliness to which menstruation is shown here to be opposed. Carrie experiences social abjection from her classmates and from her mother, who see her menarche as a sign of her sinful and polluted body. This scene in *Carrie* is impactful and loaded with aspects of the experience of social abjection. To discuss this scene with students offers an aesthetic educational approach to bringing what can be considered to be a controversial topic into the classroom. Through using this text as an example, and through facilitating contextual perceiving, students could be encouraged to think more deeply about the relationship between menstruation and its psychosocial connotations of the abject. In thinking about Carrie's social abjection by her peers, the connections between lived experience and socially constructed ideals can be formed. Her classmates have long been entrenched in the societal discourse of menstruation as being an abject matter in need of being, as Kristeva states, 'thrust aside in order to live.'⁴⁷ Due to this, their treatment of Carrie is to thrust *her* aside, plug *her* up, and wipe *her* away. She has now become the embodiment of the abject in need of expulsion from their clean and proper selves. Taking a cognetic approach to this text would encourage students to make connections with the real world menarche experience of many young girls during their school

years, as this paper has previously discussed. Furthermore, there is a sense of the ambivalent nature of menstruation, as almost entirely all women experience it and thus see themselves in *Carrie*, and therefore also abject themselves in the process. These discussions, using *Carrie* as an aesthetic educational springboard, hope to undermine and reposition the culturally formed conceptions associated with menstruation as abject.

CONCLUSION

This essay has positioned aesthetic education as the means by which we could shift the primers of our culture and interrogate aspects of social abjection. Education is, as Schiller asserts, ‘the active facilitator and the effective conditioner of civilization.’⁴⁸ And it is the effect on the ‘real bodies’ in this conditioned civilisation that experience social abjection, and also, therefore, abject themselves. This paper has argued for utilising the approach of a cognetic education, one that ensures students perceive the world contextually, ‘and observes no thing or contemplates no idea without remaining curious to see or to search for the conditions and contexts that created it – contexts that affect it and that it affects.’⁴⁹ Through this process, education can be seen to offer an effective context through which to undermine the parameters of the abject that have been shown to oppress people. Through an aesthetic education, students can be provided with an opportunity to explore, question, and better understand the contexts and conditions that have created social abjection, in the hopes that this offers an opportunity to readjust the discriminatory borders of social abjection.

NOTES

¹ Stephen King, *Carrie* (London: Hodder & Stoughton General Division, 1974), 7.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ Martin Jay critiques this in his essay ‘Abjection Overruled’, suggesting ‘it is only male chauvinist piggies who cry “we, we, we” all the way home’ (p.236). Imogen Tyler echoes this criticism but with specific reference to the universal, or assumed, figure of the mother. Barbara Creed critiques this aspect of abjection in her work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*.

¹⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark, 1966), 121.

¹⁷ Imogen Tyler, “Against Abjection,” *Feminist Theory* 10 (2009): 91.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁹ See works such as Darieck Scott’s *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*, for an example of social abjection in relation to race and queer theories.

²⁰ Hillel A. Schiller, “Steps to a Process Curriculum,” in *The Adventure of Education: Process Philosophers on Learning, Teaching, and Research*, ed. Scarfe, A. (Netherlands: BRILL, 2009), 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

- ²² Ibid., 80.
- ²³ Ibid., 88.
- ²⁴ Tyler, “Against Abjection,” 90.
- ²⁵ Schiller, “Steps to a Process Curriculum,” 88.
- ²⁶ Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 4.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁸ Breanne Fahs, “Transformational Pedagogies of the Abject Body: An Argument for Radical Fat Pedagogies,” in *Difficult Subjects: Insights and Strategies for Teaching about Race, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Badia Ahad-Legardy and OiYan A. Poon. (Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 2018), accessed 3 October 2018, <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PBNeDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=difficult+subjects&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiG6--IovLeAhUrIsAKHUIBCyQQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q=difficult%20subjects&f=false>
- ²⁹ Fahs, “Transformational Pedagogies of the Abject Body: An Argument for Radical Fat Pedagogies”.
- ³⁰ Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 3.
- ³¹ Theresa E. Jackson and Rachel Joffe Falmagne, “Women wearing white: Discourses of menstruation and the experience of menarche,” *Feminism and Psychology* 23 (2013): 12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353512473812>
- ³² Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1.
- ³³ Theresa E. Jackson and Rachel Joffe Falmagne, “Women wearing white: Discourses of menstruation and the experience of menarche”, 1.
- ³⁴ See the #BloodNormal campaign from Bodyform <https://www.bodyform.co.uk/our-world/bloodnormal/> and the Period Talk programme from New Zealand <https://periodtalk.com.au/>, which offer educational resources designed to bring the conversation of menstruation into conversation more openly. There is also coverage of protests in London with regards to the issues of shame attached to menstruation: Rush Howarth and Charlie Edge, “Does our period blood protest make you feel uncomfortable? That’s the point” *The Independent*, 10 November 2015, accessed 03 December 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/we-protested-outside-parliament-while-bleeding-without-tampons-because-a6728456.html>
- ³⁵ Mindy J. Erchull, Joan C. Chrisler, Jannifer A. Gorman, Ingrid Johnston-Robledo, “Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets About Menstruation,” *Journal of Early Adolescence* 22 (2002): 455-474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027243102237192>
- ³⁶ In the interviews in this study, young girls are embarrassed and ashamed to speak about menstruation and highlight their feelings of dirtiness and shame. They also report not feeling comfortable to ask for help due to the taboos associated with menstruation. Anne Burrows and Sally Johnson, “Girls’ experiences of menarche and menstruation” *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* 23 (2005).
- ³⁷ Jackson and Falmagne, “Women wearing white: Discourses of menstruation and the experience of menarche”.
- ³⁸ Alexandra J. Hawkey, et al. “Experiences and Constructions of Menarche and Menstruation among Migrant and Refugee Women”, *Qualitative Health Research* 27 (2017) 1473–1490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316672639>
- ³⁹ Tyler, “Against Abjection,” 90.
- ⁴⁰ This has been revealed in a 2018 study called ‘Fear Going to School Less’, which Bodyform conducted in conjunction with YouGov UK. Their research with children aged 11-16 revealed 350,000 girls missed school due to being on their period, which equates to 2.1 million hours of missed education. It also highlights 27% of girls say this is due to shame-related factors and 45% of boys that tease girls because of their periods, do so because they feel awkward about periods. 137,000 boys admit to teasing about periods at school and 42% of boys find the limited discussion in sexual education about periods awkward. To address these issues, Bodyform’s Fear Going to School Less campaign aims to improve period education and tackle the taboos around periods.
- ⁴¹ Marianne E. McPherson and Lauren Korfine. “Menstruation Across Time: Menarche, Menstrual Attitudes, Experience and Behaviours”, *Women’s Health Issues* 14 (2004), 193-200. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2004.08.006>
- ⁴² Mindy J. Erchull, et al. “Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets About Menstruation”.
- ⁴³ Televisions shows such as Channel 4’s ‘One Born Every Minute’ attempt to show a more realistic side to pregnancy and birth.
- ⁴⁴ Barbara Creed, “Horror and the monstrous-feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,” *Screen* 27 (1986).
- ⁴⁵ Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 2.
- ⁴⁶ Marit Dewhurst, “An Inevitable Question: Exploring the Defining Features of Social Justice Art Education” *Art Education* 63 (2010): 7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2010.11519082>
- ⁴⁷ Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 3.
- ⁴⁸ Schiller, “Steps to a Process Curriculum,” 83.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 88.