

# **A social semiotic approach to multimodality in the Vagina Varsity YouTube campaign series**



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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
Philosophiae in the Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape.**

**December 2018**

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## **KEYWORDS**

Linguistic landscapes

Virtual linguistic landscapes

Skinscapes

Multimodality/Multisemioticity

Vagina Varsity

YouTube

Remediation

Feminist theory

Dialogicality

Euphemisms



## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the semiotic resources used by Vagina Varsity, a campaign by sanitary towel brand Libresse on the social media platform YouTube to construct meanings around the female body. Vagina Varsity is a South African online advertising campaign on YouTube which marketed their sanitary products, whilst educating, as well as breaking the social stigma, around the black female body. In this study, YouTube was utilized as a space in which to analyze online identities and communication. The study was located within the field of linguistic landscape (LL) studies, including the sub-field virtual linguistic landscapes (VLL), later reformulated as virtual semioscapes. The conceptual framework was undergirded by multimodality/multisemioticity and feminist theory. The study used a mixed methods approach to data collection, and used a virtual linguistic ethnography (VLE) framework to collect the data sources, which included YouTube videos, YouTube comments, and emails. A focus group interview was also conducted, where the Vagina Varsity videos were shown to a group of diverse youth at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. The embodied discourses which emerged, as well as the discourse strategies of the commentators, were multimodally analysed. The study found that the Vagina Varsity course makes use of multiple modes, including embodied semiotics such as gestures and stylizations of voice, visual modes such as cartoon figures, as well as the strategic use of sound. In addition, the study found that educational content and marketing strategies are both embedded in this campaign, with the educational content overshadowing the advertising aspect. It is for this reason that the YouTube comments and focus group interview were centered on the program itself and not the advertisement. Furthermore, when looking at the medium this campaign used, one sees that the virtual space allows for the teaching of taboo topics, which would not be allowed in traditional educational domains. The virtual space is not only bridging the knowledge gap in the topic of sex education, it also bridges the gap between different communities, as the YouTube comment

section allows for people to interact across regional, national and even cultural boundaries. This study also found that Vagina Varsity not only recontextualized the educational genre, but they have also recontextualized the production and consumption of a topic which would otherwise be considered taboo. In terms of the implications for the study, one finds that the stigma that is attached to this subject is removed from this content. Although one cannot say for certain that this type of education will take over the African traditional initiation ceremonies for girls, for example, it can be used to complement some of the content that traditional counselors and social workers use to teach young African women. The fact that the program is formalized in a curriculum that can be found online opens up possibilities for open dialogue across cultures and nations in terms of feminine hygiene. This study contributes to the field of Linguistic Landscapes studies, with specific focus on virtual linguistic landscapes. The study also illustrates that the affordances of the online space allows for a hybrid edutainment space where people can learn about topics which are considered taboo in the domain of formal education. This study also extends the concept of multimodality, by including notions such as semiotic remediation and resemiotization, as well as immediacy and hypermediacy, as tools of multimodal analysis. This study also contributes to studies on gender and sexuality.

## DECLARATION

I declare that *A social semiotic approach to multimodality in the Vagina Varsity YouTube campaign series* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before, for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted, have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Shanleigh Dannica Roux

Signed.....

Date .....14/12/2018.....



## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late father, Kevin Roux, and my late grandmother, Pamela Roux, who always supported me and believed in me.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to use this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed towards the process of completing my thesis:

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for granting me the opportunity, the strength and the wisdom to complete this thesis.

I would also like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Amiena Peck, Prof. Felix Banda, and Dr. Quentin Williams for their academic support, guidance and mentorship. I would also like to thank Prof. Christopher Stroud for providing feedback, and also for providing the resources to complete my thesis.

I am profoundly grateful to the Linguistic Landscape research group and the Virt.url Xcapee research group for providing the space where I could share my ideas, receive feedback and as well as moral support.

Heartfelt thanks go to my mother, Dalene Roux, and my brother, Dylan Roux, for supporting me and motivating me throughout my academic journey. I am truly blessed to have both of you in my life.

My sincere thanks to Nathalie Hattingh for proofreading my thesis and for always being willing to help. I would also like to thank fellow postgraduate Humphrey Kapau for his time and for sharing his expertise.

I would like to thank VLIR-OUS (ZEIN2016RIP36) and the NRF (107534) for their financial assistance.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed in any manner to the success of my academic journey. I may not have mentioned you by name, but I am forever grateful.

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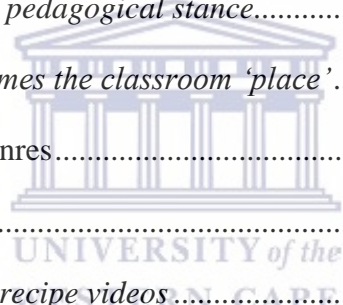
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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

### 1.0. Introduction

This study is a multimodal social semiotic analysis of a South African marketing campaign by the sanitary towel company Libresse, called Vagina Varsity. This chapter provides an overview of the study and a brief background of women's campaigns in the online space. Thereafter, the chapter provides a historical background of South Africa, a brief discussion of the affordability and accessibility of data, and the current state of social media in South Africa. Next, the statement of the problem, research aim, objectives, research questions, and research hypotheses are provided. The scope of the study as well as the significance of the study will also be discussed. Lastly, the chapter outline of this study will be provided.

### 1.1. Overview

This study is located within the male, patriarchal, and heterosexual context of South Africa, with a particular focus on the black woman's body, which was oppressed and heavily regulated during apartheid<sup>1</sup> (Poinsette, 1985). During apartheid, black women were "at the bottom rung of the economic, social, and political ladder" (Masakela, 1981, as cited in Poinsette, 1985: 93-94). The current context of post-apartheid South Africa, however, provides an apt platform to talk about how black, modern-day women talk about their bodies. One way that the researcher wishes to address this is through videos, accessed from the most frequented online space for videos, namely YouTube.

Until recently, the only sources of information about the female reproductive system had been the educational domain (which is limited and uncomfortable, notably because of the presence of male students), and television advertisements about sanitary towels. Gupta and Weiss (1995: 262) noted 20 years ago that, in South Africa, "women and adolescent girls lack basic information about their reproductive anatomy and physiology". As a result, women lacked the knowledge of how to talk about their bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> Apartheid was the institutional system of ethnic and racial separation in South Africa which existed between 1948 and 1994, the results of which can still be seen during present times (Healy-Clancy, 2017).

The timely introduction of Vagina Varsity (VV), an online campaign which was introduced in October 2016, has changed this. This interactive platform is not only entertaining, but also informational, educational, and allows for agency. Interestingly enough, this is done largely through English. Although the campaign uses English (the lingua franca of South Africa, and also accessible to anyone in the global platform of YouTube), variations of this language are used, as seen in the Africanizing of English and the African-Americanizing of English.

This study will pay special attention to the multimodal methods which Vagina Varsity employs to draw in their 'students' or customers. In addition, this study will explore the VV series as a teaching course through a linguistic analysis of discourses alluding to the emancipation of the female body. This emancipation is seen through African Americanized forms. Furthermore, the passive representation of women is being challenged through this campaign. This campaign moves beyond the linear view of marketing themselves on mass television by moving to YouTube and making their advertising interactional. Furthermore, YouTube as a platform allows for the campaign to talk about issues that are seemingly taboo in society.

In Southern Africa, many young black women receive their sexual education during initiation ceremonies once they have reached maturity, which happens when girls reach menarche (du Plooy, 2006). They are then seen as mature enough to take their place among the adults (du Plooy, 2006). Among the Lovedu, Tsonga and Pedi, part of the initiation involves older women tutoring the initiates in sex instruction and correct behaviour during menstruation, while among the Xhosa and the Thembu, initiates are taught about married life and responsibilities as a home keeper (du Plooy, 2006). Female initiation schools have come under scrutiny. Motana (2017) states that some initiation schools "condone unacceptable sexual cultural passages". For example, "[y]oung girls sleep with a man to 'prepare them for womanhood'" (Motana, 2017: 7 June).

Banda and Kunkeyani (2015) make reference to the *fisi* ('the hyena'), which refers to a man who sleeps with girls as part of their initiation into womanhood, found in the initiation ritual of the Cewa of Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. Banda and Kunkeyani (2015: 36) cite Munthali, Chimbiri and Zulu (2004: 13) who note that "the fisi can sleep with several girls on the same night and without any protection, thereby increasing the vulnerability of girls to sexually transmitted infections ... and HIV". The practice, which can still be found in some rural areas of Malawi, in particular, has been clamped down by women groups, NGOs,

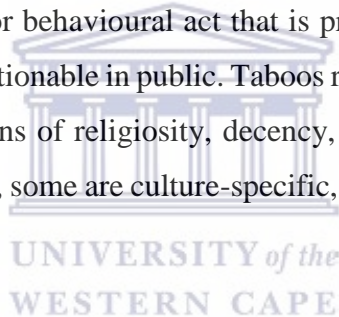


government and chiefs, with culprits risking heavy fines or imprisonment or both for indulging in sexual acts with minors or without consent. The practice has seen modification and modernization in parts of Malawi in which “cultural symbols and artefacts (e.g. traditional herbs) are used to represent sexual acts” (Banda & Kunkeyani, 2015: 44). In urban areas, in particular, the practice has been abandoned with experienced and trained female counsellors taking over the traditional role of initiating girls (and even women) with a focus on feminine hygiene, the dangers of unprotected sex, teenage pregnancies, and so forth.

Similarly, Vagina Varsity modernizes the tradition of teaching women about their bodies, and also provides a safe space for women to learn more about matters relating to the female anatomy.

### *1.1.1 So what is considered taboo in South Africa?*

Discussions about sex and sex-related issues are taboo in many societies. Sabri and Obermiller (2012) define taboo as a verbal or behavioural act that is prohibited by societal norms and is generally considered to be unmentionable in public. Taboos restrict people from speaking about certain topics in public for reasons of religiosity, decency, or morality (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012). Some taboos are universal, some are culture-specific, or internalized by a societal group (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012).



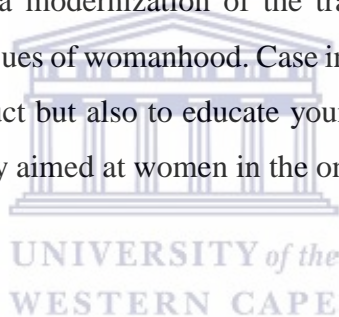
In their study on taboo themes in advertising, Sabri and Obermiller (2012: 872) found that “strong taboo themes in ads have a strong negative effect on consumers’ brand attitudes and intentions to purchase the advertised brand”. Taboo-themed advertisements include taboo topics which are presented visually or verbally to promote a product that is not considered taboo (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012). Advertising a brand by using taboos is therefore considered a “risky” strategy (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012: 872). However, Vagina Varsity has managed to be a successful campaign, even when addressing taboo topics, such as menstruation, masturbation, and vaginal discharge.

In South Africa, the vagina and vagina-related issues (including menstruation) are considered taboo. According to Cardiff, Lemieux, Mowbray, Osborne, Quint, Redding and Shi (2016: 1), “menstrual taboo frames menstruation as dirty and secretive, and this view is exacerbated by media, education, society and advertising”. Although this is true in South Africa, the sanitary

towel company Libresse found its niche by playing to the very real needs of women, thereby using the idea of destigmatizing menstruation to sell sanitary towels.

Some taboos are stronger than others, the strength of the taboo being determined by the number of people who obey it (Fershtman, Gneezy & Hoffman, 2011). The taboo surrounding vaginas and vagina-related issues are strong in South Africa, seeing that society does not allow for this topic to be spoken about in public, advertisements for sanitary towels do not address these issues directly, and at school, children are also not taught everything about this topic. Over time, taboos and their importance may change; some may weaken or disappear, while others may become stronger (Fershtman *et al.*, 2011). The success of the Vagina Varsity campaign may well index that this particular taboo is lessened and that, by teaching women more about the vagina and pushing women to use the word *vagina* instead of using euphemisms, they are empowering them.

In recent years, there has been a modernization of the traditional culture of older women educating young women about issues of womanhood. Case in point, Libresse utilizes the online space not only to sell their product but also to educate young women. The following section focuses on campaigns specifically aimed at women in the online space.



## **1.2. Women's campaigns**

In recent years, the online space has been used increasingly to bring attention to gender inequality and to advocate for women empowerment. This section briefly looks at international online campaigns aimed at women empowerment, thereafter focusing on the local campaign, Vagina Varsity. A campaign refers to a “[c]omplete, planned course of action formulated to achieve defined objectives in marketing, public relations, quality enhancement, revenue generation, safety standards, etc”.<sup>2</sup>

### *1.2.1 Always' #likeagirl campaign, HelloFlo, Period Piece*

Social media has generated a space for creating awareness about issues related specifically to women, such as gender inequality, women's bodies and menstruation. For example, it has been

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/campaign.html> (Accessed 24 November 2016)

used to bring awareness to gender inequality. Loiseau and Nowacka (2015:1) state that social media “has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women’s rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanising action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality”. Three areas where social media has activated political activism include 1) hashtag activism, which brings attention to political issues concerning women, 2) utilizing social media tools to combat violence against women, and 3) creating public accountability towards gender inequality (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015).

The following are some of the movements that use YouTube as a platform to create a greater awareness about women’s bodies and menstruation: Always’ #likeagirl campaign, HelloFlo, Period Piece, and Vagina Varsity. The first three are American campaigns, while the last campaign mentioned is a South African campaign, and will be the focus of this study.

The aim of the #likeagirl campaign by Always, an international company which sells feminine hygiene products, is to combat the drop in confidence when girls reach puberty, and as a result stop taking part in sporting activities.<sup>3</sup> This company created a social experiment where young girls and boys, as well as young women and men, were under the impression they were doing a casting call, while unbeknownst to them, it was fake. They were asked to run or fight ‘like a girl’. The women, boys and men responded to this instruction by acting weak, the stereotypical representation of doing something ‘like a girl’. The young girls, on the other hand, ran and fought the hardest and best that they could, showing that they had not yet been influenced by the above-mentioned stereotype. The video was posted on YouTube in June 2014 and received 63 million views by January 2017. This high view count can be attributed to the campaign’s strategic media outreach, the fact that they engaged with celebrities who had a high social outreach to the target audience, and also by emotionally connecting with the target audience.<sup>4</sup>

HelloFlo is a website dedicated to women’s health, specifically normalizing the conversation about women’s bodies.<sup>5</sup> Their videos can be found on YouTube. Similarly, Period Piece is a short form, comedic web series which can be found on YouTube. Although not a campaign per se, Liliana Tandon, the creator, uses the videos to “de-stigmatize menstruation in the media as well as empower women to embrace their periods”. Her videos help to “fuel the conversation about women’s reproductive issues.” She also distributes “free and affordable feminine

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.always.com/en-us/about-us/our-epic-battle-like-a-girl> (Accessed 24 November 2016)

<sup>4</sup> <https://instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Always-LikeAGirl-Turning-an-Insult-into-a-Confidence-Movement.pdf> (Accessed 8 November 2018)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlHboAAwQoI> (Accessed 24 November 2016)

hygiene products to countries where such products are not readily available”.<sup>6</sup> I now turn to the innovative marketing campaign, Vagina Varsity, by Libresse.

### *1.2.2 Vagina Varsity*

Vagina Varsity is a South African campaign launched in October 2016 by Libresse, an international feminine hygiene brand, and is aimed towards educating women about their bodies, with specific focus on the vagina and menstruation. The videos are posted on YouTube. This mode may be preferred (as opposed to radio and TV) because the topic of the female body, particularly the vagina, is still taboo in society, and would be easier to discuss online. The campaign aims to address this topic because the attached stigma has resulted in women neglecting to learn about everyday vaginal care, causing “embarrassment, shame, myths and even healthcare problems that women then feel too shy to discuss with anyone” (Makhele, 2016). The strategic planner at the advertising agency Net#work BBDO, Kerry Hibberd, stated that:

[t]he most visited pages on our website are the FAQ pages. And in consumer research groups, the women all start out shy when we introduce vaginal care topics but once they realise they are in a safe space, you can't stop them. The same is true for our school talks. Women of all ages want the information we have, they just don't want it on traditional channels in old-fashioned ways.<sup>7</sup>

Vagina Varsity is guided by professionals and was introduced to provide a private setting for women to learn about their bodies (Makhele, 2016). The issue, however, is the extent to which the message reaches the intended audience. Is this course an elite course for people who can afford data? Also, to what extent does the semiotic material reflect the socio-economic profiles of South Africans?

The campaign is packaged as a four-week course which includes four short YouTube videos per week, bonus educational content via email, as well as a quiz at the end of each week. The educational content was provided by psychosexual consultant Avri Spilka, the video content

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<sup>6</sup> <http://periodpieceofficial.cohttp://periodpieceofficial.com/about/m/about/> (Accessed 24 November 2016)

<sup>7</sup> <http://citizen.co.za/your-life/fitness-and-health-your-life-your-life/1328824/sa-launches-worlds-first-vagina-varsity/> (Accessed 11 Nov 2016)

was scripted and directed by Anne Hirsch, and the presenters are the YouTube group Pap Culture (Makhele, 2016).

In an interview with Avri Spilka on the SABC Digital News YouTube channel, she describes Vagina Varsity as “a very fun, well-packaged, entertaining, but also accurate and informative lesson”. When the interviewer asked how Vagina Varsity came about, she responded by saying that the international feminine hygiene brand Libresse, who spearheaded Vagina Varsity, wanted to move away from presenting periods and menstruation with blue liquid and white pants, and to use the correct words when talking to women about periods, vaginas and their bodies. She also stated that, with the Vagina Varsity campaign, “this is the first time that South Africa is ever mentioning vaginas in relation to femcare products,” which is another example of how Libresse is pushing the boundaries of traditional advertising of feminine hygiene products.

When asked why it is still taboo to use the word “vagina”, Avri Spilka said that one of the reasons is that “the vagina doesn’t have the same status as other body parts” (SABC Digital News, 2016). The use of euphemisms such as ‘cookie’ and ‘flower’ has resulted in the vagina having a lower status as other body parts, for example the nose or the ear (SABC Digital News, 2016). Using the correct anatomical terms for the vagina is imperative, as it would help improve the status of the vagina to have the same status as other body parts (SABC Digital News, 2016). By using the correct anatomical terms, the campaign shows the viewer that the vagina is not a shameful body part (SABC Digital News, 2016).

Using the correct anatomical terms is especially necessary in South Africa, a country with a very high sexual violence rate (SABC Digital News, 2016). The Vagina Varsity campaign aims to stop this by “empowering and educating women and girls to speak about their bodies” (SABC Digital News, 2016).

### **1.3. Historical background of South Africa**

The issue of women empowerment is being taught by trained female counsellors in African cultures in our time, and speaks to the oppression of black African women in particular. During apartheid, being a black woman meant that they were doubly discriminated against, due to their race and gender (Segalo, 2015; Cock, 1985). South Africa’s tumultuous political history (Adelman, 1982) still has an impact on the lives of many South Africans today.

In South Africa, the National Party held power from 1948 and supported the ideology of apartheid (Adelman, 1982). Apartheid involved the separate development of the different racial groups in the country.<sup>8</sup> While segregation existed before the National Party came into government, it became law after the NP took power.<sup>9</sup> During apartheid, the black population had no political rights (Adelman, 1982). Legally, they were limited to certain jobs, and the unemployment rate among them was high (more than 23 per cent in 1981). The basic pillars of the apartheid regime included the Population Registration Act (1950), the Group Areas Act (1950), Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts (1949), as well as the Prohibition of Improper Political Interference Act (1968) (Adelman, 1982). During apartheid, various restaurants, hotels, as well as most sports activities, were segregated (Adelman, 1982). The black populations had to stand in separate queues at post offices and take separate entrances into government buildings (Adelman, 1982). They also had to carry a pass legislation and registration book which made it difficult to move freely around the country (Adelman, 1982). By 1982, this started to change as gradual reforms started to take place (Adelman, 1982).

#### **1.4. The affordability and accessibility of data in South Africa**

The socio-economic background of South Africa has impacted the affordability and accessibility of data. Compared to other countries, South Africa is one of the countries with the most expensive data (Nhlapo, 2017). In December 2017, there were 30,815,634 Internet users in South Africa, which makes up 53.7 per cent of the population,<sup>10</sup> compared to a first-world country such as Norway, where 99.6 per cent of the population were Internet users by June 2017.<sup>11</sup>

Within the southern context, there is a scarcity of access to resources such as the Internet. According to Moyo (2009), there is an uneven distribution of Internet access across the world, as well as within countries. This gap that exists between those who have access to the Internet and digital media and those who do not is called the digital divide (Moyo, 2009). The disproportionate distribution of ownership and of access to the media could cause or worsen “the socio-economic inequalities based on the digital marginalization of the poorer classes and regions of the world” (Moyo, 2009: 123). Moyo (2009: 123) acknowledges that the concept is

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-apartheid-south-africa> (Accessed 20 March 2018)

<sup>9</sup><http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-apartheid-south-africa> (Accessed 20 March 2018)

<sup>10</sup><https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm> (Accessed 8 March 2018)

<sup>11</sup><https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#no> (Accessed 8 March 2018)

not as simplistic and states that “[o]ther factors such as literacy, technological literacy, content, language, network and the costs that are associated with Internet access, help in the understanding of the digital divide”.

According to Moyo (2009), there are various types of the digital divide, including the geographic divide, social divide, and the democratic divide. The geographic divide refers to the access or the lack of access to the Internet, as a result of geographic location. The social divide refers to the “differences in access between various social groups due to socio-demographic barriers such as class, income, education, gender, age and race” (Moyo, 2009: 127). The social divide is further complicated by social discrimination, which has led to the exclusion of women and black people as significant participants (Moyo, 2009). Moyo (2009: 128) states that, “[i]n terms of gender, women appear to be [digitally] marginalized due to the domination of patriarchal interests in most societies since the use of digital media and the internet is subject to social shaping”. The democratic divide refers to the divide between those who can access the Internet in order to take part in political activism, and those who cannot (Moyo, 2009).

Not all South Africans have access to the Internet because of the high cost of data. Campaigns such as #DataMustFall and #SocialMediaBlackout raised awareness of the high costs of data, and showed the high levels of dissatisfaction among of the major mobile data providers in South Africa (du Plooy, 2017) According to du Plooy (2017), most South Africans who are able to access the Internet are relatively wealthy and live in cities and suburbs. Those who are poorer and live in rural areas are, on average, less likely to be able to afford data, and are therefore not able to access the information, knowledge, and opportunities which are afforded by the Internet (du Plooy, 2017). Bearing in mind that the VV campaign was disseminated on YouTube, it is clear that data itself plays a role in the distribution of knowledge.

### **1.5. Social media in South Africa**

With the onset of social media, much of the information that African women learn during initiation, such as matters regarding sexuality and how to assert and preserve women’s prerogative in a patriarchal society (Roberts, 2014), are taken into the virtual space. According to the South African Social Media Landscape summary of 2016, the social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, all showed a growth in users. Facebook grew by 8 per cent, from 12 million to 13 million users, Twitter grew by 12 per cent, from 6.6 million

users to 7.4 million users, and Instagram grew by 133 per cent, from 1.1 million users to 2.68 million users. YouTube has also increased in popularity, as it grew by 15 per cent from 7.2 million users to 8.28 million monthly active users in 2016 (Social Media Landscape Summary, 2016). In 2017, Facebook had been used by 14 million South Africans, and YouTube had moved into second place with 8.74 million users, while the number of Twitter users rose to 7.7 million (South African Social Media Landscape Summary, 2017). Furthermore, social media is becoming “a more stable and measurable environment that can be leveraged more effectively by brands” (South African Social Media Landscape Summary, 2017).

### *1.5.1 Social media and marketing*

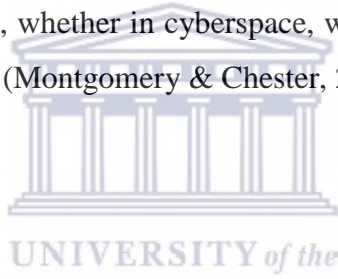
Marketing campaigns are utilizing social media to target the younger generation (Montgomery & Chester, 2009). In fact, since the start of the World Wide Web (WWW), advertisers have paid close attention to adolescents’ relationships with the Internet (Montgomery & Chester, 2009). One such example is the sanitaryware company Libresse, who uses digital marketing to advertise their products on YouTube. Digital marketing refers to “the practice of promoting products and services using digital distribution channels” (Smith, 2011: 489). Digital media usage has increased over the years, and as a result, more companies are using digital marketing in order to reach their target markets (Smith, 2011).

With the onset of advanced technology, and subsequently the emergence of Web 2.0, there is a greater possibility for social marketers to use the Internet for promotional purposes (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008). According to Thackeray *et al.* (2008: 338), “marketers use various tools to promote their products, including advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, personal selling, and publicity or public relations”. Web 2.0, which refers to Internet applications where the users control communication, can enhance the power of viral marketing, as it increases the speed at which consumers share their opinions and experiences with increasingly large audiences (Thackeray *et al.*, 2008). Instead of receiving information from static web pages (Web 1.0), Web 2.0 allows users to share, link, collaborate, and include their own user-generated content (Thackeray *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, Thackeray *et al.* (2008: 340) state that “Web 2.0 social media technology enables marketers to develop interactive Web sites that make it virtually effortless for users to engage in viral marketing by encouraging the user to share feedback, provide comments, rate products provide reviews, and download items for sharing with friends”.



According to the Social Media Marketing Industry Report, which contains a survey with more than 5 000 marketers, it was found that 90 per cent of the marketers felt that social media is an important aspect of marketing their businesses (Stelzner, 2016). Specifically, YouTube is recognized as a very effective marketing tool, as 63 per cent of marketers planned on increasing their YouTube marketing (Stelzner, 2016). Sixty per cent of marketers used videos in their marketing and 73 per cent plan on increasing their use of video as a marketing strategy (Stelzner, 2016).

Montgomery and Chester (2009) state that children and teenagers are not passive viewers on the Internet, but they actively participate to create content in the interactive digital environment that is pervading their social and personal lives. Marketers are creating campaigns that “take advantage of young people’s constant connectivity to technology, their multi-tasking behaviours, and the fluidity of their media experiences” (Montgomery & Chester, 2009: 20). This is called the “360 strategy” and is one of the fundamental principles of “contemporary youth marketing” (Montgomery & Chester, 2009: 20). This strategy is aimed at reaching users constantly and wherever they are, whether in cyberspace, watching television, or listening to music on a portable music player (Montgomery & Chester, 2009).



### 1.5.2 YouTube

The pedagogical affordances of websites such as YouTube (Cochrane & Bateman, 2010; Szeto & Cheng, 2014) allow people and companies to post educational content online. As mentioned before, this study looks specifically at videos posted on YouTube, “a free video-hosting website that allows members to store and serve video content”.<sup>12</sup> YouTube has more than 1 billion users, has launched local versions in more than 88 countries, and can be navigated in a total of 76 different languages.<sup>13</sup> The website was launched in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim. Since its inception, YouTube has become a platform for the distribution of popular culture as well as “vernacular creativity” (Burgess & Green, 2009: 6). It has also become a platform for self-expression.

According to Simonsen (2012: 17), “YouTube is by far the most widespread provider of online video streaming and thereby also the best representative of the different aspects of how we can

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<sup>12</sup><http://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/YouTube> (Accessed 3 November 2015)

<sup>13</sup><https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html> (Accessed 12 January 2017)

understand online identity formation”. My study is interested in, among other things, how identities are performed online, in particular the identity performances of the presenters of Vagina Varsity.

Vagina Varsity uses two well-known South African YouTubers as the presenters for this campaign: Nwabisa Mda and Thembe Mahlaba, two young, black women based in Cape Town, South Africa. They also host the YouTube channel Pap Culture, which was created in 2015, and has a following of over 6000 subscribers. As young, black women, they also have knowledge of popular cultural trends and have insight in how to address young girls specifically. Moreover, they were most likely cast for their knowledge of YouTube as a virtual media platform. This could be because they already have a following on YouTube and attract a particular clientele (young black women). YouTube is a space where ordinary people become self-proclaimed experts on certain issues or areas such as fashion, hair, health and fitness, and gaming (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). It is therefore not unusual on this platform that these women were chosen as presenters of this teaching course. They do, however, acknowledge that they have been informed by professionals and experts in the field of vaginal health.<sup>14</sup>

YouTube channel categories include, but are not limited to: travel and events, auto and vehicles, news and politics, music, pets and animals, comedy, education, technology, gaming, sports, film, animations, news, entertainment, how-to and style, as well as people and blogs (www.youtube.com).

People who produce, upload, or appear in YouTube videos are called YouTubers,<sup>15</sup> and they gain popularity by posting informative and entertaining videos regularly. Some of these YouTubers become role models to their subscribers and it is therefore important to look at the messages they convey and the image they portray to their subscribers. The YouTubers’ popularity can be seen by the number of followers they have, the number of likes their videos have, as well as the number of views that their channels and videos have.

Businesses and brands also have YouTube channels, where they post videos to promote their products. The most successful brands on YouTube are those who create original content for

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<sup>15</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/youtuber> (Accessed 8 November 2018)

their channels, acting as an extension of the ideals that resonate with their clientele, as opposed to reposting content that were developed for television.<sup>16</sup>

Significant to this study is the interaction between the YouTubers (in this case, the presenters of Vagina Varsity) and their audience, which has become an emerging subgenre of YouTube (Strangelove, 2010). The researcher will therefore look at how the presenters of this campaign interact with the audience, as well as how the audience interact with one another, in order to determine the extent of dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981) in the Vagina Varsity course. The comments could reveal how the videos, which are re-enactments of a classroom setting, are received by the audience, who become the ‘learners’. The comments might also uncover larger ideologies about women and their bodies.

This study will also look at the semiotic chains in the Vagina Varsity course. A semiotic chain “refers to a process of sign-making in which the meaning is materialized in a range of different but linked texts. It is based on the assumption that meaning-making is ongoing and continuous rather than limited to one moment in time”.<sup>17</sup>

The researcher believes that the Vagina Varsity campaign has chosen to use YouTube as a platform to host this course because the generation they are targeting use social media, they can watch on their cell phones and in their own time, as well as in a private space where they feel comfortable (as opposed to a classroom where they might not feel comfortable discussing these issues with older teachers and also people from the opposite sex). The affordances of YouTube also allow for the viewers to leave comments and express their feelings about the course and its contents.

## **1.6. Statement of the Problem**

Within the context of South Africa, a patriarchal society, women have been marginalized, and have not been taught about their bodies, especially with regard to sexuality (Tamale, 2008). The traditional domains of education and the home do not make allowances for women to talk about their bodies in objective ways, and to learn about issues that will affect them, such as pregnancy, menstruation, STDs and HIV (Tamale, 2008; Beyers, 2011).

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<sup>16</sup><http://mediakix.com/2017/04/best-youtube-brand-channels-content-views/#gs.bGMNw2E> (Accessed 9 July 2018)

<sup>17</sup><https://multimodalityglossary.wordpress.com/chain-of-semiosis/> (Accessed 1 October 2018)

Women in South Africa, and especially black women, have been fed myths regarding their own bodies as well as their roles in society (Lewis, Kuzwayo & Ramphele, 1999) and the effects of the patriarchal society has placed women in a position where they are not fully in control of their own lives (Segalo, 2013). Women have been taught how their bodies should look, and what they should do in relationships, and it always has a patriarchal bias. Women do not talk about what it means to be women, and as a result of the lack of education surrounding the female body, they also do not have the vocabulary to speak about their bodies. Because of this, many problems emerge, such as HIV, unwanted pregnancies, and STDs.

For the reasons stated above, I am looking at the Vagina Varsity campaign, a very successful marketing campaign that has produced a new genre. Vagina Varsity is a marketing campaign that takes place online, includes a pedagogical approach and draws on the social sensitivities which take place in South Africa today. By November 2017, the campaign had received its fourteenth award, not only locally, but also internationally.<sup>18</sup> Awards include a Kantar Millward Brown Special Award for sales impact with limited advertising budgets<sup>19</sup> as well as an award in the Health, Beauty and Fashion Digital Campaigns category at the Epica Awards ceremony in Berlin<sup>20</sup>. The campaign “performed 20% higher than industry benchmarks, paid back R2,5m in earned media with a R45k investment and delivered 2% value share growth, moving Libresse from #5 to #4 in category”.<sup>21</sup>

Localization as a theory can be used to understand why this marketing campaign was so successful. Localization refers to “the adaptation of a product or service to meet the needs of a particular language, culture or desired population’s ‘look-and-feel’” (Rouse, 2005). The campaign has focused on the taboo topics within the South African context. As a company that sells feminine hygiene brands, they have not only chosen to speak about menstruation, but have also expanded to include other social ills such as STDs and unwanted pregnancy. The campaign includes many other issues regarding womanhood, such as vaginal hygiene, pregnancy, and going to the gynaecologist in order to highlight the fact that all these issues are important. The campaign shows an awareness of the target culture, idiomatic language, local sensitivities, and gender roles. The context of South Africa has been captured perfectly. I will look at how the

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<sup>18</sup><http://m.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/16/170864.html> (Accessed 21 March 2018)

<sup>19</sup><https://sacreativenetwork.co.za/2017/07/network-bbdo-win-again-with-vagina-varsity/> (Accessed 21 March 2018)

<sup>20</sup><http://m.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/16/170864.html> (Accessed 21 March 2018)

<sup>21</sup><http://www.bizcommunity.africa/Article/410/423/173855.html> (Accessed 21 March 2018)

Vagina Varsity campaign has engaged with the local problems by looking at the learning material, in the form of videos and emails.

Women living in South Africa experience intersections of different forms of oppression (e.g. racism, sexism, classism, etc.), and are often left with few options but to bargain with different forms of gender relations as a way to obtain basic human rights, such as education, for example (Stander, 2016).

The Vagina Varsity campaign has tapped into the very local issues that we have in South Africa, where women are marginalized within a patriarchal society. Emblematic of this enduring struggle is the proposal of a ‘maiden bursary’ in January 2016 by the mayor of the uThukela district in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The then mayor, Dudu Mazibuko, proposed the introduction of a ‘maiden bursary’ which consisted of sixteen scholarships for female students who were virgins (Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016). This bursary was introduced to reward young women who remain ‘pure’ (Stander, 2016), and to prevent girls from falling pregnant and contracting HIV (Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016). This ‘bursary’ shows how saturated South Africa’s culture is with the idea that women should be pure. For a range of reasons, the maiden bursary was found to be unconstitutional and therefore had to be discontinued<sup>22</sup>. This legislative attempt indexes the very real current challenges which black women have concerning their bodies, specifically, the stigmas and the fallacies surrounding taboos.



### **1.7. Research aim**

This study aims to investigate the semiotic resources used by the Vagina Varsity campaign on the social media platform YouTube to construct meanings around the female body.

### **1.8. Objectives**

The study is geared towards achieving the following:

1. To evaluate the semiotic material used in the production of the Vagina Varsity campaign.

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<sup>22</sup><https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-06-16-virginity-testing-gender-equality-commission-bans-maiden-bursaries/#.V2Mtl-Z96Rs?platform=hootsuite> (Accessed 25 February 2018)

2. To explore the linguistic and visual strategies used in the production of the campaign to normalize images of the female body.
3. To explore the remediation of socio-cultural and political discourses as semiotic material in the normalization of socially taboo topics.
4. To uncover the dialogicality between Vagina Varsity as an advertising campaign and as a sex education programme.
5. To establish how localization impacts the success of this campaign in marketing sanitary towels as well as educating women.
6. To examine the pedagogical implications of the reformulation/modernization of sex education and understanding of female bodies online.
7. To establish what the employment of a pedagogical approach within this campaign reveals about marketing.

### **1.9. Research questions**

This study is motivated by the following research questions:

1. What semiotic materials are used in the production of the campaign?
2. What linguistic and/or visual semiotic resources are appropriated in the production of the videos? For what purposes?
3. Which socio-cultural and political discourses does the campaign draw on to normalize taboo topics?
4. How do the consumers experience participation in this course?
5. How does localization impact the success of this campaign?
6. What are the pedagogical implications of the reformulation/modernization of sex education and understanding of female bodies in the online space?
7. What does the employment of a pedagogical approach within this campaign tell us about marketing?

### **1.10. Significance of the study**

The findings of this study will contribute to the larger body of knowledge in linguistic landscape studies as it incorporates and aims to expand the novel sub-fields of virtual linguistic

landscapes (or virtual semioscapes) and skinscapes. This study also aims to shed light on other, larger issues, such as the presentation of the female identity in the online space.

### **1.11. CHAPTER OUTLINE**

Chapter One contains an overview of the study, particularly on the status of black women within South Africa, and why this is an apt time for young women to receive education specifically tailored for them, within the online space. The chapter also provided an historical background of South Africa, and discussed the issue of affordability and accessibility of data and the popularity of social media in South Africa. This chapter also included the statement of the problem, research aim, objectives, research questions, hypotheses as well as the significance of the study.

Chapter Two contains an overview of existing literature on the research topic, specifically the Internet and social media, YouTube, and also the representation of gender on YouTube. The chapter then explores literature on menstruation and the advertising of sanitaryware. Thereafter, the field of linguistic landscapes and its subfields, virtual linguistic landscapes and skinscapes, are discussed. Next, the chapter reviews literature on affective regimes and affinity spaces. This chapter also covers literature on performance and performativity, language and gender, feminist theory, as well as intersectionality.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical framework, which includes multimodality and multisemioticity, and is complemented by mediatization, intertextuality, recontextualization, resemiotization and semiotic remediation, chronotopes, immediacy and hypermediacy, genre and hybridity, stylization, as well as dialogicality and multivocality. This chapter also provides a classification scheme for YouTube comments.

Chapter Four discusses the research design and procedure that was used to conduct the research. It also discusses the importance of taking an ethnographic approach to conducting research online. The data collection procedure, data analysis methods, as well as the ethical considerations involved in these procedures, are also provided.

Chapter Five looks at two novel concepts within virtual linguistic landscapes literature, namely trajectory (the pathway which is taken in order to get into the virtual landscape) and sequentiality (the particular order by which the landscape unfolds). This chapter also suggests the use of the term virtual semioscape as opposed to virtual linguistic landscape.

Chapter Six looks at the various recontextualizations of the Vagina Varsity course. Special attention is paid to how the teaching genre has been recontextualized/remediated, the semiotic performances of different identities by the presenters, as well as immediacy and hypermediacy in the online classroom. The chapter also looks at the appropriation of YouTube genres, TV and movie scenes, and also game shows. The various languages and language varieties, as well as the different cultures which are displayed throughout the Vagina Varsity course, are also explored in this chapter. The chapter also explores the course's strategy to empower women, and also looks at the more explicit strategies the campaign uses to sell their products.

Chapter Seven is an exploration of the anachronistic figures that appear throughout the video lessons.

Chapter Eight looks at the responses that the Vagina Varsity course has generated by looking at the YouTube comments as well as the focus group discussion the researcher conducted. This chapter also includes a multimodal analysis of the handwritten notes by the focus group participants.

Chapter Nine elicits conclusions from the analysis. This chapter includes a consideration of whether the thesis achieved its objectives, discusses the limitations of the study, and also provides suggestions for further research.





## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.0. Introduction

The following section will review literature on the Internet, social media, and YouTube. Thereafter, this chapter will look at literature on women and menstruation, and literature on the advertising of sanitaryware. Thereafter, the researcher will focus on linguistic landscapes research, which also includes literature on virtual linguistic landscapes and skinscapes. The chapter covers literature on affective regimes and affinity spaces as well. The researcher will also focus on research on performance and performativity, language and gender, and feminist theory. Lastly, literature on intersectionality will be reviewed.

### 2.1. The Internet and social media

Since the onset of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1991, human communication has undergone an enormous shift (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009). Through the use of the Internet, people have changed the way they do business, exchange information, advertise, entertain themselves, and also do research (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009). The Internet is therefore an important tool used for communication in modern-day society.

The global increase and improvement in communication, which is afforded by satellite technology, improved telephone links, digital television, and the Internet, has allowed for communication with people and events internationally at a greater frequency, speed, quality and affordability (Creeber & Martin, 2009). This has resulted in the increase of globalization, which refers to “the combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces by which the people of the world are gradually becoming interconnected”, and as a result alters people’s notion of time, space and identity (Creeber & Martin, 2009: 5).

This study considers social media as a platform for teaching taboo topics (topics that people would not feel comfortable talking about with others). The virtual platform provides an alternative, and multimodal, mode for topics that are otherwise seen as socially inappropriate in homes as well as other modes (i.e. newspapers and television). How people position themselves online and how communication takes place online is of interest to this study. This section provides background on the Internet and social media.

James and Busher (2009: 6) state that “[t]he internet has greatly expanded the possibilities of conducting research with individuals and communities, providing a virtual social arena where practices, meanings and identities can intermingle between researchers and participants in ways that may not be possible in the real world”. For example, researchers have shown interest in how companies use websites, such as YouTube, for promotional purposes (cf. Thackeray *et al.*, 2008).

This study looks at social media as new platforms that enable the discussion of taboo topics, or topics which, for social, cultural, or religious reasons, would not be addressed in face-to-face conversations. Social media refers to “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). It is “a communication mechanism that allows users to communicate with thousands, and perhaps billions, of individuals all over the world” (Williams, Crittenden, Keo & McCarty, 2012, as cited in Whiting & Williams, 2013: 363). Social media consists of numerous sources of online information which are created, circulated and used by consumers (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Consumers use this content to educate themselves about the products, services and brands which are available (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Examples of social media include social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), photo sharing sites (e.g. Flickr), business networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn), micro-blogging sites (e.g. Twitter), and video sharing sites (e.g. YouTube) (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Of late, social media has been used for providing sex education to adolescents. Social networking sites have become valuable tools for adolescent care providers to share sensitive information that adolescents might not feel comfortable discussing face-to-face, such as information on condom use and age-appropriate STI information (Cookingham & Ryan, 2015). Furthermore, the relative anonymity of online spaces such as chat rooms, makes the discussion of taboo topics easier than in face-to-face conversations (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of social media, especially among the youth. Online platforms provide the space and opportunity for individuals, and also companies, to influence others online (Williams, Crittenden, Keo & McCarty, 2012). These opportunities did not exist a mere decade ago (Williams *et al.*, 2012). For example, advertising companies have shifted from traditional advertising to advertising products using social media as a marketing tool.

Cyberspace, digital media, and technology “are seen as an extension of our physical selves” (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009: 17). For example, websites such as Facebook and YouTube “allow people to present themselves, create presentations of themselves, present their views and invite the views of others” (James & Busher, 2009: 5). The virtual world allows people to not only communicate with specific, known individuals, but also, with the help of social media platforms, users are able to interact with an indefinite range of individuals (Deumert, 2014). This is one of the reasons why companies have started using social media to promote and sell their brand/products.

Whiting and Williams (2013: 362) found that the top ten uses and gratifications for social media are as follows: “social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others”. Important to this study is the use of social media as an information-seeking tool or a tool used by people to educate themselves, as well as the convenience that social media provides in terms of learning new things in the privacy of one’s own home (Whiting & Williams, 2013). An attributing factor to the popularity of social media is that it is inexpensive, and many times, free to use (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Platforms such as YouTube have become a part of the everyday routine for Internet users (Kohli, Suri & Kapoor, 2015).

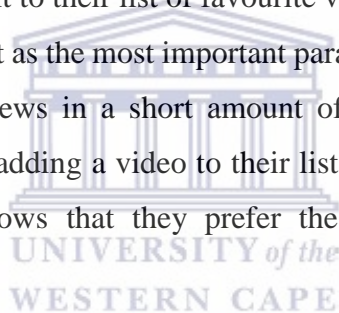
Recently, digital media have provided the affordances needed to support language teaching and learning, and offers learners a space where teachers are able to reflect on their own online and offline language use (Lee, 2017). Lee (2017) has found that the performance of identities on social media is of particular importance in the domain of education. Although Lee (2017) is addressing language learning specifically, the present study looks at the online space as a platform for teaching about other things, such as the female anatomy, and education about menstruation. This study looks at the performances of various identities by the presenters of Vagina Varsity, who also take on the role of teachers. In particular, the performance of identities on the medium of YouTube is important here.

## **2.2. YouTube**

This study looks at how YouTube is used as a platform for educational purposes. There has been an increase in literature about YouTube in recent years. For example, there is literature on YouTube as popular culture (Simonsen, 2012; Burgess & Green, 2009), as identity-forming

(Simonsen, 2012), as a pedagogical tool (Brook, 2011; Cochrane & Bateman, 2010), as participatory culture (Burgess & Green, 2009), as well as the multi-functionality of YouTube (YouTube as an online streaming platform, YouTube as a media archive, YouTube as a social network, YouTube as an information database) (Simonsen, 2012).

According to Chatzopoulou, Sheng and Faloutsos (2010), popularity on YouTube is essentially determined by selling yourself, a product, or a service. Chatzopoulou *et al.* (2010) conducted an in-depth study of the fundamental properties of YouTube video popularity. Chatzopoulou *et al.* (2010) used ‘viewcount’, which refers to the number of views a video receives, as the main factor for measuring popularity as well as studying its relationship with other popularity metrics, which include the number of comments, favourites, ratings, as well as the average rating. The metrics are also the features on YouTube which allow the viewer to provide feedback, and therefore captures the viewers’ reactions to a video (Chatzopoulou *et al.*, 2010). For example, viewers can like or dislike a video, rate the video on a five-star scale, post comments on the video, and add it to their list of favourite videos (Chatzopoulou *et al.*, 2010). As YouTube considers viewcount as the most important parameter of popularity, they are very careful not to count multiple views in a short amount of time from the same IP address (Chatzopoulou *et al.*, 2010). By adding a video to their list of favourites, users indicate their personal preference, as this shows that they prefer the video and will watch it again (Chatzopoulou *et al.*, 2010).



Registered users can also interact with each other by posting direct video responses, comment on the user’s profile, and send a private message via the private messaging service (Madden, Ruthven & McMenemy, 2013). Users are also able to befriend other users or become “fans” by subscribing to the user’s channel (Madden *et al.*, 2013). Subscribers receive alerts when the other user posts new material (Madden *et al.*, 2013).

The comments section appears underneath each video, and resembles a message board (Madden *et al.*, 2013). It allows registered users to post comments (Madden *et al.*, 2013). The individual who has uploaded the video is able to change the comment settings in order to select which users can comment, can require for comments to be moderated before they appear in the comment section, or can disable the comment section completely (Madden *et al.*, 2013).

YouTube has also been useful in academia, as shown by Kousha, Thelwall and Abdoli (2012) who looked at the scholarly use of YouTube videos. For example, YouTube is used to record and disseminate course lectures (Kousha *et al.*, 2012). Many universities have YouTube channels where they upload their lectures as well as other educational content (Kousha *et al.*, 2012). Academic researchers also use YouTube as a scientific data source (Kousha *et al.*, 2012). For example, Hossler and Conroy (2008, as cited in Kousha *et al.*, 2012) collected 72 YouTube videos about tanning bed use, analysed the contents of the videos and assessed its risks, safety and benefits. The current study also uses YouTube as a data source to collect specific data related to the Vagina Varsity YouTube campaign.

### 2.2.1. *YouTube and gender*

This study looks at how gender is represented online, specifically on YouTube. Some studies have compared female and male YouTubers' behaviours. For example, Molyneaux, O'Donnell, Gibson, and Singer (2008) compared how women and men react to vlogs (video blogs) on YouTube as well as how they use vlogs to communicate. Yang, Hsu and Tan (2010) found that there is a difference in video sharing behaviours between male and female YouTube users.

According to Wotanis and McMillan (2014), women are underrepresented on YouTube, which suggests that gender matters on this social media platform. In February 2012, out of the 50 most subscribed YouTube channels, only nine of those channels included female YouTubers, and only one female performer was in the top ten (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). In light of these statistics, Wotanis and McMillan (2014) looked at the gender dynamics on YouTube, by focusing on the most subscribed female YouTuber (at that time). The YouTuber's name is Jenna Mourey, and is known on YouTube by the name Jenna Marbles. Firstly, Wotanis and McMillan (2014) investigated the degree to which the reaction of Jenna Marbles' YouTube videos can be perceived as hostile and misogynistic. The comments generated by her top ten videos were compared to the comments of the top ten videos of Ryan Higa, also known as Nigahiga, who is considered to be her male counterpart (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). Secondly, Wotanis and McMillan (2014) analysed the content and style of Jenna Marbles' videos in order to look at how she successfully negotiates a hostile environment.

Wotanis and McMillan (2014) conducted textual analyses of the 100 most recent comments from the top ten videos of Jenna Mourey and Ryan Higa. They generated ten categories useful in discerning supportive and hostile feedback (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). The comments were then grouped into three types of feedback, including ‘supportive’, ‘critical/hostile’, and ‘omitted from analysis’ (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). It was found that Jenna Mourey received more ‘critical/hostile’ comments than Ryan Higa. In addition, her feedback included more inappropriate sexual comments and hater remarks than Ryan Higa (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). The difference in feedback appears to be connected to the gender of the YouTubers (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). It was also found that “Mourey employs a variety of performance strategies that mock traditional gender roles and stereotypes yet simultaneously reinforce them”(Wotanis & McMillan, 2014: 921) by “presenting herself in a very feminine, often objectified, manner even in the instances where she is rebuking the norm with her parodies” (Wotanis & McMillan 2014: 923). Wotanis and McMillan (2014) prove with this study that YouTube is a fertile ground for analyzing the performance of gender.

### **2.3. Literature on women and menstruation**

Menarche, also known as the first menstruation, occurs in girls from the age of 10 to 15, with the average age being 12.5 years (Kaur, Arora, Singh & Neki, 2012). According to Kaur *et al.* (2012), the onset of menstruation, a phenomenon unique to women, is one of the most important milestones in the process of maturation and growth. However, as much as it is a natural process for all healthy adult women, in many societies, it is surrounded by secrecy and myths (Kaur *et al.*, 2012). Menstruation “is viewed through a set of widely shared negative assumptions, societally and scientifically” (Kaur *et al.*, 2012: 69). Furthermore, attitudes toward menstruation are derived from one’s culture, and at the time of puberty, adolescent girls may be taught different folk beliefs and practices (Kaur *et al.*, 2012).

Kaur *et al.* (2012) conducted a study in India in 2005 in order to find out about adolescent girls’ sources of information about menarche, their perceptions of menstruation, the practice of menstrual hygiene, and restrictions practised during menstruation. Interesting findings include that only 61.3 per cent of girls were aware of menstruation before menarche, and 53.3 per cent of girls received their information about menstruation from their mothers. This number could be considered unsatisfactory, seeing that the mother is the most important source of information regarding menstruation (Rembeck, Möller & Gunnarsson, 2006). In terms of their beliefs

regarding menstruation, 73.7 per cent of girls believe that it is a normal physiological process, 16.6 per cent believe it is a curse from God, 5 per cent believe that it is a result of sin, and 4.7 per cent believe it is a disease or an abnormal process. In terms of menstrual hygiene, 69 per cent use sanitary pads, and the rest use cloth or cotton, and 98.3 per cent take regular baths during menstruation. During menstruation, 62 per cent of menstruating girls accept the restrictions placed on them by their parents, with 72 per cent of menstruating girls being restricted from visiting religious places or touch sacred books. These findings indicate that menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls is still unsatisfactory, and that varied beliefs, ignorance, unsafe practices and the reluctance of mothers to educate their daughters about menstruation, are still common among them (Kaur *et al.*, 2012).

Kaur *et al.* (2012) suggest that the girls should be educated on the facts of menstruation, the physiological implications of menstruation and, most importantly, about proper hygiene practices during menstruation. Kaur *et al.* (2012) further state that this type of education can be achieved and promoted through compulsory sex education curriculums at schools, interactions with the adolescent girls and knowledgeable individuals such as health personnel, sociologists, parents and teachers, and also educational televisions programmes. These suggestions would eliminate the restrictions, misconceptions, myths and taboos surrounding menstruation, which would, in turn, promote and improve menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls (Kaur *et al.*, 2012).

Cardiff *et al.* (2016) compiled a report about teaching about menstruation in England and Wales. The report aims to stop the transmission of menstruation taboos (Cardiff *et al.*, 2016). According to them, menstrual taboos exist in many different cultures (Cardiff *et al.*, 2016). In some cultures, these taboos manifest visibly, and in some cultures they manifest subtly (Cardiff *et al.*, 2016). Cultural taboos specifically are strengthened through society, education, the media, and advertising (Cardiff *et al.*, 2016). These taboos reinforce the idea that menstruation is dirty and secretive, and by implication, that menstruating women are likewise dirty and secretive (Cardiff *et al.* 2016). Cardiff *et al.* (2016: 3) point out that “[e]ven the use of the word ‘sanitary’ to describe menstrual products signifies that menstruators are framed as inherently unsanitary”. What is more, the euphemisms that are used to describe menstruation support the idea that it should be avoided and that talking about it should be done by using code words (Cardiff *et al.*, 2016). This points to “an enduring tradition that pathologises women’s bodies

and regards *all* bodies as objects in constant need of (commodified) improvement” (Cardiff *et al.*, 2016: 4).

Cardiff *et al.* (2016) suggest that schools should educate all genders about menstruation, and in that way, boys would grow up with this topic being part of their daily lives, and all genders will have equal knowledge about this subject. In addition, non-binary, intersex, and transsexual pupils would not be excluded from the conversation. Cardiff *et al.* (2016) also noted that there is a lack of scholarly research on how boys and men relate to menstruation. The attitude towards the topic of menstruation of those who do not menstruate, is of equal importance as those who menstruate, because those attitudes can reinforce and propagate the taboos that surround it (Cardiff *et al.*, 2016). It is therefore of importance to the researcher to look at how men react to the Vagina Varsity course.

Furthering this discussion, Thomas (2007) states that menstruation has been treated as a taboo topic since ancient times, and this taboo occurs in all cultures. Western women are constructed as “dirty” and “leaky” (Thomas, 2007: 72). Moreover, “[t]he arguments that women are ‘leaky’ and therefore considered emotional, natural, and irrational led to the pathology of menstruation and a *societal menstrual taboo*” [emphasis in original] (Thomas, 2007: 73). She states that “women are encouraged to hide their menstruation by maintaining strict codes of cleanliness and concealment” (Thomas, 2007: 65). In addition, this taboo not only distances women from men, but also causes women to feel guilt (Thomas, 2007). The characteristics associated with certain bodily zones and bodily development have served to emphasise the difference between men and women, and also to justify male dominance, even though these characteristics are biologically arbitrary (Thomas, 2007).

Historical archives show that the topic of menstruation was banished to the domestic and private spheres as a result of the view that “such discussions are not pertinent to the ‘common good’” (Thomas, 2007: 74). Thomas (2007: 74) states that “such silencing created an environment that hurt women by denying them proper education on the topic, relation to other women, and equal rights in the public sphere”.

Oxley (1998) investigated women’s experiences of managing menstruation. Oxley (1998) identified three major themes in her participants’ responses to what they have to cope with during menstruation: self-consciousness (being increasingly aware of their bodies and feeling a need to cover themselves up and affecting social and/or sporting activities); distaste of menstrual blood (feeling that menstrual blood is distasteful to oneself and others); and pain and



discomfort (pain, ways of coping with pain, as well as searching for comfort). Furthermore, Oxley (1998) argued that, in order for women to accept themselves, even during menstruation, two things need to happen. Firstly, women must resist the stigma attached to menstruation, and secondly, cultures must reduce the stigma (Oxley, 1998). This study will look at how Vagina Varsity attempts to achieve this.

As a result of powerful social taboos that dictate that menstruation should not be discussed publicly, adolescent girls, realizing their need to talk about this topic, have developed creative linguistic strategies to prevent feelings of embarrassment (Kissling, 1996). Menstruation is regarded as one of the topics (others include death and illness) that are unpleasant and uncomfortable, and therefore avoided in polite conversation, although there are instances where communicators find it necessary to discuss these topics (Kissling, 1996). For example, parents, mothers in particular, feel compelled to inform and instruct their daughters about the topic of menstruation (Kissling, 1996). The participants in the study “found it difficult to seek out information about menstruation” (Kissling, 1996: 298). Furthermore, “[a]lthough these girls were all curious about menstruation and how to manage it in daily life, they perceived a lack of information resources, and often felt too shy or self-conscious to use available resources they did recognize” (Kissling, 1996: 298). According to Kissling (1996), teenage girls feel especially embarrassed to speak about menstruation to adults.

Twenty years since the Kissling (1996) paper was written, not much has changed regarding the social status of the topic of menstruation. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2013) argue that menstruation causes social stigma for women. A stigma is defined as “any stain or mark that renders the individual’s body or character defective” (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013: 9). This stigma is transmitted through popular culture in the form of advertisements and educational materials, and is also perpetuated through silence (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). For example, the topic of menstruation is normally avoided in conversation, and when it is talked about, it usually occurs in private, which relays the idea that menstruation is an embarrassing event and must be concealed from others (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). Furthermore, the stigma of menstruation reflects, as well as contributes, to the lower social status of women (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). The stigmatization of menstruation impacted negatively on women’s health, well-being, sexuality, and social status (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013).

Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2013: 11) state that (mostly negative) attitudes about menstruation are conveyed through public discourses such as advertisements, books, magazines, newspapers, jokes, and so forth, which have constructed a stereotype of menstrual and pre-menstrual women as “violent, irrational, emotionally labile, out-of-control, and physically or mentally ill”.

Matteson’s (2014) study brings discourses surrounding menstruation into the academic sphere, thus creating a space for the female body, and contributes to work by feminist anthropologists, activists and scholars. Matteson (2014) analysed the discourses of menstruation among women at Scripps College, a liberal arts, woman’s college in California in the United States of America. Her assumption was that, seeing as this college is seen as “an ideal women’s space”, discussions about women’s bodily functions, menstruation in particular, would be talked about openly (Matteson, 2014). It was, however, found that the actual practices of the women showed that normative silences and taboos regarding this issue continued to operate (Matteson, 2014).

Roberts, Goldenberg, Power and Pyszczynski (2002) investigated the influence that menstruation has on society’s perception of women. They tested the hypothesis that “reminders of a woman’s menstrual status lead[s] to more negative reactions to her and increased objectifications of women in general” (Roberts *et al.*, 2002: 131). They tested this hypothesis by looking at the reactions of college students to an incident where a woman either “accidentally” dropped a tampon, or a hair clip (Roberts *et al.*, 2002). It was found that the college students reacted more negatively to the woman who accidentally dropped a tampon from her handbag, and was viewed as being both less competent, and less likeable compared to a woman who dropped a hair clip, which, although it is considered a highly feminine item, is still considered less “offensive” (Roberts *et al.*, 2002). It is interesting to note that this reaction was equally strong among women and men (Roberts *et al.*, 2002).

Williams (1983, as cited in Kissling, 1996) identified the following three common areas of practice and belief regarding menstrual taboos for modern-day North American women: concealment, activity, and communication. Concealment “refers to the belief that menstruation is something to hide and/or to be ashamed of” (Kissling, 1996: 293). This belief is exploited by advertisements for menstruation products, which claim how well their products hide one’s menstruation. Activity taboos refer to “restrictions placed on the behavior of menstruating women and girls” (Kissling, 1996: 293). There is a widespread belief that women have to restrict their physical activity while they are menstruating (Kissling, 1996). The

communication taboo refers to “the belief that menstruation should not be talked about” (Kissling, 1996: 293). Menstruation should be concealed physically and verbally (Kissling, 1996).

According to Erchull, Chrisler, Gorman and Johnston-Robledo (2002: 455), mothers and female relatives have the responsibility of educating young girls about menstruation, and girls list their mothers as their “most important source of information”. Lee (2008) explored first-period narratives of young women, with the focus on their relationship with their mothers during that time. Lee (2008) focused on girls who experienced menarche after 1996, a period when society started talking more openly about menstruation, according to Lee. She wanted to establish how the discourses between mother and daughter about menarche influenced how the young women experienced this event. Lee (2008) states that contemporary Western societies still frame the discourses surrounding menarche within the politics of the female body and by the uncertainties that are associated with womanhood. For example, some studies have found that young women find menarche to be a difficult transition for girls, while other studies have found that young women are more positive towards it (Lee, 2008). Although previous research have found that women are ambivalent towards menarche and that it has also been associated with shame, the result of more recent research with young women who are growing up in the digital age where there is an increase in discussions about menstruation, sexuality, and openness about bodies, tends to be more mixed (Lee, 2008). It was found that the majority of the young women recalled that their mothers were supportive during their first period (Lee, 2008). As most of the young women in this study started their menstruation around the new millennium, it shows that maternal scripts are changing. According to Lee (2008: 1325), “this study suggests that emotionally connected mothers are able to mitigate feelings of shame and humiliation associated with the discourses of menstruation in contemporary culture”.

In America, many mothers start the conversation about puberty and menarche by giving their daughters a booklet detailing information about menstruation (Erchull *et al.*, 2002). In fact, these booklets, which are produced by a manufacturer of feminine hygiene products, have been a part of American culture since the 1930s (Erchull *et al.*, 2002). These booklets “constitute a form of ‘private’ education about menstruation in the sense that girls can consult the booklets as often as they like and when they are alone” (Simes & Berg, 2001, as cited in Erchull *et al.*, 2002: 456). This privacy could be valuable to girls who are too embarrassed to ask questions and to girls whose mothers do not speak about menstruation to them (Erchull *et al.*, 2002).

Educational booklets serve two purposes: 1) to educate girls, and 2) to create product loyalty (Erchull *et al.*, 2002).

Rembeck *et al.* (2006) conducted a study on adolescent girls from Sweden. It was found that there is a need for information about sex and menstruation among these girls, as they seek information from various sources (Rembeck *et al.*, 2006). In South Africa, there is a dearth of knowledge on adolescence and puberty in health education (Nonjinge, 2017). It is therefore crucial for girls to start engaging in health education in order to break down social taboos as well as to demystify myths surrounding menstruation (Nonjinge, 2017).

#### **2.4. Advertising sanitaryware**

Traditionally, advertisements for feminine hygiene products “have emphasized secrecy, avoidance, avoidance of embarrassment, freshness, and delicacy” by using “[a]llegorical (e.g., flowers, hearts) and blue liquid (rather than reddish blood)” (Erchull *et al.*, 2002: 459). The blue liquid is used to illustrate that sanitary pads are absorbent (Luke, 1997) and is used “euphemistically” in advertisements in order to “suggest delicacy” and “promote secrecy” (Erchull *et al.*, 1997). Libresse’s “Blood” advertisement is “the first ever in the femcare category to have ever shown blood in an advert about periods and sanitaryware” (SABC Digital News, 2016). This section will look at literature on the advertising of sanitary products, to establish how these products have been marketed in the past.

According to Havens and Swenson (1988), menstruation is marketed as a “hygienic crisis”, and the advertisers’ products would effectively manage it by preventing soiling, straining, embarrassment, and odour. As a result, women go to great lengths to hide evidence of their menstruation, from disguising the packaging of their menstrual products to using euphemisms as a way to hide that they are discussing menstruation (Havens & Swenson, 1988).

Additionally, articles about menstruation in popular magazines and newspapers contain messages that reinforce and perpetuate stigmas, and also provide inaccurate information concerning menstruation and premenstrual changes (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013).

According to Coutts and Berg (1993, as cited in Roberts & Waters, 2004: 6), “[t]he marketing of menstrual hygiene or management products emphasizes an ideal of super-femininity, modesty, and decorum”. Society praises attractive and beautiful women, and the media expresses that natural bodies are unacceptable and therefore need to be sanitized, deodorized,

exfoliated and denuded (Roberts & Waters, 2004). Moreover, in a sexually objectifying culture, menstruation, more than any other bodily function, has to be kept hidden (Roberts & Waters, 2004).

According to Thomas (2007), a positive contribution by the feminine hygiene industry has been the improvement of women's social status. However, by highlighting fear and insecurity in women about menstruation, they have reinforced a menstrual taboo in order to sell their products (Thomas, 2007). Menstrual products are not inherently problematic, but the discourse used for selling and advertising these products continue to be harmful and negative (Thomas, 2007). Women's magazines and television contain advertisements with images and texts with specific, negative associations to menstruation and its problems, which women are then taught (Thomas, 2007).

Since disposable pads first emerged in the 1920s, advertisements for brands such as Kotex have warned women about offensive hygiene and odours, thus promoting these products as a way in which to prevent it (Thomas, 2007).

Erchull *et al.* (2002) were interested in the ways in which cultural products and social contexts affect attitudes toward menstruation. Preparing girls for menarche through commercially produced booklets can contribute positively to the formation of attitudes (Erchull *et al.*, 2002). Erchull *et al.* (2002) analysed 28 educational booklets about menstruation that were published between 1938 and 1997. It was found that, while the booklets provide adequate information about hygiene, the information about reproductive physiology was vague and some of the illustrations were inaccurate (Erchull *et al.*, 2002). More emphasis was placed on the negative aspects of menstruation as opposed to the positive aspects (Erchull *et al.*, 2002). In addition, the booklets included characteristics of the menstrual cycle, such as when a girl might experience menarche, how long a menstrual cycle is, as well as how long menses last (Erchull *et al.*, 2002). However, they did not provide much information on what girls want to know, such as the subjective experience of menstruation, whether there would be physical discomfort, what it feels like to menstruate, whether their lives would change as well as other experience women have during menstruation (Erchull *et al.*, 2002).

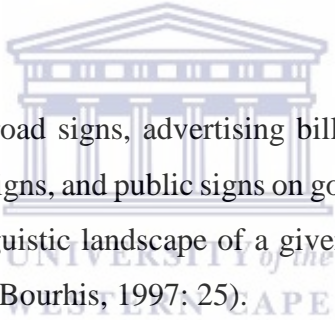
A study on HIV prevention education in Cape Town, South Africa, found that the participants, who consisted of Xhosa speaking men and women, chose non-mother tongue terminology during sexual communication (Cain, Schensul & Mlobeli, 2011). The participants preferred to use English and Zulu as a tactic to reduce the threat to 'face', and they also felt that non-mother

tongue terms do not have the same emotional and connotative impact that they would have in their mother tongue (Cain *et al.*, 2011). Using English as MOI not only ensures that the Vagina Varsity course reaches a wider audience, it also minimizes potential threat and embarrassment when addressing sexually related conversations (cf. Cain *et al.*, 2011), as it might be easier for the course presenters to address these issues in English, which is not their first language.

## **2.5 Linguistic landscapes, virtual linguistic landscapes, skinscapes**

### *2.5.1 Linguistic landscapes*

Landry and Bourhis (1997: 24) acknowledge that “the issue of linguistic landscape [is] an important sociolinguistic factor contributing to the vitality of competing ethnolinguistic groups in multilingual settings”. The linguistic landscape (LL) marks “the geographical territory occupied by distinctive language communities within multilingual states” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 24). Specifically, linguistic landscapes refers to:



[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings [which] combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 25).

Landry and Bourhis (1997: 23) propose “that the linguistic landscape may serve important informational and symbolic functions as a marker of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory”. The informational function “serves to inform in-group and out-group members of the members of the linguistic characteristics, territorial limits, and language boundaries of the region they have entered” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 25) while the symbolic function entails that “the absence or presence of one’s own language on public signs has an effect on how one feels as a member of a language group within a bilingual or multilingual setting” (Bourhis, 1992, as cited in Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 27).

Earlier LL studies followed quantitative approaches, with large-scale data, the focus being, for example, on the number of times a specific language appeared in a particular environment (Milani, 2013). These numbers would then point to “larger ideological and political language

processes”, which drew the researchers’ attention to public signage, as opposed to policy documents, “as the tool through which language policies are not just implemented, but are also contested and resisted” (Milani, 2013: 2).

Multilingual signage on public spaces is the primary concern of LL studies, as it reveals the role that a mix of different languages plays in uncovering the power relations which exist in that community (Gorter, 2006, as cited in Ivković & Lotherington, 2009). This study moves away from focusing solely on different languages being used, but rather focuses on the multimodal discourses.

Barni and Bagna (2010: 5) state that big cities with strong multi-ethnic components can be spaces where individuals as well as collective identities are able to express themselves “since spaces that are more open to creativity, change and relations between social and linguistic groups are also more dynamic”. This is also true of the online space, particularly a site such as YouTube that is accessed by people worldwide. The multi-ethnic component of YouTube will therefore be taken into account when looking at how identities are performed online.

According to Woldemariam and Lanza (2014: 79), the LL “provides an arena for investigating agency as related to literacy, language rights and identity”. Of specific interest to this study is how women exercise agency in relation to their identity, as seen on the virtual linguistic landscape, which will be discussed in the following section.

As a result of its main focus being on language policy and language attitudes, LL studies have in the past largely ignored gender and sexuality, as they are more interested in social categories such as ethnic identity and national identity (Milani, 2013). Milani (2013: 1) advocates for gender and sexuality to be considered on a larger scale in the study of linguistic landscapes because they are “two important axes of power along which public spaces are structured, understood, negotiated and contested”. The same is true for studies on the virtual space, therefore this study attempts to address this gap in LL research by looking at the representation of gender on the Internet.

The linguistic element, although extremely important, does not account for the entire construction and interpretation of place (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) move beyond ‘linguistic landscapes’ to ‘semiotic landscapes’ because they are interested in how written discourse interacts with images, non-verbal communication, the built environment, and architecture. The ‘linguistic’ is therefore only a single element of constructing and interpreting place (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). A semiotic landscape refers

to “any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010: 2). This study focuses on various different modes as opposed to only the linguistic aspect of the online course. However, although this study is about semiotic landscapes, the researcher uses the term linguistic landscapes, seeing that the latter term is established and has been adopted by other studies in the field.

### *2.5.2 Virtual linguistic landscapes*

This study expands the field of linguistic landscapes by looking at the virtual world as a LL. For this study, the virtual linguistic landscape allows for a space to not only collect video data, but also to generate meta-commentary through face-to-face focus group discussions, in other words, online as well as offline. Ivković and Lotherington (2009) have argued that the Internet should be seen as a linguistic landscape, or ‘virtual linguistic landscape’ (VLL), as it is a site where multilingual practices have become more prevalent. Similar to LL studies, studies on the VLL “serves to delineate the linguistic community and to mark language status in expressed power relations among the coexisting linguistic choices in the cyberspace community” (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009: 19).

Existing LL studies on virtual environments focus on language practices (cf. Ivković & Lotherington, 2009) and how languages are represented in digital spaces (Deumert, 2014). This research, however, is not only interested in the languages used, but also various other semiotics that are employed by individuals online.

The virtual linguistic landscape is different from a landscape in the physical world in the sense that the delocalized and deterritorialized nature of the Internet allows access to a greater number of people to participate and contribute (Ivković, 2013). As a result, anyone using the Internet, and with adequate linguistic knowledge, can take part in discussions online (Ivković, 2013). While the LL is immersive, meaning that “individuals may enter and exit, or even reside within the area, interacting linguistically within demarcated spatial boundaries”, the VLL is delocalized, meaning that “anyone can enter and engage within virtual space from anywhere” (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009: 19). Virtual space therefore allows for interaction, anytime and anywhere. The virtual space creates a platform where individuals can post comments, which is not possible with the traditional LL. In addition, comments made on the Internet are relatively permanent and open for everyone to see, whereas verbal statements are fleeting and only those in the vicinity can hear it. According to Ivković & Lotherington (2009: 19), “the linguistic



content indicating ownership, identity and laws used in physical landscape signage is, by nature, more fixed and stable than that available to the VLL”.

Tandjaoui and Abdelhay (2017) conducted a virtual linguistic landscape analysis study on an Algerian Facebook page in order to look at the emancipatory acts of women as found on this page, and what this reveals about public discourses. According to Tandjaoui and Abdelhay (2017), while women have been deprived of the right to ‘exist’ in a culturally male-dominated space, they have been given a chance to ‘exist’ on virtual spaces without being physically present. It is in the virtual space where they can express themselves (Tandjaoui & Abdelhay, 2017). The Internet offers a safe space where women may ‘exist’ without being discriminated against as well as express themselves without restrictions and without social constraints (Tandjaoui & Abdelhay, 2017). The virtual space has become a place where women perform emancipatory acts (Tandjaoui & Abdelhay, 2017). Tandjaoui and Abdelhay (2017) have also found that, since the physical and virtual spaces are interconnected as a result of the fluid movement between these spaces, women are determined to use virtual spaces to change and improve their real-life circumstances.

In the early 1990s, the Internet was mainly in English in terms of the contents as well as the users (Lee, 2017). In the late 1990s, however, Internet access became more affordable, which resulted in the growth of mass communication worldwide (Lee, 2017). This, in turn, resulted in the growing diversity of Internet users and the languages that they use to communicate (Lee, 2017). According to Lee (2017), the web provides a space for all languages.

### 2.5.3 *Skinscapes*

Linguistic landscapes is “a strand of sociolinguistic inquiry that has typically privileged written modes (verbal and visual), and has only recently begun to engage with other forms of semiosis” (Kitis & Milani, 2015: 269-270), of which skinscapes forms a part. It is an expansion of research which includes the body as a unit of analysis (Peck & Stroud, 2015). In their study on corporeal sociolinguistics, Peck and Stroud (2015: 133) explored “the materiality of the body as a mobile and dynamic space of inscribed spatialized identities and historical power relations”. They explain that, “[j]ust as a linguistic landscape may be carried on placards and t-shirts, so can landscapes be carried on the surface of the skin” (Peck & Stroud, 2015: 134). Furthermore, “[i]n like manner to how inscriptions exterior to the body may frame performances of self, so do corporeal features such as hair and bodily inscriptions also frame

(re)presentations of place that subsequently offer affordances for situated identity work” (Peck & Stroud, 2015: 134-135). Important to this study is corporeal features of race and gender.

The body is also seen as being deliberately shaped as a way of conveying meaning (Peck & Stroud, 2015). In other words, the body is not only read in terms of colour, gender or ethnicity: it is also about the authorship of the body by an individual which is read by a real or imagined audience (Peck & Stroud, 2015). It therefore relates to the woman’s agency over her body, meaning that she can choose what message her body conveys, not only to herself, but also to others. This study looks at how the women presenters author their bodies, and how they present themselves online. This notion also takes into account that the body is read by others (Peck & Stroud, 2015), therefore the researcher will look at comments related to the women’s performances, as well as asking the participants to respond to these performances.

## **2.6 Affective regimes**

Wee (2016) argues for the significance and value of attending to affect in linguistic landscape studies. Affect refers to “any evaluative (positive or negative) orientation toward an object” (Wee, 2016: 107). Wee (2016: 107) prefers looking at affect over emotion because affect is a broader and more general concept and “allows us to focus on a variety of phenomena that are not always clearly identifiable as emotions, since the range of culture-specific labels cannot be treated as exhaustive and relying on such labels alone would prove analytically too restrictive”. Affect is also “an evaluative orientation that may or may not be identifiable via culture-specific and conventionalized emotion labels” (Wee, 2016: 107). The notion of affect, according to Wee (2016), is useful when looking at the role of language in creating a particular atmosphere in the LL. Affective regimes help to emphasize which displays of affect are appropriate for which sites (Wee, 2016). Affective regimes connect affect with feeling rules (feelings considered appropriate in particular situations) and display rules (specifies how these feelings should be expressed overtly) within a particular landscape, which allows for variability in how people may respond (Wee, 2016).

## **2.7 Affinity spaces**

Gee (2005; 2018) provides the notion of ‘affinity spaces’ as a new analytic lens for looking at classrooms as well as other learning spaces such as the online space. Affinity spaces are used

as an alternative to ‘community of practice’, which Lanza (2007: 47) defines as “a social unit that has its own norms for language use”. Gee (2005: 215) critiques the notion of ‘community of practice’, stating that it creates the perception that “we are attempting to label a group of people”, which raises issues over who is in the group and who is not. Affinity space provides an alternative notion that focuses on the idea of space as opposed to the idea of membership within a community (Gee, 2005). Gee (2005: 218) is particularly focused on spaces which he calls ‘social semiotic spaces’, which “can be viewed internally as a set of signs (a type of content) or externally in terms of the individual and social practices in which people engage in respect to the set of signs”. Gee (2005) is concerned with the ways in which people receive and give meanings to the signs within these spaces. An affinity space is a particular type of social semiotic space (Gee, 2005). Affinity spaces are defined by the following features:

1. Common endeavour, not race, class, gender or disability, is primary
2. Newbies and masters and everyone else share common space
3. Some portals are strong generators
4. Internal grammar is transformed by external grammar
5. Encourages intensive and extensive knowledge
6. Encourages individual and distributed knowledge
7. Encourages dispersed knowledge
8. Uses and honours tacit knowledge
9. Many different forms and routes to participation
10. Lots of different routes to status
11. Leadership is porous and leaders are resources (Gee, 2005: 225-228).

Affinity spaces have most or all of the features described above. In affinity spaces, people affiliate around a particular cause and its associated practices, regardless of whether they have little in common or even differ dramatically on other issues (Gee, 2005). Gee argues for the use of affinity spaces in schools as young people encounter affinity spaces more and more every day as a result of technology / the Internet. Within these spaces, “[l]earning becomes both a personal and unique trajectory through a complex space of opportunities ... and a social journey as one shares aspects of that trajectory with others ... for a shorter or longer time before moving on” (Gee, 2005: 231).

As a result of the digital media, education is once again becoming the norm. Education here is defined as distributed teaching and learning where many people who are moving among many related locations help each other with issues that matter within the particular affinity space (Gee, 2018). Digital media are also drastically changing the ways in which affinity spaces function (Gee, 2018). Today, one can find new affinity spaces devoted to solving problems such as women's health, curing rare diseases, and many other interests that are "school-like" (Gee, 2018: 9). According to Gee (2018), in order to understand how young people of today are learning online, one needs to understand how affinity spaces function. Teaching and learning, according to Gee (2018), are not confined to a particular person or site, but are distributed across many people, locations, and practices. The goal of a particular affinity space is to develop skills that would allow the people in the group to solve a particular problem or set of problems (Gee, 2018). Within these online spaces, people help one another learn, produce, and act, irrespective of their age, level of expertise, place of origin, or formal credentials (Gee, 2018).

The affinity space consists of all the virtual and physical spaces a person inhabits that are part of a larger affinity space (Gee, 2018). For example, a gamer comes and goes among a range of virtual and physical places, such as the game itself, the game room within the house, the gaming rooms in friends' houses, gamer conventions, and so forth (Gee, 2018). This thesis looks at Vagina Varsity as an affinity space, which includes all the spaces people taking part in the course would inhabit.

## **2.8 Performance and performativity**

This study is interested in the performance of various identities by the presenters of Vagina Varsity. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) state that identity is not fixed, but is constantly constructed and performed. Ahearn (2012: 161-174) identifies three approaches to "performance" and "performativity":

*Performance defined in opposition to competence:* This refers to the Chomskyan view that a distinction should be made between competence or knowledge of a language, and the performance of the language.

*Performativity:* This concept originated in Speech Act Theory and refers to the ability to do by virtue of saying.

*Performance as a display of verbal artistry:* This refers to performances where performers display verbal skills for the audience who evaluates the performers by some means. The notion of performativity was coined by J.L. Austin in his book entitled *How To Do Things With Words*, published in 1962 (Ahearn, 2012). Performativity formed part of speech act theory, and refers to “those utterances that perform an action in the very saying of them (such as ‘I promise to study harder on the next exam,’ or ‘I hereby dub thee Knight of the Woeful Countenance’)” (Ahearn, 2012: 164).

Performativity was first used to look at how language was used to ‘perform’ something (Ahearn, 2012). Butler (1988) applied performativity to gender. Butler (1988: 150) found that people become a particular gender based on their performance, by stating that gender is “produced in the performance”. Gender is seen as created through choice of clothing, using certain phrases, using certain tones of voice, or partaking in certain activities (Ahearn, 2012). This study looks at how gender is performed and stylized within the Vagina Varsity videos.

According to Butler (1988: 519):

When Simone de Beauvoir<sup>23</sup> claims, “one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* [emphasis in original] a woman,” she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition. In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts* [emphasis in original]. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.

Furthermore, Butler states that “to be a woman is to have *become* [emphasis in original] a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project” (Butler, 1988: 522).

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<sup>23</sup> Philosopher <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/beauvoir/> (Accessed 11 October 2016)

Cameron (1999: 444) explains Butler's concept of performativity as follows: "[g]ender has to be constantly reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms (themselves historically and socially constructed, and consequently variable) which define 'masculinity' and 'femininity'". Femininity and masculinity are therefore seen as a routine performance, and not as a given. This research is interested in establishing how women perform their gender through the semiotics of the body.

Contemporary applications of this theory have included looking at the performances of gender in the media, through the various modes that this medium affords. For example, Milani and Shaikjee (2013) looked at the use of popular culture in mass media in order to portray notions of masculinity and femininity. They found that gender was constructed through multimodal sources such as words, song lyrics, and images (Milani & Shaikjee, 2013). This study will look at the various modes used in the performance of gender in the Vagina Varsity videos.

## 2.9 Language and gender

The study of language and gender was catalyzed by Robin Lakoff who published an article called *Language and Woman's Place* in 1973. This publication invoked a furore from a largely female base "who jumped to engage with the arguments and issues that Lakoff had put forth" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 1). An account of the interplay between language and gender is provided below.

*What is gender?*

Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti and Sunderland (2013: 1) state that

"while the term *gender* [emphasis in original] is often used in relation to the social construction of female and male *people* [emphasis in original], it may be more useful to see gender as a set of *ideas* [emphasis in original], i.e. what is said, thought, said and written about women, men, girls and boys: what they are like and do, what they should be like and should do".

Furthermore, they state that oftentimes these ideas are expressed through gendered discourses that vary according to the context (Atanga *et al.*, 2013).

According to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003), gender is embedded into our actions, beliefs, desires, and institutions to the point that it appears to be completely natural. Ideas about gender are everywhere and so commonplace that people accept it as scientific fact (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) identified four fundamental principles concerning gender.

Firstly, gender is learned, but also, because “gender involves a restriction of choice”, it must be taught and enforced (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). According to Ahearn (2012: 190), “[a]s is the case with other sociocultural practices, children either unconsciously adopt or are consciously instructed in gender-appropriate behavior that varies across societies and throughout historical time”. In South Africa, traditional gender roles include men being the breadwinners and the decision-makers, while women are expected to stay at home to raise the children and do the household chores (Strebel, Crawford, Shefer, Cloete, Henda, Kaufman, Simbayi, Magome & Kalichman, 2006). However, according to Strebel *et al.* (2006), who conducted focus group interviews in South Africa, there was a general agreement that gender roles are shifting, as many women are becoming the breadwinners and are gaining more power in the family.

Secondly, gender is collaborative, connecting the individual to the social order (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Gendered activities “are learned in, and acquire meaning from, social contexts” (Ahearn, 2012: 190-191). Furthermore, gender “is constructed in and through interactions with others” (Ahearn, 2012: 191).

Thirdly, gender is not something we have, but something we do (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Gender requires work, as aspects of gender are “consistently performed at all levels of society”. If this is not accomplished, aspects of gender can wither away (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Judith Butler’s (1988) concept of the performativity of gender is in line with this idea, and she stresses that “people continuously reinforce or reconfigure their gender identities” (Ahearn, 2012: 191). Clearly, while everyone has access to gendered performances, there are constraints as to who are allowed to perform certain identities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

Lastly, gender involves asymmetry (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). This means that, at a very basic level, inequality is built into gender (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Men and women, as well as masculinity and femininity, are not simply looked at as being different. Value judgments are usually attached to gender differences, and vary depending on the social

context (Ahearn, 2012). According to Ahearn (2012), the qualities associated with men and masculinity are often taken for granted, which means that behaving and speaking in a masculine way tends to be seen as the norm. Speaking or acting in a way that departs from this, for example, in a way that is considered feminine, is considered to be different (Ahearn, 2012). The same can be said about women and femininity.

### *Difference between sex and gender*

According to Ahearn (2012: 189), “the term ‘sex’ refers to a person’s biological existence as either a female or male human being, and the term ‘gender’ refers to a person’s cultural or social identity as either a woman or a man (or a girl or a boy)”. Whereas sex is given at birth and is unchangeable, gender identity can be changed, depending on the characteristic cultural practices associated with masculinity and femininity that the individual might choose (Ahearn, 2012).

Gender refers to those characteristics which are socially expected, which leads to certain forms of behaviour – how men and women are supposed to act (Goddard & Patterson, 2000). Goddard and Patterson (2000) looked at the qualities and characteristics associated with men and women by studying commonly-used language to describe the sexes, and considered how far this language reflects learned beliefs about men and women. It was found that the language used to describe men and women were gendered (Goddard & Patterson, 2000). “The way in which we talk about the sexes indicates that we possess a shared system of reference about traditional roles and about what is deemed masculine or feminine” (Goddard & Patterson, 2000: 34). Through socialization, we have come to acquire a shared understanding “about how men and women are meant to behave, and the characteristics they are meant to possess” (Goddard & Patterson, 2000: 34). The researcher is interested in how this understanding of sex and gender is depicted and/or challenged in the Vagina Varsity campaign.

### *How does gender relate to language?*

According to Bucholtz (2000: 80), gender “is a social construct rather than a biological given, whose ‘naturalness’ is achieved in large part through discourse”. Drawing on Simone De Beauvoir’s insights on women and gender, it is important to state that one is not born with a gender, but it is produced through language (among other semiotic resources).



According to Ahearn (2012: 211), the relationship between language and gender cannot be reduced to simplistic and dualistic generalizations and “must be determined by studying actual language use, and ideas surrounding that language use, in actual communities of practice”.

There are also various ideologies related to gender. Fairclough (2003: 9) defines ideologies as “representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing societal relations of power, domination and exploitation”. Ideologies are enacted in ways of interacting and inculcated in ways of being or identities (Fairclough, 2003). Ideologies pertaining to women and their bodies, as portrayed by *Vagina Varsity*, is of keen interest for this study.

## **2.10 Feminist theory**

Femininity and womanhood are of importance to this study, therefore feminist theory will be elaborated in this section. According to Atanga *et al.* (2013), the study of language and gender was initiated in the early 1970s, inspired by the start of the second wave of the ‘Western Women’s Movement’ in the United States of America. It has been underpinned ever since, and informed by advances in Western feminism (Atanga *et al.*, 2013).

According to Jackson and Jones (1998: 1), “[f]eminist theory seeks to analyse the conditions which shape women’s lives and to explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman”. Feminist theory therefore takes a critical look at how society has conditioned women to behave, think, and look, in a way that is ‘acceptable’ for women. Furthermore, feminist theory calls into question the hierarchy which exists in society, particularly with regards to gender (Jackson & Jones, 1998). Hesse-Biber and Griffin (2015:73) state that “[f]eminists ask ‘new’ questions that place women’s lives and those of ‘other’ marginalized groups at the center of social inquiry”, allowing the researcher to think critically about these issues.

Butler (1988) states that feminist theorists dispute assumptions that sex dictates gender roles. Feminist theory is also “critical of naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality that assume that the meaning of women’s social existence can be derived from some fact of their physiology” (Butler, 1988: 520), which is useful as this study is interested in how women deliberately go against traditional norms of femininity.

According to Atanga *et al.* (2013: 1), “Sub-Saharan Africa is an important epistemological site for the study of language and gender”. To date, the majority of studies on language and gender

have been carried out in the ‘global North’ (USA, Canada, Australasia and Europe) (Atanga *et al.*, 2013). It is therefore important to use feminist theory with the Southern context in order to expand the field as well as to gain a better understanding of the construction of womanhood in South Africa.

## 2.11 Intersectionality

The intersection between womanhood, blackness, and the body is of interest to this study. The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal theorist, in 1989. Crenshaw was a law scholar, who claimed that the struggles and experiences of women of colour were not acknowledged in feminist and anti-racist discourse (Davis, 2008: 68). Crenshaw argued that theorists should consider both race and gender, and illustrate how these categories work together to form the multidimensional experiences of black women (Davis, 2008).

Intersectionality refers to “the mutually constitutive social relations among social identities” and is also “a central tenet of feminist thinking” (Shields, 2008: 301). Shields (2008: 302) explains that ‘mutually constitute’ “mean[s] that one category of identity, such as gender, takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category”. This theory has also changed how gender is conceptualized (Shields, 2008). In addition, this perspective reveals how ones social identities profoundly influences ones beliefs about and experiences of gender (Shields, 2008).

The origins of the intersectionality framework grew out of feminist and womanist scholars of color pressing the position that most feminist scholarship at that time was about middle-class, educated, white women, and that an inclusive view of women’s position should substantively acknowledge the intersections of gender with other significant social identities, most notably race (Shields, 2008: 302-303).

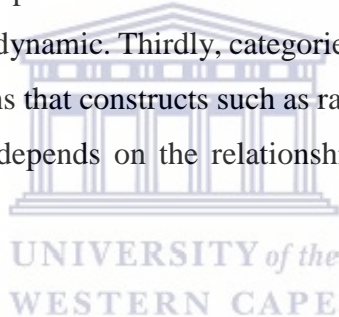
According to Shields (2008: 302), intersectionality entails that “social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another”. Therefore, it is not enough for one category (e.g. ‘woman’ or ‘lesbian’) to explain individual experience or behaviour (Levon, 2015). This point is particularly salient in the South

African context where virginity testing, scholarships and success are intertwined. In particular, the researcher is interested in how this revoicing of womanhood is taken up on YouTube.

Intersectionality was further developed by black feminist scholars (Levon, 2015). Furthering this work, Levon (2015) argues for the integration of intersectionality theory in language, gender, and sexuality research.

Levon (2015) identifies three basic tenets of intersectionality theory:

Firstly, lived experience is intersectional in nature. If the goal is “to understand how social forces inform and constrain observed practice”, then the intersectional complexity should be placed at the heart of the analysis (Levon, 2015: 297). This is accomplished by identifying the “the multiplicity of categories, ideologies, and forces that undergird any observed social phenomenon” (Levon, 2015: 297). It is therefore impossible to describe intersections as stable or universal conditions (Levon, 2015). The focus should rather be on “the ways in which different social histories, interpersonal motivations, and local ideological expectations shape the imbrication of categories of experience in real-world empirical encounters” (Levon, 2015: 298). Secondly, intersections are dynamic. Thirdly, categories not only intersect; they mutually constitute one another. This means that constructs such as race, class and gender are not single entities, but that their meaning depends on the relationship with the other categories they intersect with (Levon, 2015).



## **2.12 Summary**

This study focuses on a campaign that takes place online. This chapter therefore reviewed literature on the Internet and social media, as well as YouTube. Seeing that the Vagina Varsity campaign was introduced to sell sanitaryware, the chapter also reviewed literature on women and menstruation as well as on the advertising of sanitaryware. Thereafter, the field of linguistic landscapes and its subfields, virtual linguistic landscapes and skinscapes, were discussed, as both concepts provide a framework for this study. This study also reviewed literature on affective regimes and affinity spaces. This chapter then reviewed literature on performance and performativity, language and gender studies, feminist theory, as well as intersectionality.

## CHAPTER 3 - A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO MULTIMODALITY

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at the theoretical/analytical framework that will be used in this study. This study is informed by a multimodal discourse analysis approach, and is complemented by mediatization and intertextuality, recontextualization, resemiotization and semiotic remediation, chronotopes, immediacy and hypermediacy, genre and hybridity, stylization, as well as dialogicality and multivocality. Thereafter, this chapter will provide a schema for analyzing YouTube comments, which would include inter alia advice, opinions, site processes and personal feelings.

### 3.1 Multimodality and multisemioticity

Language is no longer the most important part of communication. People have turned towards the use of images, music, gestures, colours, and so forth (Kress, 2010; Iedema, 2003). Multimodality refers to “the idea that communication and representation always draw on a multiplicity of semiotics of which language may be one” (Kress, 2001: 67-68). This is particularly true of the Internet, where the technological affordances allow for the use of various modes (Domingo, Jewitt & Kress, 2014). Domingo *et al.* (2014) have found that the role of inscribed communication online is changing and that images are gradually taking the place of writing. Similarly, Yang, Hsu and Tan (2010) state that, in the past, websites were based only on text or the written word, but its functions have since grown, and is now used in combination with all types of media. Multimodality is therefore a useful theory to use when analysing online phenomena. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of going beyond the linguistic element of public texts in order to understand their multimodal and multisemiotic nature (Milani, 2013). For this study, a multimodal analysis will be conducted on the Vagina Varsity campaign materials, which includes video data as well as emails as both data sources are multimodal. These materials can all be found in the online space.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2002: 346) state that “[w]hat makes a mode mode-like is its availability as a resource for making signs in a social-cultural group”. According to Kress (2010), mode is defined as semiotic resources which are socially shaped and culturally given,

and used for meaning making. Examples of modes include writing, image, layout, music, gesture, soundtrack, and so forth (Kress, 2010).

In recent years, there has been a shift from discourse analysis to multimodal discourse analysis (Iedema, 2003). An important contribution to this shift occurred in the mid to late 1980s, with Hallidayan discourse analysis taking into account meaning making through semiotics other than language (Iedema, 2003). Iedema (2003) thus highlights the importance of taking a multimodal approach to the meaning making process. Multimodality recognizes that “language is not at all the centre of all communication” (Iedema, 2003: 39). According to Iedema (2003: 33), “this new emphasis on and interest in the multi-semiotic complexity of the representations we produce and see around us”, is the increasing prevalence of image, sound, and film found on the computer, television, and the Internet.

In summary, multimodality:

1. Is concerned with giving proper recognition to semiotics other than language in its analyses of representations.
2. Focuses on the relationships between these different semiotics, and on the ‘division of labour’ between them in particular representations.
3. Aims to understand and describe in ‘phylogenetic’ terms the displacement of some semiotics by others (e.g. the displacement of the linguistic by the visual).
4. Links the potential of the different semiotics deployed to how they affect (enable and constrain) interaction and the formation of subjectivity (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996: 39; Iedema, 2003: 48).

Banda (2016) argues for a social semiotic approach to multimodal analyses because 1) the semiotic resources are shaped by society and derived from cultures within society, and 2) it pushes for wider theoretical and methodological considerations when looking at the semiotic resources in architecture, and the semiotics which constitute multimodal texts broadens researchers’ interest in signs across media, modes, channels, and so forth, as well as how the signs interact to make meaning.

The researcher is interested in identifying the different semiotic modes the Vagina Varsity campaign employs in the construction of identity, in their videos as well as their emails. A

multisemiotic analysis will be performed on the selected videos and emails in order to identify the different semiotic artefacts that are appropriated and transformed in these videos.

According to Bezemer (2012), there are three theoretical assumptions that underpin multimodality.

Firstly, “multimodality assumes that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning” (Bezemer, 2012). The focus is on analyzing as well as describing all meaning-making resources (e.g. visual, written, spoken, gestural, and so forth, depending on the domain in which it is represented), used in different contexts and developing ways to show how the resources are organized for meaning making (Bezemer, 2012).

Secondly, “multimodality assumes that resources are socially shaped over time to become meaning making resources that articulate the (social, individual/affective) meanings demanded by the requirements of different communities” (Bezemer, 2012). These semiotic resources are referred to as modes, realizing communicative work in distinctive ways, which makes choosing a mode a fundamental aspect of interaction as well as meaning (Bezemer, 2012). For resources to become more fully and finely articulated, they have to be continuously used in the social life of a particular community (Bezemer, 2012). For something to be considered ‘a mode’, a community needs to have a shared cultural sense of a set of resources and how these resources can be organized to make meaning (Bezemer, 2012).

Thirdly, “people orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes, foregrounding the significance of the interaction between modes” (Bezemer, 2012). All communicational acts are therefore shaped by the norms and rules functioning at the moment of sign making, and are influenced by people’s motivations and interests within a particular social context (Bezemer, 2012).

Bezemer and Kress (2015) take a multimodal perspective to teaching and learning. As an example they provide two images, one of medical students and surgeons looking at a screen during an operation, and another picture of a snapshot from a screen as the operating surgeon says, ‘That’s the liver’. Firstly, this example illustrates how people make use of the various semiotic resources available in the particular environment to communicate (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). The surgeon uses *gesture* to point at the liver on the screen, as well as *speech* to name

the organ he is pointing at. Both *gesture* and *speech* are needed to draw the student's attention to the organ on the screen and to identify it as 'the liver' (Bezemer & Kress, 2015), illustrating how modes work together and are of equal importance in a communicative turn. During this communicative event, the students are engaging with the object on the screen through *gaze*, and it is also through *gaze* that they communicate to the operating surgeon that they are paying attention to what he is showing (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). The students are also *positioned* in such a way that they can see the liver shown on the screen (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). Secondly, teaching is an instance of multimodal communication and it is therefore important to look at *how* semiotic resources are used to 'teach' (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). The example illustrates that the surgeon creates a multimodal learning environment by using a range of different communicative resources (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). Thirdly, "the use of semiotic resources provides inroads into *learning* [emphasis in original]" (Bezemer & Kress, 2015: 2). This example shows that learning does not necessarily have to occur within "an institutionally designed and located curriculum" (Bezemer & Kress, 2015:2).

Multisemioticity looks at how these different semiotic modes work together to make meaning (Kress, 2010). This concept is especially useful when looking at video files, like those posted on YouTube, as they incorporate language, images, as well as sound (Adami, 2009a: 371). All these semiotic resources are important for analysis, as each mode makes a unique contribution to the message being conveyed. Furthermore, as these videos reach people worldwide, they also create "an intricate network of communication threads made up of video responses and written comments" (Adami, 2009a: 371). Important to this study is not only the YouTube videos, but also the comments and the email content as well, as the comments reveal how the Vagina Varsity subscribers receive the videos.

This study takes a multimodal/multisemiotic approach to the Vagina Varsity course material in order to explore the linguistic and visual strategies the campaign uses to normalize images of the female body.

### *3.1.1. Mediatization and intertextuality*

Mediatization and intertextuality are both used in the analysis of Vagina Varsity campaign material. Mediatization refers to the "meta process by which everyday practices and social relations are increasingly shaped by mediating technology and media organizations"

(Livingstone, 2009: 3). The media has pervaded contemporary society, to the extent where it can no longer be seen as being detached from social institutions and cultural processes (Hjarvard, 2008). The task is therefore to gain an understanding of the ways in which the omnipresence of media has changed the character, function and structure of social institutions and cultural processes (Hjarvard, 2008).

Mediatization can be applied to the virtual space, as seen with the shift from print advertising to online advertising. Advertising campaigns have now also moved to the virtual space. An example of this is Vagina Varsity, an advertising campaign for sanitary towel company Libresse, which utilizes the online space to sell their products. This advertising campaign is designed creatively as a teaching course, where the presenters speak about womanhood. This shows how the virtual linguistic landscape (VLL) allows for a campaign to be used in a completely different way.

Mediatization, according to Hiramoto and Park (2010), is inherently intertextual, as the process entails extracting elements from a specific context, and thereafter reshaping it to fit into media discourse. According to Roberts (2018), advertisements cannot exist without drawing on outside discourses, an occurrence which is referred to as intertextuality. Seeing that Vagina Varsity is an advertising campaign, this study will look at intertextuality within the course material. The notion of intertextuality was first put forward by Mikhail Bakhtin, and refers to the idea that texts draw on other texts. Furthermore, “intertextuality is responsible for the ‘blurring’ of genres by drawing upon multiple codes from wider contexts – both textual and social” (Roberts, 2018: 50).

According to Lam (2013), intertextuality manifests in various ways in computer-mediated discourse. Bakhtin stated that all existence, meaning, word, or thought enter into dialogue or ‘dialogic’ relations with the other, and exhibits intertextuality in both time and space (Morris, 1994). Alfaro (1996: 272) puts it simply by stating that dialogism means that we are not only in dialogue with ourselves and others, but also with the natural and cultural configurations, which together are grouped as “the world”.

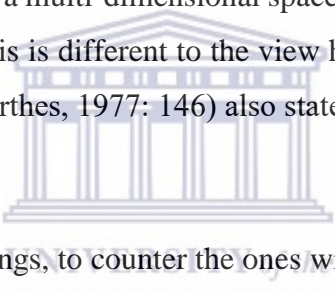
Intertextuality was further elaborated by Kristeva (1986: 37), who defines intertextuality as the idea that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another”. Intertextuality requires that we understand texts as differential and historical, not as self-contained systems, and since they are formed by repeating and transforming other textual structures, they should be understood as traces of otherness (Alfaro,



1996). The concept of intertextuality maintains that “a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole, and so, that it does not function as a closed system” (Alfaro, 1996: 268). Alfaro (1996: 271) also noted that producing art and literature has become “an act of creation based on a recycling of previously existing works”. Intertextuality can occur both consciously and unconsciously (Berger, 2004). Additionally, two axes of intertextuality exist: the horizontal axis, linking the author to the audience, and the vertical axis, linking the text to other texts (Kristeva, 1980).

Barthes (1981) states that texts are by default intertextual. This means that other texts are always present within a text, and varies in levels of recognisability (Barthes, 1981). According to Alfaro (1996), Barthes’ (1981) view of intertextuality highlights the frequency in which the sources of the intertextual quotations are anonymous. Barthes (1973, as cited in Alfaro, 1996) also states that, while it might appear that a writer of a text is expressing himself spontaneously or transparently, a text contains elements of other texts.

Barthes (1977) states that a text is a multi-dimensional space wherein a variety of writings, not one original, merge and clash. This is different to the view held previously that a text has one single meaning. Furthermore, (Barthes, 1977: 146) also states that the writers’



only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.

Reflecting on the total existence of writing, Barthes (1977) states that a text consists of multiple writings, which are drawn from many cultures, and enters into dialogue, contestation, and parody, but this multiplicity is not in the author, but in the reader. Barthes (1977: 160) further states that an intertextual reference should not be confused with the origin of the text. Intertextuality, therefore, illustrates the fact that no text exists on its own, and is connected to other texts at all times (Haberer, 2007).

According to Fairclough (2003), who analysed spoken and written language, intertextuality refers to instances where elements of other texts are found within a text. There are also less

obvious ways of incorporating other texts (Fairclough, 2003). For example, in reported speech, writing or thought, it is possible to summarize, and possibly reword, a text as opposed to quoting the actual words that has been said or written (Fairclough, 2003).

Tryon (2008) looked at the use of intertextual references to popular culture in online parody videos of political advertisements on YouTube before the 2008 elections in America. Tryon (2008) looked at how popular culture was used as a tool to offer commentary on political campaigns, and found that the humour in these videos relied on references to other forms of popular culture, such as TV shows, movies, as well as advertisements. These intertextual references were utilized to create new meaning (Tryon, 2008). Similarly, my study looks at how the Vagina Varsity campaign draws on popular cultural discourses such as TV shows and songs, as well as humour, to create a new type of teaching course which is different from the norm.

Hiramoto and Park (2010: 180) looked at media intertextuality, which involves the insertion of “images of culturally distant others and voices of the past into the ‘here and now’ of our discourse” by the wide reaching mass media. The mediatisation of ideas, discourses and people, or the process through which the media orients and organises the interpretation and perception of social roles and values, is constantly at work in our interpretation and construction of social identity (Hiramoto & Park, 2010).

This study looks at the various socio-cultural and political discourses Vagina Varsity draws on in order to normalize socially taboo topics.

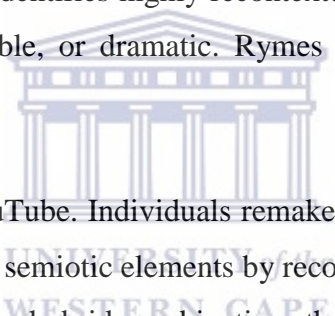
### *3.1.2. Recontextualization*

Recontextualization, according to Bernstein (1990: 184), “selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses, and relates other discourses to constitute its own order”. While Bernstein (1990) focuses on recontextualization within educational discourse and Bauman and Briggs (1990) focuses on recontextualization within ethnography, Linell (1998) extends the notion to all levels of discourse: intratextual (occurring within texts), intertextual (occurring across texts and discourses), and interdiscursive (occurring at abstract and global levels). Linell (1998: 144-145) defines recontextualization as “the dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context (the context being in reality a matrix or field of contexts) to

another”. It entails detaching a particular aspect of a text or discourse (e.g. linguistic expressions, stories, ‘facts’, ideologies, values, and so forth), and fitting this aspect into another context (Linell, 1998). Importantly, “recontextualization is never a pure transfer of a fixed meaning”, as it involves complex transformations of meanings and meaning potentials (Linell, 1998: 145).

Androutsopoulos (2010: 206) defines recontextualization as the process of fitting existing social practices into a new setting. More specifically, it “involves the appropriation and reworking of globally circulating media material in the media into a local code for a local audience” (Androutsopoulos, 2010: 215).

Rymes (2012) studied recontextualization on YouTube, specifically focussing on the manner in which YouTube videos, “Crank That” by Hip Hop artist Soulja Boy, and the “Yes We Can” speech by former USA President Barack Obama, were recontextualized and used in other YouTube videos. Rymes (2012) identifies highly recontextualizable elements in videos to be those that were catchy, memorable, or dramatic. Rymes describes the recontextualization process as follows:



A video circulates on YouTube. Individuals remake that video—not replicating it, but highlighting certain semiotic elements by recontextualizing them in a new semiotic array. In this new hybrid combination, the individual makes a bid at recognition by like-minded peers. In this way, the individual is using the recontextualized bit as a new element of his already established communicative repertoire (2012: 224).

The researcher is interested in the recontextualizations which take place within the Vagina Varsity course materials, the YouTube videos as well as the email content.

### *3.1.3. Resemiotization and semiotic remediation*

This study draws on the concepts of resemitization and semiotic remediation. Resemiotization is used to study multimodal phenomena which occurs when social processes unfold

(O'Halloran, 2011). Resemiotization looks at how meanings shift between semiotic modes (Iedema, 2001). More specifically, it is interested in meaning making, and how it shifts across contexts, practices, and from one stage of practice to the next (Iedema, 2003). According to Iedema (2003), resemitization is intended to provide the analytical tools to 1) trace how semiotics are translated from one into the other in the unfolding of social processes, and 2) asking why those particular semiotics (as opposed to others) are used for certain purposes at certain times.

Prior, Hengst, Roozen, and Shipka (2006) looked at the practice of semiotic remediation within reported speech. Semiotic remediation focuses on the various ways in which the semiotic performances of humans and non-humans are reused and re-represented across a range of media, modes, and chains of activity (Prior *et al.*, 2006).

Prior and Hengst (2010) explain that the word 'semiotic', in the term 'semiotic remediation', signals an interest in signs across media, modes, and channels, while 'remediation' refers to the ways existing materials are used in the present, and in that way creates transformed conditions for future use. Remediation implies that activities are not mediated anew each time, but are (re)mediated by taking existing material, using these materials in the current context, and thus producing altered conditions for future use (Prior & Hengst, 2010). Irvine (2010: 237) further explains that the "*re-* prefix in 'remediation' implies that something important is taken to be the same, while situated in a different event of semiosis". Prior and Hengst (2010: 1) advocate for a focus on discourse practice "because semiotic remediation is at the heart of *sociogenesis* (the people-, artifact-, and society-making dimensions of all activity) as well as of *situated discourse* (that is, discourse situated both *in* concrete, historical acts and *across* extended trajectories)" [all emphasis in original].

Bolter and Grusin (1999) use the term remediation to explain the representation of one medium in another. Remediation was believed to be a defining characteristic of new media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Bolter and Grusin (1999) provides the example of books (originally intended for printed publication) on CD-ROM. Although the content stays the same, the medium is different.

Banda (2016) argues that we need to take into account the semiotic material affordances in new media and communication technologies, and also suggests that the notion of semiotic remediation should be added to the inventory of the social semiotic theory of multimodality.

This argument is motivated by Kress (2010) who argues for a multimodal theory of social semiotics which is able to sufficiently explain current developments within the world of media and communication, characterized by mobility and semiotic instability.

Banda (2016) demonstrates how multimodal sign production is a result of agency and proactivity in the new information age by illustrating remediation as repurposing in advertisements, linguistic landscapes, soundscapes, and so forth. Semiotic remediation, as used by Banda (2016), focuses on “how prior semiotic material and activities in original or modified forms are redeployed in new missions and with different purposes/meanings” (Banda, 2016).

In order to fully understand the meanings and historical authenticity of the semiotic material in place, the socio-cultural history of these semiotic materials should be traced over time (Banda, 2016). Doing this “enables the locating of the histories of meaning making, and the stages and transitions of meaning making in time and space and contexts” (Banda, 2016).

Semiotic remediation is also used as a marketing technique (Banda, 2016; Dentith, 2000). This offers copywriters the opportunity to draw on and rework prior texts or sections of prior texts (Banda, 2016). The audience might be aware of this ‘borrowing’ but the copywriters are not too worried about being authentic or being 100 per cent truthful to the original creator(s) of the text(s) (Banda, 2016). Dentith (2000, as cited in Banda, 2016) states that this technique involves the transformation and imitation of images, words, or other recognizable elements of existing texts. The purpose of this mimicked text is to communicate with the viewers’ existing knowledge or schema (Banda, 2016). What makes the reworked text different to the original, is the creativity that went into the remediation and repurposing of semiotic material at hand (Banda, 2016). Oftentimes, in order to avoid copying an entire text, historical facts are transformed into humorous semiotic resources, which fits the goal of the new text (Banda, 2016).

This study will look at how the Vagina Varsity course resemiotized and semiotically remediated certain outside elements into the teaching material in order to make it marketable to a young audience.

### 3.1.4. Chronotopes

This study also uses the notion of chronotopes, which is closely linked to semiotic remediation (Prior & Hengst, 2010). Chronotopes are key “to understanding how participants in a moment of discourse routinely navigate multiple representational worlds or indexical fields on the one hand, and also how such situated interactions link to past and projected histories of representation” (Prior & Hengst, 2010: 6). Bakhtin (1981: 425) introduced the concept of chronotope, or “time-space”, as the unit of analysis by which the nature and ratio of time and space are represented within literature. According to Agha (2007: 321), Bakhtin believed that “all semiotic representations are chronotopic”, seeing that they occur in time and space. What makes this concept distinct from other uses of time and space in the analysis of literature is that time and space are interdependent; neither time nor space are privileged (Bakhtin, 1981). Agha (2007) states that every chronotopic representation has two vital characteristics. Firstly, “[i]t links representations of time to those of locale and personhood”, and secondly, “it is experienced within a participation framework” (Agha, 2007: 321). A chronotopic analysis will therefore be useful for tracing trajectories and semiotic chains within the Vagina Varsity course.



### 3.1.5. Immediacy and hypermediacy

The Vagina Varsity campaign is set up like a teaching course, with the presenters teaching the audience, thus creating a virtual classroom where immediacy and hypermediacy can take place. According to Bolter and Grusin (1999), remediation manifests itself in two ways, namely immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy speaks to the immersive nature of virtual reality, which means that the purpose of this medium is to disappear (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). The definition of immediacy is: “[a] style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium (canvas, photographic film, cinema, and so on) and believe that he is in the presence of the objects of representation” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999: 272-273).

Hypermediacy, on the other hand, is “a style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999: 272), and is most evident in the “windowed style” of the pages on the WWW, the desktop interface, multimedia programs, as well as video games (Bolter & Grusin, 1999: 31). Immediacy therefore differs from hypermediacy in the

sense that “[w]here immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as ‘windowed’ itself – with windows that open on to other representations or other media” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999: 34). According to Roberts (2018: 70), YouTube “represents the most influential expression of hypermediacy in that it has multiple representations inside the window such as text, hypertext, graphics and video”. Furthermore, “the drop-down menus, icons and toolbars present this windowed style as tiling and overlapping each other” (Roberts, 2018: 70). YouTube, therefore, “becomes a heterogeneous space to compete for the viewers’ attention” (Roberts, 2018: 70).

Double logic looks at the interconnectedness of immediacy and hypermediacy which is illustrated in the fact that “[o]ur culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999: 5). Immediacy and hypermediacy provide a way in which to examine the viewer’s “involvement with the multimodal text” (Roberts, 2018: 72). This study will therefore look at how the Vagina Varsity course creates an immersive online space for the participants of the course.



### 3.1.6. Genre and hybridity

The concepts of genre and hybridity are important to this study. There are many different genres of videos on YouTube (cf. Simonsen, 2011). Yates *et al.* (1985:84, as cited in Askehave & Nielsen, 2005: 121) define genre as:

socially recognized types of communicative actions... that are habitually enacted by members of a community to realize particular social purposes. A genre may be identified by its socially recognized purpose and shared characteristics of form.

Askehave and Nielsen (2005) looked at the genre characteristics of multimodal, web-mediated texts. The concept of genre has been a topic of discussion in research communities worldwide since its introduction in the 1980s (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005). However, the focus was on

genres which were transmitted either through speech or print (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005). Modern applications of genre extend beyond literary texts to include “films, music, and computer games and into professional, academic, and everyday forms of speech and writing” (Hyland, 2004:1). At present, studies of genre are concerned with taking into account the context and form and also put emphasis on description and analysis instead of mere classification (Hyland, 2004). According to Hyland (2004: 3), genres “function as frames for the ways we act, the thoughts we have, and the interactions we engage in”.

The concept of genre is used to group texts and it assists in the organization of common-sense labels used to categorize texts and the contexts in which they occur (Hyland, 2004). Texts are created by following established patterns (Hyland, 2004). For example, readers of a text can immediately identify whether it is a recipe, a joke, or a love letter (Hyland, 2004). On the basis of this, they can respond to the text and even construct a similar text (Hyland, 2004).

In recent years, there has been an increase in research on genre transmitted through the Internet, which is unsurprising, seeing that the use of web-mediated communication has rapidly increased (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005). This increase is due to the fact that the Internet became immensely popular among businesses and organisations across the world (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005).

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), genres are viewed as social processes, “because members of a culture interact to achieve them: they are goal-oriented because they have evolved to achieve things; and they are staged because meanings are made in steps, and it usually takes writers more than one step to reach their goals” (Hyland, 2004: 25). SFL research on genre has stressed the significance of a genre’s social purpose, as well as describing the linguistic structures developed to serve these purposes (Hyland, 2004). Hyland (2004) further goes on to state that when a group of texts share a purpose, they will likely share the same structure, and as a result of their shared purpose and similar structure, they would then belong to the same genre.

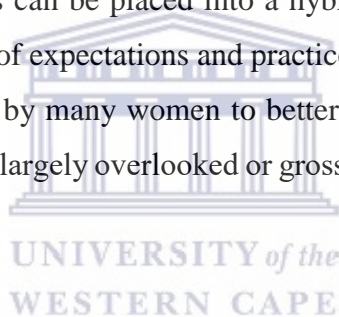
According to Kristeva (1986:203), hybridity refers “to the absence of fixed boundaries between styles and genre of language, and people’s fusing of multiple styles and registers when they communicate”. Hybridity is therefore the mixing of different genres within texts (Fairclough, 2003). Hiramoto and Park (2010) note that in postmodern society, hybridity is associated with advances in media technologies. An example of genre mixing, or hybridity, in a modern media text is that of a television talk show which typically combine conversation, interview, and



entertainment (Fairclough, 2003: 216). Similarly, YouTube allows for a space where various genres can merge. For instance, one YouTube channel can include various genres of videos and one video can include more than one genre.

The mixing of genres results in a hybrid space, which Bhabha refers to as the “third space” where new and alternative identity options emerge (Rutherford, 1990). Furthermore, Bhabha states that the “third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (Rutherford, 1990: 211).

According to Miller and Shepherd (2009: 265), “[g]enres originate not only from changes in situation, context, and culture but also from other genres, in an evolutionary process, and occasionally from the conscious effort of individuals to fill a previously unmet need”. In the case of Vagina Varsity, a ‘mixed’ genre is identifiable. What this study explores is the blurring of education and entertainment space. Following Miller and Shepherd (2009) and Bhabha (in Rutherford, 1990), the VV series can be placed into a hybrid edutainment (cf. Addis, 2005) space as it allows for new norms of expectations and practices to emerge. This space may well have been borne out of the need by many women to better understand their bodies, a reality which, until VV came along, was largely overlooked or grossly misaligned with ‘sanitized’ and arbitrary advertising.



### 3.1.7. Stylization

This study looks at the stylization of identities by the presenters of Vagina Varsity. Fairclough (2003) defines style as an enactment of identities through discourse. Fairclough (2003) further explains that one’s identity is made up of how one speaks, writes, as well as embodied aspects such as how one looks, holds oneself, moves, and so forth. Bucholtz (2009: 146) views style as “a multimodal and multidimensional cluster of linguistic and other semiotic practices for the display of identities in interaction”. This definition shows that performance of identities entails the utilization of various modes and semiotics. Hip Hop performances, for example, rely on modes that go beyond language, such as sound, movement, technical manipulation of objects, and visual representation (Androutsopoulos, 2009).

Bakhtin (1981: 362) states that “[e]very authentic stylization ... is an artistic representation of another’s linguistic style, an artistic image of another’s language”. Stylization therefore refers

to the borrowing of someone else's voice, recognizable by its distinct style and timbre (Bakhtin, 1981, as cited in Vice, 1997). Every stylization contains two different linguistic consciousnesses: that of the stylizer, and that of the one who is stylized (Bakhtin, 1981).

Coupland (2001: 345) defines stylization as the “knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context”. Dialect stylization, more specifically, entails the performance of other personas by drawing on phonological and related methods, often for the purpose of play or parody (Coupland, 2001). Of interest to this study is how the presenters employ stylization in the performance of different personas.

According to Williams and Stroud (2010), one of the focuses of sociolinguistic research on globalization is on how stylization and appropriation are utilized in the local performances of global genres. Of interest to the researcher is how the Vagina Varsity presenters use various modes to stylize and perform various identities, as well as how they draw on global genres to perform these identities in a localized setting.



### *3.1.8. Dialogicality and multivocality*

Dialogue, according to Roberts (1994: 247), “is perhaps the basic trope in all of Bakhtin’s thought”. Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of dialogicality states that all existence, meanings, words, or thoughts enter into dialogic relations with the other. For Bakhtin, “communication is a dialogic process”, which means that it is “a process characterized by the unity of different, usually opposing, tendencies, or voices” (Baxter, Hirokawa, Lowe, Nathan & Pearce, 2004: 229).

Prior and Hengst (2010: 6) take a dialogic approach to semiotics, which brings attention to all the semiotics present in interactions, as opposed to “taking single-mode analyses (of talk, of writing, of gesture, of visual image) as autonomous communicative domains”. This approach also calls for seeing “signs of all kinds as dialogic” (Prior & Hengst, 2010: 7). Signs are, therefore, “not generated out of abstract systems, but drawn from a history of sign use, tuned to the present interaction, and oriented to future responses and acts” (Prior & Hengst, 2010: 7).

Bakhtin’s notion of multivocality is also used in this study, and refers to the existence of multiple discernable voices within a text (Koschmann, 1999). More specifically, these voices

refer to different perspectives, orientations and values, and communication always bares traces of them (Baxter, Hirokawa, Lowe, Nathan & Pearce, 2004).

Higgins (2009: 6) states that multivocality “describes the quality of linguistic utterances as ‘contested terrains’ ... in which multiple meanings of utterances can be voiced, and where an indefinite number of interpretations are possible”. Higgins (2009) uses the term multivocality in two interrelated ways. At a micro-level, it refers to the multiple ‘voices’ that occur within a single utterance, also called polyphony (Higgins, 2009). At a macro-level, it looks at the various languages in multilingual societies (Higgins, 2009). Furthermore, “[s]peakers achieve multivocality through inhabiting already-existing language and inflecting it with their own meanings” (Higgins, 2009: 7). The notions of dialogicality and multivocality will be used to analyse the different voices present within the Vagina Varsity course at a micro-level as well as at a macro-level.

### **3.2. YouTube comments classification scheme**

While YouTube comments were originally envisioned as a method for viewers to provide information about the videos as well as to react to videos, it is also employed for other communicative purposes such as social networking, sharing ideas, paying tributes, and answering questions (Madden *et al.*, 2013). Researchers who are interested in YouTube comments mostly investigate user behaviour, look at how content is used for marketing purposes, and measure video popularity (Madden *et al.*, 2013). In relation to other aspects of YouTube, the comments have been understudied, “because the sheer number of comments, lack of structured organization, and the variable quality in terms of spelling, grammar and expression, have presented considerable difficulties for conducting analyses” (Madden *et al.*, 2013: 696). Madden *et al.* (2013) conducted a content analysis of 66 637 YouTube user comments and identified ten categories for YouTube comments, and 58 subcategories. These categories and subcategories highlight the wide-ranging use of the YouTube comments function (Madden *et al.*, 2013). I will only be identifying and defining ten broad categories.

1. *Information*: Information comments request or provide factual information based on the video content, context, or an unrelated topic.
2. *Advice*: Advice comments request, provide assistance or provide suggestions on a particular situation.

3. *Impression*: These comments express people's immediate reactions to the video content or other comments.
4. *Opinion*: In these comments, commenters request or provide their points-of-view on a particular person, video, topic, or object.
5. *Responses to previous comments*: In this category, commenters either support or dispute the opinions or information found in other comments.
6. *Expression of personal feelings*: The commenter's personal feelings or emotional responses are expressed in reaction to the video content, the video topic, or previous comments.
7. *General conversation*: These are comments that fulfil particular purposes in the initiation and maintenance of conversations.
8. *Site processes*: Comments which speak about actions such as watching videos, suggesting content for a future video, requesting another video, sharing videos, and so forth.
9. *Video content description*: Comments that either contain direct quotations, or paraphrased descriptions, of words and phrases used in the video. These comments might also contain 'deep links', which are links to a specific time in the video (e.g. 03:56) the commenter wants to refer to.
10. *Non-response categories*: These comments are also called spam, and convey unwanted or unsolicited information such as advertisements or links to dating sites or pornography sites (Madden *et al.*, 2013).

These categories will be used to group the YouTube comments found in the comment sections of each of the 16 YouTube videos that the researcher has selected for analysis for this research in order to establish the viewers' feedback of the content. Their feedback will help to establish how the viewers felt towards the videos or the topics discussed in the videos.

### **3.3. Summary**

This chapter presented the theoretical framework used in this study. Multimodality and multisemioticity will be used to analyse the Vagina Varsity campaign seeing that the online space is a multimodal platform. The VV campaign will also be analysed in terms of mediatization and intertextuality, recontextualization, resemiotization and semiotic remediation, chronotopes, immediacy and hypermediacy, genre and hybridity, stylization,

dialogicality, as well as multivocality. Additionally, the YouTube comments will be categorized and analysed according to a YouTube classification scheme.



## CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter is a description of the methods that were used to carry out this research. Firstly, the research design will be described. Secondly, the concept of virtual linguistic ethnography will be defined and explained. Thirdly, the data collection process will be described. Thereafter, the researcher provides the data analysis methods, which includes thematic analysis as well as the transcription conventions that were used to transcribe the data. Lastly, the researcher discusses the ethical considerations of this study.

### 4.1. Research design

This study used a mixed methods approach, thus combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). Reasons for combining these approaches are, firstly, to achieve triangulation, i.e. “combining two or more theories or sources of data to study the same phenomenon in order to gain a more complete understanding of it”, and secondly, to enhance the results of one method by using the strengths of the other method (Sale *et al.*, 2002: 48). The main research design for this study is the qualitative approach, while the quantitative approach is used to complement the qualitative research.

#### 4.1.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research methods were used to conduct this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 8), “[q]ualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry”. Furthermore, qualitative researchers “emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry”, and “seek answers to questions that stress *how* [emphasis in original] social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 8). Qualitative research involves collecting data directly from people, whether it is through observations, interactions, or conversations (Tewksbury, 2009). Qualitative methods focus on social aspects of the discipline and also on gaining a complete understanding of issues, such as how people understand, experience and operate (Tewksbury, 2009). Small samples are used because the respondents can express themselves and provide important information, and are not meant to

represent larger groups (Sale *et al.*, 2002). In addition, qualitative methodology is used to gain an understanding of the behaviour, ideologies, as well as the motivations behind certain beliefs, values and emotions (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987). Notably, by looking at black South African women addressing the taboo topic of vaginas and menstruation in this study, the researcher hopes to uncover the deeper ideologies regarding gender in South Africa.

#### 4.1.2 Quantitative research

The quantitative paradigm is based on an objective reality existing independently from human perception (Sale *et al.*, 2002). Sample sizes tend to be larger than those in qualitative research (Sale *et al.*, 2002). Data collection techniques include surveys (Tewksbury, 2009), questionnaires (Sale *et al.*, 2002), as well as mathematical models, graphs, and statistical tables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Quantitative data were used in this study to quantify YouTube data (e.g. likes, views, types of comments) as well as to quantify certain occurrences within the data (e.g. languages used, number of appearances of certain characters).

## 4.2 Virtual linguistic ethnography

This study took an ethnographic approach to conducting research on the Internet. Traditional ethnographic research involves an attempt to place particular events, encounters, as well as understandings into a meaningful context (Tedlock, 2000). Ethnography “combines research design, fieldwork, and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives” (Tedlock, 2000: 455).

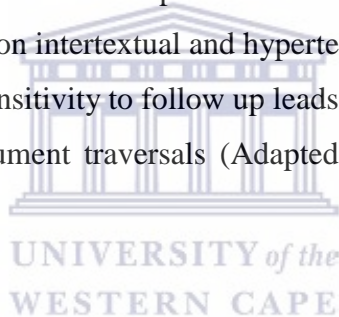
As the videos were sourced online, it was important to conduct a virtual linguistic ethnography of the platform in order to best engage with the data. An increasing number of researchers in online communication have turned towards ethnographic methods (Lee, 2017). The reason for this is that ethnographic data is seen as useful in revealing the actual practices and social activities online in order to gain a better understanding of how individuals write and what they write online (Lee, 2017).

Hine (2000: 14) introduced a new way of perceiving ethnography, called virtual ethnography, and states that it “entails taking seriously the accounts of the world produced by technological subjects”. Virtual ethnography is used to examine meaning making in online environments

(Kelly-Holmes, 2015). It allows for various types of engagement with the Web, including surfing the Web, observing a specific website, and lurking, which involves long-term engagement with the website, without openly participating (Kelly-Holmes, 2015). With the acknowledgment that computer-mediated communication is as meaningful as face-to-face communication (Hine, 2000), the Internet becomes a focus point for ethnographic studies (Kelly-Holmes, 2015). According to Kelly-Holmes (2015: 134), “the Web enables new forms of mobility and ‘travel,’ which result from the compression of time and space which digital technology permits”.

The framework that was used in this study is called virtual linguistic ethnography (Hine, 2000; Kelly-Holmes, 2015) which combines linguistic landscape analysis with virtual ethnography. The steps for conducting a virtual linguistic ethnography are listed below:

1. First of all, the researcher suspended what is taken for granted when using the Web.
2. Use fieldwork notes to record and document when the site was accessed.
3. Audit the site and provide a full description of it.
4. Document and follow up on intertextual and hypertextual links.
5. Adopt an ethnographic sensitivity to follow up leads which look interesting.
6. Take screenshots to document traversals (Adapted from Kelly-Holmes, 2015: 134-135).



During the process of data collection, the researcher was already familiar with YouTube, therefore the researcher had to suspend all prior knowledge of the website in order to be mindful of the structure of YouTube. The researcher logged the dates the site was accessed in order to see if any changes occurred on the YouTube channels which could affect the data. If links to other websites were posted on the YouTube channel, the researcher followed up on these links, as they provided more details on the video. When conducting the ethnography, the researcher kept in mind the research questions in order to be sensitive to relevant data. Lastly, screenshots of the relevant YouTube channel were taken regularly, in order to document any traversals or changes that occurred over time.

Additional data which proved to be useful when collecting the videos on YouTube, included “field” notes recording observations, screenshots, records of changes in content on the site, site traffic, other statistics indicating where users are from, any sociolinguistic data about them, multimodal data (aural, visual, textual, etc.), secondary texts about the site, as well as links,



trajectories and information about the languages encountered in these links/through these trajectories (modified from Kelly-Holmes, 2015: 136).

### 4.3 Data collection procedure

In order to collect the data, the researcher used data triangulation (cf. Denzin, 1970). The term triangulation is used to refer to the process of observing a particular issue from two or more different points, and is often accomplished by using different methodological approaches (Flick, 2004). Triangulation is used as a way to obtain greater knowledge of a subject (Flick, 2004) which includes (but is not limited to) the triangulation of data and methodological triangulation (which also includes between-method triangulation, or the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods) (cf. Denzin, 1978). The researcher collected four different data sets, which include both qualitative and quantitative data.

The study is based on the following data sets: YouTube videos, YouTube comments, email data, as well as a focus group interview.



#### 4.3.1 YouTube videos

In order to gain access to the video lessons by Vagina Varsity, the researcher registered at [www.vaginavarsity.co.za](http://www.vaginavarsity.co.za), on 17 October 2016. For a period of 28 days (four weeks, from 23 October 2016 until 18 November 2016), the researcher received five emails per week, four of which contained video links. The links took the researcher to the YouTube website, to the specific lesson for that day.

Individuals were able to register and take part in the Vagina Varsity course from October 2016 until December 2016,<sup>24</sup> therefore the actual videos are no longer available. However, the Vagina Varsity trailers can still be found on YouTube. The links to the trailers are provided here: Trailer 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21Kzj4Q73cw> and Trailer 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXftUoepNfg>. Be mindful that these two videos do not form part of the data which is analysed in this thesis.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.rattleandmum.co.za/2017/01/19/earth-vagina-varsity-know/> (Accessed 17 March 2018)

The course consisted of 16 videos. On average, each episode is one to three minutes long, with the exception of episode 15, which is seven minutes and 30 seconds in length. The researcher used a browser extension to access the videos from YouTube. The course was set out in a Monday-to-Friday structure, thus having a pedagogical orientation. It is divided into four levels: one for each week, ranging from “the basics” to “expert”.

A multimodal analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Iedema, 2003; Kress, 2010) was conducted on the Vagina Varsity videos. These videos were also used during focus group discussions. A more in-depth description of the focus groups is provided further on in this chapter.

In terms of the multimodal data, screenshots were taken of the videos because still images “have the potential to bring out visual characteristics and appearance such as skin colour, hairstyle, clothing, facial expression, posture, gesture and spatial proximity, supplying a certain specificity that must be described, or omitted, in writing” (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011: 200).

#### *4.3.2 YouTube comments*

The comments posted on YouTube indicated the viewers’ reactions to the selected videos, whether defending, praising or critiquing, and were analyzed in this study, not only to evaluate the effectiveness of the videos and the messages they brought across, but also to gain a broader understanding of people’s beliefs about female gender roles in South Africa. The comments were used to reveal whether the course resulted in enlightenment, emancipation, and bodily empowerment for the participants.

The researcher collected the YouTube comments on 8 January 2018. The comments were copied from the YouTube website and pasted into a Microsoft Word document. A total of 107 comments were collected. A full list of comments be found in Appendix E.

#### *4.3.3 Email*

The Vagina Varsity videos were sent via email on a daily basis, and extra information about the topic handled in the particular episode, was included. At the end of each five-day week, Vagina Varsity sent a quiz via email to test the knowledge of the viewers. The educational content is in English, presented in colour, and often contained illustrations along with the text.

During the period of four weeks, the researcher received five emails per week (in a sequence of five days on, two days off, to represent a work/school week) from Vagina Varsity. The emails contained bonus information related to the lesson of that day. The screenshots of the emails were taken on 17 November 2016. The email content for the selected lessons can be found in Appendix B.

#### 4.3.4 Focus group interviews

This study made use of one focus group, where “[d]ata are generated by interaction between group participants” (Finch & Lewis, 2003: 171). According to Krueger and Casey (2009), the goal of a focus group is to promote self-disclosure within the group, to ascertain how people really feel about a particular topic. Typically, focus groups have five characteristics, which relate to the following components: “(1) people who (2) possess certain characteristics and (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest” (Krueger & Casey, 2009: 10).

The focus group discussion consisted of five participants, and took place on 10 October 2017. At the time of the interview, the participants were Honours students at the University of the Western Cape. The groups consisted of a group of men and women of different racial categories<sup>25</sup>. The participants in this group presented their own opinions and experiences, and they also heard from others. In light of these views, they were then able to reflect on their own opinions, ask questions, seek clarification, and make comments, thus generating additional information (Finch & Lewis, 2003).

The researcher recreated the focus group setting to resemble the YouTube react genre, where people watch videos and are asked to discuss what they had seen in the videos. Although reaction videos are one of the most viewed genres on YouTube, it is largely understudied (Oh, 2017). According to Oh (2017: 2271), “to study reaction videos is to give voice to the everyday tastes of fans”. Similarly, the researcher wanted to give voice to the consumers of the Vagina Varsity advertising campaign, to find out what they liked and disliked about the campaign, and also whether watching the videos had provided them with more insight into the female body. The researcher was also interested in the interpretations of the videos through the participants’

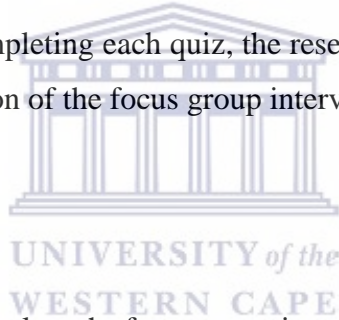
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<sup>25</sup> The participants were allowed to self-identify in terms of their racial category, as well as their gender identity.

“own situated cultural experience” (Oh, 2017: 2272). The immediate reactions of the viewers are also of importance to this genre. The focus group discussions were therefore recorded with a video recorder to capture their visceral reactions to the videos. The researcher also used a voice recorder to record the interview, to ensure voice/sound clarity for transcription purposes.

The researcher used the selected YouTube videos of the Vagina Varsity campaign in order to analyse the semiotic/linguistic resources used to lessen the stigma surrounding vaginas and menstruation. The videos were used as a point of departure in the interviews. By conducting interviews, the researcher hoped to receive feedback from local youths on the selected videos to obtain an idea of how they felt about these videos, which could reveal some of the ideologies of young South Africans surrounding women’s bodies.

During the focus group interviews, the researcher also asked the participants to complete the quizzes given at the end of each week. Each quiz consists of five multiple choice questions. The researcher typed out the quizzes for the participants, and handed it out to them at the end of each week’s videos, in the order that it would have been taken if the videos were watched over the month period. After completing each quiz, the researcher then discussed the answers with the group. A full transcription of the focus group interview can be found in Appendix F.



#### **4.4. Thematic analysis**

A thematic analysis was used to analyse the focus group interview that the researcher conducted with university students regarding their overall impression of the Vagina Varsity course, within a social semiotic approach to multimodality. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and report themes within a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method organizes and describes the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme captures an important element within the data in relation to a particular research question, and represents patterns of meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The importance of a theme is not measured by quantity, but rather whether it encapsulates something important in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six phases of thematic analysis, which are described below.

Phase 1 – becoming familiar with the data: It is important to become familiar with the data to the extent that the researcher knows all of its content. This can be achieved by repeatedly reading the data, and actively reading, which means to search for patterns, meanings, and so

forth. Ideally, the data set should be read at least once before starting the coding process, as the researcher would already have shaped ideas and started identifying possible patterns. During this phase, the researcher should start taking notes or mark ideas for coding that will be useful for subsequent phases. Verbal data (e.g. interviews, television programmes, and political speeches) need to be transcribed into written form in order to conduct the thematic analysis.

Phase 2 - generating initial codes: This phase involves producing initial codes as emergent in the data. Codes are the most basic element of the raw data which can be assessed in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and identify interesting features of the data. Manual coding involves writing notes on the transcribed text, using highlighters or coloured pens to indicate possible patterns, or using post-it notes to identify sections of data. Braun and Clarke (2006: 19) provide the following advice for coding:

- a) code for as many potential themes/patterns as possible (time permitting);
- b) code extracts of data inclusively – i.e., keep a little of the surrounding data if relevant. This is important as a common criticism of coding is that the context is lost (Bryman, 2001);
- c) individual extracts of data can be coded in as many different ‘themes’ as they fit into – so an extract may be uncoded, coded once, or coded many times, as relevant.

It is also important to ensure that all data extracts are coded and organized within each code.

Phase 3 – searching for themes: Once the data is coded and collated, and the researcher has a list of different codes have been identified throughout the data set, the researcher will then sort these codes into possible themes. In this phase, the researcher has to consider how different codes combine to form an overarching theme, and start thinking about the relationship between codes, between themes, as well as between different levels of themes (e.g. main themes and sub-themes). By the end of this phase, the researcher would have a collection of initial themes and sub-themes, as well as all data extracts which have been coded.

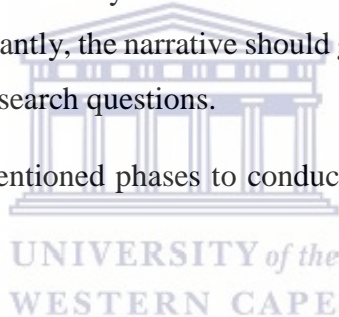
Phase 4 – reviewing themes: This phase entails refining the initial themes. Some initial themes might fall away, some might merge, while others might be broken down into separate themes. Data within one theme should cohere meaningfully, and there should be clear distinctions between themes. This phase comprises of two levels: level one involves reviewing the coded

data extracts, and considering whether they form a clear and coherent pattern within each theme, while level two involves the consideration of the validity of each theme in relation to the data and also whether the thematic map reflects the meanings emergent in the data as a whole.

Phase 5 – defining and naming themes: This phase involves defining and refining the themes that will be used for the data analysis. A detailed analysis, which explains what is interesting about the data and why it is interesting, should be written for each theme. The researcher should also ensure that each theme fits into the overall story being told about the data in relation to the research questions, making certain that the themes do not overlap. The researcher should also consider whether a theme has any sub-themes.

Phase 6 – producing the report: This phase involves the final analysis and write-up of the report, which occurs once the themes have been worked out. This report should tell the story of the data which convinces the reader of the validity of the analysis. The report should provide a concise and interesting account of the story that the data reveals, and should provide sufficient evidence from the themes. Importantly, the narrative should go beyond describing the data, and make an argument towards the research questions.

The researcher used the abovementioned phases to conduct a thematic analysis of the focus group interview.



#### 4.5 Transcription conventions

The interviews were transcribed by using an adapted version of the transcription key proposed by Eggins and Slade (1997: 2-5).

.	Termination or certainty.
,	Non-final talk.
?	Indicate questions or mark uncertainty.
!	Expression of counter-expectation (e.g. shock, amazement).
==	Overlapping talk.
()	Inaudible segments of talk indicated by empty parentheses.
{ }	The guess of a possible word or phrase.
[laugh]	Non-verbal information
–	False starts or restarts: when speaker “rethinks” what s/he wants to say; s/he rephrases before completing the first thought.
...	Hesitation (a pause of approximately 0.5 to 1 second)

<i>Italics</i>	Using words other than English.
“ ”	Quoting another person/ using someone else’s words.
CAPITAL LETTERS	Words/syllables that are louder than usual.

#### 4.6 Ethical considerations

The data for this study consisted of data collected from YouTube, as well as a focus group interview. The ethical procedures for the different data sets (YouTube videos and comments, and focus group interview) will be discussed later in this section.

##### 4.6.1 YouTube videos and comments

The Internet opens up new ways for researchers in the social sciences to examine interactions and experiences by humans in new contexts (James & Busher, 2009). According to Pace and Livingston (2005: 35), “[r]esearchers are increasingly turning to the World Wide Web as a convenient, ubiquitous laboratory for gathering data and conducting research”. The Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) (Markham & Buchanan, 2012: 3-4) have listed numerous objectives and purposes for Internet research, of which the following are applicable to this study:

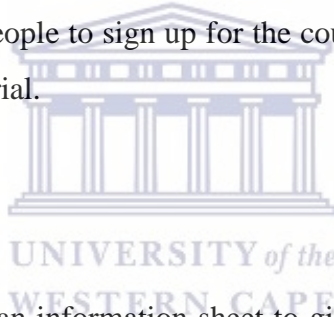
- (a) to utilize the Internet to collect data or information, e.g., through online interviews, surveys, archiving, or automated means of data scraping;
- (b) to study how people use and access the Internet, e.g. by collecting and observing activities or participating on social network sites, listservs, websites, blogs, games, virtual worlds, or other online environments or contexts;
- (c) to employ visual and textual analysis, semiotic analysis, content analysis, or other methods of analysis to study the Web and/or Internet-facilitated images, writings, and media forms.

As a result of the growing number of online research, there are rules set in place for conducting research on the Internet. If web-based venues such as electronic mail, chatrooms, and also blogs, are private, the individuals’ identities and responses may be protected (Pace &

Livingston, 2005). However, if they are freely available to the public, “the archived responses of individuals may be construed to be matters of public record” (Pace & Livingston, 2005: 35). Pace and Livingston (2005: 38) provide the following conditions under which public matter on the Internet can be analyzed without consent:

1. The material is publicly archived and readily available.
2. No password is required to access the material.
3. The material is not sensitive in nature.
4. No stated site policy prohibits the use of the material.

The Vagina Varsity campaign can only be accessed by those who sign up to receive the videos. The videos are sent via email, and cannot be viewed on YouTube without being signed up to Vagina Varsity. However, viewers of these videos are encouraged to “share” these videos with their friends, in that way, making it publically available. TV advertisements of Libresse sanitary towels also encourage people to sign up for the course. Lastly, there is no site policy that prohibits the use of the material.



#### 4.6.2 Focus group interview

Participants were provided with an information sheet to give them a better understanding of the project. They were also told that they were free to ask any questions about the research project. The participants were asked to sign a consent form outlining the terms of their participation. By signing the consent form, they agreed to take part in the research project and agreed that the data collected from them should be used in this research project. They were informed that participation in this research project was voluntary. They were assured that they were free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In these instances, all data produced as a result of their participation would be discarded. In addition, should they not wish to answer any particular question or questions, they were free to decline. They were also assured that their responses and personal data would be kept strictly confidential, and their names would not be linked with the research materials, and they would not be identified or identifiable in the reports or publications that result from the research, as pseudonyms will be used. The video recordings were only used by



the researcher, for the purpose of analysis. When necessary, the faces of participants will be blurred before used for presentation/publication purposes.

#### **4.7 Summary**

This chapter provided a backdrop to the subsequent data analysis chapters. Firstly, the chapter defined the research design employed in this study, which is a mixed methods approach consisting of qualitative and quantitative research. Secondly, the chapter discussed the process of conducting virtual linguistic ethnography. Thirdly, the data collection procedure for each data set was explained. Thereafter, the data analysis methods, which includes thematic analysis as well as transcription conventions, were discussed. Lastly, the ethical considerations of this study were provided.



## CHAPTER 5 - TRAJECTORIES AND SEQUENTIALITY IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the Vagina Varsity campaign through the lens of virtual linguistic landscapes, specifically focusing on the manner in which virtual linguistic landscapers navigate the online space. Notably, very few studies in linguistic landscapes (LL) literature problematize how the researcher *enters* into the space. However, the salience of finding oneself in a space becomes very clear when working with online materials. This chapter therefore seeks to establish what novel pathways (trajectories) exist in the virtual space. In addition, LL is looked at synchronically and not as made up of different pieces that have been there for different lengths of time. This chapter will therefore also look at sequentiality in the virtual space. What follows is a step by step introduction into just how the researcher entered the online space and how the space unfolds in a particular sequence.

### 5.1 Reading paths in the virtual space

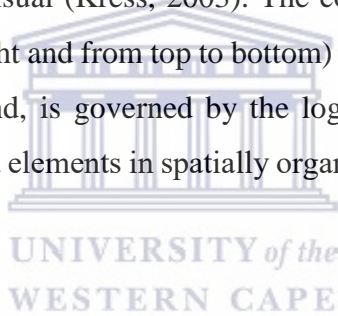
The virtual space is a landscape in which signs are read and absorbed in different ways, much like conventional linguistic landscapes. Ivković and Lotherington (2009) extended and reconceptualized LL into the virtual space. They found that the virtual space reflect in many ways the functions of LL in the physical world. For example, we describe the virtual space by using metaphors from the physical world (such as chat “room”, discussion “forum”, “lurking” and “surfing” the net) and this enables the Internet user to “interact with the virtual domain based on familiar experiences from real world domains” (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009: 20). They also go on to say that interaction in the virtual space is digitally mediated and delocalized. This means that anyone can access it from anywhere (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009). In addition, web content can be updated more frequently than signs in the physical LL (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009).

Clearly the navigation into a space (whether physical or virtual) is an important one. Kress (2003: 3) explains reading paths in the following extract:

There is a ‘reading path’ set by the order of the words which I must follow. In a written text there is a path which I cannot go against if I wish to make sense of

the meaning of that text. The order of words in a clause compels me to follow, and it is meaningful.

Furthermore, a reading path “marks the line along which a text is to be read ‘properly’” (Kress, 2003: 50). Reading paths exist in texts and images, and as a result of new technologies, also in the online space (Kress, 2003; Adami, 2009b). When looking at a page which contains both text and image, “there has to be a reading ‘across’ the two modes, a reading that brings together the meaning realized via the two modes” (Kress, 2003: 157). The online space has the ability to display both of these modes, as well as audio and video (Kress, 2003). According to Kress (2003), the difference between the reading path of the traditional page and the reading path of the screen is that the former has a clear path that has to be followed, while the latter is open in its organization and therefore offers many reading paths. Text and images have distinct affordances and are governed by distinct logics: writing is governed by the logic of time as well as “the logic of sequence of its elements in time” (Kress, 2003: 1). On a screen, writing is subordinate to the logic of the visual (Kress, 2003). The conventional Western reading path (i.e. reading a text from left to right and from top to bottom) also applies to web pages (Adami, 2009b). Image, on the other hand, is governed by the logic of space and by “the logic of simultaneity of its visual/depicted elements in spatially organized arrangements” (Kress, 2003: 2).



For this reason, the multitude of reading paths are of keen interest here. Particularly, the researcher is interested in how the Libresse marketing campaign created particular pathways for subscribers to navigate.

## 5.2 Trajectory

This section looks at the set pathway one needs to navigate in order to take part in the Vagina Varsity course. Using virtual linguistic ethnography (VLE), the researcher had to suspend what is taken for granted when using the Web, used fieldwork notes to record and document the accessing of the site, audited the site and provided a full description of it, documented and followed up on intertextual and hypertextual links, adopted an ethnographic sensitivity to follow up leads which look interesting, as well as take screenshots to document traversals (adapted from Kelly-Holmes, 2015: 134-135). Suspending what one knows in the virtual space

is quite a challenge as the Internet is pervasive, but it is an important step in understanding the virtual space in a way that regular users may never be aware of.

Much like a LL whose signage targets a specific, local population, the VLL has online communities with restricted membership, which creates “a more delineated community” (Ivković & Lotherington, 2009: 19). For instance, the Vagina Varsity course was only accessible to those who had registered online.<sup>26</sup> The only way to gain access to the videos is to register for the course. The videos cannot be accessed by doing a simple search for “Vagina Varsity” on YouTube. This already is quite an unusual approach as one would surmise that marketers would wish to be as visible as possible. However, as I will argue, this and other strategies employed by Vagina Varsity allow for the creation of a safe space and a way of treading on ‘taboo’ terrain.

What follows is a step-by-step account of how to gain access to the course material. Image 5.1 is a screenshot of one of the two trailers made public on YouTube, all other videos were private or ‘unlisted’. Therefore, you can search the term ‘Vagina Varsity trailer’ and both would appear. For the purpose of this chapter, I will only be focusing on the first trailer.

*Step 1: Watch Vagina Varsity trailer on YouTube*



Image 5.1- Vagina Varsity trailer

<sup>26</sup>Individuals were able to register and take part in the course from October 2016 until December 2016. (<http://www.rattleandmum.co.za/2017/01/19/earth-vagina-varsity-know/> Accessed 17 March 2018)

In an introduction that is much like a trailer to an action movie, the presenters state that “two women fearlessly go where no man or woman has been before: Vagina Varsity”. One of the presenters states that “for the next four weeks, Monday to Friday, we’re gonna be teaching you everything that you need to know about your vagina”. They also state that they have approached an expert to teach them, and now they are going to teach the viewers about vagina-related issues. In the trailer, one can also see small snippets of the videos while they are talking, which gives the viewer a sense of what to expect in the course.

*Step 2: Click on link*

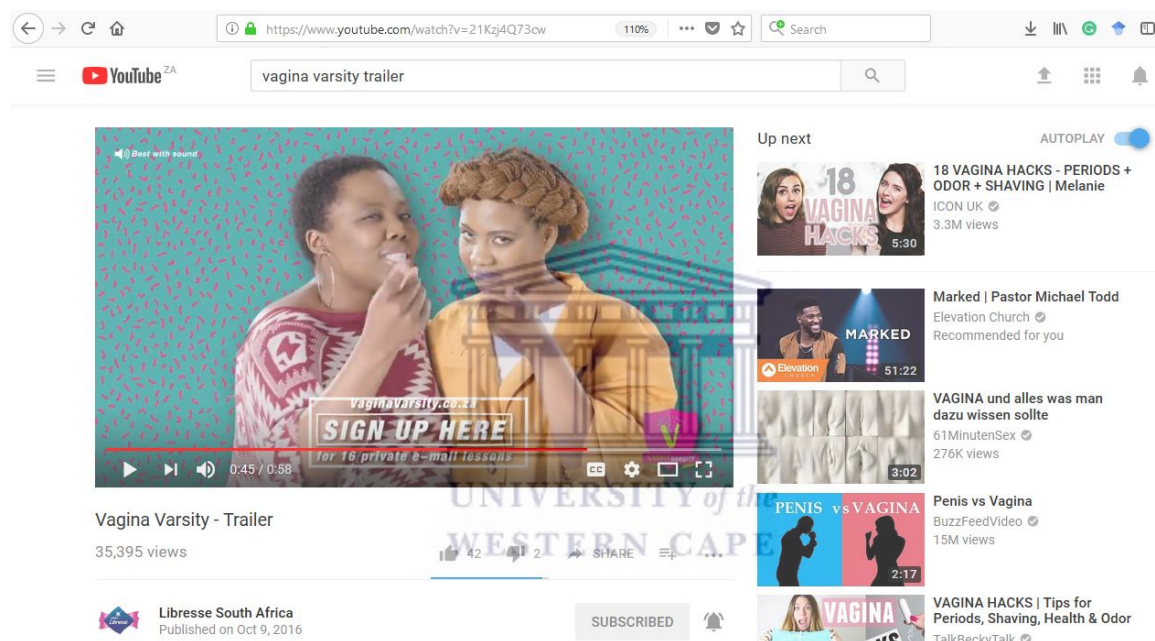


Image 5.2 – Link to Vagina Varsity website

Towards the end of the video, a link appears in a box which says “SIGN UP HERE”, and below this, in a smaller font, it says “for 16 private e-mail lessons” (Image 5.2). On top the name of the website appears “vaginavarsity.co.za”. By clicking on the link, the viewer is directed to this website.

### Step 3: Register

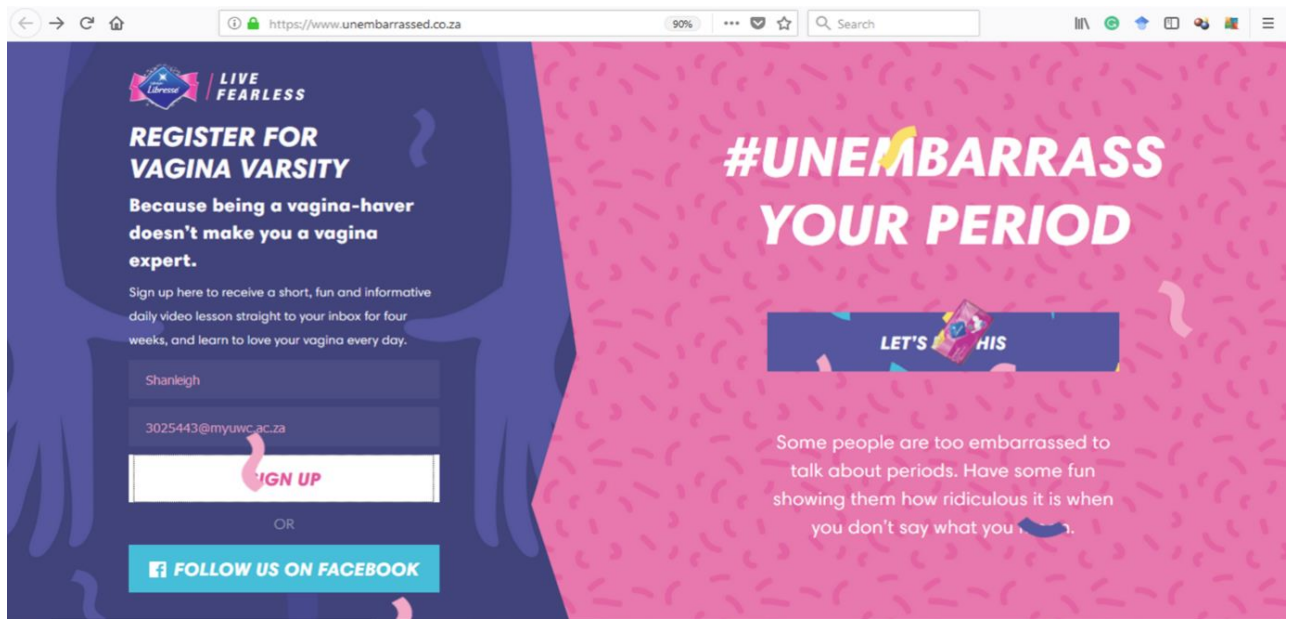


Image 5.3 – Vagina Varsity website

Once you have clicked on the link, it takes you to the official Vagina Varsity website where the individual can register for Vagina Varsity. By signing up, you would “receive a short, fun and informative daily video lesson straight to your inbox for four weeks, and learn to love your vagina every day”. Signing up required minimal information as the user is simply asked for their name and email address or given the option of following them on Facebook. The researcher opted to register via email. The researcher realizes in hindsight that it would have been fruitful to see what the Facebook pathway looked like and to navigate the campaign progress in that social media platform as well.

Note that the above screenshot was taken after the Vagina Varsity campaign ended. When the VV campaign ended, the website changed from [www.vaginavarsity.co.za](http://www.vaginavarsity.co.za) to [www.unembarrassed.co.za](http://www.unembarrassed.co.za), which formed part of another, but still related, Libresse campaign. This campaign was focused on encouraging young women not to be embarrassed about menstruation and not to use euphemisms when talking about menstruation. As part of this campaign, women were encouraged to create their own advertisements which highlighted “how ridiculous it is when you don’t say what you mean” (Image 5.3). The pathway, although still there, changed to accommodate a new campaign.

#### Step 4: Receive introductory email

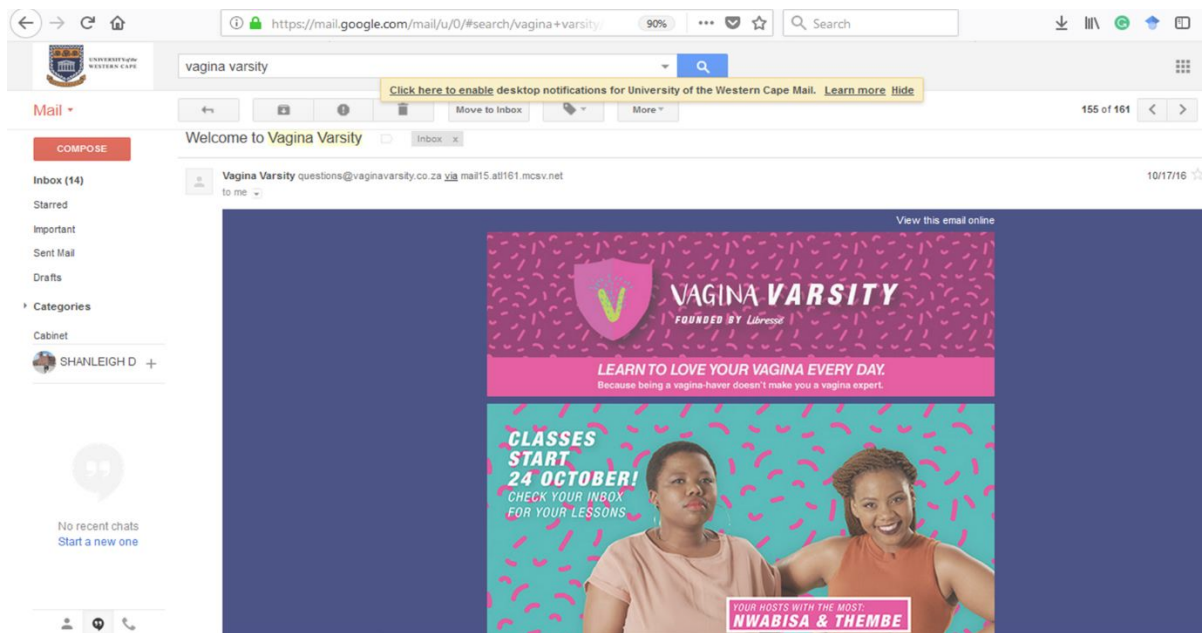


Image 5.4 – First Vagina Varsity email

Once you have signed up, you receive an email with a reminder of when classes will start, and also to “check your inbox for your lessons” (Image 5.4). Note that receiving an email is not a step per se, but the email is important as it is a reminder for you to wait/anticipate for the class to start and also to check your email for the lessons that will follow. This is an important step, however, as it shows how bodies are regulated, and the beginning of virtually structuring the user’s time – in days and weeks.

*Step 5: Receive lessons via email*

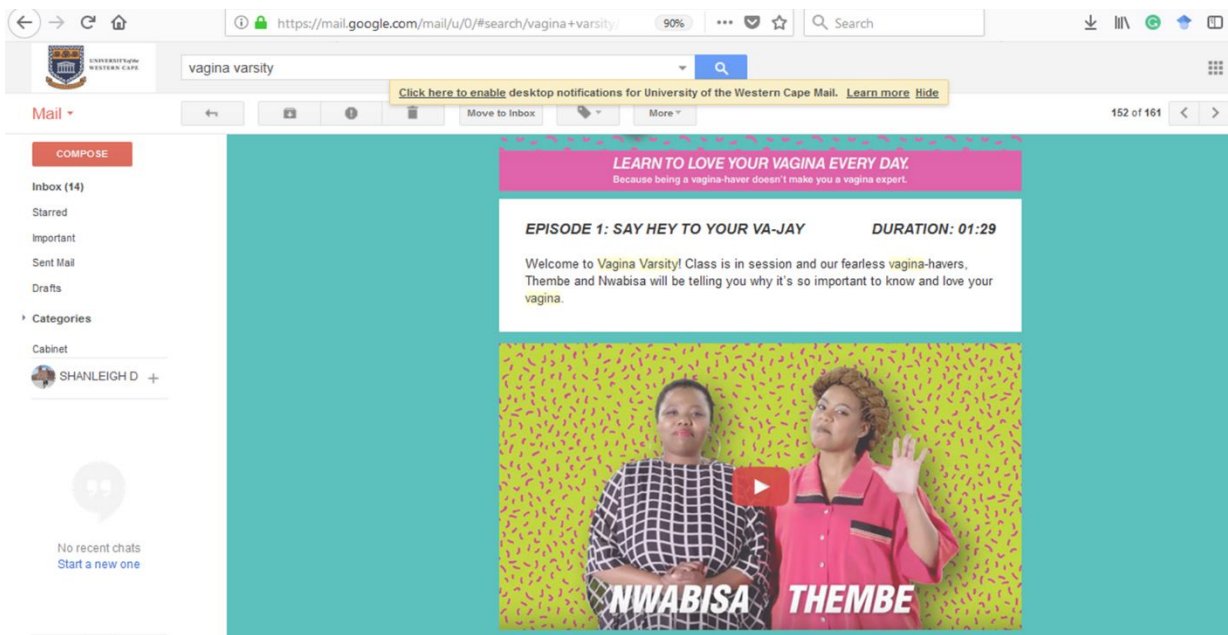


Image 5.5 – Lesson 1 email

Once “classes start”, those who have signed up receive the lessons via email. Each email contains the name of the particular lesson, the duration of the lesson, as well as the YouTube play button which acts as a link to YouTube. Each lesson also has a different picture as the one seen above (Image 5.5). Additionally, each email contains educational information about the day’s particular lesson.



## Step 6: Watch lesson

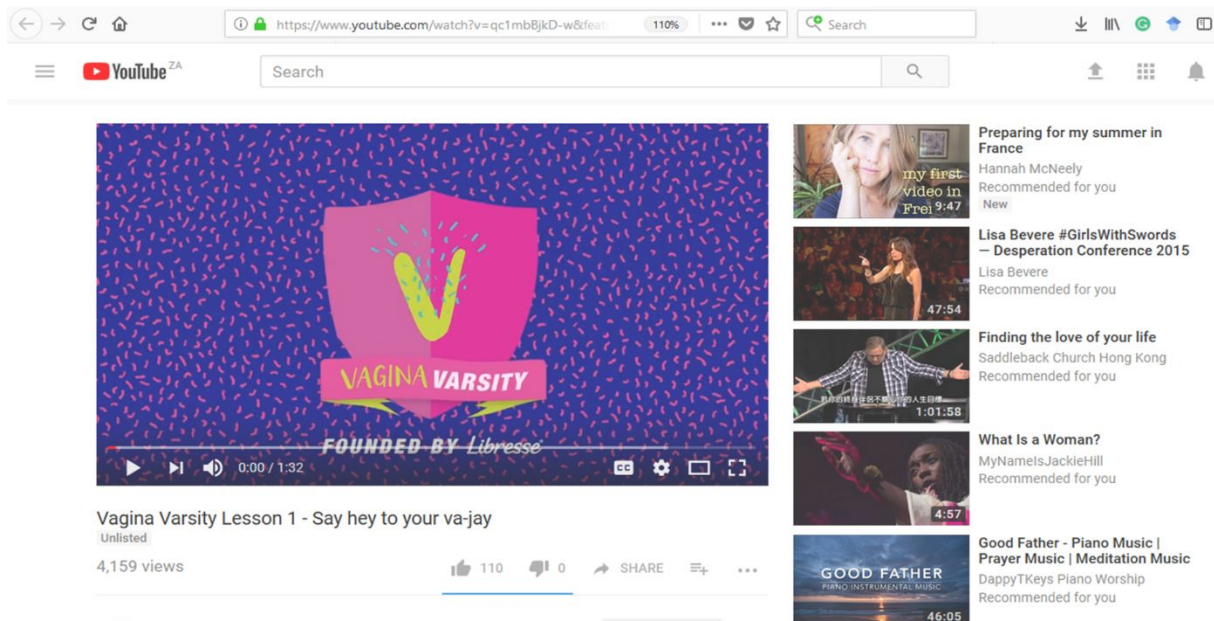


Image 5.6 – Vagina Varsity Lesson 1

After clicking on the YouTube play button, it takes you to the particular lesson for that day. Interestingly, below the name of the lesson is a grey box which says “Unlisted” (Image 5.6). This means that the YouTube video will not appear in the search results or on the person’s channel. Only those who know or have the link can view it, and it can be shared with anyone, even if they do not have a YouTube account.<sup>27</sup> By using this tactic with their videos, the founders of Vagina Varsity can control the access to the videos. It could also be for monitoring purposes, to see how many people have registered for the course. Only those who have shown enough interest to register for the course could access the videos, also potentially to eliminate or minimize the presence of Internet trolls. An Internet troll is defined as “the individual who baits and provokes other group members, often with the result of drawing them into fruitless argument and diverting attention from the stated purposes of the group” (Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler & Barab, 2002: 371). These unpleasant commenters would arguably be especially problematic for such a sensitive topic and reinforces the idea that online reading pathways are not incidental, and rather quite well thought through. Therefore, the requirement to sign up to the course, as well as to dedicate 28 days to complete the course, was mostly only done by

<sup>27</sup><https://studio300.org/2014/03/11/private-vs-unlisted-on-youtube/> (Accessed 18 June 2018)

those who earnestly wanted to learn more about vagina-related issues, and not by people intent on being contentious in the YouTube comment section.

What is also interesting to see is that, when looking at the YouTube genre, the videos which appear in the recommended section on the right usually contains videos with similar content. However, as the videos are unlisted on YouTube, the other lessons do not appear as recommended videos. This could be argued as another seemingly unconventional approach for a marketing campaign as they may well have missed out on thousands of potential viewers who would have come across them through the recommend video view. However, by opting to have their video unlisted, the VV series may well have ensured the privacy (and safety) of the space, therein ensuring that only truly interested parties were privy to the information. One can argue that this strategy may also have assisted in the building of an online community. Vagina Varsity is therefore an instance of an affinity space (Gee, 2005; 2018) where people who affiliate around a particular cause (in this case learning about the vagina and vagina-related issues) are able to ‘come together’.

Having opted for the channel to be unlisted, users who wished to watch the videos would have to wait for it to be emailed to them. For those that wish to watch one of the lessons again, you have to go back to your inbox and search for the particular lesson, and then click on the YouTube play button, which will take you to the video. So there is no direct Google search available for users. This arguably adds to the exclusivity of the space.

Signing up to the Vagina Varsity course is like going through a gated community. There are many steps one needs to follow in order to gain access to the course material. By following these steps, the user’s reading path is structured in a very specific way – one which is unconventional within the YouTube space. Vagina Varsity is set up in such a way that it becomes a private setting which is used to speak about sensitive topics. Vagina Varsity has therefore found creative ways to be a private space on YouTube, which is typically a very open, public space.

Seeing that the subscriber knows that Vagina Varsity takes place within a private space, they may be more amenable to share private things about themselves in the comment sections of the videos. This pathway therefore creates an affective response (Wee, 2016), in the sense that the subscriber is lead to feel safe within the space.

### 5.3 Sequentiality

The following section focuses on sequentiality, or how the course is structured and how it unfolds in a particular order. The Vagina Varsity campaign is structured like a teaching course, and with teaching courses, there is a particular course outline that needs to be adhered to. The order of the course can be seen in the timetable below:

<b>WEEK 1: THE BASICS</b>	LESSON 1: <b>MEET YOUR VULVA</b>	LESSON 2: <b>THE OUTSIDE BITS</b>	LESSON 3: <b>THE INSIDE BITS</b>	LESSON 4: <b>PERIODS &amp; PADS</b>	TEST: <b>QUICK QUIZ</b>
<b>WEEK 2: NOVICE</b>	LESSON 5: <b>HYGIENE</b>	LESSON 6: <b>DISCHARGE</b>	LESSON 7: <b>WHEN TO SEE THE DOCTOR</b>	LESSON 8: <b>UNDERWEAR &amp; CAMELTOE</b>	TEST: <b>QUICK QUIZ</b>
<b>WEEK 3: INTERMEDIATE</b>	LESSON 9: <b>THE GYNAE</b>	LESSON 10: <b>THE HYMEN</b>	LESSON 11: <b>GROWING &amp; BABY</b>	LESSON 12: <b>CONTRACEPTION</b>	TEST: <b>QUICK QUIZ</b>
<b>WEEK 4: EXPERT</b>	LESSON 13: <b>SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS</b>	LESSON 14: <b>DECORATING DOWN THERE</b>	LESSON 15: <b>SEXY TIME</b>	LESSON 16: <b>ALL VAGINAS ARE AMAZING</b>	<b>FINAL QUIZ</b>

Image 5.7–Vagina Varsity timetable

Above is a picture of the timetable (Image 5.7). It is very colourful and bright and caters to a young audience. There are many important things that this timetable reveals in terms of sequentiality. Immediately, one can see that each week builds on the next and a sense of ‘levelling up’ from basics, to novice, intermediate and expert is realized.

*The course has a pedagogical orientation:*

As with a teaching course, there are specific lessons every day and there is a gradual increase in the difficulty level, and also the level of sensitivity of a topic. The course starts with the basics, like teaching the basic terminology of the female genitalia, such as ‘labia’ and ‘vulva’. Then the course also moves on to talk about different types of STIs and different contraceptives.

The videos clearly follow a particular reading path (Kress, 2003), one which is consistent with a teaching course. The course also includes four quizzes, one at the end of each week. Quizzes, or tests, are also typical of teaching courses, as the learners are tested on the content they have learned.

*The course has a specific sequence:*

It is a four-week course, 28 days in total, and is set up in a Monday to Friday structure, having five days on and two days off. For four days you have lessons and on the fifth day you take a quiz. What is interesting here is that the reading path (Kress, 2003) which led to the viewer becoming a subscriber, begins to mimic time in the physical world. In effect, the YouTube channel comes full circle with users now settled within a private (safe) space being reintroduced into the familiar monthly structure of days and weeks.

This is another unconventional advertising strategy as traditional campaigns would try to maximize all times to ensure the selling of their product. Normally advertising campaigns want to get the word out. In this case, however, these lessons, and especially the quiz shows, reveal Libresse's commitment to actually teaching the subscribers certain things about their bodies that could potentially save their lives. This is a win-win situation: they sell their products, and subscribers learn valuable information in a safe and non-threatening environment.

In addition, in the virtual space one would normally have free reign, but here you can see that they are structuring you through the virtual space. There is a specific sequence in which the course will play out. You have to wait for the lessons to be emailed to you, in a particular order.

*The campaign's marketing agenda:*

The fact that this course is 28 days long is not a coincidence. The average menstrual cycle is 28 days long. A menstrual cycle is counted from the first day of one period to the first day of the next period<sup>28</sup>. This means that chances are the viewer will be menstruating during the time that this course plays out. The viewer will end up buying the product from the company that is engaging with her, sending emails to her every day, and who is teaching her valuable

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<sup>28</sup> Definition provided in the Vagina Varsity quiz for Week 1.

information about her body. Here one also sees how the Vagina Varsity campaign is using time to their advantage.

#### **5.4 Virtual semioscapes**

This study focuses not only on the language aspect of the Vagina Varsity course, but also on the other semiotics that play a part in the course, be it the email content, quizzes, or the videos. The researcher therefore prefers the term ‘semioscape’ over ‘linguistic landscape’, as the former encompasses all semiotics, while LL puts a focus largely on the linguistic element. For this reason, the researcher is foregrounding all semiotics. The term ‘semioscapes’ is widely used as an alternative for ‘linguistic landscapes’ (cf. Ferenčík, 2015; Shep, 2015). A few scholars have also shown interest in semioscapes in the virtual space (cf. Weiss, Nolan, Hunsinger & Trinofas, 2007; Paech, 2009). As the present study is largely conducted online, the researcher will use the term ‘virtual semioscapes’<sup>29</sup> as an alternative for ‘virtual linguistic landscapes’.



#### **5.5 Summary**

This chapter, firstly, looked at the pathway/trajectory taken in order to enter the Vagina Varsity course. The researcher discussed the steps needed to gain access to the course. Secondly, the researcher looked at how the course unfolded in a particular way. Treating this course as a virtual semioscape gave the researcher two constructs one doesn’t often think about when looking at conventional linguistic landscapes studies. One is the importance of trajectory, how you enter and move through the space in a particular way, and another is the importance of sequentiality, referring to how the landscape unfolds for you. The course needs to be accessed in a particular sequence, which means that you have no choice over the unfolding of events (for instance, you receive Lesson 1 first and not Lesson 12). These two aspects are part of all landscapes, but they only become very clear when you see them through virtual linguistic landscapes.

Vagina Varsity is a hybrid advertisement which appeals to people, but which plays out in this set way which forces you to engage with the advert in a particular way, in a particular order.

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<sup>29</sup> This notion emerged in informal discussions with myself and Dejan Ivković at the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Linguistic Landscapes conference. I gratefully attribute this conceptualization to our discussion.

The added advantage of this is that it creates an affective response which is even more effective than seeing it on a billboard, because it forces you to engage with it in a way that looking at a billboard will not.

This chapter also discussed the fact that the term ‘virtual linguistic landscape’ places emphasis on the language aspect of the virtual space, while not acknowledging the other semiotics which are as important (if not more, in some instances) online. The researcher therefore moves forward with the reframing of the study as operating in the ‘virtual semioscape’ as it foregrounds all semiotics.

This chapter allowed the reader to see how novel online reading pathways effectively creates a space of safety – realized through strategic privatizing of the YouTube videos. It also gives insight into how the days and weeks in a month are structured in the virtual space. What this chapter offers is a look at the unconventional strategies which Vagina Varsity took – and ultimately led to their success.

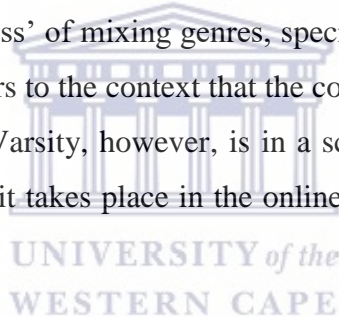


## CHAPTER 6 - MULTIMODALITY, REMEDIATION AND REPURPOSING

### 6.0 Introduction

Having explored the steps to navigating the viewing pathway to the Vagina Varsity (VV) virtual semioscape, the study now turns to the videos themselves, specifically focussing on multimodality, remediation and repurposing. This chapter looks at the various forms of recontextualizations, done through different multimodal tools which bring in resemiotization and remediation into the Vagina Varsity course, and how these recontextualizations are exploited for extended meanings. Specific attention will be paid to how the VV producers recontextualize the concept of university, resemiotize the school/university curriculum, how the pedagogical discourse is personalised, how they appropriate YouTube tutorials, appropriate movie genres, and remediate stereotypes.

This chapter also looks at the *slippage* of domains taking place in the Vagina Varsity course. This is indicative of the ‘messiness’ of mixing genres, specially education and entertainment. The domain of language use refers to the context that the communication/interaction is taking place (Fishman, 1965). Vagina Varsity, however, is in a schoolroom format, but it is also a marketing campaign. Moreover, it takes place in the online space as opposed to a classroom setting.



### 6.1 Recontextualizing the teaching genre

#### 6.1.1 Recontextualizing the concept of university

This section looks at how Vagina Varsity remodels the teaching genre and the way we think about the female genitalia. In order to establish how Vagina Varsity is different to a formal teaching course, one first has to look at what one would expect of the formal teaching genre. Firstly, one would expect a formal tone and discourse. However, the Vagina Varsity course is more informal. For example, when looking at the name of the course, the actual word *vagina* is used in the name of the course. Although this is the correct anatomical word, saying this word in public is taboo in many cultures around the world (Thomas, 2007; Kissling, 1996), and also unexpected for a teaching course. This not only indexes an alternative/different way of learning, but also that, through the use of the word *vagina*, the course aims to reclaim and

reframe this word in such a way to reduce its taboo nature. The word *varsity* is an informal name for the word *university*, thus suggesting that this is a less formal course than one would take at a normal university, and that they are appealing to a young audience.

Secondly, the logotype and discourse often found on institutions of higher learning has been recontextualised/remediated (Iedema, 2003; Prior & Hengst, 2010). A university logo is typically made up of a shield, scroll, and logotype. When looking at the Vagina Varsity logo (Image 6.1), one sees that it is a remediation of a traditional university logo. The letter ‘V’ appears on the shield, upon which short blue stripes appear. This resembles a vagina with pubic hair. The shield is therefore made to look like a vagina, although it is still designed in such a way that it is aesthetically appealing and not ‘offensive’. Judging by the name of the course, as well as the fact that the ‘V’ looks like a vagina, the ‘V’ also stands for vagina, or could represent the fact that both words ‘vagina’ and ‘varsity’ start with the letter ‘V’.

The colour of the shield is bright pink. Pink is a colour typically associated with femininity (Koller, 2008). The writing is green and white, colours, which along with pink, purple, and blue, are also used on the packaging of Libresse pads. According to Luke (1997: 29), it is common for sanitary towels to use soft pastel colours, which are associated with femininity, and which highlight the ‘sweet’, feminine nature of using these products. Market research has found that women tend to relate better to these colours, especially during menstruation (Luke, 1997). Many advertisements for feminine products such as pregnancy tests, tampons and pads use typically feminine colours such as all shades of pink, light blues, light greens and light mauves (Luke, 1997). Libresse, on the other hand, has opted for brighter hues.

The colours used in the background of the videos follow the same bright-coloured theme. The background is also similar to the background used in the shows of MTV (Music Television), the television channel first introduced in America but has since spread to other countries, including South Africa. The colours of the Vagina Varsity logo are also brighter than a traditional university logo, as seen with the logo of the University of the Western Cape, which uses blue, white, and gold (Image 6.2). The scroll contains the name of the course, Vagina Varsity. The word *Vagina* is typed in a less standard-appearing typeface than the word *Varsity*. The logotype contains the words “Founded by Libresse”. The phrases “founded by” or “founded in” are normally used by institutions to indicate by whom, or in what year, the institution was created. The name *Libresse* is in the same typeface found on the packaging of



their products. When comparing these logos, one can see that the name Vagina Varsity appears in the scroll, while the University of the Western Cape appears below the scroll.

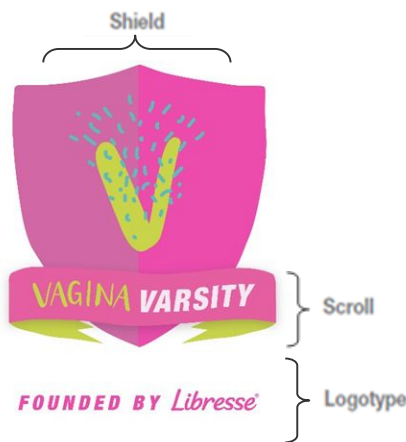


Image 6.1 –Vagina Varsity logo



Image 6.2 - Example of a university logo

One can also see that classroom discourse is used in the Vagina Varsity course. For example, in the video description of Lesson 2 (Appendix A, Lesson 2), a lesson about the anatomy of the vulva, the Vagina Varsity producers state that they will be calling it “vulvanatomy 101 – from top to taint”. They have created a subject name by combining the words vulva and anatomy. By using the word anatomy in the name of the subject, the viewer is reminded of a biology course, where the focus is often on anatomy. The number ‘101’ acts as a code for the course or lesson, in this case. University courses have codes to distinguish them from each other. The words “from top to taint” acts as a course name, giving more detail about what they will be teaching in the lesson. It also sets the tone for the class as it portrays the course as funny, laidback and in line with popular culture trends.

### 6.1.2 Recontextualization of the curriculum

This section looks at how Vagina Varsity has recontextualized the school curriculum through various resources. Firstly, when revisiting the length of the course, which spanned over four weeks (28 days), this length of time would for the large part, coincide with the length of a menstrual cycle. Importantly, a menstrual cycle is counted from the first day of one period to the first day of the next period.<sup>30</sup> This guarantees that if the subscriber is a girl/woman (who is

<sup>30</sup>This definition was taken from the Vagina Varsity quiz.

able to menstruate), she would typically have her period within this time. If the viewer is consistently watching the videos and seeing the Libresse pads in the videos, it increases the chances of the viewer buying Libresse pads. This can be said to be a marketing strategy. Secondly, the course is also set up in a Monday to Friday structure, having weekends off, as with school. This can be seen as a remediation of real-life events, similar to live television, where the viewer tunes in to watch something as it is happening in real time. By employing the interplay of double logic (i.e. immediacy and hypermediacy), the social distance is reduced.

Thirdly, when looking at the name of the course, the VV producers have chosen to use the non-standard word *varsity* instead of the standard term *university*. Non-standard English is also used throughout the course, specifically in the timetable, the email content, as well as the language used by the presenters, Nwabisa and Thembe. This is done to appeal to a younger audience, who likely do not speak a standard variety of English.

The timetable was introduced in the trailers of Vagina Varsity (there are two), before the course started. It is significant to note that there is a difference between the titles used in the timetable and the video titles, seeing that the timetable showed in the Vagina Varsity trailer is available for everyone to see, while the video titles are only shown to those who have signed up to the course. Notably one can only view the videos once signed up. Below is a table containing the titles of the lessons as found on the timetable, alongside the titles of the lessons as found in the videos (accessible only by the subscribers). The language use in the timetable is different to the language use in the video titles.

<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Timetable title (Public)</b>	<b>Video title (Private – subscribers only)</b>
1	Meet your vulva	Say hey to your va-jay
2	The outside bits	My bits, my bits, my lovely lady bits
3	The inside bits	Step inside my crib
4	Periods & pads	That time of the month
5	Hygiene	Let's keep it clean
6	Discharge	Honourable discharge
7	When to see the doctor	Call a doctor!
8	Underwear & cameltoe	Be careful of the camel
9	The gynae	Going to the gynae
10	The hymen	All that hymen hype
11	Growing a baby	Where do babies actually come from
12	Contraception	Preventing pregnancy
13	Sexually transmitted infections	Better safe than sorry
14	Decorating down there	What to wear, down there

15	Sexy time	Sexy time
16	All vaginas are amazing	All vaginas are amazing

Table 6.1 – Timetable titles and video titles

When comparing the timetable titles with the video titles, the subject matter of the lessons are clear in both sets of titles, but the style differs. For example, the timetable is publically available and appears to contain more formal language than the video titles. When looking at the names of body parts found on the timetable (e.g. vulva, hymen, and vagina), one can see that the VV producers have repurposed a biology course, with the focus being on the female anatomy. However, looking at the poetic language, non-standard English, as well as the references to American culture, one can see that this is not a traditional course. Not only do they draw on biology lessons, but also life orientation, a compulsory school subject in South Africa which was initiated after apartheid ended (Jacobs, 2011). According to the Department of Education, Life Orientation is aimed at developing learners in a range of areas, including personal, psychological and physical (Jacobs, 2011). Similar to Life Orientation, the VV course touches on these areas, by teaching about issues such as reproduction, STIs, and teenage pregnancy.

In addition, while course modules are typically structured as being detached from the person learning the module, the words in the titles of the course suggest that it directly applies to the subscriber. For example, the deictic pronouns in the following titles: ‘Meet your vulva’, ‘Say hey to your va-jay’, ‘My bits, my bits, my lovely lady bits’, ‘Step inside my crib’, and ‘Let’s keep it clean’, index a more personalized approach than a traditional course. In addition, the titles ‘Call a doctor!’, and ‘Where do babies actually come from’, are structured in such a way that it directly speaks to the subscriber because of the exclamation and question marks, respectively (although there is not a question mark at the end of the latter title, the sentence is structured as a Wh-question). This is also a form of ‘immediacy’ as it is “[a] style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium (canvas, photographic film, cinema, and so on) and believe that he is in the presence of the objects of representation” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999: 272-273).

The classroom practice has been remediated in video/movie format. This is seen in the fact that every lesson has a different title, like a course that has different lessons with different themes. There is an exploitation of different media affordances and genres, for extended meaning potentials (Prior & Hengst, 2010; Banda & Jimaima, 2015). Not only has the classroom practice

been remediated into video format, the VV programme itself is mediatized, meaning that the classroom content is now in the media. Vagina Varsity has connected the traditional way of teaching with the social media platform YouTube. One sees a shift from teaching which is traditionally oral, to the multimodal content seen in the VV videos.

There is also an interplay between formal and informal language. As seen in the table above, the language used in the timetable titles are more standard than the video titles, with the exception of Lessons 15 and 16, which have the same titles on the timetable as in the videos. For example, the title on the timetable for Lesson 1 contains the word “vulva”, which is the correct biological term for the mound of skin above the pubic bone. The video title, however, contains the euphemism for vagina, “va-jay”, a term that has been remediated (Prior & Hengst, 2010). For example, “va-jay” is a shorter version of “va-jay-jay”, a term that was made popular by the American TV series *Grey’s Anatomy*, and was also taken up by African American talk show host, Oprah Winfrey. The word “va-jay” could also have been taken from “VJ”, which stands for Video Jockey, someone who introduces and plays music videos on television, for example on MTV.

Based on the timetable titles as well as the video titles, one can deduce that the videos are aimed at young individuals. For example, the video title of Lesson 2 is a reference to a song that forms part of popular culture. The video title is ‘My bits, my bits, my lovely lady bits’, which is a play on the lyrics to *My Humps*, a song by the popular American group Black Eyed Peas. In the song, the female vocalist sings “My humps, my humps, my lovely little lumps”. The word “humps” is therefore replaced by “bits”. Also, while the song speaks about a woman’s curves, the video is referring to a woman’s vagina. The word “bits” is also found in Lessons 2 and 3 on the timetable, which is a euphemism to describe parts of the vagina. The use of euphemisms in the titles seems especially ironic, as one of the main aims of this campaign is to encourage women to move away from the use of euphemisms and start using the anatomical terms for the female body. However, the use of euphemisms in the titles can be seen as adding to the informal tone of the VV course.

On the timetable, Lesson 4 is titled ‘Periods & pads’, which is by no means formal language, but more straightforward than ‘That time of the month’, which is a euphemistic term that refers to the woman’s menstrual cycle. Similarly, Lesson 5 appears as Hygiene which is slightly more revealing than the video title, which is called ‘Let’s keep it clean’. This phrase also has various meanings ([www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com)). However, when looking at it in relation to its associated

title “Hygiene”, the reader is meant to assume that the video will be about vaginal hygiene, seeing that the course is about the vagina. The word “it”, in this case, refers to the vagina, which could be considered another euphemism for this word. On the timetable, Lessons 12 (‘Contraception’) and 13 (‘Sexually transmitted infections’) contain standard language that would typically be found in sex education, whereas the corresponding video titles are less formal, being titled ‘Preventing pregnancy’ and ‘Better safe than sorry’, respectively.

The rhyming found in the video titles of Lesson 1 and Lesson 14, (‘Say hey to your va-jay’, ‘What to wear, down there’), is not only poetic, but it also adds to the idea that the videos will be fun and entertaining. Similarly, the use of the exclamation in the video title of Lesson 7 (‘Call a doctor!’) not only speaks to the urgency of vaginal health, but it also adds to the fun, humorous aspect of the video.

The course draws on American culture, as seen in the ubiquitous use of African American English (AAE) in the course. AAE refers to a variety of English predominantly spoken by black people in the United States (Weber & Horner, 2012). This variety has been popularized worldwide through rap and hip hop, which forms part of urban black youth culture (Weber & Horner, 2012). In the video title ‘Step inside my crib’ (Lesson 3), the word “crib” is typically used in AAE, and is another word for “house”, and here it is used as a euphemism for the word “vagina”, as the lesson is about learning the correct words about the anatomy inside the vagina.

On the timetable, one finds evidence of alliteration and assonance, two literary devices used in stories and poetry. Alliteration occurs when words that are close together have the same consonant sound at the beginning (e.g. ‘Be careful of the camel’, ‘Going to the gynae’, ‘Preventing pregnancy’, ‘Better safe than sorry’, ‘Let’s keep it clean’) and assonance occurs when there is a repetition of vowel sounds (e.g. ‘Say hey to your va-jay’, ‘Let’s keep it clean’, ‘What to wear, down there’, ‘All that hymen hype’). On the timetable, the only titles containing alliteration are ‘Periods & pads’, and ‘Decorating down there’, also showing that the timetable has a slightly more serious tone than the video titles. However, overall, the shortened video titles (e.g. Va-jay instead of vagina, Gynae, instead of Gynaecologist) indicate that the course is less formal than a traditional course.

By looking at the titles of the videos, one can see that the tone of the womanhood/menses discourse in Vagina Varsity is different to what is expected in a formal classroom setting. The campaign clearly employs an upbeat and informal tone, which draws in the audience. The language used in the VV course has more currency online than it would have in a traditional

classroom. This is because online spaces such as YouTube allow for a hybrid, edutainment (Addis, 2005), space to be created.

## 6.2 Vagina Varsity and African culture

As discussed in the previous section, the Vagina Varsity course makes reference to popular culture. However, it is clear that the curriculum is tailored for a South African audience. This section looks at the strategies used by the Vagina Varsity producers to localize the course.

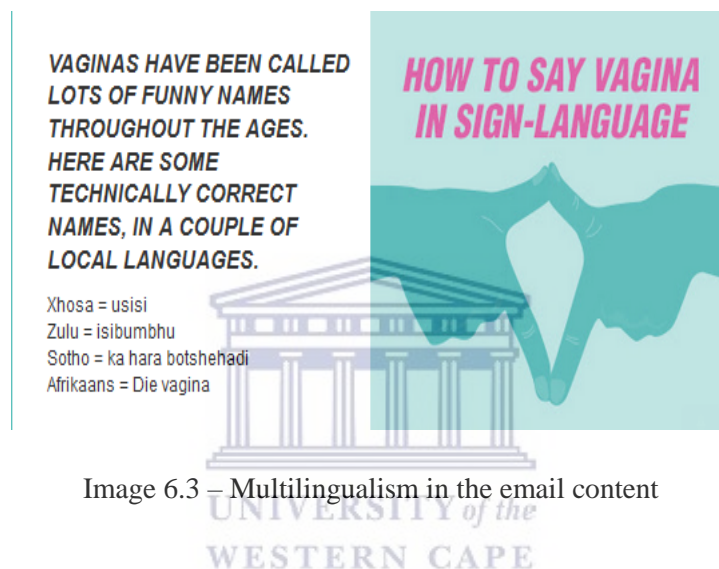


Image 6.3 – Multilingualism in the email content

The medium of instruction (MOI) of the Vagina Varsity course is English, possibly to attract a wide audience because most people in South Africa understand English. The course also takes into consideration their South African audience by including different translations of the word *vagina* in the email of Lesson 1 (See Appendix B for the entire email for this lesson). They have included the translations of *vagina* in South African languages, including isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, and Afrikaans, as well as sign language (Image 6.3). However, it is interesting to note that the isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho translations are, in fact, euphemistic terms for the vagina. These are the words that young women in the African culture use. Lack of technical terms for this word in African languages shows that it is taboo in certain African cultures to speak about vaginas. It could also be why the course is taught in English and not in an African language.

The presenters of the course, Nwabisa and Thembe, are also South African. When analyzing the presenters' speech on a phonological level, the presenters switch between various accents, such as a South African accent, an exaggerated black South African accent, as well as African American English (discussed later in this chapter). For example, in Lesson 2, Thembe and Nwabisa use the word *labia*, which they pronounce as [labɪa], which is in a South African accent, as it can be both an Afrikaans variety and it can also be an African variety. (All video transcriptions can be found in Appendix C). The standard pronunciation of the word *labia* is [leɪbɪə] or [læbɪə]. The use of the /a/ sound instead of /eɪ/ and /æ/ shows the influence that African languages have on the speakers' English. By pronouncing words the way that (South) Africans would pronounce it, they are localizing speech. If the presenters had used a formal, British English pronunciation of words throughout the course, it would have distanced them from their viewers. Therefore, by using African pronunciations, they are authenticating the course.

There are also instances where the presenters have pronounced or stylized certain words in an exaggerated black South African accent, predominantly by African users or by people trying to imitate African users. For example, in Lesson 2, Thembe pronounces the word *girl*, typically pronounced by South Africans as [gɜ:l], as *gal* [gæl] by inserting the open low (unrounded) front short vowel /æ/ between the velar voiced plosive /g/ and the lateral liquid /l/. Her use of *gal* as opposed to *girl* could be a sign of excitement and pride shown toward her co-presenter who was, at that moment, correctly listing the different parts of the vagina according to where it is located. Another instance of the exaggerated black South African accent occurs in Lesson 12, which deals with pregnancy prevention. Thembe lists abstinence as one method of preventing pregnancy. Interestingly, she pronounces the word (i.e. /abstɪnəns/) as /abstɪne:ns/. In Bantu languages, length (apart from tone) is very prominent. The use of the non-existent English phoneme \*/e:/ is a result of the Bantu language influence, where length usually plays a major role. Length affects their accuracy in pronunciation seeing that some syllables are lengthened almost naturally by the speakers in polysyllabic words to which the word *abstinence* is part. For this reason, a non-existent \*/e:/ is lengthened even though it does not exist in English. In Bantu languages, length is sometimes used for emphasis and exaggeration. This pronunciation is therefore used by Thembe to put particular emphasis on this contraceptive method.

In addition to the South African pronunciations of words, Nwabisa also uses an isiZulu word twice within the course. She uses the isiZulu word ‘mina’ which means ‘me’, in Lesson 4 and in Lesson 14. In Lesson 4, Thembe interrupts Nwabisa while she is speaking to the viewers/learners, and Nwabisa says to Thembe, “Mina, I’m trying to talk to the ladies and gentle brothers out there”. In Lesson 14, Thembe lists the different types of bikini waxes: “Bikini, Brazilian, Hollywood, Bloemfontein”, to which Nwabisa replies, “Mina, I don’t know about the Bloemfontein”. The Hollywood and Brazilian waxes are named after particular geographical locations. Thembe adds another location, Bloemfontein, which is the name of a city in Free State, South Africa. Although the type of bikini wax does not exist, the researcher argues that they have added *Bloemfontein* not only to add humour, but also to localize the content.

As seen in the above examples, the presenters draw on local accents and the use of local spaces to localize the VV content, in order to relate to their South African audience.

### 6.3 Semiotic performance of different roles

Apart from the two presenters, the only other live person seen in the course is Dorothy Black, a ‘sexpert’, who appears in Lesson 15 as a guest. There are also appearances by two other characters which will be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 7). For the majority of the course, however, the presenters are the only characters, and therefore they need to take on different identities and social roles, and they do so through the semiotic performance of different identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). For instance, in Lessons 1 and 2, Thembe is the one who is more knowledgeable about the issues related to the vagina, while Nwabisa is embarrassed to talk about vaginas and uses euphemisms instead. In Lesson 5, however, Nwabisa and Thembe do a quiz, and Nwabisa is seen as knowing more than Thembe. The interplay of different identities and social roles not only provides entertainment, but the viewers can also relate with the various roles performed by the presenters. This section highlights the performance of different mental states, as embodied by Thembe in Lesson 9, ‘Going to the gynae’.

In Lesson 9, Thembe takes on the role of the nervous patient who is moments away from going to the gynaecologist. In this lesson, she performs three different mental states. At the beginning of the lesson, Nwabisa states that she is going to walk Thembe through three things she needs to be aware of when going to the gynaecologist. With each point Nwabisa mentions, the camera



zooms in on Thembe's face, at which point a different scene is shown where she is alone, and each scene depicts a different state of mind. The first remark Nwabisa makes is that "you probably want to just get to a place where you feel the most comfortable" at which point the camera zooms into Thembe's face and the video switches to a scene where Thembe is alone. She is wearing a gold dress with her hair hanging loose down her back. This scene moves in quick succession where Thembe is shown putting hairspray on her hair, then dancing with a hairdryer, then putting on lipstick, putting a crown on her head and then dancing with the crown on her head (Image 6.4). This scene takes place while Nwabisa's voice can be heard saying "probably taking a shower before you go, waxing your legs, under your arms". This scene shows Thembe performing and stylizing a particular type of commercialized womanhood which (arguably) should then lead to a state of comfort and confidence.

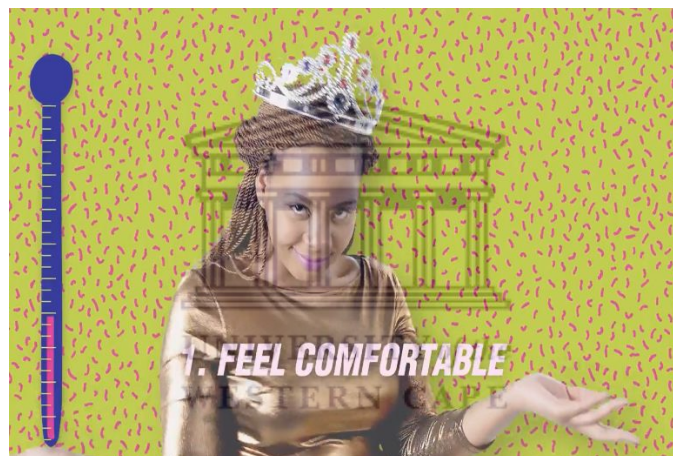


Image 6.4 – Thembe dancing

The video description of this particular video includes a reference to a popular cultural song. The video description, which is intended to be read before watching the video, states that "If you've never been before you will learn what to expect from this visit, and if you've been going for years and it's not a biggie anymore", watching the video is still "worth it just to see Thembe in her golden gown. Isn't she lovely? \*Cue Lionel Richie\*" (Appendix A, Lesson 9). This reference was most likely made because Thembe's dress is reminiscent of the gold lamé dresses worn in the 70s, when this song was released. Although this iconic song was actually sung by Stevie Wonder, the reference is still affective in that even younger generations know the song.

The second point that Nwabisa makes is that the gynaecologist is going to ask Thembe for her medical and sexual history. Nwabisa also says: “They will also then ask you to get naked, but you’re gonna get a gown, so you’ll feel very comfortable in that space”, and when Nwabisa says “and again, remember, talk to your doctor if you’re feeling uncomfortable”, the camera zooms in to Thembe’s face and the video goes to a scene where Thembe is in a medical gown, with a plain pink background. The background looks like an empty space, which gives a sense of being alone. She looks around, and then, noticing that she is alone, she looks at the camera, eyes wide, and she starts screaming (Image 6.5). The scream lasts for four seconds. This scene, then, shows Thembe performing and stylizing a state of panic.

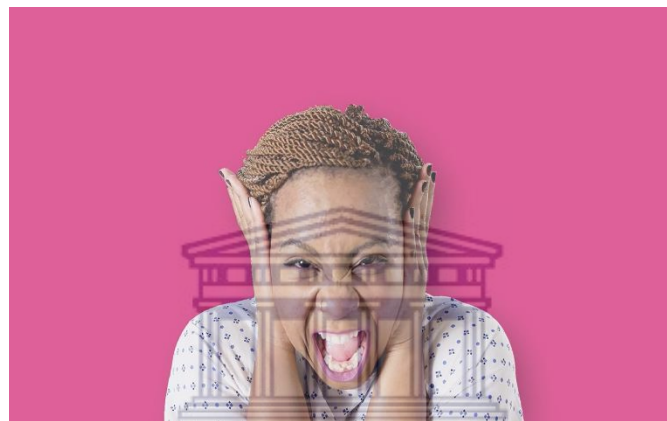


Image 6.5 – Thembe screaming

Thirdly, Nwabisa explains the actual procedure to Thembe. While she explains the procedure, the camera once again zooms in to Thembe, whose eyes are widening as Nwabisa explains the procedure, and the video switches to a scene where Thembe is wearing a wrestling robe, workout leggings, a loose-fitting top, and hairband. While Nwabisa explains the procedure, the video shows Thembe boxing to a song which sounds similar to the theme song for the film *Rocky III*, an American movie about boxing<sup>31</sup>. Thembe performs some elaborate boxing moves while looking directly into the camera, her eyes comically wide (Image 6.6). Here, Thembe is performing and stylizing a mental state of panic, in a comical manner.

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<sup>31</sup> It could be that they did not use the original song, *The Eye of the Tiger*, because it might be copyrighted.



Image 6.6 – Thembe boxing

The above examples showed the stylization and performance of different mental states, all within one Vagina Varsity lesson. Addressing potential mental states of the subscribers allows the viewer to become more absorbed in the video. This is discussed further when exploring the effects of immediacy and hypermediacy.

#### 6.4 Immediacy and hypermediacy in the online classroom

Prior and Hengst (2010) state that remediation as repurposing is not replication or reproducing anew. It is about creating something new with future implications. As seen in the previous section, the public timetable differs to the timetable available only for those that have subscribed. This is also true of the content of the videos. The idea of what happens at a university has been repurposed for this campaign. However, it does resemble the classroom setting in some ways.

This section looks at how the virtual space becomes a place, the latter of which is meaningful, a place for interaction, and engagement (Saunders, Rutkowski, van Genuchten, Vogel and Orrego, 2011). Saunders *et al.* (2011) state that space refers to the sum of all places, while virtual place refers to “the perception of bounded space imbued with meaning” (Saunders *et al.*, 2011: 1080). According to Saunders *et al.* (2011), ‘place’ is situated within space. Therefore, although the Vagina Varsity course takes place in the virtual space, it becomes a ‘place’ as it has meaning, and there is interaction and engagement between the presenters and the viewers, as well as between the viewers themselves.

The following section will look at 1) how the presenters perform the role of teachers, and 2) how the virtual space becomes a specific *place*, the classroom, by using the theory of immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999).

#### *6.4.1 The presenters and the pedagogical stance*

From the start, the presenters position themselves as being novices when it comes to the topic of vaginas. In the first lesson, after they introduce themselves, Nwabisa says “With the help of experts, we’re here to host you at Vagina Varsity”. With this statement, we see that before this course, they were not knowledgeable about this subject, but they have been taught by people who have the experience and the qualifications to teach about this topic, and now they will teach the subscribers. This contrasts with academic teachers or lecturers who construct themselves as knowledgeable in what they teach or lecture. The actual ‘expert’ appears in Lesson 4 and Lesson 5, but only her voice is heard. In Lesson 5, she is depicted as a deer (discussed later in the chapter). It could be said that the actual expert would not have been as relatable to a young audience. The presenters also don’t call themselves teachers, but say that they will “host” this course. This may well be seen as a nod to the hybridity of the space. Throughout the course, however, the presenters do act as teachers, seen not only through what they say, but also by looking at the camera, pointing, gesturing, and speaking to the audience “face-to-face”. A heightened sense of immediacy is brought about when a particularly retched ‘smell’ is produced in the video and in this case we later see how viewers react to the ‘smell’ emanating from the video.

Bezemer and Kress (2015) look at ‘teaching’ as an instance of multimodal communication. For instance, spoken words, written texts and pictures are combined to illustrate the same idea. The presenters utilize different modes for teaching the viewers, by using hand gestures, facial expressions, illustrations with props, and using their bodies to illustrate certain actions. For example, in Lesson 11, they play a game where the one player has to guess which word the other one is describing or acting out. Thembe illustrates the act of water breaking by moving her hand from her stomach downwards while she describes it as “the thing that tells you that you’re about to have a baby. Your amniotic fluid”. After the answer is revealed, the words ‘water breaking’ appears along with an animation of water rising up over the words (Image 6.7). In another instance, Nwabisa holds her stomach while describing ‘morning sickness’ in

order to imitate the feeling of nausea. Nwabisa also illustrates what fallopian tubes look like by bending her arms and pointing her hands (Image 6.8).



Image 6.7 – Multimodal representation of “water”

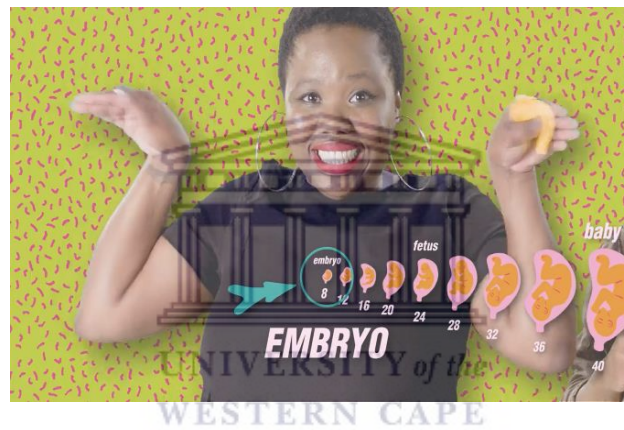


Image 6.8 – Imitating fallopian tubes

Thembe acts out giving birth by moving both her hands downward while describing it as “the act”. When Nwabisa answers correctly, two cartoon images appear: one where the baby is being held up by two arms (to illustrate normal birth), and another where the uterus is opened by using forceps and the baby appears (to illustrate a C-section). They have also resemiotized a doughnut in order to represent something else. When describing the cervix to Thembe, Nwabisa says it’s “a doughnut with a hole in it at the end of the hallway at my house”. When illustrating the doughnut, she puts her fingers together to create a circle and when she describes the end of the hallway, she illustrates the distance by stretching out her arm in front of her. These gestures and pictures, together with their verbal explanations, work together to help the viewer remember the different terms. The appearance of cartoon images in the videos is an example of hypermediacy, as the viewer is made aware that they are watching the lessons

through a screen. The next section, however, looks at instances where the viewer becomes immersed in the VV classroom.

#### *6.4.2 The virtual space becomes the classroom 'place'*

When watching the videos of Vagina Varsity, the viewer is made to feel like they are a part of the interaction, and at times they are made to feel like they are there with Nwabisa and Thembe. This is an example of immediacy, where the medium is erased (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Within the videos, they use various strategies (not only visual), to create the illusion that the medium has been erased.

The course is made interactive by involving the subscribers, which is another way of immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). For example, in many instances throughout the course, the presenters say “we”, which not only include themselves, but also the audience. For example, in Lesson 1, Nwabisa says to the viewers, “Tomorrow, we taking a tour of my crib, so you might wanna take a mirror, get familiar with your lady parts”. By saying “we” she is talking about herself, Thembe, and the audience, and they are going to look at her “crib”, meaning her vagina. She also instructs the audience to take a mirror to look at their own vaginas. This is their ‘homework’, what they should do in preparation for the next lesson. This instruction is not unlike the homework that learners receive at school from their teachers. Considering that this is an edutainment (Addis, 2005) space, we see a leaning towards traditional practices within the sphere of education. In this way, the audience is encouraged to participate. In the following lesson, Nwabisa says that she looked at her vagina. She then says “I hope you guys did too”, reminding the audience of their homework from the previous lesson. This shows that while each lesson can be seen as a lesson on its own, there is also a thread throughout the videos. In this lesson, they then discuss the various parts of the vagina. In Lesson 4, in which they discuss the topic of menstruation, the first thing Nwabisa says to the viewers is, “You know that time of the month when you’re on your period?” The audience is therefore drawn into the conversation.

In Lesson 4, Nwabisa talks directly to the camera, and then Thembe comes in and interrupts her train of thought. She then says to Thembe, “I’m trying to talk to the ladies and gentle brothers out there”, the viewer acquires the sense that what is happening is taking place in real time. At the end of the lesson Nwabisa says, “Thank you guys so much for watching another lesson of Vagina Varsity. It’s ALWAYS a pleasure having you here”. By saying “having you

here”, it creates the sense that the audience is actually there with them. This provides the sense that the medium is erased (immediacy) (Bolter & Grusin, 1999).

One of the strategies of eliminating the distance between the presenters and the viewers is incorporating the Question and Answer (Q & A) genre, in their videos. This is not only done in the emails, as seen above, but also in their videos. One such lesson is Lesson 8, ‘Be careful of the camel’, a lesson about camel toe.<sup>32</sup> In this lesson, they answer questions from the viewers. It is therefore as if the subscribers are sitting in the classroom and asking questions. (However, the timespan from when the viewers ask the questions to the time they are answered are considerably longer than if they were in a classroom). There is also a sense of closeness to the audience, as if Thembe and Nwabisa know the viewers. For example, in the Q & A session, Sam from Cape Town asked: “In winter, our uniform consists of stockings. Is that bad for my vagina?” Thembe then responds by firstly saying “Baby, don’t worry” and thereafter explaining that “for optimal vaginal health, try and find stockings that will have a cotton crotch. You know why? Cotton is natural and porous”. By calling the subscriber “baby”, it suggests a close relationship, that they know each other. Also, by asking the question “You know why?” and then assuming the viewer said “yes” and then providing the answer, is another instance of immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Thembe calls another viewer who asked a question, “babes”, also suggesting a close relationship.

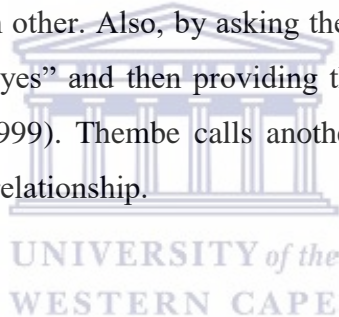


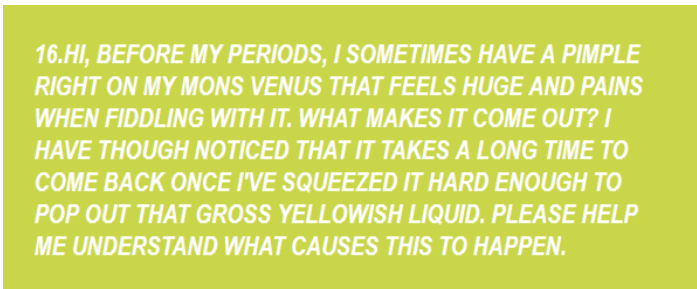
Image 6.9 - Remediating camel paws

<sup>32</sup> A colloquial term used to describe the appearance of a woman’s labia when it’s visible through her pants.

In this lesson, the viewers' questions appear on screen, with drawings of camel paws at both ends of the question (Image 6.9). The drawings of the camel paws may have been remediated as quotation marks in order to creatively frame the viewers' questions, and also for comedic effect. Camels have two toes on each foot, and therefore this drawing imitates the two marks characteristic of a quotation mark.

Another example where the medium is erased occurs in Lesson 16, the final lesson, when Thembe says goodbye to the subscribers. She tells the viewers "I miss your faces already", implying that she has seen them face to face throughout the course, as you would in an actual classroom. The only possible way she might have seen the faces of the viewers would have been their profile pictures on YouTube.

In a classroom, learners ask the teacher questions if they are uncertain about a particular topic. At Vagina Varsity, the subscribers become involved by asking questions via email, which the presenters then answer in the videos, as well as via email. On 23 November 2016, those who were signed up on Vagina Varsity received an email with 20 selected questions asked by the viewers, which have then been answered by a professional. Below is an example of one such question (question number 16, as recorded on the list found in Appendix B), where the participant asks about a pimple that appears on her mons venus every month before her menstruation (Image 6.10). The professional first thanks the participant for asking the question, gives advice, and then refers her to another professional (a skin expert). These interactions are therefore also a way in which Vagina Varsity communicates with the subscribers personally. Note that the question has been reformulated by VV, which is why the subscriber's question is in capital letters. All the subscribers' questions in this email were capitalized.



*16.HI, BEFORE MY PERIODS, I SOMETIMES HAVE A PIMPLE RIGHT ON MY MONS VENUS THAT FEELS HUGE AND PAINS WHEN FIDDLING WITH IT. WHAT MAKES IT COME OUT? I HAVE THOUGH NOTICED THAT IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO COME BACK ONCE I'VE SQUEEZED IT HARD ENOUGH TO POP OUT THAT GROSS YELLOWISH LIQUID. PLEASE HELP ME UNDERSTAND WHAT CAUSES THIS TO HAPPEN.*

Thanks for your question. Before, during and after your period, your body is undergoing hormonal changes which can result in pimples – and pimples can happen anywhere on the body. This may explain why you get a pimple just before your period starts. Chat to a skin expert to find a regime that helps keep your pores clear or for suggestions of something that will help dry out the pimple once it starts forming.

Image 6.10 –Email Q & A



Immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) is also apparent in the email content. For example, in the email of Lesson 6 ('Honourable discharge'), Vagina Varsity urges you to go to a doctor if you suspect that you might have an infection. The heading for this warning is "ALERT! ALERT! ALERT!" (Image 6.11). The use of multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006) can be seen here, where they use capital letters and exclamation marks to add to the sense of urgency. This warning is followed by the following words: "If you think you have an infection, don't leave it untreated!" Once again, they use an exclamation mark, which not only adds to the urgency of the message, but also gives a sense that they are speaking directly to the reader. Another example of immediacy occurs in the email contents of Lesson 13 ('Better safe than sorry'). This email contains a section on HPV (human papillomavirus). They remind the participants that they spoke about Pap smears in a previous lesson, by asking the participants "Remember when we spoke about Pap smears in the Gynae lesson?" (Image 6.12). By asking the participants a question, as if expecting an answer back, it gives a sense that the medium (computer, cell phone) is erased (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), and the person is therefore addressed directly. Assuming that the participants answered yes to the question, and therefore remember what Pap smears are, they then exclaim "That's how they detect HPV!" Asking questions also makes the video interactive, despite the lack of a 'real' audience.

On the left-hand side of this section, they have placed an interesting fact about HPV: it is the only virus that cannot be detected through a blood or urine test. Below this fact are drawings of what appears to be drops of blood and urine. The drops are purple and yellow, colours which closely relate to blood and urine, respectively. This is not only an instance of multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006), but they have also made the appearance of these bodily fluids more palatable by using drawings instead of real pictures, and by not using the exact shades of the colours of blood and urine.

**ALERT! ALERT! ALERT!**

If you think you have an infection, don't leave it untreated! If you suspect that something is wrong, get to your doctor or gynaecologist as soon as you can. Untreated infections can lead to OTHER infections, or spread to other areas of your body, which can also put you at risk of developing conditions like pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can affect your long-term reproductive health.

Image 6.11 –Email information about infection

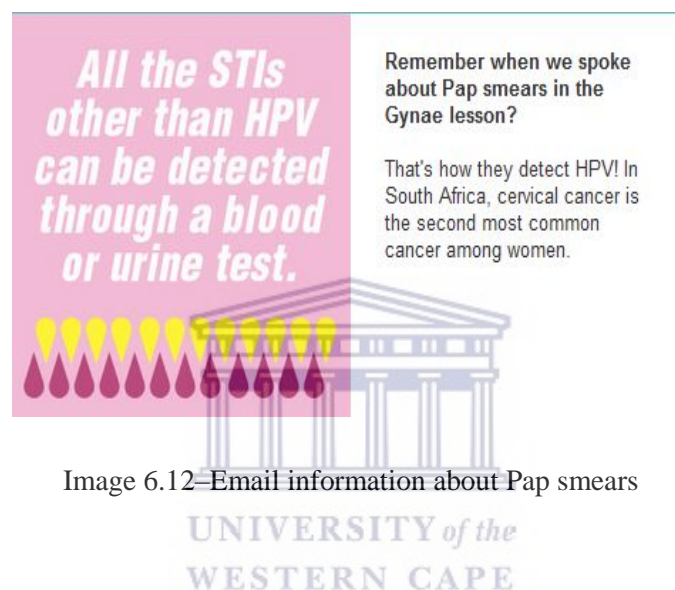


Image 6.12–Email information about Pap smears

Immediacy is found in the comment section as well. For example, in the comment section of Lesson 5, a viewer stated: “This series needs more advertising. especially because I know so many girls out here who do not have this knowledge”, to which Libresse SA responded, “Thanks (Name), we’d love for everyone to be students at Vagina Varsity, so share and invite your friends to join you in class too!”. The viewer is encouraged to invite her friends to “join” her in class, which creates the idea that the lessons are taking place in a real classroom, and that the viewers are all physically in the same place. This can be said to be one of the techniques which digital marketers use to encourage young Internet/social media users “communicate with their friends about a brand or a service, creating subtle forms of product endorsement that are spread (like a digital-age chain letter) to a vast population of recipients” (Montgomery & Chester, 2009: 21).

This section looked at how the course recontextualizes the classroom setting to where the classroom is now online and how the videos and email content uses immediacy as a strategy to draw in the viewers.

There are many instances where the medium is erased and you are allowed to immerse yourself in the ‘classroom’. However, there are also instances where one cannot help but see the medium. In these instances, links to other videos or websites appear on screen. For example, in Lesson 4, Thembe suggests that the viewers watch a Libresse advertisement, which is the first advertisement for sanitary towels where blood is shown. As she talks about the advertisement, it appears as a hyperlink in the background, and continues to play without sound (Image 6.13). A hyperlink is also an example of intertextuality (Lam, 2013), and in this case the ‘other text’ is being referenced explicitly. Clicking on the hyperlink would then take the viewer to this advertisement elsewhere on the Internet, which is much like walking from one place to another in the traditional linguistic landscape. The affordances of YouTube, however, allow for a much faster transportation from one place to another.



Image 6.13 – Link to other Libresse advertisement

This advertisement is called the ‘Blood’ advertisement, because this is the first sanitary towel advertisement in history that shows blood.

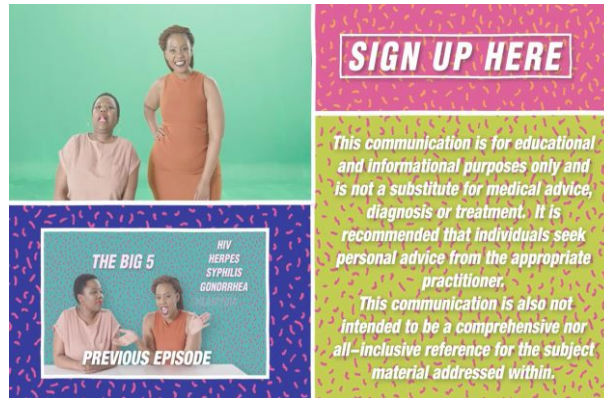


Image 6.14 – End of Lesson 14

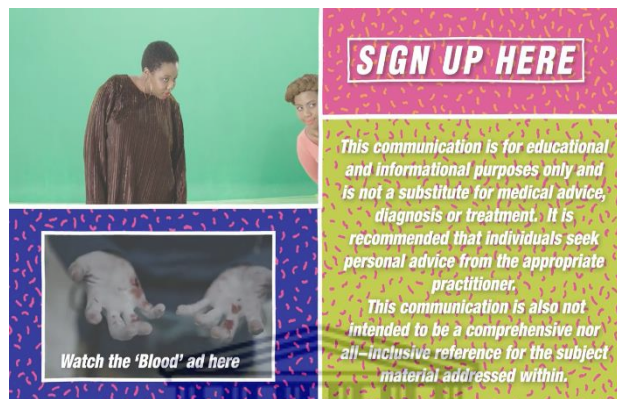


Image 6.15 - End of Lesson 4

The practice of hypermediacy is most evident in the “windowed style” of web pages, video games, multimedia programs as well as the desktop interface (Bolter & Grusin, 1999: 31). The representations within the windows (i.e. text, video, and graphics) compete for the viewers’ attention (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Hypermediacy appears throughout the videos (as seen in the above examples). Images 6.14 and 6.15 are examples of what appears after the end of each Vagina Varsity lesson. In the top left corner, they show the bloopers of the shooting of that particular video, or they show behind-the-scenes footage or footage that did not make it into the actual lesson. This footage is usually humorous. In the bottom left corner they play the previous lesson for the duration of the ‘bloopers’ in the top corner, without sound. They show the previous lesson in all the videos except Lesson 4. In Lesson 4, they put a hyperlink to the Libresse ‘Blood’ advertisement. In the top right corner is a hyperlink which takes you to the VV website. Below that is a disclaimer which appears in all of the videos, and which states

This communication is for educational and informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. It is recommended that

individuals seek personal advice from the appropriate practitioner. This communication is also not intended to be a comprehensive nor all-inclusive reference for the subject material addressed within.

The different videos that play at once, as well as the links to other websites, bring awareness to the fact that the subscriber is online and not in an actual classroom.

The Vagina Varsity course makes use of both immediacy and hypermediacy. The instances of immediacy gives the subscriber a feeling of closeness to the presenters and gives a sense of being in a classroom, while hypermediacy brings awareness to the affordances of the online space, such as being able to replay a lesson, the ease of being able to go to other places in the online space with one ‘click’, and the ability to watch different videos at once, and on one screen.

## **6.5 Appropriating YouTube genres**

Vagina Varsity, which uses YouTube as a platform for their videos, also draws on genres typical of this platform, such as tutorial videos and recipe videos.



### *6.5.1 YouTube tutorials*

One of the genres that Vagina Varsity appropriates is YouTube tutorials. The tutorials is an important genre on YouTube, and includes demonstrations or overt instructions on various topics such as applying make-up, playing instruments, making repairs, making videos, and cooking (Lange, 2014). In Lesson 4, ‘That time of the month’, Thembe illustrates step by step to the viewers how to use a sanitary towel. While illustrating this, she uses a panty and a Libresse pad, thus at the same time advertising the brand that sponsors the Vagina Varsity course. On the left-hand side of the table is a display of Libresse products (Image 6.16). It is commonplace for a YouTuber to use a particular brand in a video, in order to endorse that brand (cf. Fred, 2015).



Image 6.16 – Tutorial on how to use a sanitary towel

### 6.5.2 Repurposing YouTube recipe videos

In Lesson 7, ‘Call a doctor!’, a lesson about sexually transmitted infections, there is a segment where Nwabisa and Thembe display what an STI looks like. It is set up to look like a recipe video, which is also a popular genre on YouTube. The presenters construct and perform certain smells as well as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) made possible by technology affordances in multimedia (Marthinus, 2015; Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Gilje, 2010). They do this by putting various ingredients (cottage cheese, milk, mustard, a fish), into a blender. Nwabisa keeps her hands on the blender and says “what we are going to display here, mayday, mayday, mayday”. Thembe then exclaims “Call a doctor!” and saloon music starts to play, adding to the comical nature of this segment. Thembe first pours mustard into the blender, and then milk. As Thembe pours in the milk, Nwabisa says, “Remember. Liquid, liquid, liquid”, instructing the viewer as with a recipe video. Thembe then exclaims, “This stuff!”, referring to the liquids. Thembe puts cottage cheese into the blender and the contents splatters out of the blender, while Nwabisa theatrically moves away to avoid the splatter. Nwabisa then says “This is a yeast infection happening.” Thembe picks up the fish on the table and says, “And then the grand master. This, this is, THIS!” putting emphasis on the smell of the fish. Each ingredient they have placed in the blender represents a different symptom of an STI, because as they are blending the ingredients, Nwabisa shouts “Problem! Problem! Itchiness! Pain! Burning sensation! Problems!” Additionally, when they start blending the ingredients, the music changes from saloon music to the more modern music that played before they started adding ingredients into the blender.

Once they have blended all the ingredients together, a drawing resembling green fumes appear above the blender (Image 6.17). The fumes “move” side to side slightly. This moving sign is what Burn (2013) calls a kineikonic use of mode. The colour green is used to show that the contents of the blender is smelly. Nwabisa points to the blender with the lid and moves it up and down as she says “this is a problem”, putting emphasis on what she is saying. Thembe is bent over and she waves a banana peel across her face to get rid of the smell of the blender’s contents. Thembe’s facial expression and the fact that she says “Whoo!” adds to the idea that the contents of the blender smells bad. This performance can be characterized as immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), as the viewers can almost smell the STI recipe, which evokes a sense of disgust from viewers. This is palpable in the comments analysis and the focus group (discussed in forthcoming chapters).



Image 6.17 – STI recipe



Image 6.18 – Nwabisa throwing the roses

Another instance of “creating” a smell happens just before they illustrate what an STI looks and smells like. Nwabisa holds a bunch of roses in her hand, and then she says “to summarize, vaginas do not look, or smell, like roses” (Image 6.18). When Nwabisa says “vaginas”, she picks up the roses laying in front of her. She moves the roses up and down with each word she says, until the word “roses”, when she throws the roses away from the table. By doing this, she is visually showing how far the smell of roses is from the smell of vaginas. This could also symbolize that we should get rid of the idea that it is supposed to be smell that way. The ‘smell’ of the roses then disappear, and is replaced by the ‘smell’ they create in the blender. What they are saying here is that even though vaginas do not smell like roses, women should still be weary of certain smells, as it can indicate an infection.

The YouTube genres are therefore skilfully incorporated into the VV videos, in order to promote products as well as to educate the viewer.

## **6.6 Appropriating TV and movie scenes**

In some of the videos, you also find that the Vagina Varsity producers are appropriating iconic moments from TV shows and movies. In Lesson 9, ‘Going to the gynae’, Thembe is preparing to go to the gynaecologist. Throughout the video, she appears to be very nervous. When Nwabisa informs Thembe about the procedure (that the doctor will use a speculum to open her vagina), they switch to a scene where Thembe appears alone, the background plain, wearing a boxing robe and a headband. She performs boxing moves while looking straight into the camera. It can be said that she does this in order to prepare herself mentally for her visit to the gynaecologist or that she is panicking and her response is to “fight”. At the end of the video, Thembe is alone again and she is boxing while the song is playing in the background.

Another example of where they appropriate a movie genre can be seen in Lesson 6, ‘Honourable discharge’. Nwabisa introduces the video by saying “So today we are going to be talking about discharge”. When she says “discharge”, the screen turns black and white (Image 6.19), the camera zooms in on them and the screen “shakes”, while a sound typically used in movies to signify danger (dun, dun, duuuun!), is playing. Here, multimodality is skilfully used to overlay text with sound and imagery (black and white filter). The interplay of modes creates a typical horror movie scene, which is used here to illustrate the idea that the topic of discharge is terrifying. In this lesson, Thembe is performing the role of someone who is terrified of going to the gynaecologist. This is done to resonate with viewers who might feel the same. Although



Thembe is scared, she ends up going anyway and this might encourage the viewers to go to the gynaecologist.



Image 6.19 – Recreating the black and white movie scene

An iconic TV moment is also recreated in Lesson 12 which deals with the prevention of pregnancy. This iconic moment is an episode on the Oprah Winfrey show which originally aired on 13 September 2004. In this episode, she gave away new cars to everyone in the audience. Every member of the audience received a box. She proceeded to tell the audience members that inside of one of the boxes there is a car key, and the person who has the box with the key receives a car. Everyone proceeds to open the boxes and it turns out that everyone has a box containing a key. As the audience members are screaming, Oprah informs the audience that, in fact, all of them will be receiving new cars, by shouting repeatedly “You get a car!” while pointing at different audience members and then shouts “Everybody gets a car!” (Image 6.20). Since the airing of that episode, it has been parodied by people all over the world in various ways (e.g. memes, videos, etc.).



Image 6.20 – Oprah

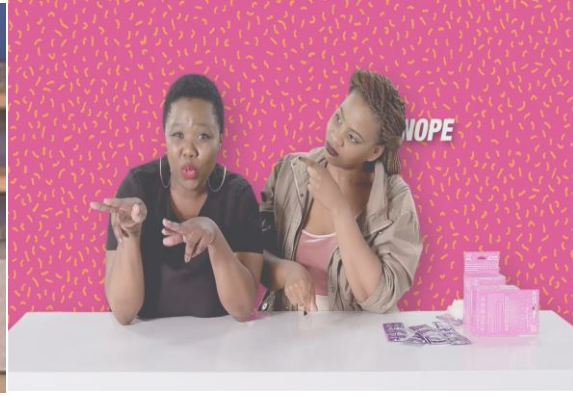


Image 6.21 – Oprah parody

The presenters capitalize on this iconic moment in television in their own idiosyncratic way. They do this by first informing the viewers that a male contraceptive pill will be coming to South Africa. Nwabisa then goes on to say “So what does this mean? You getting one, you getting one, you getting one. Look under your seat. Everybody’s getting one.” Nwabisa points to an imaginary audience as she says “you getting one”, imitating Oprah. This is an instance of semiotic remediation (Prior & Hengst, 2010), as a semiotic performance from a different person is re-used and re-purposed in a different context. In contrast to Oprah’s excitement, Nwabisa and Thembe’s delivery is much less enthusiastic. This lack of enthusiasm is accelerated by the fact that each time Nwabisa says “you getting one”, the word “nope” appears on the screen (Image 6.21). Most likely, their message is that the male contraceptive, although readily available, will probably not be taken up by many men.

### 6.7 Appropriating game shows

In the course, one also sees the appropriation of the game show genre, typically seen on TV. This is seen in Lesson 11, ‘Where do babies actually come from’. In this lesson, they play a game called “Guess what I’m thinking”. When they introduce this game, a game show logo appears (Image 6.22). The circle appears first, then the words appear in the circle. The words then move in and out of the circle in random order. The logo moves from side to side, while a game show tune is playing. They have appropriated the typical style of American game show logos. This can be seen by comparing the “Guess What I’m Thinking” logo with the logo of the popular American game show Family Feud (Image 6.23), which was introduced in 1976, however many examples are comparable.



Image 6.22 – Game show from VV



Image 6.23 – Family Feud game show

In this lesson, Nwabisa and Thembe ask each other questions about conception and pregnancy. When one presenter asks the other a question, the other presenter is seen thinking of the answer, and the sound of a ticking clock can be heard. When they answer correctly, a “ding ding ding” sound can be heard, along with the sound of applause from an imaginary audience. When they do not know the answer, a buzzing sound can be heard, along with the sound of shock from the “audience”. This is also typically found in game shows.

As mentioned before, they also use Q & A sessions in creative ways (Q & A is also a very popular video genre on YouTube). For example, in Lesson 5, ‘Let’s keep it clean’, the Q & A session resembles a game show. The ‘expert’ does a pop quiz to test Nwabisa and Thembe about their vaginal hygiene knowledge. This not only provides entertainment to the viewer, but also helps the viewer to remember the answers, and thereby learn information.

### 6.8 Appropriating popular cultural music

References to popular cultural music is also found in the email content of Lesson 8 (Careful of the camel). The heading of the warning against wearing thongs<sup>33</sup> while exercising, contains a line from the *Thong Song* by Sisco, an African American R & B artist. The line from the song is “that thong, th-thong, thong, thong” (Image 6.24).

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<sup>33</sup> “A piece of underwear, or the bottom part of a bikini, with a very narrow piece of cloth at the back” (macmillandictionary.com)

On the left-hand side of the information on thongs is information on ‘the importance of panties’. The written information is accompanied by a drawing of women’s underwear. This is an instance of multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

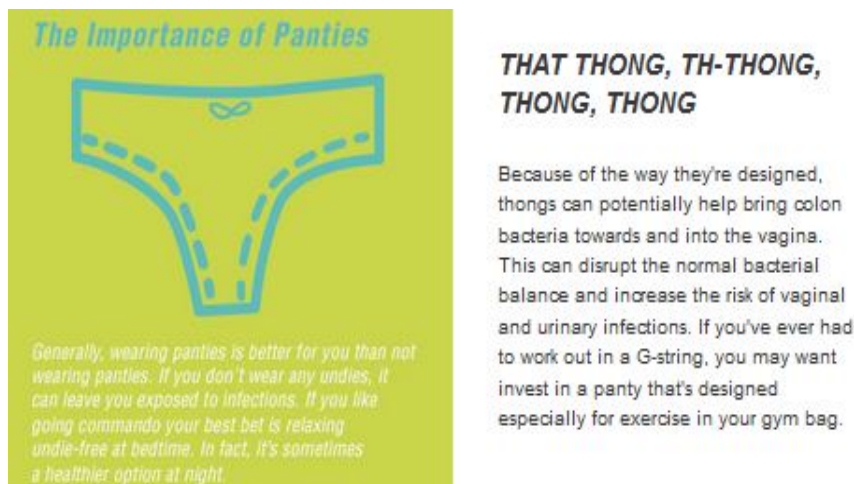


Image 6.24 – Popular culture in the email content

In line with the popular cultural references, the presenters also use Hip Hop style throughout the videos. For example, in Lesson 2, Nwabisa and Thembe are going through the different parts of the vagina, and Nwabisa then does a victory dance as she remembered the correct term for the area below the vaginal opening (the perineum). This dance move is reminiscent of a Hip Hop gesture (Image 6.25) which was made popular by African American rapper Jay Z, in his song *Dirt off Your Shoulder*, which was introduced in 2003. In line with the title of the song, the music video sees Jay Z brushing off his shoulders. Image 6.26 is a still image from the music video, where Jay Z is acting out the words “brush your shoulders off” as he is rapping. By imitating this dance move, one sees that Hip Hop stylization comes out throughout the videos, not only in their language use but also their gestures.



Image 6.25 – Nwabisa’s Hip Hop gesture



Image 6.26 – Jay-Z

Another example occurs in Lesson 11, ‘Where do babies actually come from’. Towards the end of the lesson, Thembe tells the viewers to “keep watching” and “stay tuned”, and then says “We’re gonna learn some mo”. She pronounces the word ‘more’ as ‘mo’, which is a typical AAE pronunciation. After she says this, she crosses her arms, pouts her lips and winks at the camera (Image 6.27), in order to look ‘cool’ and in that way relate to the (young) audience. Using kinesics, Hip Hop music is not only appropriated, but also the dress and demeanour (Pennycook, 2007). Global Hip Hop culture is therefore produced in the local.

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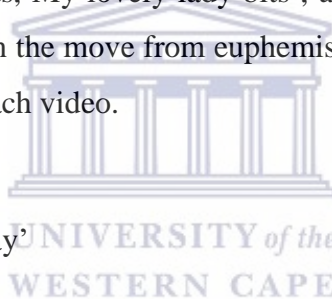


Image 6.27 – Thembe’s Hip Hop inspired pose

This section explored how the course transgresses cultural boundaries in order to popularize the lessons. It was found that the courses draw mostly on African American culture, while also incorporating their own style and accent.

## 6.9 From euphemisms to anatomical terms

Throughout the course, the viewers are taken through a journey, from not having much knowledge about the female anatomy, to becoming unofficial “experts”. The Vagina Varsity slogan, “The more you know, the less you fear”, shows that the Vagina Varsity producers believe having knowledge will increase the power that the viewer/participant has, which is also seen in Lesson 1, when Thembe says “We’re gonna get to a point where we’re empowered”, including not only herself and Nwabisa, but also the audience. The presenters go through a journey towards being comfortable about the topic of vaginas, and they invite the audience to do the same. What follows is an analysis of the first three lessons in the VV course, ‘Say hey to your va-jay’, ‘My bits, my bits, My lovely lady bits’, and ‘Step inside my crib’, as these videos place specific emphasis on the move from euphemisms to the use of the correct terms. Below are the transcriptions of each video.



### Lesson 1 – ‘Say hey to your va-jay’

1. Nwabisa: Hi guys, my name is Nwabisa.
2. Thembe: And I’m Thembe.
3. Nwabisa: With the help of experts, we’re here to host you at Vagina Varsity.
4. Thembe: Did you know that more than half of women lack the basic understanding of their female genitalia? But don’t worry. That’s why we’re here. The next four weeks, we’re going to be talking everything vagina-related.
5. Nwabisa: We can definitely be using the words Vag Minaj, Va jay-jay, Down There.
6. Thembe: Uh, no. We’re going use the correct terms, because things like euphemisms: cookie, flower, enough. We need to know the correct terms so we know what we talk about.
7. Nwabisa: That’s fine for you, but I can guarantee you that there are ladies out there, even men, even me, who are uncomfortable talking about this stuff.
8. Thembe: We’re gonna get to a place where we can talk about our vaginas same way we talk about our hands, our feet, and do you know what’s great? We’re gonna get to a point where we’re empowered. We get to talk health and pleasure.
9. Nwabisa: Tomorrow, we taking a tour of my crib, so you might wanna take a mirror, get familiar with your lady parts.

10. Thembe: When she says “a tour of her crib”, she means a tour of the vulva. We’re gonna be talking vulva and vagina kind of interchangeably. We’re at your cervix.

When looking at the use of euphemisms on a lexical level, it becomes clear that the presenters use euphemisms as a tactic to move away from euphemisms and use the technical terms. This is particularly prevalent in the first and second videos, when they are setting the tone for the rest of the course. In these lessons, Nwabisa uses euphemistic terms for different parts of the female anatomy, and Thembe rectifies her by using the correct terms for the same body parts. This turns into a metalinguistic conversation, a conversation about language, specifically euphemisms that, according to the presenters should not be used, and words that should be used. Lesson 2 is a continuation of this, while going into more detail on different parts of the vagina.

In Lesson 1, turn 5, Nwabisa is not able, or does not want to, say the word vagina. She states “We can definitely be using the words Vag Minaj, Va jay-jay, Down There”, thereby reassuring the viewers, and also herself, that they can use these euphemisms. Here, she is resemiotizing (Iedema, 2003) the name of the female African American rapper, Nicki Minaj, uses the popular euphemism va jay-jay, and the words Down There. Nwabisa uses the American pronunciation of ‘there’, or [ðer]), which consists of the dental voiced fricative /ð/, the close mid front short vowel /e/; and the alveolar approximant /ɹ/, as opposed to the standard pronunciation [ðe:], which consists of the dental voiced fricative /ð/; and the open mid front unrounded vowel /ɛ:/. Here, one can see Thembe’s use of the rhotic /r/ which is typically found in American English, instead of the non-rhotic /r/ which is common in South Africa. This could have been done to put emphasis on the word ‘there’, which is referring to the vagina. In addition, by using a different accent along with a euphemistic word, Nwabisa distances herself even further from the actual term ‘vagina’. The use of American English and American popular cultural references is common in the VV course, and is also used to draw in a young audience, who is typically into popular culture.

Nwabisa’s reassuring statement to the viewers is short-lived, because as Nwabisa mentions these euphemisms, Thembe looks downward and shakes her head, clearly disagreeing with what Nwabisa is saying. Thembe, then, responds to Nwabisa’s statement by saying “Uh, no. We’re going use the correct terms, because things like euphemisms: cookie, flower, enough. We need to know the correct terms so we know what we talk about” (Lesson 1, turn 6). Images

of a cookie and a flower appear when Thembe mentions these words. The images add to the idea that describing a vagina in that way is ridiculous. When Thembe says “enough”, the word appears on the screen, and she puts one hand on top of the other and then moves them in the opposite direction, indicating finality. In addition, when she says “enough”, the music changes. This therefore sets the tone for the whole course, and is specifically apparent when Thembe is constantly correcting Nwabisa when she uses euphemisms. It becomes clear that the aim of the course is not only to learn the correct terms, but also to become comfortable with using these terms, and to replace the euphemisms. This is important, because, as Buni (2013) states, teaching “standard” dialect for body parts is important in teaching healthy childhood sexual development and preventing sexual abuse. In this particular lesson, Nwabisa and Thembe play two different roles: one who is embarrassed about talking about the vagina (Nwabisa) and one who is unashamed about it (Thembe). The characters are therefore relatable to a larger audience with various levels of knowledge and comfort regarding this topic.

Towards the end of Lesson 1, Nwabisa tells the viewers what they can expect in the following lesson. She states “Tomorrow, we taking a tour of my crib, so you might wanna take a mirror, get familiar with your lady parts” (turn 9). Nwabisa says “we Ø taking” instead of “we are taking” which is an instance of copula deletion, a feature of African American English (AAE). This line contains another reference to American culture. As Nwabisa says “a tour of my crib”, Thembe shakes her head, which shows that she does not agree with what Nwabisa is saying. Nwabisa uses the word “crib” as a euphemism for the word “vagina”. The word “crib”, as mentioned before, is an American slang term, and it means “house”. Thembe explains to the viewers that Nwabisa is actually referring to the “vulva” (turn 10). Another very common euphemism used here is “lady parts”, which is considered to be a playful euphemism<sup>34</sup>. Interestingly, “lady parts” is not recognized by Thembe as being a euphemism. She only focuses on the euphemism “crib”.

What is interesting here is that they are still using the euphemisms, but they use euphemisms to help the viewer remember the actual words. Using the euphemisms is therefore a tactic because they could have chosen not to include them at all, but they have chosen that one of the presenters uses them in order for the viewer to remember the link, as the presenters are linking the standard terms to their existing knowledge.

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<sup>34</sup>[http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2014/07/21/lady\\_parts\\_how\\_the\\_euphemism\\_reinforces\\_biology\\_as\\_destiny.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2014/07/21/lady_parts_how_the_euphemism_reinforces_biology_as_destiny.html) (Accessed 20 February 2018)



In the second lesson, Nwabisa and Thembe go through the different parts of the vagina and what they are called, and Nwabisa is, once again, the one using euphemisms while Thembe gives the correct words. A cartoon illustration points to each part of the vagina as they are naming it. The combination of the words with the images, also known as multimodality, helps in the learning process.

## Lesson 2 – ‘My bits, my bits, my lovely lady bits’

1. Thembe: So, remember in the last episode, she said that she would use a mirror to “visit her crib”? Did you do it?
2. Nwabisa: I did. I hope you guys did too. Because I mean, I saw some stuff. There’s a space at the top there, which has the pubic hairs. Uhm it’s called the =
3. Thembe & Nwabisa: mons venus
4. Nwabisa: I knew that.
5. Thembe: So that’s a mound of skin that’s above the pubic bone.
6. Nwabisa: What about the entrance gates? The – the lips?
7. Thembe: So those are separated into two parts. You have the external lips, the labia majora and then you have the internal lips which are called the labia minora.
8. Nwabisa: Your labia isn’t supposed to be symmetrical. Uneven, pink, or brown, wrinkly, or smooth, tucked in, poked out. I mean, your labia is beautiful, so stop stressing. Then I know that there’s like the doorknob, the B and the P, you know? The peeping Tom.
9. Thembe: Please, again. This is the internal clitoris. The internal clitoris is shaped like a wishbone. And get this, it approximately has 8000 nerve endings, which is twice as many as the head of a penis, and its sole purpose is pleasure.
10. Nwabisa: Then we move further down. Uh, the urethra opening. It’s pretty much where we pee from, right?
11. Thembe: Right.
12. Nwabisa: Then below that is the vagina opening.
13. Thembe: Okay! Okay gal.
14. Nwabisa: I know this one. Uhm, the perineum. That’s the skin between, or the space between the vaginal opening and you anus. I mean.
15. Thembe: Also called the taint, ‘cause it ain’t your anus and it ain’t your vagina.
16. Nwabisa: You have got to stop.
17. Thembe: Okay. The next other thing is the fourchette. The part where your vulva ends.
18. Nwabisa: Fourchette.
19. Thembe: It’s fine.
20. Nwabisa: Wow.
21. Thembe: Those are the most important things you need to know about your vagina, vulva, you know. So stay tuned for more Vagina =
22. Nwabisa: Varsity.

The first body part they talk about is the *mons venus*, which Nwabisa describes as the “space at the top there, which has the pubic hairs” (Lesson 2, turn 2). They then proceed to talk about the labia. Nwabisa calls the labia “entrance gates” (Lesson 2, turn 6), likely because she sees it as the entrance of the vagina. After that, she uses another euphemism, “the lips” (Lesson 2, turn 6), which is also another body part. This euphemism is very common. In fact, Thembe also uses this euphemism, but as a way to teach the viewer the correct term.

When they move on to the internal clitoris, Nwabisa uses three euphemisms: “doorknob”, “B in the P”, and “Peeping Tom” (Lesson 2, turn 8). Her use of three euphemisms shows that people use many euphemisms for this particular body part. A doorknob is a round door handle which opens the door once it is turned. It is uncertain as to what “the B in the P” stands for, although it also references the clitoris. Peeping Tom is a nickname for a male voyeur, based on the legend of a man named Tom who was struck blind after peeping through a hole in his shutters to see a woman, Lady Godiva, riding naked on a horse through the streets of Coventry, England<sup>35</sup>. Similar to her American pronunciation of the word “there” in Lesson 1, Nwabisa pronounces the words *doorknob* and *Tom*, as in Peeping Tom, in an American accent. In South Africa, the word *doorknob* is typically pronounced as [dɔːnɒb], with a non-rhotic /r/ and the open back rounded vowel /ɒ/, but in this lesson, Nwabisa pronounces this word as [dɔːrnɑːb], with a rhotic /r/ and open back unrounded long vowel /ɑː/, which is typical of an American pronunciation of the word. The name Tom, typically pronounced in South Africa as [tɒm] with the open back rounded vowel /ɒ/, is pronounced by Nwabisa as [tɑːm], with the open back unrounded long vowel /ɑː/. Once again, Nwabisa not only uses euphemisms, but also a different accent in order to distance herself from the word ‘vagina’. This might be to make her feel less embarrassed about the topic at hand.

In the same lesson, after Nwabisa explains where the perineum is located (turn 14), Thembe makes a joke by saying that it’s “[a]lso called the taint, ‘cause it ain’t your anus and it ain’t your vagina”. “Taint” is presumably a shortening of “it ain’t”. “Ain’t” is a non-standard way of saying “is not” (as in, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it), and is found in African American English. Nwabisa tells Thembe to stop, referring to the fact that this was not the first time she made a joke about parts of the vagina. For instance, in the first trailer, Thembe says to the

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<sup>35</sup><https://www.historychannel.com.au/this-day-in-history/lady-godiva-rides-naked-through-coventry/>  
(Accessed 23 February 2018)

viewers “We are at your cervix”, which is a play on the phrase “We are at your service”. Nwabisa does not like it when Thembe makes jokes about the vagina, just as Thembe does not like it when Nwabisa uses euphemisms for the vagina. VV might want the viewers to not make jokes about the vagina, as it might have the same effect as using euphemisms.

Lesson 3 is a continuation of learning the various parts of the vagina.

### Lesson 3 – ‘Step inside my crib’

1. Thembe: Okay, let’s jump right into it.
2. Nwabisa: Welcome to my crib. So the vagina is the hallway to my crib. And then a few centimetres down, same size as your bellybutton, that is the G-spot. Then at the end of the hallway, there’s this little sort of like keyhole-vibe that’s there.
3. Thembe: Okay so the little key-vibe that she’s talking about, is the cervix. Think of it like a doughnut, with a hole in the middle, you know?
4. Nwabisa: Now my favourite room in this house is the nursery. That’s where the baby grows.
5. Thembe: Also called the uterus. That’s where the foetus grows, and it’s the size of a fist, and when the baby’s growing, it expands.
6. Nwabisa: Now, I remember the expert mentioned like that thing. It’s like, that thing, uhm.
7. Thembe: Those are the fallopian tubes where fertilization and conception happens, and the egg is released or produced in the ovaries. Now that we’ve learned the ins and outs of the vulva, stay tuned for some more information.

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Nwabisa starts the lesson by saying “Welcome to my crib” (Lesson 3, turn 2) which is typically what the celebrities say in the show *MTV Cribs* when the cameras are allowed into the homes of celebrities. The word ‘crib’ is an American slang term meaning ‘house’. Then, Nwabisa describes the vagina as “the hallway to my crib” (Lesson 3, turn 2), and then she mentions the G-spot, which is “a few centimetres down” (the hallway) (Lesson 3, turn 2). Here, the word *hallway* is used to refer to the vagina, most likely because a hallway is a long passage. Nwabisa then mentions that at the end of the “hallway”, there is a “keyhole” (Lesson 3, turn 2), and Thembe clarifies by saying that Nwabisa is referring to the cervix, and then she uses the imagery of a doughnut to explain what a cervix looks like. Nwabisa therefore describes the cervix as a keyhole and Thembe describes it as a doughnut.

Nwabisa and Thembe talk about the uterus. Keeping with the idea that the vagina is ‘the crib’ or house, Nwabisa uses various house-related words to describe the different parts of the vagina. The words “room”, “house”, and “nursery” are used as euphemisms. “Room” is used

as another word for “body part”, while “house” is used as a euphemism for “vagina”, and the uterus is described as a “room”, in particular a nursery (a baby room). Most of the euphemisms are related to a house in some way. Playing with the euphemism “crib” and expanding it to various parts of the vagina.

This section looked at how VV moves away from the use of euphemisms. It was found that, instead of omitting euphemisms completely and only using the correct anatomical terms, they still decided to include the euphemisms, arguably so that viewers would be able to connect the euphemism with the correct term. Additionally, when looking at the lexical items, one sees that the euphemisms are mostly taken from American culture. In terms of phonology, Nwabisa strategically used American pronunciation, which lessened her embarrassment. At times the presenters also used grammar found in AAE and Hip Hop, which is done to popularize the video, drawing in a particular, young South African audience.

### **6.10 From fear to freedom**

The next section looks at the journey the presenters take to move away from fear of things related to the vagina, to being more confident at the end. In some of the lessons, there are instances where the presenters perform the role of someone who is afraid. For example, in Lesson 1, Nwabisa holds Thembe’s hand tightly while she says “Tomorrow, we’re taking a tour of my crib”, as if she is nervous about doing that. In Lesson 9, the roles are reversed; Thembe is about to go to the gynaecologist but is afraid of doing so. At the beginning of the lesson, Nwabisa grabs Thembe’s hand as she says “Bestie is going for the first time today”, and at the end of the lesson, they hold hands again while Thembe says “She’s gonna hold my hand while we go, because I know I’m like 23 and stuff but I need- I need” and then Nwabisa says “Moral support is powerful”. Nwabisa and Thembe then hold hands while they walk “out” to go to the gynaecologist. Holding hands therefore signifies one woman supporting another.

The presenters also empower women through the way that they reassure them by saying “it’s fine”, “it’s okay”, “don’t worry”, “don’t stress”, and “the more you know, the less you fear”. They are, therefore, aware of the fact that the viewer might not yet be comfortable with the topic. In addition, their reassurance adds to the idea that the viewer is in a classroom, as it is more personal than you would assume an online course would be. The presenters are therefore speaking to the women as if speaking to people they know.

At the end of the Lesson 6, Nwabisa uses the euphemism *va jay-jay*, when she says “It’s very important to look after the *va jay-jay*” and Thembe corrects her by saying “No. Vagina”. This speaks to the very first lesson when Nwabisa says that during the course they will use euphemisms when referring to the vagina, and Thembe says no, they need to use the correct terms. In Lesson 6, Thembe once again says “No, vagina” and she urges Nwabisa to repeat the word *vagina* with her, whilst dancing and having fun. Saying no to the idea that the word *vagina* is taboo, is therefore a way of countering vulnerability. A black and white cartoon image of an old man appears, and he dismisses them by rolling his eyes, but they dismiss him as well by continuing to say the word and to dance while doing so (Image 6.28).



Image 6.28 – Old man rolls his eyes

The final lesson marks the end of their journey. Nwabisa, especially, appears more empowered and confident.

1. Nwabisa: I know guys, it’s been a whirlwind of ups and downs, ins and outs. I mean I’ve learned so much on this journey. It’s been a bit crazy. I can now say “vagina”. It’s my new best friend.
2. Thembe: Say it again. Say it again.
3. Nwabisa: Vagina.
4. Thembe: Say it again!
5. Nwabisa: Vagina.
6. Thembe: Ah! Lovely.
7. Nwabisa: Thank you.
8. Thembe: Guys, if you remember, Nwabisa started a little scared in the beginning, but now over the course of this journey, she’s even able to say vagina more than three times. Oh my goodness.

When Nwabisa says “vagina” (turn 1), a drawing of a vagina appears, along with the word ‘vagina’ in capital letters (Image 6.29). Thembe is ecstatic to hear her friend say this word because Nwabisa “started a little scared in the beginning” (turn 8) and urges Nwabisa to say it another two times. Each time Nwabisa says the word *vagina*, a different drawing of a vagina appears on screen. They have chosen to use cartoonish drawings of the vulva in a variety of colours (Image 6.30), as opposed to using textbook drawings or actual pictures. This is in line with the campaign’s promise to not show any nudity in the videos, as seen in the video trailer where the words “No nudity, no porn, just learning” appears on screen. The video description box of each video also contains the following statement: “You won’t be seeing any actual pictures or videos of vaginas, vulvas or porn or nudity, just illustrations and animations”. Cartoon images are less intimidating for viewers and are also possibly not allowed on the YouTube platform.

These cartoon drawings move side to side slightly. In the background, Offenbach’s *Infernal Galop* plays, a classical orchestral piece which adds a fun, slightly humorous affect to what Nwabisa is saying. When Thembe says “yours”, she points towards the camera, once again speaking directly to the audience, also an instance of immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999).



Image 6.29 – Thembe says ‘vagina’



Image 6.30 – Different drawings of vaginas

Also, when looking at the title of the final lesson, ‘All vaginas are amazing’, a shift is seen from the first and second video titles, which contained euphemisms (‘va-jay’ and ‘bits’), to now using the correct anatomical word. The title makes this inclusive, as they use the word “all” vaginas and they state that vaginas are “amazing”.

### 6.11 Vagina Varsity as an advertising campaign

Keeping in mind that Vagina Varsity is an advertising campaign, the researcher will now look at how they advertise the Libresse brand in the course material. The marketing of the products is the thread that runs through the entire course. However, the advertising in the campaign is hidden in the programme, while the edutainment (Addis, 2005) aspect is foregrounded. Even though it is an advertisement, they try not to project that image, because they might lose their consumers. In this study, the analysis of the advertising becomes peripheral, or supplementary, to the other analysis, which is similar to how the VV programme is run. This section looks at instances where the actual product is visible.

This course is used to advertise Libresse products, as it is sponsored by this brand. This is done by using Libresse products in the videos in a tutorial-type video (See section 6.3.1), advertising Libresse at the end of each video, as well as in the emails.



Image 6.31 – Libresse products and slogan



Image 6.32 - Libresse products and 2<sup>nd</sup> slogan

As the sponsor of this course, Libresse promotes their sanitary products in each video by having their pads appear at the end of each video, along with their slogan “Live fearless” (Image 6.31). In some cases, the logo is extended to include the word “every day” (Image 6.32). Different products are advertised at the end of the videos. The slogans are therefore also empowering women, which ties in with the aim of the course.

The advertising appears not only in the videos, but also in the emails they send out along with the videos. For instance, in the email of Lesson 6, ‘Honourable discharge’, they added a section on pantyliners. They pose a question: “What does a pantyliner do?” which is possibly a question that a subscriber sent to them via email. In their answer, and after explaining the function of a pantyliner, they sell the Libresse pantyliner product by stating that “Libresse liners have a ProSkin formula so it also looks after your skin, not just your underwear” (Image 6.33).





Image 6.33 – Promoting Libresse pantyliners via email

Additionally, at the end of each email, there is a picture of Libresse products along with the slogan, reminding the subscriber of the brand (Image 6.34).

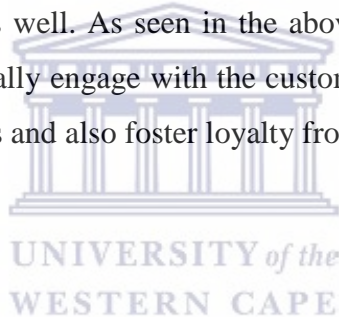


Image 6.34 – Picture of Libresse sanitary towels in an email

Promoting their products also occurs in the comment section on YouTube. This can be seen in the comment section of Lesson 4, which dealt specifically with the menstrual cycle. A viewer commented, “This is cool, would have been better if you spoke about tampons too”, to which Libresse SA responded, “Thank you! Because we’re experts in pads we decided to stick to what

we know best :)”. Another viewer requested a tutorial video on how to use a tampon, and Libresse SA responded by saying, “Libresse doesn’t produce tampons in South Africa but we can share this guide with you”. They added a link to a website along with instructions on how to translate the website into English<sup>36</sup>. Also in the comment section of Lesson 6, when a viewer asked when pantyliners can be worn, Libresse SA answered, “Libresse liners are specifically designed to be worn every day and allow your vagina to breathe”, in this way promoting Libresse products specifically.

Another instance where Libresse promotes their products in the comment section occurs when a viewer commented: “This video inspired me to get tested immediately after i saw this video!! Thanx so much!!! I am HIV negative. The emphasis at the end of testing! Testing! Testing! ...made me stand up and GO!!!! I will defiantly [sic] try to test every six months to a year.” Libresse South Africa responded by saying: “That's great, we are so happy to hear that - we really believe that the more you know the less you have to fear, and we're so glad to have inspired you :)”, thus cleverly using Libresse’s slogan, “The more you know, the less you fear” in one-on-one communication as well. As seen in the above example, the comment section allows the company to authentically engage with the customers (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012), which could increase sales and also foster loyalty from customers.



## 6.12 Summary

This chapter investigated the slippage between the entertainment and teaching genre as it has been refigured in the Vagina Varsity course and how the context has been remediated, which entailed a look at the resemiotization of various curricula. In addition, this chapter discussed the performances of different roles by the presenters, and how they use different semiotics/modes to perform these roles. The chapter illustrated that the Vagina Varsity course is anchored by popular culture (e.g. Hip Hop stylization, clothing, references to songs) and this is done to popularize the course, drawing in a young audience. A strategy for drawing in a South African audience in particular is found in instances of localization and particular African accent stylizations.

Furthermore, Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) immediacy and hypermediacy were used to explain how the course creates an online classroom space which simulates real-time, face-to-face

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<sup>36</sup>The viewer’s comment as well as Libresse SAs response has been removed.

communication with their subscribers, who become the learners. Furthermore, this chapter focused on how Vagina Varsity appropriated YouTube genres, specifically YouTube tutorials and recipe videos. This chapter also discussed how the Vagina Varsity producers have recreated television and movie scenes as well as game shows, which is emblematic of the entertainment genre.

Overall, this chapter highlights the messiness and of an edutainment space. The subscribers are in fact ‘learners’ who receive ‘homework’ and are ‘taught’ about STIs and pregnancy in fun and entertaining ways (e.g. dramatic music, game show feel). The VV series constructs a world which skilfully plays with immediacy and hypermediacy and by doing so, creates a digital space which is safe and educational. Lastly, the chapter discussed how this hybrid space is then used to market Libresse products within the VV series.





	Type	Number of appearances	Lesson	Time
1.	'Old man'	8	6	00:09-00:13 00:23-00:25 00:49-00:50 01:09-01:10
			10	00:10-00:15 00:32-00:36 00:42-00:46 00:57-01:00
2.	'Expert'	5	5	00:15-00:23 00:35-00:42 00:50-01:10 01:15-01:32 01:39-02:05
3.	Doctor and patient	5	7	00:08-00:13 01:39-01:40
			9	00:38-00:54
			12	00:51-00:58
			13	00:28-00:33
4.	Woman shielding herself	2	1	00:11-00:13
			15	03:18-03:20
5.	Older woman advising younger woman	2	7	00:35-00:38
			15	02:54-02:56
6.	Woman trapped behind web	1	7	01:22-01:29
7.	Woman consoling another woman	1	10	00:43-00:46

Table 7.1 - List of anachronistic figures

Below is an example of a pop-up which appears in the videos (Image 7.1). In this moment in the video, we are able to see different dialogues taking place, one between Thembe and the audience, and one between the lady in the pop-up and the audience. These black and white figures are reminiscent of the black and white drawings used in Someecards (Image 7.2).



Image 7.1 – Black and white pop-up in VV

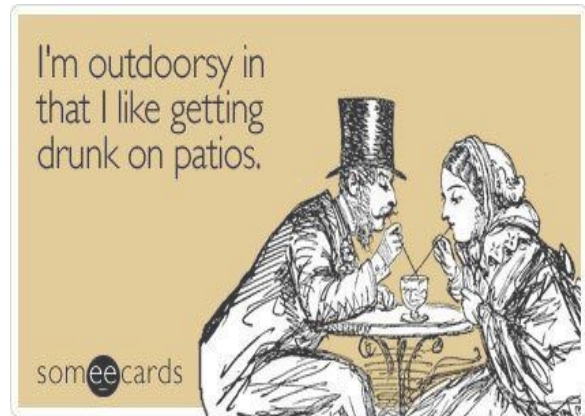


Image 7.2 – Example of a Someecard

Someecards themselves are parodies of Hallmark greeting cards. The Someecards normally have black and white drawings of people (from different eras, plausibly Victorian/Elizabethan)<sup>38</sup> and the cards usually have colourful backgrounds and funny text related to the cartoon image on the card. The following section focuses on the various pop-ups that appear throughout the videos. Particular attention is paid to the dialogicality between the presenters and the pop-ups as well as the pop-ups and the viewers.



## 7.2 Dialogicality in the Vagina Varsity videos

The black and white figures serve different purposes in the videos. The next two characters that will be looked at are dialogic figures – they are in direct communication with the presenters. These figures are images that have been given ‘voices’. The first figure is that of the ‘expert’, represented by a deer who knows about vagina-related issues, and the second figure is that of the ‘old man’, who is an antagonistic figure.

### 7.2.1 The ‘expert’

The ‘expert’ is never physically seen, but her voice is heard. In Lesson 5 (‘Let’s keep it clean’), the ‘expert’ is depicted as a deer (Image 7.3). The drawing of the deer is black and white, and in the drawing, the deer wears a monocle and a neck ruff. The fact that the deer is in black and

<sup>38</sup> It is unclear which era these cartoon figures most resonate with. Either way, the eras are indicative of the pervasive patriarchal emphasis in women’s lives during those time periods.

white, accompanied by the monocle and neck ruff, could signal that the deer is from a different generation and is therefore older than the presenters, and therefore more knowledgeable. A monocle is a single eyeglass that is kept in position by the muscles around the eye ([www.oxforddictionary.com](http://www.oxforddictionary.com)). It was popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was a status of wealth (Lowder, 2012). Ruffs are large collars worn around the neck. It was worn during the Elizabethan era. They were seen as highly luxurious, and as a symbol of wealth and status.<sup>39</sup> The ‘expert’ has a female voice and has a serious tone, but she does have a sense of humour. For example, when one of the presenters answers correctly, she stretches out the first syllable of the word “perfect” which makes it sound that she is saying “purr-fect”, making reference to another animal, a cat. Another example takes place towards the end of the video, when she says “You’ve passed this test, but you’ve got a lot more to learn before you’re pawsome.” Here, she is saying “pawsome” instead of “awesome”, playing on the words “paw” and “awesome”. Her jokes are therefore animal-related, which adds to the humour as she herself is depicted as an animal.



Image 7.3 – The deer

In Lesson 5, ‘Let’s keep it clean’, the ‘expert’ tests the presenters on their vaginal hygiene knowledge by doing a pop quiz. During the pop quiz, the ‘expert’ asks them five questions, most of which are “myth or fact” questions where she makes statements such as “douching and chemicals aren’t good for the PH of the vagina”, and “After going to the toilet, you must wipe from front to back”. The presenters must state whether the statement is true or false. The only

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<sup>39</sup><http://www.thefashionhistorian.com/2011/11/ruffs.html?m=1> (Accessed 6 June 2018)

question the ‘expert’ asks that is not “myth or fact” is “What products can you use on your vagina?” Similar to the game show theme, when they answer correctly, the ‘audience’ can be heard celebrating in the form of laughter and applause. These sounds resemble the audience reactions in game shows.

What is interesting to the researcher is that the creators of Vagina Varsity use an animal, and not a woman, to depict the ‘expert’. They could have chosen a deer because it symbolizes innocence and femininity. Therefore, although depicted as an animal, the ‘expert’ still has feminine attributes. It is interesting to note that, throughout the course, various pop-ups of women in the Victorian/Elizabethan era are shown, but they are not given a voice and often have their eyes averted. The deer, however, has a (female) voice, but she is rather depicted as something else. It could be that they are recreating the fact that during the Victorian/Elizabethan era, women did not have a voice.

### *7.2.2. The ‘old man’ - Remediating the straw man*

This section will look at how Vagina Varsity debunks certain ideologies and myths related to the woman’s body. Throughout the videos, black and white images are superimposed in the videos. Similar to the ‘expert’ that is depicted as a talking deer from a previous era, there is another character, simply called the ‘old man’. He appears in Lesson 6 (‘Honourable discharge’) and Lesson 10 (‘All that hymen hype’). I will first look at Lesson 6, and how the presenters remediate the stereotypes put forward by the ‘old man’, and thereafter I will look at Lesson 10.

In these two Vagina Varsity lessons, the campaign draws on an intriguing pop-up of a white male Southern-sounding American figure. Based on his Southern drawl, his clothing, and the “saloon” music that plays in the background when he speaks, one could assume that he is a slave owner of yesteryear. He appears as the antagonist in the campaign and is found rolling his eyes, shouting nasty comments and behaving in a decidedly sarcastic and contemptuous fashion. For example, when Thembe and Nwabisa talk about vaginal discharge, his comments range from chauvinistic arrogance (nothing should come out of woman’s vagina apart from a baby) to downright insults (women’s vaginas smell like fish!). This bellowing antagonist is framed as a cleverly resemiotized mode for what is commonly known as a straw man. Coined in the 1620s, this term is used to refer to an “imaginary opponent” and is often used in debates, but can also be used in smaller interactions to diffuse argumentative people in polite

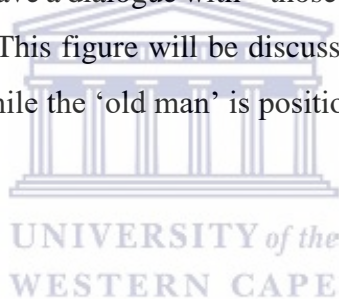


company<sup>40</sup>. This strategy is typically used for debating. This figure is only used in two of the videos, namely in the video about vaginal discharge, and a video about the hymen, topics which are considered particularly taboo.

This figure is in direct opposition to the presenters and what they represent. He is a very loathsome male, they are female; he comes from a past era, they are modern; his values are conservative, while they are liberal; he is white, they are black.

By use of ventriloquation (Bakhtin, 1981; Samuelson, 2009), the Vagina Varsity producers are using the ‘old man’ as a prop to say things that would be unacceptable/politically incorrect if a real person said it. Ventriloquation is “a specialized type of voicing” which occurs “when a speaker speaks through the voice of another for the purpose of social or interactional positioning” (Wertsch, 1991, and Wortham, 2001 as cited in Samuelson, 2009: 52).

Interestingly, in terms of the vector of the gaze, one can see that he is looking to the side, not engaging the viewers or the presenters with his eyes. This is very different to the other black and white figures the presenters have a dialogue with – those images look directly at the camera while talking to the presenters. (This figure will be discussed in the next section). The other figure is positioned as an ally, while the ‘old man’ is positioned as the antagonist in the video series.



#### *Myth-busting: Vaginal discharge*

When looking at the title of Lesson 6, ‘Honourable discharge’, one can see that it is a play on words. The term *honourable discharge* is traditionally used when a military service member has completed all their obligations, with no blemish on their record. The video title is therefore an intertextual reference to the military, which is still considered a largely male-dominated space. Also, by coupling the word “honourable” with “discharge”, it moves away from the idea that there is a problem with discharge, and in that way, they are elevating the status of vaginal discharge.

The ‘old man’ is an older, white man, and his Southern American accent clearly indicates that he is not South African. The font that they use when he speaks is old-English style and his clothing indicates something akin to an American slave plantation owner in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and

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<sup>40</sup><https://www.etymonline.com/word/straw%20man> (Accessed 28 March 2018)

19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Knottnerus, Monk & Jones, 1999), and someone of a high social ranking of his time. Also, he is in black and white, and old Western saloon music plays in the background whenever he talks. This all signals that he is from a different era and adds to the idea that he is outdated, and by implication what he is saying is outdated as well. Similar to the deer that was mentioned in the previous section, he is also black and white, but instead of symbolizing knowledge and wisdom, the ‘old man’ symbolizes old gender ideologies.

During the Middle Ages, there were numerous prohibitions and regulations surrounding sex (Hopkins, 2005). In 1215, the Church attempted to regulate sexual behaviour by holding the following fundamental beliefs:

that sexual intercourse was permissible only within a legitimate marriage; that procreation was the primary purpose of marital intercourse; that intercourse was to be regulated according to certain times, places, and conditions of husband and wife; that virginity was superior to all other states of life (Hopkins, 2005: 2).

In addition, “there was considerable hesitation about the moral assessment of sexual pleasure” (Hopkins 2005: 2). It was, therefore, only morally acceptable when used for procreation.

During the videos, the old man makes statements such as “Nothing should come out of a woman’s vagina apart from a baby” and “Women’s vaginas smell like fish”. These myths are then “busted” by Nwabisa and Thembe, by providing factual information.



Image 7.4 – ‘Nothing should come out of a woman’s vagina apart from a baby’

By looking at Image 7.4, one can see that there is a marked difference in the cartoon drawing of the man, compared to the background and the presenters. By using the black and white image against the colourful background, it could indicate that they are pitting modern and outdated ways of thinking against each other. Throughout the lessons, they also make use of drawings of people from the Victorian/Elizabethan age, a patriarchal time period, when men held all the power. It is all showing that he is outdated, and that what he is saying is outdated.

The old man's first utterance is, "Nothing should come out of a woman's vagina apart from a baby". Not only is he implying that discharge is not normal, it also indexes the traditional view of women being confined to the domestic sphere, in order to focus on child-rearing (Smyth, 2008). The pervasive sex role stereotype that women should be housewives could cause women to feel inferior, especially in the workplace (Taub, 1980).

When looking at Nwabisa and Thembe's response to what he said, their facial expressions show that they completely disagree. Thembe responds to the man verbally by exclaiming "No!" therefore clearly disagreeing with what he is saying. She also says "Discharge is absolutely normal and healthy and it happens to all of us". By using absolute words, she is reassuring women there is nothing wrong with them for having vaginal discharge. Another instance of assurance occurs in the video description of Lesson 6, when Libresse South Africa states that "Discharge is not a dirty word and vaginas aren't supposed to be as dry as the dessert" (Appendix A, Lesson 6). As mentioned in Chapter 6, reassurance is a strategy the presenters use to empower women. It is also a way of countering feelings of vulnerability, and is most prevalent in Lessons 6 and 10. It is used as a strategy against the old man, whose utterances may evoke feelings of vulnerability. This strategy is also used in the video description of Lesson 10, when they state that: "really, for all the hype around it, the hymen is just another body part" (Appendix A, Lesson 10). Thembe also adds that discharge cleans the vagina, and Nwabisa agrees and adds that it is a way for the vagina to regulate itself. By knowing the purpose of discharge, the viewer can feel less conscious about having it.



Image 7.5 – ‘Women’s vaginas smell like fish’

The old man’s second statement is that “women’s vaginas smell like fish” (Image 7.5), which is quite degrading and belittling to women. When he says this, Thembe and Nwabisa’s eyes widen and their mouths hang open in disbelief of what they just heard. By saying this, women are made vulnerable. Women are taught that they are the weaker sex because they smell unpleasant. Here, the woman’s body is read by a man as unwanted, and by hearing this, the woman could become more conscious of herself. Lee and Sasser-Ceon (1996), as cited in Thomas (2007: 78), suggest that most of the words society uses to describe or talk about vaginas imply that it is “unpleasant” and “smelly”. As a result of the shame women feel about their vaginas, they powdered their underwear in order to make them smell better<sup>41</sup>.

The old man’s utterance is already somewhat downplayed by the cartoonish drawing of the fish which appears when he speaks (Image 7.5), because it makes what he is saying comical, instead of completely offensive.

Thembe then says “Dude, whoa! You have got to dial it back.” By calling him *dude*, Thembe is talking to him as if talking to one of her peers, and not as someone of a high social standing. She is also using a colloquial register when talking back to him. Thembe goes on to state that while discharge does have a slight odour, “it’s nothing fishy”. When she says “fishy”, her use of air quotes and her furrowed eyebrows work together to show that she does not agree with what he is saying (Image 7.6).

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<sup>41</sup><https://www.thecut.com/2016/04/sad-truth-behind-the-baby-powder-ovarian-cancer-lawsuits.html> (Accessed 16 February 2018)



Image 7.6 – ‘Yes, discharge has a slight odour, but it’s nothing “fishy”’

Nwabisa adds to Thembe’s statement by saying that discharge is “clean and clear during the time of your ovulation and a tint of brown before or after your period”. This information is not about the smell of discharge, but she is giving educational information about the appearance of discharge. She therefore gives factual information, which is in contrast to the old man, who is merely voicing his opinions or re-voicing old ideologies. In addition, she once again reassures the viewer, by stating that “It’s totally healthy and normal so don’t stress”.



Image 7.7 – ‘AAAARGGHH!!!! That’s disgusting!’

After Nwabisa gives a description of what discharge looks like, the man exclaims “That’s disgusting!” (Image 7.7). He is clearly repulsed by what is said. This could indicate that men do not want to hear about things such as discharge. It sets up the idea that it is the woman’s problem. Once again, the woman is made to feel unwanted because of a normal bodily fluid.

Nwabisa’s eyes widen, once again in disbelief of what she is hearing, and Thembe responds to the man by saying “Whoa, I have just about had it with you, old man.” When she says “whoa”, she holds up her hand in a “stop” gesture. And once again, she is using a colloquial register when talking back to him. She also calls him “old man”. She could be calling him this to insult him.

Nwabisa then says: “Pantyliners are a great product to use to capture your discharge, and just to help you, you know, feel fresh.” In this way, she is providing a solution for dealing with discharge, while also selling pantyliners. Keeping in mind that this is a marketing campaign, she is selling the Libresse brand specifically.

### *Myth-busting: The hymen*

In Lesson 10, All the Hymen Hype, Vagina Varsity aims to debunk the myths surrounding the hymen. In the beginning of the video, Thembe says, “Today we’re gonna be dropping some real truth-bombs and myth-busting that old man again.” They once again use the old man to put forward the myths.



Image 7.8 – ‘Women can lose their virginity by riding a bicycle or a horse’

The first myth he mentions is that “Women can lose their virginity by riding a bicycle or a horse” (Image 7.8). Here, women are taught that, in the process of being active, (i.e. riding a horse or a bicycle) your hymen can break. Women are being cautioned, and it puts the woman in a position of less power. So when a woman is not being passive, she is regulated, and she is made immobile.

But Thembe corrects the old man by stating that the hymen is like a scrunchie so you can't really "break it" or "lose it" in any way. When Thembe says "scrunchie", she pulls the fingers of her right hand in towards each other. When she says "expands", she moves her hands away from each other. When she says "retracts", she brings them closer together. It is interesting that they use a woman's hair accessory to adequately describe what a corona does. When she says "break it", and also when she says "lose it", she makes air quotes with her fingers, and the words appear on the screen. She does this to show her disagreement as putting something in air quotes delegitimizes what is being quoted ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). In addition, she frowns as she says this, which shows that she does not agree with what the old man said.



Image 7.9 – ‘The hymen is a big entrance gate at the entrance of the vagina’

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The second myth he mentions is that “The hymen is a big entrance gate at the entrance of the vagina” (Image 7.9). The drawing of the vagina can be seen first, with the words “the hymen”, next to it. A rectangular shape appears around the vagina. Then a drawing of a gate moves in to the rectangular shape. As this happens, there is a sound of a gate closing. With this statement, the old man tells women what their body looks like on the inside. The image of the gate is an instance of the semiotics of vulnerability. The gate indexes the feeling of being trapped, or it indexes the need for protection. In both cases, it symbolizes a blockage. The hymen is not a gate, but by the old man saying that, it conjures the image that the vagina is locked, and should be unlocked. Then the question arises: who has the power to unlock it? So, by him saying this, it puts him in a position of power.

Nwabisa goes on to say where the hymen really is spatially, that it is actually two centimetres into the vagina, thus discrediting the old man's statement even further.

The third myth that the old man mentions is that “When women have sex for the first time, they bleed and experience pain” (Image 7.10). When the old man says “sex”, a cartoon drawing of two ladies appear. In this image, one lady is consoling the other. When he says “experience pain”, a blue tear next to the one lady appears and disappears.



Image 7.10 – ‘When women have sex for the first time, they bleed and experience pain’

The image above contains a black and white drawing of two women from the same era as the man. They could be a mother and daughter, one is consoling the other who is crying (as seen by the blue tear rolling down her face). During the Middle Ages, virginity was considered the ideal state for men and women and sex was not a personal matter (Hopkins, 2005). Virginity was also medically tested (Kelly, 2000). In addition, on the wedding night, when the newly married couple are supposed to have sex for the first time, if there was no blood on the sheets, the bride was considered not to be a virgin, and she could be killed. It is a myth that women have to experience pain. Here, the man is talking, and the women are silent, which tells us a lot about the dynamics of that society during that time.

Nwabisa then says, “That is a myth. I mean, some girls do bleed, but if you are sufficiently lubricated and aroused, you should not feel any pain or bleed.” She says confidently that what the old man is saying is a myth, and provides a reason for why a woman might bleed when having sex (she might not be ‘lubricated’ or ‘aroused’). This shifts the focus from the women and makes it her partner’s problem.





Image 7.11 – ‘You can tell if a woman is a virgin by checking her hymen’

The fourth myth the old man mentions is that “You can tell if a woman is a virgin by checking her hymen” (Image 7.11). When he says this, a drawing of a vagina appears, just above the speech bubble, and in the middle of Thembe and Nwabisa. Soon after the image of the vagina appears, a magnifying glass moves over the vagina in a circular motion. This is an example of semiotics of vulnerability: images used to make a woman feel vulnerable. In terms of multimodality (Kress, 2010), it can be said that the image complements the old man’s statement. As the magnifying glass is used to ‘inspect’ the vagina once again, one could ask, who wields the magnifying glass? It is doubtful that it is the women themselves as it is them that is being inspected.

The old man’s statement is currently a dominant ideology, and this practice of checking the hymen still takes place in the Zulu culture (Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016). As stated previously, in January 2016, the mayor of uThukela district in KwaZulu-Natal, Dudu Mazibuko, founded the Maiden bursary programme, where 16 bursaries for tertiary study were awarded to girls who were virgins (Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016; Stander, 2016). The girls had to undergo virginity testing periodically, and the scholarships would be renewed as long as they remained virgins during the course of their studies (Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016). In the Zulu culture, virginity testing also has a cosmological significance, as this practice is seen to sustain “the land and livelihood of the nation through appeasement of the supernatural entity, Nomkhubulwane (‘Mother Nature’)” (Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016: 119). The practice of virginity testing has been opposed by liberals and feminists, as they argue that “it is a violation of a woman’s body, that it is unconstitutional and that linking the practice with the provision of scholarships is ‘unethical’” (Burch, 2016, as cited in Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016: 119-120). The practice is also

seen as ‘unscientific’ as there is no failsafe way to establish virginity, and also discriminatory, as boys are exempted from virginity testing (Kale, 2016 and IRIN, 2005, as cited in Mkasi & Rafudeen, 2016). A study among female Zulu students showed that they saw this practice as unfair, as men do not receive the same pressure and judgment from society (Naidu, 2008, as cited in Stander, 2016). The maiden bursary was found to be unconstitutional and therefore had to be discontinued<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, debunking this myth is particularly important in the context of contemporary South Africa. In this case specifically, it is an advantage that an unknown figure is used to articulate this point, and not an African man, because it might have been too sensitive for South Africans to watch. So here, the distance between the audience and the old man is good because you are not affected that personally and you can easily write him off.

Significantly, at the end of this lesson, Thembe tells Nwabisa, “I think we should try out horse riding.” This is in reference to the myth that women can lose their virginity by riding a horse (mentioned by the old man). By saying this, this might imply that Thembe was scared to go horse riding before, because of this myth, but because they have debunked the myth, she is now willing to do it. This might signal a diminishing of the fear and anxiety produced by men.

Nwabisa and Thembe use specific strategies to debunk the myths. For example, their facial expressions, which show that they disagree with the old man, and their gestures, such as putting up their hands, all work together to show the viewer that they disagree with what he is saying, therefore countering the semiotics of vulnerability.

They also use absolute words when saying “it’s absolutely normal” and “it happens to all of us”, and also the certainty and confidence they have when they give the facts. They also draw on a colloquial register to speak back to the man, by for example saying “Dude, whoa”, and “totally healthy”. This is in contrast to how the man speaks, and this register also makes the presenters more relatable to a young audience. By calling the old man “dude”, a colloquial term used to address a man, Thembe is diminishing his status as someone holding the power and brings him down to her level. The words “dude” and “totally” also form part of a colloquial register typically used by surfers, and in recent years these words have been used by the youth.

Also, unlike the man’s statements that seem to be purely based on myth and stereotypes, Nwabisa and Thembe’s statements consist of strategic scientific information expressed through biological terms and standard language, as seen in the words “ovulation”, “ring of elastic and

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<sup>42</sup><http://www.enca.com/south-africa/maiden-bursaries-unconstitutional> (Accessed 6 July 2017)

folded mucous tissue”, “corona” and “sufficiently lubricated and aroused”. Seeing that the old man is the antagonist, the presenters’ statements carry more weight than the old man’s statements. Pitted against the old man, the presenters seem more believable and trustworthy. This shows that the straw man strategy worked.

This section looked at the strategies the course used to remediate stereotypes. It was found that Lesson 6 and Lesson 10 in particular aimed to do this. This was done by pitting traditional gender roles against non-traditional gender roles, as well as the modern era against an old one (as seen in the modern music and the saloon music, as well as the black and white drawings against the colourful background). Clearly, there is quite a lot of engagement with the old man pop-up and while he is set up as an antagonist whose statements are debunked, he is actually quite interactive. This cannot be said about the other pop-ups (consisting of women) in the Vagina Varsity series.

### **7.3 Other anachronistic figures**

Apart from the ‘expert’ and the ‘old man’, there are five other cartoon pop-ups that appear throughout the lessons. However, they are not as developed as the ‘old man’ and the ‘expert’, as they do not have voices, and neither do the presenters acknowledge that they are there or address them directly. These figures include the doctor and patient, the older woman advising the younger woman, the woman trapped behind the web, the woman shielding herself, as well as the woman consoling another woman.

#### *7.3.1 Doctor and patient*

The doctor-and-patient pop-up appears five times throughout the course. It is used in four of the sixteen videos (‘Call a doctor!’, ‘Going to the gynae’, ‘Preventing pregnancy’, ‘Better safe than sorry’), usually when giving viewers advice on when to go to the doctor. In Image 7.12, for example, this pop-up appears when Thembe says that she and Nwabisa are going to talk about “when you need to call the doctor.”



Image 7.12 - Doctor and patient

In this pop-up, there is a male doctor and a female patient. Interestingly, the doctor and patient are not represented as equal. The doctor is standing, while the patient is sitting. It can be said that the doctor is in the dominant position, as he is the one with the knowledge, and also authority. Also in this instance, it is a male doctor who is giving medical advice to a woman. During the time that this pop-up plays out, there probably were not any female doctors. This is much different to today, where women have the option of seeking advice from a female doctor. Based on the woman's dress, and keeping in line with the recurring theme of these pop-up figures, one can see that this picture is from a different era. The doctor's face is shown, while the patient's face is not. Only the back of the woman is shown. This is possibly because of the anonymity afforded to patients. Seeking medical help, especially regarding vagina-related issues, is a private and sensitive matter, therefore it would make sense that the woman's anonymity is maintained in this instance. Notably, the woman's hair is unkempt. In the past, women were often diagnosed with female hysteria, which was considered a common and chronic ailment in women and was characterized by nervousness, anxiety, sleeplessness, irritability, among many other symptoms (Maines, 1999). The woman in this image seems to play into this stereotypical role. She also appears to be in a weaker position, simply seated, not looking up at the doctor, but facing him nonetheless. The doctor himself appears to be 'talking' as he has one hand by his side and another halfway to his chest, which gives the appearance of perhaps being in the middle of a conversation.

### 7.3.2 Older woman advising younger woman

In this pop-up, which appears twice in the course, there are two women who are sitting down, one is an older (on the right) woman who is giving advice to a younger woman (on the left). The older woman is holding the young woman's arm with one hand and pointing with her other hand as if she is making a particular point.



Image 7.13 – Woman advising younger woman in Lesson 15



Image 7.14 - Woman advising younger woman in Lesson 7

As seen in Image 7.13, both women look very serious, which also relates to the serious nature of the topic being discussed, and also coincides with the facial expressions of the presenters. In Lesson 15, Thembe introduces the topic of masturbation and then asks the sexpert, Dorothy Black, how she would advise or suggest to the viewers how to get themselves mentally prepared for this, or to “Try maybe have a conversation with someone, to kind of try it out, you know?” The image is on the screen while she says this.

Compared to the topics addressed in Lesson 15, Lesson 7 is treated in a less serious manner, which can be seen in the way they have changed the same image. They have added humour by changing the old woman's facial expressions (see, for example, Image 7.14), at different times. This particular lesson is about detecting when you need to go to the doctor. In the lesson, Nwabisa says "Detecting that you have a problem might come in four different ways: Discomfort, pain, burning, or even itchiness". With each of these symptoms that she mentions, a different facial expression is superimposed on the old lady's face (see Image 7.14, and Appendix D for other expressions), along with a different sound (groans, screams, etc.). One can therefore see that the image is used differently in each of the lessons, depending on the tone of the lesson. In Image 7.15, they are talking about more serious matters (talking to someone about masturbation) at the time that the image pops up, while issues such as vaginal itchiness and burning are treated in a more humorous manner.

### *7.3.3 Woman trapped behind web*

The image of the woman trapped behind the web appears once in the Vagina Varsity course. It appears in Lesson 7, a lesson on when to see a doctor regarding vaginal health issues. Here, the presenters talk about how to detect when you have a medical problem, by looking at specific signs before you see a doctor.



Image 7.15 – Woman trapped behind web



Image 7.16 - Superimposed apple

In this lesson, Nwabisa speaks about different infections and their symptoms, to which Thembe says “don’t worry, not all of these things that are mentioned might be an infection. Sometimes changes in like your diet, stress, maybe using a new soap, might result in these symptoms that we’ve mentioned”. As she says this, there is an image of a woman trapped behind a spider web next to her on the screen (Image 6.15). With each word (diet, stress, new soap), a different image is superimposed on the pop-up image (an apple, sweat drop, bar of soap). The image of the woman with the superimposed apple can be found in Image 6.16. (See Appendix D for the images of the woman with the superimposed sweat drop and bar of soap.) This is similar to the previous example of the older woman whose facial expression changed depending on what the presenter was saying.

Using a spider web in this scenario could symbolize entrapment. It could also symbolize the vagina itself, which feels “trapped” as a result of the symptoms it is experiencing. Another possibility is that the images of the apple, sweat drop and bar of soap appear on the spider web, to illustrate that the spider web is the issue that is being caused by the diet, stress and new soap. A feeling of futility is conjured where the woman is trapped in her own body.

#### 7.3.4 *Woman shielding herself*

A pop-up image of a woman shielding herself, along with a speech bubble and text, appears twice in the course. In this pop-up, there is a woman who is looking away and downwards, and she is lifting her hands to cover her face. It appears as if she is shielding herself from something.

She could be shielding herself from hearing the topics discussed by the presenters at the time she appears on screen. Her head is covered by a veil, which symbolizes modesty and purity.



Image 7.17 – ‘Oh no! Genitalia!’

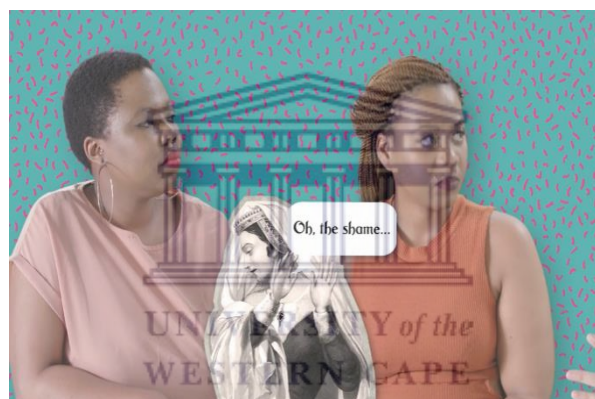


Image 7.18 – ‘Oh the shame...’

The pop-up appears in two different videos, Lesson 1 and Lesson 15. In both instances, the woman has a speech bubble, but she says different things in each of the videos. They are giving the woman a ‘voice’, but unlike the old man and the ‘expert’, she cannot be heard audibly. What she is saying also reveals more about her personality: she is modest and submissive. For example, in Lesson 1, Thembe asks Nwabisa “Did you know that more than half of women lack the basic understanding of their female genitalia?” and the woman appears, along with the words “Oh no! Genitalia!” (Image 7.17). In combination with what Thembe tells Nwabisa, this image represents the women who lack knowledge about their vaginas, and perhaps all of the women who have just started this course. In Lesson 15, as the presenters are talking about masturbation with sexpert Dorothy Black, the image appears once again, this time with the



words “Oh, the shame...” (Image 7.18). In the first example, the exclamation marks convey shock, while the ellipsis in the second example could express that there is more left unsaid. The woman in the drawing shows an aversion to the topics being discussed. This woman could be representing the attitudes women had towards these topics in the past, or they were forced to have this stance towards these issues. The use of this drawing also shows that the fear of speaking about the anatomy is an outdated way of thinking, and they are showing this in a comical way. Moreover, pitting this drawing against the colourful, modern, and fun background, further highlights this.

### 7.3.5 Woman consoling another woman

The last type of pop-up that appears in the videos is that of a woman consoling another woman. In this image, one woman’s head is resting on the other woman’s shoulder. The other woman is looking down at her face, and her hand is placed on her chest.



Image 7.19 - Woman consoling another woman

As mentioned before in this chapter, this pop-up appears in Lesson 10, when the old man says “When women have sex for the first time, they bleed and experience pain” (Image 7.19). A blue teardrop also appears on the face of the woman on the right. In addition, the sound of a woman gasping can be heard, enhancing the fact that she is experiencing pain. What is interesting here is that they are showing two women. The use of this image, as opposed to using an image of a man and a woman, is that women tend to seek advice and comfort from other women, and would not speak to a man about it.

The black and white figures are used strategically throughout the course. Different figures pop up depending on which topics are being addressed. In certain cases, the appearance of the figures also creates humour.

#### 7.4 Summary

This chapter looked at the different pop-ups which appear throughout the Vagina Varsity course, two of which were in dialogue with the two presenters, and the others that appeared at strategic times in the videos. The pop-ups are all from a different era, and therefore they represent old ways of thinking and doing.

In the data shown, there are no other black African characters besides the presenters. When needing to represent an older male figure, they do not use someone from an African context (e.g. ‘mamas’ (mothers), ‘gogos’ (grandmothers), and ‘malumes’ (uncles)). Instead, they use what could plausibly represent a slave plantation owner, a derisive character from a different country and different era. Perhaps it would make it ‘too real’ to use people or characters from the current context which could cause viewers to become uncomfortable.

When showing someone who is afraid to speak about the female anatomy, they use a drawing of a woman from a different era. Using characters far removed from the South African context, as with using non-mother tongue language in sex education, distances the topic from the viewer’s own culture (Cain *et al.*, 2011), thus arguably making the content easier to watch, more palatable. It shows how culturally sensitive certain topics are.

Perhaps even more surprising is that the medieval woman in the pop-ups never actually ‘speak’, which is contrary to the male antagonist who is consistently engaging in a dialogue with the presenters. This shows how marginalized women were at that time. Their voices were not heard. In the case of the deer – the voice can be heard, and it is of a woman, but the woman is not shown, but is rather depicted as a bejewelled animal.

Pop-ups are typical of the YouTube genre as many YouTubers use it to enliven the video and make it more visually appealing. From this chapter, it is clear that one graphic can index layers of meaning. This is clear when considering the Victorian/Elizabethan era, a time when women were oppressed and patriarchy pervaded every domain of women’s lives. Medical care was a male-dominated industry (Porter, 1995) and women had no agency or voice, less rights, privileges, less wealth and less influence (Stretton, 2005), which was exemplified by her weak

posture and feelings of being shielded or trapped. While the old man pop-up had no body, he was quite dynamic with facial expressions and a range of tones (sarcastic, disgusted, and arrogant). His dynamism may be put down as the reason why the straw man strategy worked effectively. The viewer could take the side of the presenters and enjoy moments where the old man is ‘schooled’ on his archaic way of thinking.



## CHAPTER 8 - ANALYSING RESPONSES TO VAGINA VARSITY

### 8.0 Introduction

The researcher is interested in how people experienced participating in the Vagina Varsity course. Using the concept of dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981), this chapter looks at three forms of responses to the Vagina Varsity course as part of semiotic chains. The first type of responses are derived quantitatively from the number of views, likes, dislikes and comments each video received. Secondly, an analysis of the actual YouTube comments is undertaken by categorizing these comments according to a classification scheme by Madden *et al.* (2013). Thirdly, the focus group session is analyzed thematically.

### 8.1 Quantitative video statistics

This section looks at the popularity metrics of the YouTube videos. The popularity metrics, according to Chatzopoulou *et al.* (2010), include viewcount, number of comments, number of favourites, number of ratings, as well as average rating. The popularity metrics has been adapted as follows: the number of favourites will not be considered for this analysis, and neither will the average rating seeing that this function is no longer used on YouTube. The following table lists the videos in terms of the number of views (as of 26 September 2017), the amount of likes and dislikes as well as the number of comments. This will be followed by a discussions of the findings in the table.

	Title	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Comments
Lesson 1	Say hey to your va-jay	4 010	109	0	7
Lesson 2	My bits, my bits, my lovely lady bits	3 286	80	1	10
Lesson 3	Step inside my crib	2 696	56	0	6
Lesson 4	That time of the month	2 622	56	0	13
Lesson 5	Let's keep it clean	2 013	48	0	2
Lesson 6	Honourable discharge	1 749	37	1	4
Lesson 7	Call a doctor!	1 681	46	0	6
Lesson 8	Be careful of the camel	1 471	37	0	3
Lesson 9	Going to the gynae	1 410	32	0	10
Lesson 10	All that hymen hype	1 271	31	0	3

Lesson 11	Where do babies actually come from	1 098	19	0	3
Lesson 12	Preventing pregnancy	1 193	29	1	8
Lesson 13	Better safe than sorry	927	16	0	10
Lesson 14	What to wear, down there	988	15	0	5
Lesson 15	Sexy time	2 277	34	0	4
Lesson 16	All vaginas are amazing	820	26	0	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>29 512</b>	<b>671</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>107</b>

Table 8.1 – Statistical breakdown of Vagina Varsity videos

### 8.1.1 Views

The number of times a video is viewed is one of the most important ways to measure a video's popularity. When looking at the number of views for each video in the Vagina Varsity course, one sees that the first four videos have the most number of views as well as the most number of likes. It could therefore be said that these are the most popular videos in the course. The final video of the course has the least number of views. However, the number of views for Lesson 1 (4 010) is vastly different to the number of views for Lesson 16 (820). This indicates that, while many people started the course, not a lot of people completed it by watching all 16 videos. A possible reason could be that there was a decline in interest as the course progressed or subscribers did not have enough mobile data.

There is a decline in views with each video up until Lesson 11, and thereafter the views for each video fluctuated. Lesson 12 ('Preventing pregnancy') has more views than Lesson 11 ('Where do babies actually come from'). Lesson 15, which has 2 277 views and dealt with sexual intercourse, is the exception, as it has a significantly higher number of views than Lessons 14 and 16, with 988 and 820 views respectively. The more views, the more chances of people commenting on the video.

### 8.1.2 Likes and Dislikes

The "like" and "dislike" bar on YouTube measures how videos are perceived by the audience. It is not possible to see who liked or disliked the video, unless the individual states this in the

comment section. Commenting is optional, which explains why the number of likes and dislikes are much lower than the number of views for each video (Table 8.1).

In addition to the first four videos having the most views, they also have the most likes. Lesson 1 has 109 likes, Lesson 2 has 80 likes, and Lessons 3 and 4 both have 56 likes. Lesson 14 ('What to wear, down there') has 15 likes and Lesson 13 ('Better safe than sorry') has 16 likes, which make them the videos with the least number of likes.

Overall, the videos did not have many dislikes. Only three lessons had dislikes. These are Lesson 2 ('My bits, my bits, my lovely lady bits'), Lesson 6 ('Honourable discharge'), and Lesson 12 ('Preventing pregnancy'). Each video has one dislike, which could indicate that the subscriber/s did not agree with the concept of the video, or with specific content in these videos.

The fact that there are more likes than dislikes indicates a positive reception of the videos. This could be attributed to the fact that the viewers are all subscribers to the campaign and are likely to be more positive in their reception of the videos because they have invested their time by taking part in the course.



### 8.1.3 Comments

Comments on YouTube can be seen as “community feedback” (Siersdorfer, Chelaru, Nejdil & San Pedro, 2010: 891). Individuals can use the comment section to voice their opinions of the specific video (cf. Madden *et al.*, 2013 for a classification schema used to categorize types of YouTube comments). The comments enable the researcher to analyse dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981), as well as how the viewers understand the pedagogical aspects of the lessons (i.e. whether the ‘students’ understand the lessons).

The videos with the most comments are Lesson 4: ‘That time of the month’, as well as the final lesson: ‘All vaginas are amazing’. Each video has 13 comments. The video with the least number of comments is Lesson 5: ‘Let’s keep it clean’, with only two comments.

Unlike views and likes, which decline in numbers from the first video, the number of comments per video is random. Overall, there are not many comments for any of the videos. The total number of comments is 107. Comments are important as they tell the producers whether their content resonates with the viewers and what can be improved.

## 8.2 Analysis of YouTube comments

The YouTube comments which are posted for each video form part of a dialogue with the video lessons. Madden *et al.*'s (2013) classification scheme will be used to categorize the comments on the videos, in order to highlight the various ways that the viewers dialogue with the lessons/presenters. It is, however, important to note that the categories are not mutually exclusive, as some comments fall under more than one category (Madden *et al.*, 2013). What follows are examples of each of the ten categories (Information, Advice, Impression, Opinion, Responses, Expression of personal feelings, General conversation, Site processes, Video content description, and Non-response comments), as found in the comment section of all of the Vagina Varsity videos. In the examples, the researcher uses comments which clearly fall into one type of category, in order to highlight that particular category. The complete list of the YouTube comments can be found in Appendix E.

### 1. Information

Information comments are those where commenters either request or give information, whether related to the videos or in general (Madden *et al.*, 2013). In the example below (Image 8.1), which was made on the video of Lesson 12 about pregnancy prevention, a subscriber is requesting information about the video – why they did not include IUDs as one of the methods for preventing pregnancy.

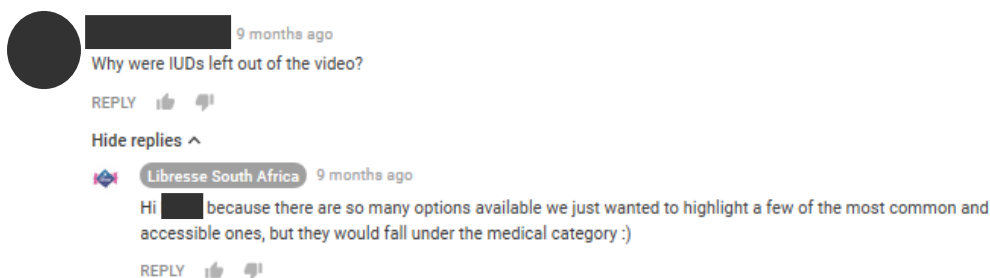


Image 8.1 – Lesson 12, Comment 7

Libresse South Africa, which is the channel on which these videos are posted, responded to the commenter's query. Libresse South Africa was always prompt to respond to any questions or comment on the statements made by commenters throughout the course of the video series.

## 2. Advice

In advice comments, the commenters either ask for or offer ideas or assistance in a particular situation, or suggest another video on YouTube (Madden *et al.*, 2013). In the following example, made on the video ‘Going to the gynae’, the commenter says “something I need to do since forever” (Image 8.2), referring to going to see a gynaecologist. She also adds “I need me a Nwabisa”, referring to the video, where Nwabisa is planning on going with Thembe to provide moral support. Another viewer offers advice by stating that she should take a friend with her and that the procedure goes very quickly. She also adds smile :) as a way of showing kindness, and also possibly reassuring the other commenter.



Image 8.2 – Lesson 9, Comment 6-7

## 3. Impression

Impression comments are one-word expressions which capture the commenters’ immediate reactions in response to the content of the video. Image 8.3 shows a response from a viewer which says “Loooooovvveeee!!!!” Without giving an explanation or description of what exactly she loves, it can be assumed that she loves the entire video (Lesson 8.4). Similarly, Image 4 shows a response from Lesson 14, which says “interresting”, without saying specifically what the commenter found interesting. It can therefore also be assumed that she is referring to the entire video. This commenter, unlike the commenter in Image 3, multiplies only one letter, the letter ‘r’, which is an indication to the researcher that this commenter is replicating an alveolar trill, which is often used in an exaggerated African English accent (Harry, 2018).



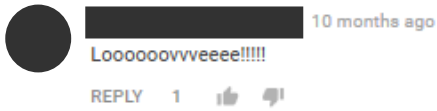


Image 8.3 –Lesson 4, Comment 9



Image 8.4 - Lesson 14, Comment 1

Image 8.5 below is an example of a commenter responding to a particular moment in the video, specifically the end of Lesson 6 where Nwabisa and Thembe are repeating the word ‘vagina’. This commenter is therefore joining in by also ‘saying’ vagina. This commenter also uses a hashtag, which refers to a “sequence of non whitespace characters preceded by the hash character” (Tsur & Rappoport, 2012: 644). A hashtag is mainly used on social networking sites such as Twitter, and is used to simplify the search for similar content elsewhere (Veszelszki, 2016). The hashtag comment can also be seen as multimodal, as it combines the # - character with words. As seen in Image 8.5, the hashtag is blue, which shows that it is a hyperlink – you can therefore click on it and it will lead you to a results page where you can see which other YouTube videos contain the same hashtag.<sup>43</sup>

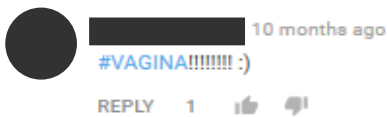


Image 8.5 - Lesson 6, Comment 3

The comments shown above are only one-word responses but both say a lot about their impressions/reactions to the respective videos. These comments all show positive impressions of the videos. There were no impression comments that can be seen as ‘negative’ or ‘general’. Exclamation marks, as used in Images 8.3 and 8.5 as well as word lengthening (as seen in Images 8.3 and 8.4), are features which “are employed to convey personal responses and imitate features of spoken conversation” (Madden *et al.*, 2013: 706). The researcher sees this as an empowering instance, where the commenter is expressing joy at his/her ability to declare ‘vagina’ openly.

<sup>43</sup><https://www.engadget.com/2018/07/19/youtube-hashtags/> (Accessed 30 September 2018)

#### 4. Opinion

Most of the comments on the Vagina Varsity videos are Opinion comments, where the viewers give or request points of view on a person, object, or topic addressed in the video (Madden *et al.*, 2013). Opinions can be positive, negative, mixed, or general sentiments (Madden *et al.*, 2013). The following examples show viewers' opinions of the videos as well as the course as a whole.



Image 8.6 – Lesson 15, Comment 2

Above is an example of a positive opinion of a particular video, specifically Lesson 15 (Image 8.6). Her opinion is that it is “such a necessary and relevant conversation”, referring to the conversation about sex that the presenters have with the sexpert Dorothy Black.

Apart from positive opinions, the commenters also had negative opinions. Below is such an example.

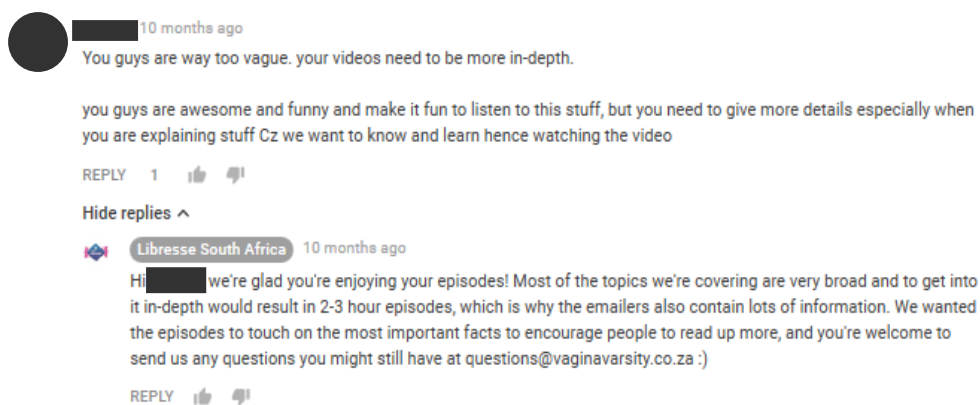


Image 8.7 – Lesson 13, Comment 1-2

In the above comment, the viewer expresses both negative and positive sentiments as the commenter find the Vagina Varsity series entertaining but lacking in depth of content (Image 8.7). Libresse South Africa responds to the commenter by explaining why the videos do not go in-depth. The responses of Libresse South Africa to the viewers' comments is another form of dialogue between Vagina Varsity and the consumer.

Participants in the focus group as well as the online viewers felt the same as the commenter in Image 8.7. They also stated that Vagina Varsity does not elaborate enough. For example, during the focus group interview, participants stated that they would have preferred if the presenters went more into detail with the five major groups of STIs. Lesson 13 about the big 5 (drawing on African knowledge about the Big 5, referring to animals in Africa<sup>44</sup>). In the description of the video they provide a reason for not going into detail about the five STIs, stating that “We’re discussing the big 5 today, but we’re not getting into too much detail about any of them – you might never need to know more because you’ll be so educated about preventing them”.

In the following YouTube comment on Lesson 4, the commenter starts with a positive opinion, and then states what they would have liked in the lessons overall (Image 8.8). The viewer has an issue about the fact that the content is not trans-inclusive. Libresse South Africa then replies by stating that the individual can send their tips on how to do this via email, taking the dialogue between this viewer and themselves to another platform.

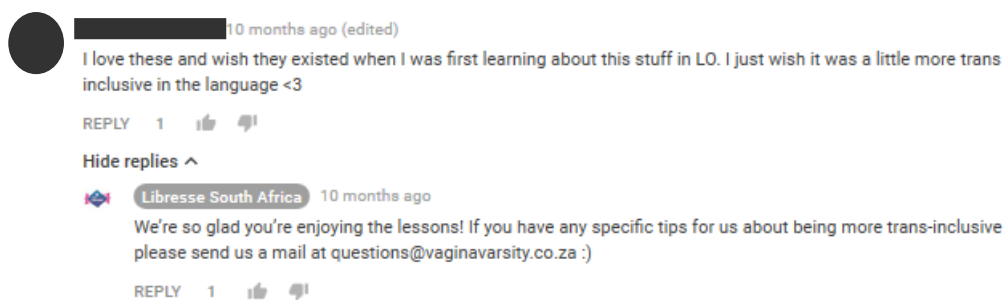
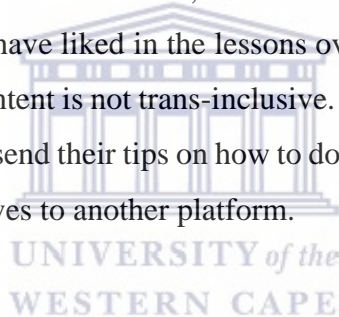


Image 8.8- Lesson 4, Comment 5-6

<sup>44</sup> Africa's big five animals are the lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo. "These five wild animals were originally termed 'the Big Five' by big game hunters who found them to be the most difficult and dangerous African animals to hunt on foot" (<http://www.africanbudgetsafaris.com/blog/facts-about-the-big-five-of-africa1/>)

Although the commenter did not make any suggestions on how to execute this in the comment section, a website called [www.pride.com](http://www.pride.com) suggest that curriculums should acknowledge gender nonconformity, gender variance, and the gender spectrum. They also state that:

The mainstream education models often ignore many of the major changes that we have made in society for marginalized groups. Many curriculums continue to focus on the white, cis, heterosexual male perspective, forgetting that there is so much diversity sitting right in front of the teachers. Educators should make a point of acknowledging that diversity and be aware of the possibility of having gender-variant students in their classes.<sup>45</sup>

Although the VV videos are not ‘trans-inclusive’ in their language use as noted by heteronormative language such as exclusively using “he” to refer to someone who was biologically born a male and “she” to refer to someone who was biologically born a female, they do, in fact, address the issue of transgender people in the email content of Lesson 16. In a section titled “Do all women have vaginas”, they state that “not everyone with a vagina sees themselves as a woman, and not every woman has a vagina”. They also ask subscribers to be respectful to those who identify as transgender.



Image 8.9 – Vagina Varsity email – Lesson 16

<sup>45</sup><https://www.pride.com/transgender/2015/10/06/11-ways-schools-can-be-more-trans-inclusive> (Accessed 4 June 2018)

Below is another example of an opinion comment (Image 8.10). Here, the commenter states that they think schools should use these videos as well, to which Libresse South Africa replies that they are, in fact, working on distributing these lessons to schools.

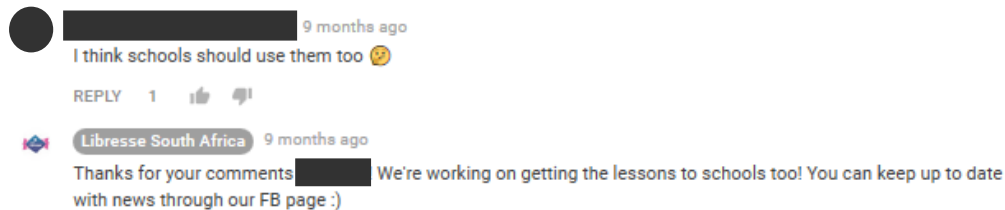
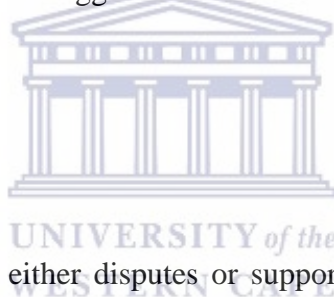


Image 8.10 - Lesson 12, Comment 5

The above examples showed how the commenters are providing suggestions or opinions on content as well as what they would like to see happen with the course as a whole (spread to schools). Libresse South Africa also suggested to the subscriber to go to their Facebook page for further information.



### 5. Responses

In this category, the commenter either disputes or supports the information or opinions in previous comments (Madden *et al.*, 2013). Most of the responses are from Libresse South Africa, as seen in Images 8.1, 8.7, and 8.8, for example. They would promptly respond when someone had a query. In total, there were 29 responses, none of them negative. The response comments either provided information or a supportive statement. For instance, in the comment section of Lesson 4, a commenter stated that “it would have been better if [they] spoke about tampons too”, as the video had a tutorial on how to use a sanitary towel, to which Libresse South Africa stated “Thank you! Because we’re experts in pads we decided to stick with what we know best :)”. Here, Libresse South Africa is providing information in response to a previous comment. Also in the comment section of Lesson 9, ‘Going to the gynae’, a commenter stated that she is scared (presumably to go to the gynaecologist), to which someone responded “Don’t be scared. :)”, thereby responding to the commenter in a supportive way.

## 6. *Expression of personal feelings*

In expression of personal feelings comments, the commenters describe personal feelings or emotional responses to the content in the video, the topic addressed in the video, or a previous comment (Madden *et al.*, 2013). This category is subdivided into three components: positive, negative, and general (Madden *et al.*, 2013).



Image 8.11 – Lesson 9, Comment 8-10

In the comment section of Lesson 9, 'Going to the gynae', a commenter expressed her personal feelings by stating "No. I had to do this when I was small for some reason... and I hated it. I felt so exposed." By using emotive words such as "hated" and "exposed", she is expressing how she felt about going to a gynaecologist. Interestingly, she starts her comment by pointedly saying "No" as if directly responding to the presenters who are advising their audience to go to a gynaecologist. This example is an instance of an expression of negative personal feelings. Libresse South Africa then sympathizes with her, but suggest that she still go to a gynaecologist, as this is "such a vitally important relationship for [her] health" and suggests ways of how to make the process easier. She then responds by saying now that she is older, she would do it. The privatized space created by VV allows for this type of opening up by subscribers. Within this safe space, they are able to share personal experiences.

## 7. *General conversation*

General conversation comments refer to the comments that do not directly relate to the video (Madden *et al.*, 2013). In the comments of the Vagina Varsity videos, there are no comments that fall under this category. All comments were in some way related to the video content, or

the course as a whole. The fact that these videos have to be accessed in a deliberate way (as discussed in chapter 5) might have eliminated the aspect of having general conversations with people in the comment section. Everyone watching is focused on the lesson at hand and intent on learning, and the comments reflect this.

### 8. Site processes

This comment type occurs when a commenter requests that the person/company running the YouTube channel post another video or suggests content for a future video (Madden *et al.*, 2013). An example of this occurs in the comment section of Lesson 13, where a commenter states that she did not receive the previous lesson (Image 8.12). Correspondence ensues between the commenter and Libresse South Africa, where they assist her with this issue.



Image 8.12 – Lesson 13, Comment 4-8

Where the commenter above requested an existing video, another viewer requested that Vagina Varsity create a video related to a specific topic (Image 8.13).



Image 8.13- Lesson 4, Comment 12-13

The above comment, also on Lesson 4, shows a viewer making a suggestion for a future video, by asking that Vagina Varsity post a tutorial video on how to use a tampon, seeing that Lesson 4 showed a demonstration on how to use a sanitary towel. The commenter also acknowledges that such a tutorial “would be great in SA” referring to the fact that nothing like this exists in South Africa. The commenter also provides a title for the tutorial video: “vagina varsity how do you use a tampon”. Libresse South Africa then responds by saying why they did not include a tutorial on how to use a tampon, but they included a link to a Libresse website from a different country where the subscriber could find a guide. When looking at VV as an affinity space (Gee, 2005; 2018), one can see that this website, then, becomes a smaller affinity space within the larger VV affinity space that subscribers can visit to learn more about related matters.

### 9. Video content description

Video content description comments refer to the comments that contain direct quotations from the video or descriptions of the video content as well as hyperlinks in a time format which directs viewers to a specific point in the video (Madden *et al.*, 2013). These hyperlinks take the person who clicks on the link to a particular time and space within the video itself. It also includes paraphrased descriptions of the video content (Madden *et al.*, 2013).

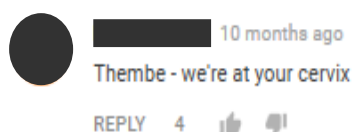


Image 8.14 – Lesson 1, Comment 1



The comment above is from Lesson 1 (Image 8.14). At the end of the lesson, Thembe says “we’re at your cervix”, as a play on words, and also as a way to be humorous. When someone says that they are “at your service”, it means that they are willing to help. The commenter most likely posted this statement from Thembe because she found it humorous.



Image 8.15- Lesson 14, Comment 3

Similar to the previous comment, another commenter quotes an excerpt from a particular video that he found humorous. In his comment, he states “Chris Pratt, Zach Braff. LOL” (Image 8.15). In this case, one knows for certain that he thinks it was funny, because he ends the comment with the abbreviation LOL (laugh out loud). In this comment, the commenter is referring to the part in the video where Thembe uses the names of the two actors while listing the types of ways for decorating the vulva:

Nwabisa: There’s a number of ways of decorating your vulva, such as vajazzles, which are press on diamantes that can be arranged in a variety of ways like

Thembe: Stars, diamonds, cats, mats, Chris Pratt, Zach Braff.

Thembe could likely have run out of types of designs, as she starts listing names of actors instead. She might have chosen Chris Pratt because Pratt rhymes with mat, and she could have chosen Zach Braff because Braff is also an actor and his name has the same [a] sound. She pauses before saying Braff’s name, almost as if she had to think what rhymes with Pratt. As she says Chris Pratt, a male voice with an American accent says “yes!” When she says Zach Braff another male voice (also American), says “what?” sounding confused. These sounds also added to the humour of this moment in the video. While the former is considered a typical Hollywood heartthrob, the latter is not, which adds to the humorous nature of her rhyming couplet.

Another type of video content description comments are “deep links” or hyperlinks in a time format which direct the reader of the comment to that specific moment in the video (Madden *et al.*, 2013). In the comment section of Lesson 9, ‘Going to the gynae’, a commenter states “2:01 hahahaha omg im so scared...hahaha Thumbs up to Libresse for this initiative!” Here she is directing the reader to the point in the video (at 2 minutes 1 second) where Thembe has her back towards the camera and she starts boxing. She adds “hahahaha” to indicate that she found this particular moment to be humorous.

These examples show viewers directly quoting content from the videos, or a specific moment in the video, and all instances are done because the sections in the videos are humorous.

#### *10. Non-response comments*

Non-response comments are comments that do not fit into the other categories, and are considered ‘spam’, comments that have been removed, comments that have been posted multiple times, and comments that are not in a recognizable language (Madden *et al.*, 2013). There were no non-response comments, possibly for the same reason there were no general conversations: the viewers had to sign up and they were all focused on learning.

Most of the comments contained content which fall under the following three categories: Opinion, Expression of personal feelings, and Responses. The comments were overall positive and supportive, from the viewers’ side as well as Libresse South Africa. This indicates that by them having made the space ‘exclusive’ or private on YouTube, they have also effectively filtered out a lot of unnecessary and toxic comments.

### **8.3 Thematic analysis of focus-group interviews**

As the researcher was interested in how individuals engage with the VV videos, focus was placed on selected participants’ reactions to the course content. The following section is a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the focus group discussion the researcher conducted. The researcher set up the interview to resemble the videos on the popular YouTube channel called REACT, where one or more person watches a video or a particular set of videos, and is/are then asked to state what they think about each video.

The focus group data session was made up of five participants, ranging from 21 to 23 years old. The participants were Honours students in Linguistics at the time of the interview. Three of the participants self-identified as women and two self-identified as men. The participants are named Stacy, Mpho, Chad, Aabid, and Leigh<sup>46</sup>. Four of the participants identified as coloured while one participant (Mpho) identified as black. In terms of their sexual orientation, four of the participants identified as heterosexual, and one male participant (Chad) identified as bisexual. When it came to their religious beliefs, four of the participants identified as Christian, while one participant (Aabid) identified as Muslim. In terms of their language backgrounds, Mpho's first language is isiXhosa and her second language is English, while the other four participants' first language is English and their second language is Afrikaans.

The focus group session was two and a half hours long, which included a short break. The entire transcription of the focus group interview can be found in Appendix F. During the focus group session, the participants were shown all 16 videos and took all four quizzes.<sup>47</sup> (See Appendix G for all quizzes and memos). The researcher played four videos, asked the participants to complete the quiz for that week, discussed that week's content, and then moved on to the following week's content. On average, the videos are normally two to three minutes long. The videos were therefore short enough to watch all of them and complete all of the quizzes in one session. Although this is not how the course is intended to be consumed (it is supposed to be done over a period of 28 days), the students could only commit to one session because of their schedules. Also, the course is meant to be watched alone, but the researcher decided to show the videos to a group of participants. As opposed to having one person watching the videos at a time and then comparing the responses, the researcher wanted to generate a discussion among a group of people from different cultural backgrounds in order for the participants to interpret the videos "through their own situated cultural experience" (Oh, 2017: 2272).

The discussion surrounding the Vagina Varsity course generated the following themes: *Vagina Varsity versus schools, Insider knowledge versus scientific knowledge, Handling taboo topics, Role of parental figures, Breaking stereotypes, Importance of Vagina Varsity for woman empowerment, Vagina Varsity and semiotic modes, Reflections on learning in an online space, Importance of Vagina Varsity in the South African context, Media representations, Peer*

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<sup>46</sup> Pseudonyms were used.

<sup>47</sup> The researcher showed only the video content and not the email content. Vagina Varsity's intention of the quizzes were to test what the viewers have learned from the videos as well as the emails.

*learning, Positive feedback of Vagina Varsity and Critique of Vagina Varsity.* In certain instances, YouTube comments are also included, if the commenters share similar sentiments as the focus group participants.

### 8.3.1 Vagina Varsity versus schools

This theme looks at how Vagina Varsity is compared to traditional school education during the focus group session. Seeing that this advertising campaign has been labelled as a “varsity” (university), and also remediated school and classroom discourse, it is not surprising for the participants to compare the two. The word ‘school’ was used three times and the words ‘high school’ were used four times during the interview, as a way of comparing school and Vagina Varsity.

During the focus group interview, the participants compared Vagina Varsity with school subjects, particularly biology and life orientation. For example, Chad mentioned twice that he learned more doing the Vagina Varsity course than he learned in biology. He stated that learning about the vagina in biology is very formal and that they only learn about the vagina “in general” (turn 13). Later on in the discussion, he states that during the Matric year, biology teaches the students about sex, but they keep it “hush hush” (turn 222). Keeping something *hush hush* means to keep it a secret. Chad is therefore saying that this topic is something that is kept secret and private in the school setting. He states that when teaching, the teachers explain “oh okay, this is the vagina, this is the penis, this is what happens, you have sex, this is how babies are born” (turn 222). He then compares this to Vagina Varsity, which, according to him, is “totally different”, as it goes more “in-depth”, which to him is “really cool” (turn 222). The benefits of an edutainment space may well be articulated as the repackaging of information which could be seen as sensitive or uncomfortable.

Towards the end of the focus group interview, the researcher asked whether the participants thought the course is worth doing in terms of learning more about the female body. All the participants agreed and Leigh elaborated by saying, “Well, I’ve learned much more in this short time than I like learned in L.O”, to which she confessed “In high school to be honest” (turn 219), thereby including all school subjects throughout her school career. Chad agreed (turn 218) with Leigh. During a discussion on whether the participants felt that Vagina Varsity is an effective tool for learning, Aabid stated: “we haven’t learned these things on school, even

though we spent twelve years on school. We learned much more in a few minutes of these videos, so I do believe it's very enlightening" (turn 236).

The connection between school and Vagina Varsity was also made in the comment sections of the YouTube videos. For example, a commenter on one of the YouTube videos suggested that Vagina Varsity should be used to supplement life orientation programmes at school, saying, "I hope that Libresse can take this content further and share it in school Life Orientation program's and with Facebook mom-groups who are going through raising young girls and need some funky, accessible, appealing help/inspiration". This commenter recognizes that there are similarities between this particular school subject and Vagina Varsity, and that it can be used to supplement the content young girls are learning. Elsewhere, another commenter states that she thinks schools should use these videos. This desire to bring new media into the classroom makes sense as the current generation at schools are part of the millennial generation and they already have a digital footprint.

### 8.3.2 *Insider knowledge versus scientific knowledge*

Considering that the focus group comprised of women and men, the researcher was keen to establish whether there was a difference between the responses from the women and the men. The Vagina Varsity videos are primarily targeted at women, but there is evidence in the videos which suggest that anyone can watch these videos. For example, in Lesson 4, Nwabisa states that she is talking to the "ladies and gentle brothers", thus including males as well. In addition, in Lesson 1, Nwabisa states "That's fine for you, but I can guarantee you that there are ladies out there, even men, even me, who are uncomfortable talking about this stuff". In Lesson 15, Nwabisa asks sexpert Dorothy Black how women and men prepare themselves for sexual intercourse, therefore including men in the conversation. The researcher therefore wanted the opinions of men as well. The researcher found that there was a difference in how women spoke about the topic as opposed to how the men spoke about it.

Throughout the interview, the women participants tended to refer to experiences they had or issues they knew other women had. They also addressed insecurities women (themselves or in general) might feel when it comes to their bodies. For example, Leigh stated that she likes how the Vagina Varsity presenters emphasise that everyone is different. She then proceeds to explain by saying that "'Cause you know when you're growing up – for me, I was like 'does my vagina look like everyone else's?' [laughing] ( ) It was weird like you know, it's something

you think about” (turn 18). Here she is sharing a personal insecurity that she had regarding her own vagina while she was growing up.

Stacy stated that she knows that a lot of girls stress if they do not start menstruating at the same age their friends do (turn 19). This shows that she has insider knowledge. Another example of this insider knowledge can be seen when Mpho stated that “a lot of girls are questioning themselves whether they HAVE the orgasm or they don’t have during sex” (turn 162). She knows that girls have these types of questions possibly through conversations with female friends.

Although the women participants had more personal experience, there are instances where they admitted to gaining new knowledge. For example, after the researcher asked whether the participants had learned anything new, Mpho stated: “They talked about parts of the vagina [giggling] which I didn’t think we know [giggling] you know, so” (turn 15). Stacy responded by saying: “Mmm. Ja I also didn’t know all the parts [giggling]” (turn 16). Here, Mpho and Stacy admitted that they did not know every part of the vagina. Both Mpho and Stacy were giggling, which could signal that both of them felt uncomfortable talking about this topic. Here, Mpho giggled directly after saying “vagina”, which could suggest that she does not say this word often publically, and therefore saying this word generates a nervous reaction. It could also suggest that she felt uncomfortable saying this word among a group of people, which included men. After watching week four’s videos, the researcher asked the participants whether they had learned anything new, to which Stacy stated:

== Throughout- but throughout the thing uhm you think you know so much and that’s why you also get stuff wrong in the tests ‘cause- ‘cause you’re always learning new stuff, that’s why you get stuff wrong, because- I don’t know. You think you know everything but you don’t [giggling] (turn 174).

Here, Stacy admitted (to her chagrin), that she did not know as much as she thought, because the course had taught her new things about issues related to the vagina. She realized this while doing the quizzes. The male participants also stated that they learned new things while watching the videos. For instance, Chad stated that he gained more knowledge, particularly on the subject of STIs, while Aabid pointed out that he learned about the plans to introduce male contraceptives in South Africa.

While the women participants could speak about their personal experiences, the male participants spoke of their knowledge of vaginas in terms of learning it at school and at university. Aabid stated that he learned more by watching the VV videos than he learned at school (turn 236), showing that the curriculum at school lacks this type of teaching. Chad stated that he learned about it in biology at school (turn 13) and also at university from the HIV unit (turn 188).

### 8.3.3 Handling taboo topics

In this study, a taboo topic is defined as a subject matter that is forbidden to talk about or do in society. When the researcher asked the participants what they found to be interesting in the videos, Leigh responded that she liked how Vagina Varsity addresses the topic like it's "such a normal thing", because "it's seen as very taboo to talk about the vagina" (turn 2). Leigh was the first person to acknowledge that the topic of vaginas is taboo.

When the researcher asked what the participants thought about how Vagina Varsity handled the taboo topics, Stacy responded:



It didn't really feel taboo in the- in the videos. Like they did it with ease so it didn't feel like a taboo topic here. But I think at school, that's why you learn less 'cause they tiptoe around it and they make you feel like- like you won't raise your hand in class and ask a question whereas here I feel like uhm they made it more comfortable (turn 251).

To this, Chad responded:

Ja, like- like Stacy say like in high school you have to accommodate everybody because you don't know what the students- especially 'cause, I quote like "they're underage" in a sense also so you'd have to get consent from the parents. Some parents aren't really liberal about their children learning about exploring their sexual being in a sense so I think that it's cool that they called it Vagina Varsity 'cause I mean when you come to varsity, it's this world where you're exposed to everything and if a high school child is watching it, I think it's very inclusive for them like even though they might be going behind their parents' backs and watching it but it's still like- it's still part of their education like I get that some parents are old school and really like stern in their ways, but eventually your child is gonna come to you and ask you these questions and what if your child has a STI or something. Like I really think that it's very {productive} in the society that we live in, and it's really cool (turn 252).

Stacy and Chad agreed that it was easier to talk about taboo topics on the platform that Vagina Varsity has provided, whereas at school it would be more difficult for teachers to handle these topics in a similar way. At school it would be more taboo than in an online space dedicated to breaking the taboo. Chad made an interesting observation about the name of the course. According to him, university is a place where you are exposed to things that you were not exposed to at school, which is also true of Vagina Varsity, because you are taught things that you are not taught at school, and also not in the way that you would be taught at school. Chad also stated that the course is “inclusive”, meaning that even though it is called a ‘varsity’, high school children can also learn and relate. Stacy pointed to the fact that the way the class was set up, possibly referring to the fact that there are many students, most of the time having boys and girls in class, a learner would likely not feel comfortable to ask questions or make certain points that might put them in a position where they feel embarrassed (turn 251). (At Vagina Varsity you could ask questions by emailing the Vagina Varsity team. In this way you could ask questions while maintaining anonymity). She also stated that the way the presenters handled the topics made it feel like the topics are not taboo (turn 251). She explained that learners learn less about these topics at school because the teachers “tiptoe” around these topics. What is interesting to the researcher is the fact that tiptoeing around this topic in school could also reinforce the idea that it is in fact a taboo topic. Chad acknowledged the taboo nature of the topics when he stated that learners “might be going behind their parents’ backs and watching it” (turn 252). Chad might also mean that it is the parents that think that the topics are taboo and therefore the children feel like they need to watch these lessons in secret.

Additionally, the term “casual” is used by the participants as the opposite of taboo. Some of the participants stated that Vagina Varsity treats the topic of vaginas as something casual, which to them is a strategy for overcoming the taboo nature of the topic. Stacy stated that the presenters spoke about vaginas in a casual way and “made it more casual” (turn 3). Chad stated that the videos made the topic “very casual” (turn 13). Leigh stated that the presenters talked about the topics “in a very casual way” (turn 254). In all these instances, the casual nature of addressing this topic is seen as something positive. Leigh also used the word “normal” in the same way, which could have the same meaning as “casual”, when saying that the presenters spoke about this topic like it was “such a normal thing”.

Mpho stated that the presenters “talked about parts of the vagina [giggling] which I- I don’t think know [giggling]”. This lack of knowledge could be an indicator that this part of the anatomy is not addressed, likely because it is construed as taboo. The fact that Mpho was



giggling while making this statement may be indicative of her discomfort or embarrassment, which could be because she does not usually talk about this topic. Overall, the participants giggled 18 times during the discussion, with Leigh giggled the most (ten times), Mpho giggled four times, Stacy giggled twice, and the group (or at least more than one participant) giggled together twice. Laughter, which could have the same root cause as giggling, occurred 19 times throughout the focus group interview. Although the male participants did not giggle, they did participate in laughter.

#### *8.3.4 Role of parental figures*

Stacy, Chad and Leigh drew on the role of the parental figure in the dissemination of this sensitive topic. Stacy stated that students learn less in school, compared to what can be learned in the VV course (turn 251). Chad agreed with Stacy and provided a possible reason for this. He stated that “in high school you have to accommodate everybody” because “they’re underage in a sense also so you’d have to get consent from the parents” (turn 252). According to Chad, parents control what their children learn about with regards to sex in school. He stated that “Some parents aren’t really liberal about their children learning about exploring their sexual being”. In the same conversational turn, he spoke about Vagina Varsity and stated that:

if a high school child is watching it, I think it’s very inclusive for them like even though they might be going behind their parents’ backs and watching it but it’s still like- it’s still part of their education like I get that some parents are old school and really like stern in their ways, but eventually your child is gonna come to you and ask you these questions and what if your child has a STI or something (turn 252).

Chad therefore sees Vagina Varsity as a legitimate form of education that is important for young people in high school. He also acknowledged the taboo nature of the topics covered in the course when he stated that high school children “might be going behind their parents’ backs and watching it”. He also highlighted the importance for young people to watch these videos when he stated that these children will eventually seek advice from their parents regarding sex-related issues. Leigh, however, felt that young girls, specifically, are reluctant to approach older people regarding these issues. In two different instances during the discussion, she talked about the fact that young girls do not talk about the things that are of a sexual nature to the older female figures in their lives:

apparently we or most females should have a gynae especially when they start having uhm sexual intercourse uhm but like you don't know what to really expect, you don't know who to talk to, you don't like {talking to} your mother (turn 118)

Yes especially for maybe a younger audience even, they can't talk to older people about- 'cause lots of- lots of young girls, they are experimenting and they're doing things and maybe older figures in their life don't even know that, they don't assume, so they can't talk to their mothers or their aunties or their sisters (turn 231)

In the second example, Leigh points out that young girls cannot talk to older female figures about these issues. She states that the older women in their lives assume that they are not sexually active, and therefore the young girls do not have the confidence to approach them. In this regard, VV can be seen as replacing inadequately prepared or unwilling parents to deal with these important issues facing girls and women.

### *8.3.5 Breaking stereotypes*

Throughout the focus group interview, some of the participants pointed out that the VV videos broke certain stereotypes regarding healthcare and the woman's body. For example, when the researcher asked what the participants had learned when watching Week two's videos, Chad responded:

Uhm the videos are breaking a lot of stereotypes about like healthcare and especially like the whole entire- the forum that this videos are doing like I learnt a lot about- again like, you don't learn this stuff like in social aspects no one wants to talk about like the genitals or their genitals or vagina, and I think it's really important that this platform is a- and I also enjoyed like the fact that people are responding with questions, asking the questions so I think like it just shows that there are people that are a bit shy perhaps to talk about it but I learnt a lot about STIs and it's really cool. Not STIs, the videos (turn 87).

Here, Chad noted that the Vagina Varsity videos were breaking stereotypes when it came to healthcare, in particular reference to STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections). He also stated that no one wants to talk about issues related to genitals, and noted that people are shy to talk about it. This is an important point, seeing that there is a stigma attached to STIs, resulting in people not wanting to discuss it.

In turn 89, Leigh noted that the videos were breaking stereotypes about how women should look and smell, especially Lesson 8, the episode where the presenters answered questions related to the camel toe, as well as other underwear-related questions. Chad mentioned

somewhere else during the interview (when talking about sex education) that Vagina Varsity was breaking the norm.

Stacy made particular reference to the “old man” in Lessons 6 and 10, as she stated that she liked the fact that they used him “for addressing the stereotypes to show it’s kind of old outdated stereotypes” (turn 91). Earlier in the discussion, she had also mentioned the old man, stating “he presented stereotypical comments or myths that uhm we hear all the time about the vagina and it was nice that they addressed those uhm stereotypical comments or myths in the video” (turn 78). Stacy was able to recognize that the old man was used as a straw man through which old stereotypes were addressed and debunked.

### *8.3.6 Importance of Vagina Varsity for woman empowerment*

Apart from selling their product, Vagina Varsity is also geared toward teaching women the fundamentals about their bodies, and empowering them in this way. The participants picked up on this, and noted various strategies the Vagina Varsity course used to achieve this goal.

Leigh: Ja and it’s very- it’s very pro-women. Like when the one question came in about her partner likes it when I wear lingerie, uhm they say again like “do it for yourself” uhm and like women are supposed to smell like nice all the time but those are harmful to your vagina, just things that women are expected to do and look like and smell a certain way (turn 89).

Leigh noted that the course is “very pro-women”. She also quoted one of the videos where Thembe gives advice to an anonymous viewer who sent in a question. The question is: “My partner likes it when I wear lingerie, but sometimes over a long period of time I feel uncomfortable.” Thembe responded: “Remember Anon, rule number one, do it for yourself. If you don’t wanna do it, babes, it’s okay”. Stacy reflected on the course by saying that she liked that they stuck to a particular theme throughout the course. She labelled the ‘theme’ “put yourself first” (turn 161), which also relates to women empowerment.

Chad mentioned that it is particularly important to speak about consent in the South African context (turn 159). He could be referring to the high rate of sexual abuse in South Africa.

Stacy noticed that a recurring theme of the course was that they encourage women to put themselves first (turn 161). Mpho singled out a particular video that she thought was

“informative”. This is also an instance of women empowerment, as the videos are informing women of things they had not known before. This knowledge can help them in future situations. Leigh also stated that Vagina Varsity was a good platform to teach young girls things they would not be able to learn elsewhere (turn 231). Here, one can see the importance of utilizing the online space to educate women.

### 8.3.7 *Vagina Varsity and semiotic material*

The researcher is interested in YouTube for its technical affordances (Adami, 2009b). YouTube is a platform on which the semiotic affordances are displayed; some are appropriated from culture, politics, and stereotypes, and are reframed as lessons. The researcher asked the participants about their perceptions of the linguistic and visual strategies Vagina Varsity uses to normalize images of the female body. The participants acknowledged that they appreciated the use of the images during the lessons.

Researcher: What do you think about the different modes, like images and sounds, that they used in the videos?

Leigh: I think it worked well together.

Stacy: It complemented each other also.

Leigh: There was an image for everything [giggling] (turn 224-227).

Leigh thought that the different modes worked well together, to which Stacy added that the modes actually complement each other, meaning that each mode contributes to the other mode, thereby enhancing the mode. The participants did not provide any specific examples. It is, however, clear that these participants felt that the affordances of videos allowed for more informative and more entertaining content.

At the end of week one’s videos, consisting of Lessons 1 to 4, Leigh commented that she liked how ‘visual’ the videos were, and refers specifically to Lesson 4:

Uh I like how visual it was. They showed everything as they were explaining it so you could picture that inside your body [giggling] you could see what- what’s going on uhm during the menstrual cycle. Ja I liked how everything was very visual (turn 24).

Leigh's giggling might signal that she felt slightly uncomfortable talking about the images that she saw in the lessons. The first time she does this is when she said "there was an image for everything", and the fact that she was giggling could signal that she was referring to the images of the vaginas (because there are many other 'normal' images as well). Although she felt uncomfortable talking about it, she did say that she actually liked the fact that the course incorporated all these visual images.

When the researcher asked what they thought about the tests, three of the participants mentioned that the images used in the videos helped them answer the questions in the quizzes.

Mpho: It made you think about what you watched in the videos, 'cause some of the questions ( ) in the test.

Chad: Ja like it's fine and all to watch the video and then you get the test and then it's like "I remember they spoke about this. I remember this image was there and then they said this"==

Stacy: == I remembered the images==

Leigh: Ja.

Chad: Like the visual representation comes through in the test, so I think it's like cues to help you remember, and I think it's really cool that it was visually there. Like they knew that they were gonna speak to a young audience, so having those visuals and having humor, it's like having- like the presenters are two older sisters, perhaps, that you could go to and just speak to them about it and they'll be like "no, it's cool" like "I can explain this to you" (turn 240-244).

Once again, the participants talked about how useful the images were for remembering the content, especially when it came to doing the quizzes. Chad noted that the combination of the images and the humour in the videos showed that the makers of these videos knew that they were going to speak to a young audience.

For the most part, the subscribers did not focus on specific semiotics, except for language. However, one subscriber commented on a particular scene in Lesson 7, when the presenters made the STI smoothie. The subscriber commented "I dont [sic] see how I can forget the smoothie right there".

### 8.3.8 Reflections on learning in an online space

Throughout the discussion, the participants addressed the fact that these videos are on an online platform, and how this influences the learning experience that Vagina Varsity provides. Leigh stated that technology was “taking over, or took over already” (turn 223). She acknowledged the fact that the Internet has become a place for learning, and “lots of people get their information from videos, from the internet” (turn 223).

In the next extract, Chad compares Vagina Varsity to school education:

And in high school, they just hush hush. They like “oh okay, this is the vagina, this is the penis, this is what happens, you have sex, this is how babies are born.” Like with Vagina Varsity, it’s totally different. They go in-depth with it, and I think it’s really cool and I hope that they got their message across to a wide audience (turn 222).

Chad stated that the presenters “go in-depth” with the topics, which is different from how they deal with the topics at school, where these topics are not explained at full length. It could be that it is easier to talk about more sensitive topics on an online platform, as opposed to a classroom setting. Additionally, Chad stated that he hopes Vagina Varsity had spread their message to a wide audience, which is possible to do through the online medium.

When the researcher asked what they had learned in the videos of Week two, Chad stated that the videos were breaking many stereotypes and that he learned a lot, thanks to the forum that Vagina Varsity is on, and that “you don’t learn this stuff like in social aspects” (turn 87), referring specifically to genitalia. He also pointed out that people might be shy to talk about these issues, but with Vagina Varsity, people asked questions anonymously. People were able to ask questions via email, to which Vagina Varsity responded in certain videos. Anonymity is one of the affordances of the online space. The VV subscribers were able to participate fully, and receive information while remaining anonymous and ‘safe’.

### 8.3.9 Importance of Vagina Varsity in the South African context

Some of the participants talked about the need for the type of education that Vagina Varsity provides, particularly in the South African context. When talking about what the participants found interesting about the videos in Week four, Chad spoke about Lesson 15 which to him

“broke the boundaries beyond compare” (turn 157) and he stated that he thinks Vagina Varsity should continue with the type of education that they are offering, to which Leigh stated:

Especially here in South Africa with all these cultures and all these religions in one, where these things are not spoken about. Uhm I like that they’re making the videos and that it’s South African, especially, ja. So every- lots of people watch YouTube videos and I think it’s very accessible like the information uhm and they’re not being- there’s no bias in it, there’s no ideologies or anything. It’s very- very neutral, very out- very practical as well for people to understand. Young girls (turn 158).

Leigh pointed out that the topics they were touching on in these videos are not spoken about in the South African context, especially considering the different cultures and religions in the country. Many cultures and religions in South Africa are very conservative, and speaking about sexual matters, or matters related to genitalia, is taboo. Chad provided an example of this when he spoke about an incident in a Sociology lecture where they spoke about sex in class and the black male students said, “no, we can’t talk about it at all,” especially when it came to the topic of circumcision (turn 157). When the women in the class gave their opinions on this topic, said students objected to them expressing their opinions.

Chad: Like, for me I know like on campus when we spoke about it in undergrad in second year, we spoke about sex in Sociology and a lot of the black guys were like “no, we can’t talk about it at all,” especially when it came to a topic of discussion in Sociology of Health and we discussed circumcision. A lot of the girls gave their opinions and the guys thought that was like- they shouldn’t be giving their opinions at all (turn 157).

This example highlights the issue of cultural differences in South Africa and how this influences how this information is being talked about as well as how it is taught.

Chad: And I mean also like the main issue with sexual education is that we always get it from a Western perspective or a Eurocentric perspective and I mean as Leigh said like South Africa is diverse, so having a content show where it’s placed in a South African context speak openly about like masturbation, sex, sex toys and it’s- consent especially, it’s very inclusive in how they have delivered their programming to South Africans, young South Africans, old South Africans, I mean it’s really good (turn 159).

Chad agreed with Leigh that South Africa is a diverse place and stated that it is problematic that the sexual education that the students receive is derived from a Western or Eurocentric perspective, and not from a South African perspective. He then praised Vagina Varsity for

creating content that is placed within a South African context, as well as for being inclusive to all South Africans, no matter what their age.

When the researcher asked whether Vagina Varsity is an effective tool for learning, Stacy agreed and referred to the high rate of underage pregnancies in South Africa, and stated that the type of education that Vagina Varsity is providing could combat teenage pregnancies (turn 232-234).

In these examples, the participants highlighted the importance of the VV lessons, especially in the South African context. South Africans can therefore relate to the videos more than if it were taught from a Western perspective. Here, one can see the importance and effectiveness of localization, achieved through the use of black African presenters, being sensitive to the cultural diversity in South Africa, and by tapping into local issues.

#### 8.3.10 Media representations

The participants also compared Vagina Varsity to the media. For example, after showing the participants the videos of week three, the researcher asked whether they found anything interesting within this set of videos. Leigh responded that she found the conversation about contraceptives interesting (Lesson 12 – ‘Preventing pregnancy’), and she liked that they showed female condoms because the media, sitcoms, videos and movies do not show female condoms (turn 121). Aabid also stated that the media only shows that it is men that wear condoms and not women. Aabid stated “they’re showing us that it’s not only uh males who needs who needs to wear condoms as we see in the media and so forth” (turn 123).

When speaking of the media’s portrayal of sex, Chad stated that *Cosmopolitan* (a popular women’s magazine) focuses on how women should pleasure their male partners and *Men’s Health* (a popular magazine for men) focuses on how men should please their female partners. He goes on to say that these magazines “make a dream of the whole entire notion of masturbation and sex and everything when it’s not really like that” (turn 157). He also stated that the sexperts (sex experts) who write these articles in the magazines could just be putting their own opinions onto the readers (turn 157).

Leigh stated that the media romanticizes sex, and compares this to Vagina Varsity, who, for example, states that an orgasm is different for each person. She then also stated that “you shouldn’t see something and think this is the way it should be” (turn 160), referring to the



media's portrayal of sex. Clearly, the realistic stance that VV takes on the topic of sex was deemed preferable.

### 8.3.11 Peer learning

Not only were the participants gaining knowledge from the video lessons and the quizzes, but the focus group discussion also allowed for the participants to learn from each other. The following extract took place after the participants watched the videos from Week four, and the researcher had asked them what new things they had learned from the videos:

178. Stacy: Uhm the big five, the STI thing. I didn't know that. And I was also a bit like uhm confused about the whole dental dam thing but ja.
179. Leigh: Ja what is that?
180. Chad: Dental dam is basically- so let's think about- you have condoms for obviously penetration sex so dental dams is when you go downstairs and you give oral sensation. So instead of having- perhaps your partner has==
181. Leigh: ==Is that like a sheet?
182. Chad: Ja. It's a sheet so vagina, mouth, dental dam. It's very stretchy.
183. Leigh: Okay.
184. Chad: So you [illustrates how to use a dental dam]
185. Leigh: Ai, Chad.
186. Chad: There's also anal dams as well. Ja. Guys go on campus and get tested. They explain this to you guys a lot.
187. Aabid: Cool.  
[Laughter]
188. Chad: That's me sponsoring for the HIV unit on campus.
189. Mpho: Represent.
190. Aabid: Learned something.

In this extract, Stacy stated that she learned about the five types of STIs, but also admitted that she was confused about what dental dams were. Chad then explained to the group what dental dams were, while also demonstrating with his hands how a dental dam is used. It is interesting to note that all the participants contributed to this discussion. Prior to this, Chad mentioned that

he and a friend always get tested (for HIV) on campus, and it is compulsory to watch a visual demonstration on how to use male condoms, female condoms, as well as dental dams. When Stacy, and also Leigh, wanted to know more about dental dams, he used this opportunity to educate them, and also to advocate for the HIV unit at their university. Chad's explanation and illustration of the use of dental dams was not only useful to Stacy, but also Aabid, who then stated that he "learned something".

### *8.3.12 Positive feedback of Vagina Varsity*

The following section looks at the positive remarks made by the focus group participants regarding the Vagina Varsity course. Following Leigh's statement that she liked how they addressed the subject like it was a "normal thing" (turn 2), Stacy stated that they spoke about the subject in a casual manner (turn 3), "not so formal" (turn 5). Chad also noted that in biology, learning about the vagina is "very formal". He then compared it to Vagina Varsity, which "made it very casual" (turn 13). Towards the end of the interview, Leigh reflected on the videos and stated that the presenters were talking to the viewers "like they're talking to a friend", and they addressed the topics "in a very casual way" (turn 254). She also provided an example of this. She stated that "they were making those eyes" (turn 254), which could refer to the instances where they visually showed their discomfort at the camera. One such example happens in Lesson 11 at 01:20-01:22, when Nwabisa and Thembe are playing a game and Nwabisa has to give Thembe clues as to what the answer is on her card. The content on the card makes Nwabisa uncomfortable, and as she looks at the card, her eyes widen, she moves on to another card without saying anything and, as she does this, she looks at the camera. Leigh enjoyed the fact that they showed their discomfort and that "it's still not stopping them which is kinda showing you like even though you still maybe feel uncomfortable while you're watching it, it's- it's no reason to not talk about it" (turn 254).

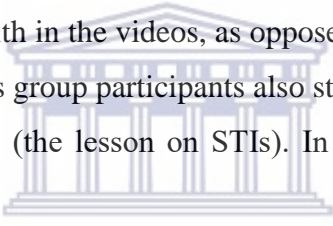
Chad and Leigh stated that they liked the practicality of Week three specifically. Chad specifically mentioned practical aspects of hygiene, and also going to the gynaecologist (turn 120). Leigh also agreed with Chad in that the lesson was practical and that she liked that aspect of that particular set of videos (turn 126). At the end of watching Week four's videos, Leigh once again stated that she liked how practical the videos were "for people to understand. Young girls" (turn 158). She singled out young girls in particular.

Leigh stated that she liked how they kept the videos of Week three and Week four neutral (turn 118; turn 158), meaning that they did not speak about virginity in an idealistic way or romanticized it (Week three), and that there were no bias and no ideologies (Week four's videos). She stated that a lot of videos on YouTube "say that you're better if you are a virgin, or they romanticize breaking your virginity" (turn 118).

Other positive feedback included Leigh stating that she liked how Week three's videos were straightforward in the delivery of the message (turn 126), and Aabid stated that the points that the whole course address are very enlightening (turn 236). Overall, there seemed to be more positive feedback than critique, which will be discussed in the next section.

### *8.3.13 Critique of Vagina Varsity*

The researcher also asked the participants whether there were aspects of the YouTube videos that they did not like. Their critiques included the length of the videos as well as the brief overviews of the subjects dealt with in the videos, as opposed to having in-depth explanations of each subject. Some of the focus group participants also stated that they wished the episodes were longer, especially Lesson 7 (the lesson on STIs). In a discussion on the final week's videos, Mpho stated:



For me I just feel like they should have made the videos a little bit longer 'cause it's very informative what they're talking about in each of their videos, and I was interested in the first video when they were talking about STIs and the prevention but they didn't really expand on it and uh they left me curious 'cause I also wanted to know about the causes of that and everything surrounding STIs (turn 162)

When the researcher asked which aspects of the videos they did not like, Leigh commented on the length of two particular videos, one being too short (Lesson 13; 02:03) and one being too long (Lesson 15; 07:30):

Just the length of it uhm and the way they- so they went so into so much detail regarding self-pleasure, uhm but ja with the STI video they didn't give as much information, it also wasn't as long as that. I don't know their reasons but== (turn 164).

A little further into the conversation she also stated:

Ja even- even in the introduction of that video, they- they name the five and they say "we are here to talk about how to live with it if you have a lifelong STI or to like what you

can do to prevent it” but prevent it or maybe not cure it per se but they didn’t actually go into what they were- what I thought was coming uhm in the video. I think ja they should’ve touched more on the SERIOUS topics (turn 168).

Interestingly, the participants would have preferred to learn more on the STIs instead of having a long video on issues related to sex and self-pleasure (Lesson 15), which is considerably longer than the other videos (seven and a half minutes). The focus of the participants were therefore not just to be entertained but also to be educated on these more “serious” matters, as Leigh pointed out. She was therefore disappointed by the episode about the STIs, as they did not go into more detail as she was expecting, or hoping they would. Of course, this is in line with Libresse’s campaign brief, as seen in the video disclaimer which states “This communication is ... not intended to be a comprehensive nor all-inclusive reference for the subject material addressed within”. The idea is to sell sanitary towels, so although they touch on the topic of STIs, there was no point in delving deeply into this subject.

#### 8.4 Handwritten notes

As a departure from mainstream ‘react’ genre, this study also included the handwritten notes produced by the focus group participants themselves in an attempt to address the way they reacted textually to the information they received. Apart from the written content, the researcher is also interested in the participants’ “use [of] the physical space of the sheet to provide organizational cues of the information that is recorded” (Piolat, Olive & Kellogg, 2005: 294). At the beginning of the focus group interview, the researcher provided the participants with pages on which to make notes, like learners do at school. Piolat *et al.* (2005: 292) define note-taking as “short condensations of a source material that are generated by writing them down while simultaneously listening, studying, or observing.” This complex activity entails the interlinking of production and comprehension processes, and functions as a method to gather information that should be remembered, in academic contexts, many professional contexts, and also in everyday life (Piolat *et al.*, 2005). In general, note-takers use their own methods of taking notes, which leads to much diversification in these practices (Piolat *et al.*, 2005). These notes are used to complement their reactions to the videos. Four out of the five participants took notes while watching the videos (everyone except Leigh). The following section is an analysis of these notes. The researcher will also compare these notes and discuss

whether the notes are similar or different to the responses the participants made during the interview.

## Mpho

Mpho was the only participant that self-identified as black, and considering that the target market is most likely young black (South African) women, her notes are of great interest. Interestingly, she took down the most notes of all the participants, having three pages of notes at the end of the session.

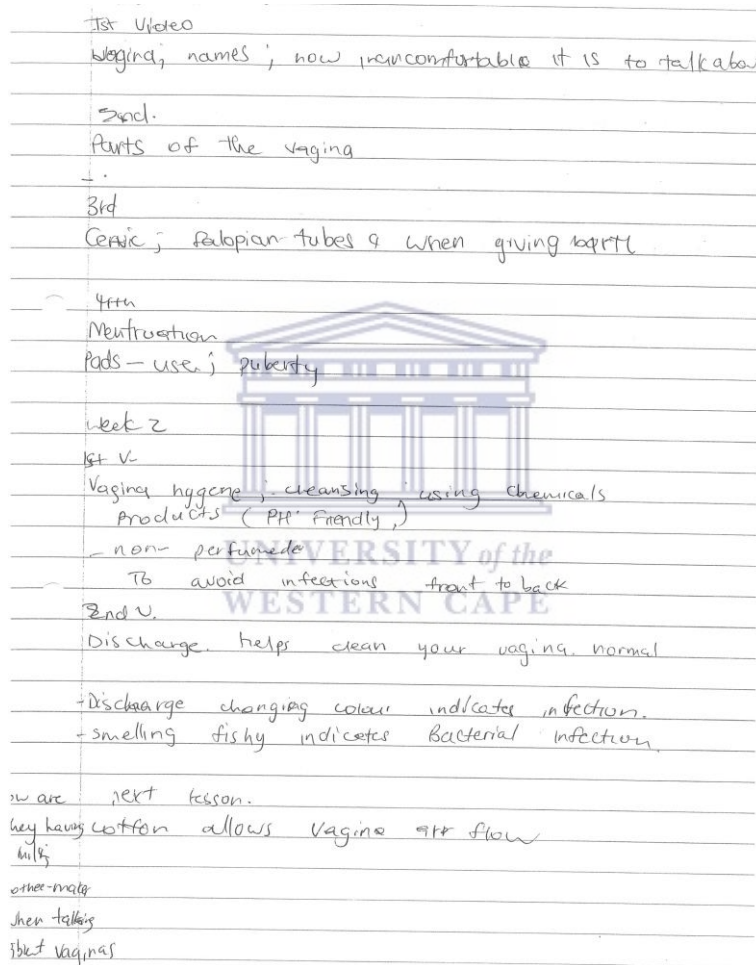


Image 8.16 – Mpho’s notes page 1

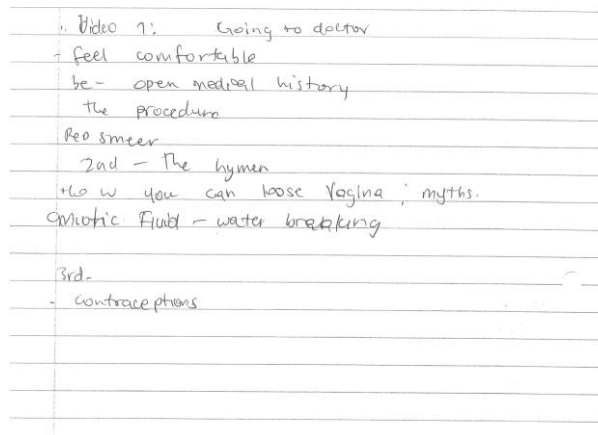


Image 8.17 – Mpho’s notes page 2

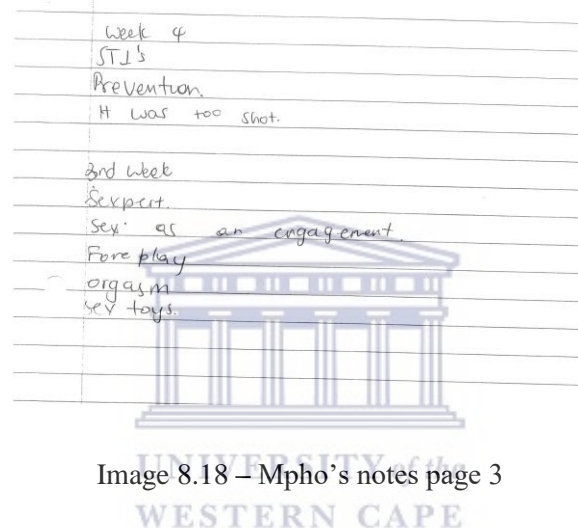


Image 8.18 – Mpho’s notes page 3

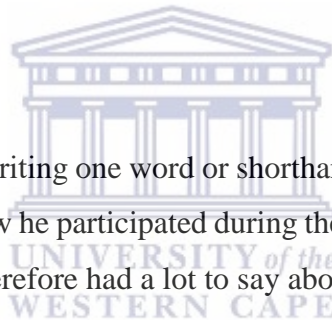
By looking at Mpho’s notes, one can see that her approach to note-taking was learner-centred. She made short summaries of each of the videos (e.g. “1<sup>st</sup> video vagina; names; how uncomfortable it is to talk about”, “2nd Parts of the vagina”, etc.) (Image 8.16), possibly as a way to remember what each video was about. This technique proved helpful to Mpho as she was able to refer back to her notes during the discussion. She also made notes of the functions of certain things (e.g. “falopian [sic] tubes 4 when giving birth”, “Discharge. helps clean your vagina. normal”, and “amiotic [sic] fluid – water breaking”. In a statement she made during the focus group interview, at the end after watching Week three’s videos, she revealed that she had misconceptions about amniotic fluid. When the researcher asked whether the participants had learned anything new, Mpho stated that she did not know the water coming out of the womb is actually called amniotic fluid. She stated “I always thought ‘okay how is the water coming out of the womb?’ type of thing, but now they clarified the whole thing for me” (turn 124).

Therefore, seeing that the notes made about discharge and fallopian tubes are similar to the notes made about amniotic fluid, one could assume that she was clarifying misunderstandings or misconceptions about them as well.

Interestingly, Mpho also made a note in the margin, which reads: “How are they having milk; smoothee-maker [sic] when talking about vaginas”. This is an instance of dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981), as she is asking herself a question about the smoothie maker, therefore dialoguing with the text to make meaning of what she is seeing. She also provides a critique of one of the videos, saying “It was too shot [sic]” (Image 8.18), particularly referring to the length of the video on STIs. We know that she is talking about this video in particular, because she made a comment during the discussion, saying that she felt that they could have made the videos a bit longer, and then stated “I was interested in the first video when they were talking about STIs and the prevention but they didn’t really expand on it and uh they left me curious ‘cause I also wanted to know about the causes of that and everything surrounding STIs” (turn 162). She, therefore, made a note of the critique, and then pointed it out during the discussion.

### **Chad**

Chad’s notes are minimal, only writing one word or shorthand (abbreviations and symbols) for one idea. This is in contrast to how he participated during the session; he had in fact the longest speech turns in the group, and therefore had a lot to say about the topics that were discussed.



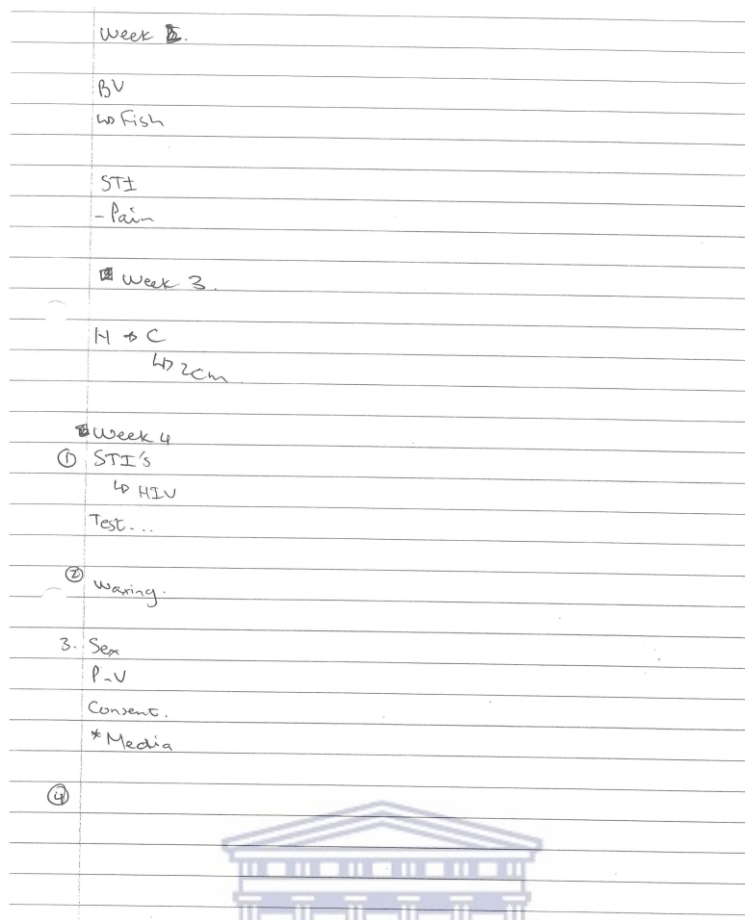
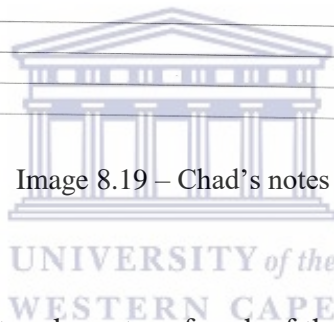


Image 8.19 – Chad’s notes



In contrast to Mpho, Chad did not make notes of each of the episodes, neither did he jot down any questions. His use of abbreviations show that his notes were only for himself and not for anyone else to read or understand. Similar to Mpho, he also used his notes to refer back to in the discussions. For example, he made an asterisk next to the word media (the asterisk could signal importance) (Image 8.19). During the discussion on Week four’s videos, he brought up the issue of the media’s portrayal of sex. Intriguingly, he used an ellipses in his note-taking, writing the word “test” as “Test...” The use of ellipses may indicate that Chad is contemplating it in his mind, or it might indicate concern or some other cognitive factor.



## Stacy

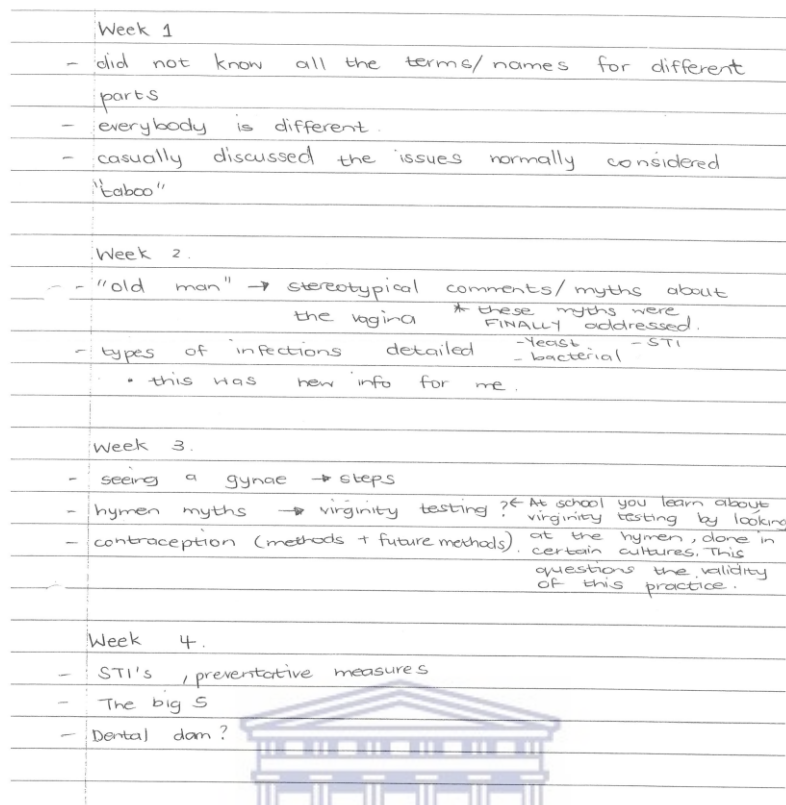


Image 8.20 – Stacy's notes

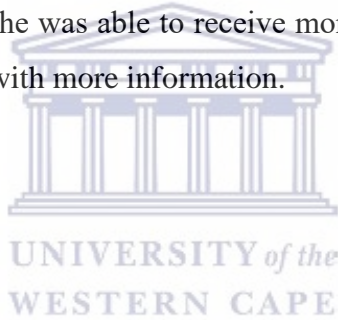
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Stacy made notes for each week of the Vagina Varsity course (Weeks one to four). What is particularly interesting about Stacy's notes is that they are dialogic, written in such a way that it looks like she is speaking to someone other than herself. For example, the first sentence is "did not know all the terms/names for different parts" (Image 8.20), which is something you would tell someone else, and not yourself. When writing about the video on STIs, she states "this was new info for me". These statements are also providing information about her prior knowledge and what she is learning as the videos are progressing. This is in contrast to Chad's notes that are arguably just for himself.

Similar to Mpho, Stacy also provided short overviews of some of the videos. For example, she wrote "seeing a gynae → steps", "hymen myths → virginity testing?", and "contraception (methods + future methods)" are all notes made in Week three, for Lessons 9, 10, and 12, respectively. Her notes for Lesson 10, 'All that hymen hype', is particularly interesting as she put a question mark next to the words "virginity testing" which could signal a lack of

knowledge on the subject or it could indicate that she is questioning her understanding of the practice. She directs another arrow back at “virginity testing” and then links it to her own experience of learning about it at school. She stated that “At school you learn about virginity testing by looking at the hymen, done in certain cultures. This questions the validity of this practice”. One sees a clashing of traditional ‘school learning’ and the ‘edutainment’ that the VV campaign provides. The fact that virginity testing is part of a school curriculum as part of ‘certain cultures’ indicates that the practice has been naturalized as an extension of her high school teaching practice. Moreover, by questioning the practice, we see Stacy move back and forth between a traditional schooling environment and the virtual edutainment space.

Her notes end with the words “Dental dam” along with a question mark, which she uses as a ‘mental note’, because she later referred back to the note in the discussion. She stated that she was “confused about the whole dental dam thing” (turn 178). In Lesson 13, dental dams are described as “latex sheets used and placed over the whole vulva during oral sex”, along with a cartoon illustration of how the dental dam is placed over the vulva. By referring back to her ‘mental note’ in the discussion, she was able to receive more information about dental dams, as Chad was able to provide her with more information.



**Aabid**

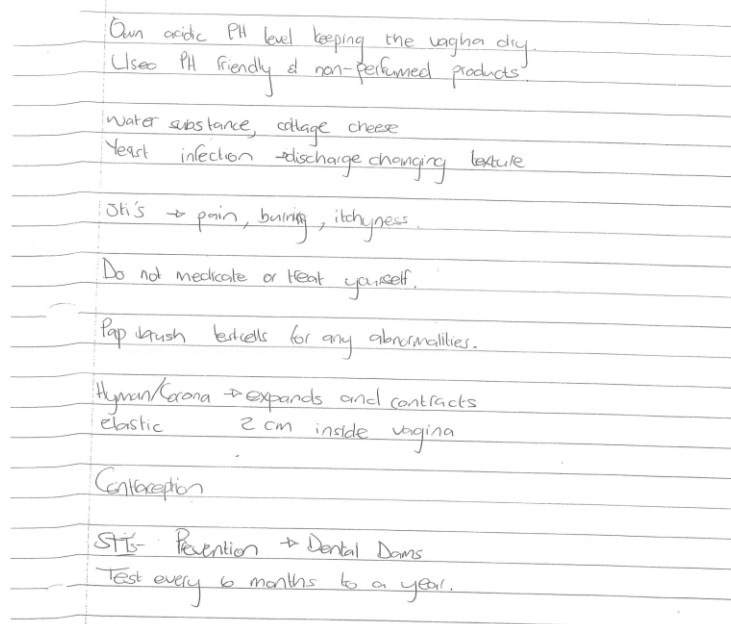


Image 8.21 – Aabid’s notes

Aabid's notes do not indicate the lessons or the weeks where he made his notes from. His notes are interesting as it appears devoid of any personalized 'voice'. The notes also read like a doctor's prescription, as it gives specific medical advice and arguably is done to remove/distance himself from the information itself. His notes are focused on instructions (e.g. "Use PH friendly & non-perfumed products", "Do not medicate or treat yourself", "Test every 6 months to a year") (Image 8.21). These instructions are taken directly/verbatim from the videos, not deviating from what he has heard, therefore it is unclear how he engaged with the information.

As a self-described Muslim male, his background might have impacted the manner in which he participated both verbally (he spoke the least in the focus group discussion) and textually. It is well-known that in conservative Muslims, many of the topics discussed by VV would be considered as social 'taboo' (e.g. sexual relationships outside of marriage, explicit talk of women's bodies, sex toys). The researcher argues that, by using direct passages from the VV videos, Aabid is able to distance himself from the content while still participating fully in the focus group session. The handwritten notes therefore reveal that the participants experienced the course material in different ways, which might be due to differing intersections between gender, religion, and sexuality.

Rhetorical questions, writing in margins, ellipses and sterile language usage appear to have been complementary functions to the group discussion. The notes were able to capture how the participants questioned, wondered, and at times, also distanced themselves (as seen in the written notes) from the sex education they were receiving. The notes were therefore an intriguing space which allowed individuals to voice their unique engagement with the information.

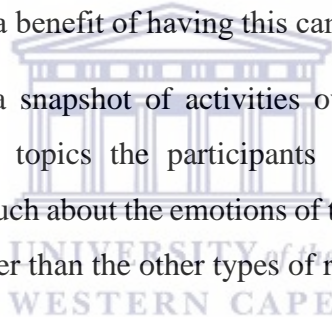
## 8.5 Summary

This chapter looked at the responses of people of the Vagina Varsity course, both online and offline. The chapter was divided into four sections. The first section looked at the statistics of the Vagina Varsity YouTube videos in terms of views, likes and dislikes, as well as YouTube comments. The second section was an analysis of the YouTube comments using Madden *et al.*'s (2013) YouTube comment classification scheme. The third section was a thematic analysis of the focus group participants' responses to the Vagina Varsity course. The fourth section is an analysis of the notes the participants made while watching the videos.

In terms of the different types of responses, the focus group interview offered more insight. Not only did the discussion generate many different themes, the participants' written responses to the videos also revealed their interactions with the videos as they were playing. What the focus group participants and the subscribers have in common is that members from each group lamented the fact that the video on STIs was too short. This reveals to the researcher that, while they enjoyed the humour and entertainment that these videos offered, both groups showed a real interest in learning more about pressing issues.

The subscribers opened up more than the focus group participants. Some of the subscribers shared their personal experiences in the YouTube comment sections. This could be because of the fact that VV created a space within the virtual semioscape where the subscribers could feel safe to share personal information. In addition, the subscribers could 'hide' behind their phone/laptop screens, while the focus group participants were being recorded and were discussing these matters in a group, which might make sharing more difficult. The YouTube comments sections also did not contain any spam, which shows that the subscribers were focused on learning. This is also a benefit of having this campaign in a 'private' space.

The quantitative data provided a snapshot of activities over a pre-set period of time. The number of views reveal which topics the participants are more/less interested in. The quantitative data did not reveal much about the emotions of the participants apart from the likes and dislikes, which is much vaguer than the other types of responses.



## CHAPTER 9 - CONCLUSION

### 9.0 Introduction

This study looked at the various semiotic resources and modes used within the Vagina Varsity course to speak about and normalize the taboo nature of the topics addressed in the campaign. This chapter will revisit the objectives that were initially set out in the study. Thereafter, the researcher will outline the limitations of this study, provide suggestions for further research, as well as provide a final conclusion.

### 9.1 Objectives revisited

#### 9.1.1 To evaluate the semiotic material used in the production of the Vagina Varsity curriculum/syllabus.

The Vagina Varsity campaign draws on multiple different modes in their course. In terms of embodied modes, the presenters use particular gestures, different stylizations of voice, as well as facial expressions which are used to teach the viewer different terms and concepts. They also use particular attire to perform certain roles. In terms of visual modes, each video and email contain cartoon images (both black and white and colour), writing, and colours. In terms of audio, the videos incorporate a strategic use of sounds and music.

The affordances of YouTube allow for a space where all these modes can work together to create a new way for teaching women about their vaginas.

#### 9.1.2 Explore the linguistic and visual strategies the campaign uses to normalize images of the female body.

In terms of linguistic strategies, the presenters repeat the word “vagina”, they use the correct anatomical words, and they also encourage the viewers to do the same. They also address certain insecurities that many women have by reassuring them through the use of absolute words e.g. discharge is absolutely normal and healthy and it happens to all of us, that all vaginas are unique, and that all vaginas are amazing.

In terms of visual strategies, they have opted to use cartoon images instead of real pictures as in biology textbooks. For example, they use colourful cartoon images of the female and male genitals, as well as for depicting bacteria, giving birth, and so forth. Cartoon drawings are used since they are arguably easier to consume than real pictures. Humour is also used as a strategy to normalize the taboo nature of this topic. Humour is achieved not only through words, but also through pictures and certain sounds which appear at strategic times. For example, when Nwabisa describes the different ways the vulva might look (i.e. tucked in, poked out), different images of vulvas appear, in different colours (e.g. pink, yellow, blue) while an upbeat tune is playing in the background. The presenters also create humour by making jokes and through their actions and facial expressions.

Vagina Varsity not only normalizes images of the female body (and the male body to a certain extent), they also remove the stigma and taboos surrounding vaginas.

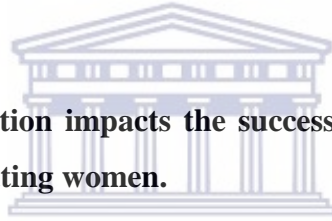
### **9.1.3 Explore the remediation of socio-cultural and political discourses as semiotic material in the normalization of socially taboo topics.**

The discourses Vagina Varsity drew on to normalize socially taboo topics include women empowerment, as well as those on myths and stereotypes (i.e. a woman's virginity can be tested by looking at the hymen). These discourses were recontextualized as curriculum material and in the process created new meaning potentials. Debunking the myth on the hymen, for example, is especially important in the South African context, where this practice is taking place with many people believing this it is an accurate method for testing whether a woman is a virgin. The Vagina Varsity course empowers women by teaching them about their bodies and also by showing them that they do not have to be afraid to use the correct anatomical terms.

The Vagina Varsity producers' use of anachronistic pop-up figures instead of present-day people is intriguing. The decision to opt for cartoon drawings of people from a past era not only signifies an old way of thinking and doing which Vagina Varsity is moving away from, but they also distance themselves culturally from this old way of thinking. The researcher argues that displacing a topic from the viewers' own culture makes the content easier to watch. For instance, watching an old man from a past era spew sexist remarks might be humorous, but having a man say the same things, may not be as funny.

#### **9.1.4 To uncover the dialogicality between Vagina Varsity as an advertising campaign and as a sex education programme.**

The researcher looked at two types of consumers of the Vagina Varsity campaign. The first type was those who participated online and responded via YouTube comments, and the second type was the focus group set up by the researcher. The viewers on YouTube, as well as the focus group participants found the course informative, stating that they had learned things that they had not learned at school. In the YouTube comments section, women were able to share their stories and, amongst other things, encouraged each other to go to the gynaecologist. The online participants were also able to engage with Libresse South Africa, representatives of the brand. Libresse South Africa responded to statements and questions the viewers had left in the comment sections of the videos. The focus group generated discussions about, among other things, the difference between Vagina Varsity and school education, the role of parental figures in teaching young girls about sex and sex-related issues, how Vagina Varsity breaks stereotypes, and also how they advocate for women empowerment.



#### **9.1.5 To establish how localization impacts the success of this campaign in marketing sanitary towels as well as educating women.**

Although Libresse is an international brand, this campaign is aimed at the South African market. The South African branch wanted not only to increase their sales, but also to empower South African women by providing them a platform where they could learn about their bodies. The campaign used various strategies to localize their content. For example, the campaign focused specifically on issues that South African women can relate to, such as virginity testing. The presenters also used exaggerated South African accents at certain times (for added humour). Instead of using presenters from a different country they used young, black South African presenters who already have a strong following on YouTube. These presenters could therefore relate better to the target audience. The content was therefore specifically tailored for a South African audience.

### **9.1.6 To examine the pedagogical implications of the reformulation/modernization of sex education and understanding of female bodies online.**

As a result of the growth in technology over the past few decades, technological affordances allow for a new educational platform. Classroom settings are no longer the only places people go to learn and seek information. For instance, YouTube is not only utilized for entertainment, but also for educational purposes. In the case of Vagina Varsity, they have opted to use the platform for edutainment, a combination of both entertainment and education. Vagina Varsity strategically used YouTube's functions to create a private setting for people to learn more about the female body. The lessons are sent via email, which can be accessed on your phone. This platform is therefore useful for teaching about issues that are deemed "taboo", because the lessons can be watched at home, or in private. The use of immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) created the sense of being in an actual classroom.

### **9.1.7 Establish what the employment of a pedagogical approach within a marketing campaign reveals about marketing.**

Companies are using innovative methods to sell their products by using technological advancements to their advantage. Advertisements on television, magazines and billboards (unidirectional advertising), can now, with the help of technology, be replaced with or complemented by online campaigns. In the case of Vagina Varsity, marketing is not only about selling a product, it is also about teaching women essential things about their bodies. For 28 days, the Libresse brand became more than just a sanitary towel brand; they became educators. Consumers of this campaign could interact with the brand by sending emails to ask personal questions, or they could comment on YouTube and receive responses by Libresse South Africa. This approach to marketing was a "win-win" situation: the brand increased their sales (they moved from being the number five sanitary brand to fourth place in a matter of months)<sup>48</sup>, and women could increase their knowledge of their bodies.

This thesis used the notion of affinity spaces (Gee, 2018). In order to understand how young people of today are learning online, one needs to understand how affinity spaces function. Teaching and learning, according to Gee (2018), are not confined to a particular person or site, but are distributed across many people, locations, and practices. The goal of a particular affinity

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.bizcommunity.africa/Article/410/423/173855.html> (Accessed 21 March 2018)



space is to develop skills that would allow the people in the group to solve a particular problem or set of problems (Gee, 2018). Within these online spaces, people help one another learn, produce, and act, irrespective of their age, level of expertise, place of origin, or formal credentials (Gee, 2018). In terms of the eleven features of an affinity space, as identified by Gee (2005), the researcher identified six of these features within the Vagina Varsity course, namely 1) that common endeavour, where neither race, class, gender or disability is primary; 2) newbies, masters and everyone else share a common space; 3) internal grammar is transformed by external grammar; 4) Vagina Varsity encourages individual and distributed knowledge; 5) encourages dispersed knowledge; and 6) there are many different forms and routes to participation.

At Vagina Varsity, the common endeavour of those who signed up was to learn more about the female body. There were no restrictions as to who could sign up to take part in the course. Although it was arguably mostly geared towards younger, South African women, anybody could sign up. It also did not matter what level of knowledge you have regarding the female body. Everybody was accommodated within the space. Those who had signed up to the course could initially also influence how the course played out. For example, in each of the emails that were sent out, viewers/participants were encouraged to ask any questions. These questions were then used in the video of Lesson 8, 'Be careful of the camel', where the presenters answered some of the questions that the viewers submitted via email. Additionally, a few days after the final quiz was posted (and the course was finished), Vagina Varsity sent out an email titled "Questions and Answers". They posted the most commonly asked questions, and one of the experts (Avri Spilka) provided the answers. Vagina Varsity also encouraged and allowed people to gain individual knowledge (through their teaching). They also enabled people to contribute to distributed knowledge. For example, in the comment section of the video on Lesson 4, which dealt with the menstrual cycle, someone commented on one of their YouTube videos that they wished the content was more trans-inclusive, to which Libresse South Africa stated that they would like the individual to provide them with tips on how to do so. That person's skills could therefore possibly be used in future posts (in a later email, they do speak about transgendered individuals. It could have possibly been because of that person's comment). Vagina Varsity also encouraged dispersed knowledge, which is knowledge obtained from other sites. Another example occurs in the comment section of Lesson 4, where someone stated that they want a tutorial on how to use a tampon, to which Libresse South Africa stated that they do not produce tampons, therefore they did not provide such a tutorial.

Nevertheless, Libresse South Africa provided a link to another Libresse website from a different country, which has a tutorial on how to use tampons. Lastly, viewers/participants participated by sending emails to the Vagina Varsity email address. They could also comment on the videos, and interact with others who were taking part in the course. Vagina Varsity therefore did not set strict boundaries about where people should go to gain new knowledge, which is a feature of an affinity space (Gee, 2015). This resonates with what multimodal theory calls intersemiotic chains, as these are spaces where meaning is made.

This marketing campaign was therefore able to use the affordances of the online space to create an affinity space where learning could take place. This interactive space contributed to the overall success of the campaign.

## **9.2 Limitations and suggestions for further research**

As a result of the time constraints, the researcher could not conduct more focus group interviews. For future research, it would be suggested that more focus group interviews be conducted, with all-women groups as well as all-men groups. In this way, the reactions by the women can be compared to the men's reactions. The researcher could have also had the participants take part in the 28-day course on their own, as it is intended, and have them report regularly in order to track their progress as they completed the course. However, the participants were university students, and were therefore busy with their own studies. They were, however, willing to take part in a single 2-hour focus group session as opposed to providing feedback about the course content every week. It would also be useful to conduct focus group interviews with teenage girls as they are the target market of the Vagina Varsity campaign. Interviews with the creators of this course would also be insightful, as this would shed light on the intended meanings of the various semiotics used within the course. The researcher would also like to recommend to virtual linguistic ethnographers that they go down every possible pathway while conducting their research in the virtual semioscape, as pathways change or disappear in a rapid pace online.

## **9.3 Contribution of the study**

In terms of theory, this study has brought in notions such as recontextualization, semiotic remediation, immediacy and hypermediacy as part of the toolkit of multimodal analysis. This

study is also a contribution to the field of linguistic landscapes studies, particularly the relatively new sub-field of virtual linguistic landscapes. This study introduces a new term, virtual semioscapes, which is offered as an alternative for the term virtual linguistic landscapes, as it encapsulates all semiotics as opposed to focusing on the linguistic element of the virtual landscape. This thesis has also managed to show the intersection between the virtual and the real. Even though the viewer watched the lessons on a screen, they were still able to feel that they were immersed within a classroom. This intersection demonstrates the changing ways of teaching, not only in formal Western education, but also in African tradition. Vagina Varsity shows a merger between these forms of teaching in the virtual space. The fact that the presenters are black South African women, talking about sex in a very open way, shows a changing image of liberated African women who respect culture but also realize that it needs to evolve.

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

The Vagina Varsity campaign offers South Africans new ways to look at the woman's body, and it lessens the taboo surrounding the vagina and vagina-related issues using various strategies (e.g. semiotics, discourses, creating a private educational platform).

The success of the Vagina Varsity campaign can be measured by the awards that they have won, as well as the increase in sales of their product. However, this study measured their success by the responses from participants of the course; those that signed up and completed the course online by watching the videos on YouTube, reading the email content, doing the quizzes and posted comments (optional), as well as those who participated in the focus group.

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## APPENDIX A – VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

### Lesson 2



#### [Libresse South Africa](#)

Uploaded on Oct 20, 2016

This Vagina Varsity lesson is all about the outside anatomy of the vulva, AKA the vagina. We're just gonna go ahead and call it vulvanatomy 101 – from top to taint. This Vagina Varsity lesson is all about the outside anatomy of the vulva, AKA the vagina. We're just gonna go ahead and call it vulvanatomy 101 – from top to taint. You'll learn the proper names for everything down there so you never have to say 'down there' again. Vagina Varsity, founded by Libresse, is a fun educational series where you will learn everything you need to know about your vagina. From vulvas to vajazzling, periods to panties. Because being a vagina-haver, doesn't make you a vagina expert. You won't be seeing any actual pictures or videos of vaginas, vulvas or porn or nudity, just illustrations and animations. We're here to learn, people! If you found this video valuable, please give it a like and share it with your friends. Visit <http://www.libresse.co.za/> or follow us on social media to find out how you can continue being the strong and powerful woman you are every day.

### Lesson 6



#### [Libresse South Africa](#)

Uploaded on Oct 23, 2016

Discharge is a normal part of being a vagina-haver. It helps the vagina clean and regulate itself, and can tell you a lot about what's happening in your vagina. Discharge is not a dirty word and vaginas aren't supposed to be as dry as the dessert. In fact, discharge helps the vagina clean and regulate itself. Knowing your discharge will also help you identify when it changes, which could be a sign that's something wrong. Today we're going to bust some myths about these vaginal secretions, released by glands in the cervix. Vagina Varsity, founded by Libresse, is a fun educational series where you will learn everything you need to know about your vagina. From vulvas to vajazzling, periods to panties. Because being a vagina-haver, doesn't make you a vagina expert. You won't be seeing any actual pictures or videos of vaginas, vulvas or porn or nudity, just illustrations and animations. We're here to learn, people! If you found this video valuable, please give it a like and share it with your friends. Visit <http://www.libresse.co.za/> or follow us on social media to find out how you can continue being the strong and powerful woman you are every day.



## Lesson 9



### [Libresse South Africa](#)

Uploaded on Nov 3, 2016

Going to the gynaecologist has got a bad rap, but it's so important! If you've never been before you will learn what to expect from this visit, and if you've been going for years and it's not a biggie anymore it's worth it just to see Thembe in her golden gown. Isn't she lovely? \*Cue Lionel Richie\* Today, Thembe is preparing for her first visit to the gynae, and she's asked Nwabisa to talk her through it. This episode will also help you prepare and find out what you can do to make your first time easier. Vagina Varsity, founded by Libresse, is a fun educational series where you will learn everything you need to know about your vagina. From vulvas to vajazzling, periods to panties. Because being a vagina-haver, doesn't make you a vagina expert. You won't be seeing any actual pictures or videos of vaginas, vulvas or porn or nudity, just illustrations and animations. We're here to learn, people! If you found this video valuable, please give it a like and share it with your friends.

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## Lesson 10



### [Libresse South Africa](#)

Uploaded on Nov 3, 2016

There are many myths around the hymen, and in this episode we bust the most common misconceptions. Because really, for all the hype around it, the hymen is just another body part, and one that has been misunderstood for far too long. There is also still a lot of misinformation about the hymen on the internet, so if you want to know more make sure you get your information from a reputable source. Vagina Varsity, founded by Libresse, is a fun educational series where you will learn everything you need to know about your vagina. From vulvas to vajazzling, periods to panties. Because being a vagina-haver, doesn't make you a vagina expert. You won't be seeing any actual pictures or videos of vaginas, vulvas or porn or nudity, just illustrations and animations. We're here to learn, people! If you found this video valuable, please give it a like and share it with your friends.

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## APPENDIX B – VAGINA VARSITY EMAILS



### **EPISODE 1: SAY HEY TO YOUR VA-JAY**

**DURATION: 01:29**

Welcome to Vagina Varsity! Class is in session and our fearless vagina-havers, Thembe and Nwabisa will be telling you why it's so important to know and love your vagina.





*Believe it or not, the first movie to use the word 'vagina' on film was Disney's "The Story of Menstruation", released in 1946.*

## **YOU KEEP SAYING VULVA AND VAGINA. WHAT IS WHAT?**

What most people call the vagina is actually the vulva. That's why we're just sticking with vagina. The vulva refers to the outside, visible parts of your genitalia.

The vagina, on the other hand, is the muscular passageway inside. We'll be learning about both in detail.

**VAGINAS HAVE BEEN CALLED LOTS OF FUNNY NAMES THROUGHOUT THE AGES. HERE ARE SOME TECHNICALLY CORRECT NAMES, IN A COUPLE OF LOCAL LANGUAGES.**

Xhosa = usisi

Zulu = isibumbhu

Sotho = ka hara botshehadi

Afrikaans = Die vagina



## **HOW TO SAY VAGINA IN SIGN-LANGUAGE**



## **QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions send them to our expert at [questions@vaginavarsity.com](mailto:questions@vaginavarsity.com). Once the course is over you'll receive a special edition Q & A class. Only questions related to the syllabus will be considered and questions selected will be at the discretion of the moderators and expert\*

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every day



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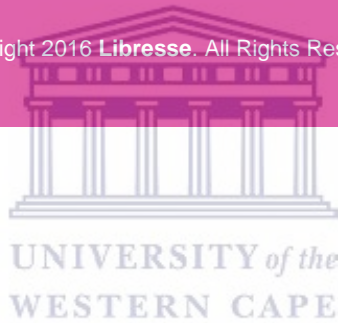
\*Our expert is not in a position to answer every single question submitted. Please note that by submitting your question to Vagina Varsity, you are giving your permission for her to use your question as the basis of our communication, published online and sent via email to our database.

All questions will be kept anonymous and key details, facts and figures may change, at our discretion, to protect your identity. Our expert's answer is based on the information you give her and her advice is not a substitute for medical, therapeutic or legal advice. It is recommended that you seek personal advice from an appropriate practitioner who are availed of all the relevant facts and considerations.



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# VAGINA VARSITY

FOUNDED BY *Libresse*

**LEARN TO LOVE YOUR VAGINA EVERY DAY.**

Because being a vagina-haver doesn't make you a vagina expert.

## *We answer your questions!*

You asked and we answered! Thanks for all the questions sent to our Vagina Varsity expert, Avri Spilka, without whose incredible amount of knowledge these lessons would not have been possible. Although we'd love to, we couldn't answer every question individually but hope that you will find some answers to your burning questions in this special edition Q & A email. We collected the most commonly asked questions and tried to make it a bit more general so if you don't see your specific question it might just be because we've rephrased it to be more inclusive.

If you enjoy (and learnt) from Vagina Varsity, please keep talking and sharing, we want everyone to learn to love their vaginas every day.

### **1. CAN THE GYNAECOLOGIST TELL IF OR WHEN YOU'VE LAST HAD SEX? I'M STILL REALLY SCARED TO GO, I FEEL LIKE THEY'LL JUDGE ME**

If you go to the gynae within 48 hours of having penetrative sex (including masturbation with a finger or toy), your vaginal tissues may be reddish or a bit swollen. Also, if you've had penetrative sex with a male partner who ejaculated without a condom, the ejaculate will be visible on the inside of the vagina. If you're concerned

about your gynae knowing you're sexually active, wait a few days before going for an appointment. But remember, ideally, you should feel comfortable telling your gynae about your sexual history, including that you're sexually active, so that they can advise you with information that is helpful to you. If you're not comfortable being honest about your sexual and medical history with your gynae, maybe look around for one you can trust.

## ***2. I'M JUST CURIOUS, WHAT ABOUT MEN WHO BECOME WOMEN? DO THEY HAVE REAL VAGINAS?***

We call 'men who become women' a person who was 'assigned male at birth' (AMAB) or a transgender woman. Some transgender women undergo a vaginoplasty during which a surgeon turns the person's existing genital tissue into a vaginal passage, clitoris and labia. This vulva is capable of experiencing sexual pleasure as well as penetration. It's important to keep in mind that not all transwomen want a vaginoplasty - each transwoman's journey is different and unique. Not having a vagina doesn't make a transwoman any less of a woman. Also, while it's okay to ask this type of question at Vagina Varsity (we welcome it), it's rude to ask a transwoman what's going on in her pants, just like it would be rude to ask any woman that question.

## ***3. I'VE HEARD ABOUT THE MORNING AFTER PILL A LOT. WHY DIDN'T YOU TALK ABOUT IT IN THE CONTRACEPTION EPISODE? HOW DOES IT WORK? IS IT THE SAME AS AN ABORTION?***

There are many forms of contraception out there - in the episode on contraception we wanted to inform viewers that there are options and to consult your health care provider for more details. The difference between the pill and the morning after pill is the amount of hormones in the pill, but they essentially work in the same way – it prevents ovulation so there's no egg to be fertilized by the sperm, and it also makes vaginal mucous thicker which makes it more difficult for the sperm to get through it. The morning after pill, like other forms of contraception, stops pregnancy from occurring in the first place. It's important to take the morning-after-pill between 24 hours and 120 hours after you've had unprotected sex or a condom break. It usually takes about this time for a sperm to fertilize an egg, so there's still a chance to stop a pregnancy from happening. An abortion is an option once pregnancy has already

happened and involves removing the fertilized egg or embryo from the uterus through the use of medication or surgical procedure. The morning after pill is available from pharmacies, however, if you're considering an abortion, please see a qualified medical professional who can provide a safe procedure.

#### **4. ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD ORAL OR ANAL SEX STILL VIRGINS? WHAT ABOUT LESBIAN OR GAY PEOPLE? AND RAPE SURVIVORS?**

This is quite a complicated question, so I'm going to break it down:

What is virginity? Virginity is more a social, cultural and emotional idea than something physical. It's more accurate to talk about sexual debut – the first time you have sex – than about virginity which suggests there's a change to the body before and after your sexual debut.

But what 'counts' as sex? Sex is not just a penis penetrating a vagina, it can include oral sex, digital (fingers) sex, and anal sex. It can involve stimulation with fingers, lips, tongues, toys, or a variety of body parts. What can 'count' as sex is only limited by your imagination, physical health and personal comfort.

What about gay and lesbian people? Just like heterosexual people, gay and lesbian people have sex in many different ways. Our first sexual experience, no matter our sexual orientation, could include any of the sexual behaviours that 'count as sex'. Interestingly, there are more heterosexual people that have anal sex than gay people, and not all gay people have anal sex.

What about rape survivors? This painful experience becomes part of a rape survivor's sexual story and how they make sense of a non-consensual sexual debut will be up to them. Remember to keep in mind that virginity is a social idea and sexual debut is not something that permanently changes the body (unless it results in pregnancy, major injury or an STI). Whatever happens, a non-consensual sexual debut does not devalue the rape survivor's body. Many survivors may emotionally experience a loss of value, shame and guilt. If you're a survivor and want support to process these complex emotions, please remember rape is never your fault and there are many hotlines and centers which can provide counselling.

**5. WHEN I HAVE SEX WITH MY BOYFRIEND NOTHING HAPPENS. LIKE, I DON'T COME (HAVE AN ORGASM). I TRY SO HARD AND REALLY CONCENTRATE WHICH DOESN'T SEEM LIKE IT'S WORKING... I KNOW THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME BECAUSE WHEN I MASTURBATE AND USE A VIBRATOR IT WORKS. IS THAT MAKING ME "NOT AS SENSITIVE"?**

I don't think the vibrator is making you less sensitive, but our bodies can become used to one way of orgasming and then we become less responsive to other kinds of stimulation. My advice is to first relax – it's much harder to reach orgasm when you're stressed out about it. Second, for a few weeks, don't make orgasm the goal of sex with your boyfriend, just focus on enjoying the pleasurable sensations of being touched and kissed. Make pleasure and intimacy the goal and a sign of success rather than feeling negative because an orgasm didn't happen. Third, experiment with different positions, being touched in different ways (harder, softer, slower, faster), and on different parts of your body. Fourth, stop masturbating for a few weeks and give your body a chance to become responsive to different forms of stimulation with your boyfriend. After a few weeks, see if you're more able to reach orgasm with your boyfriend. If yes, you can add masturbation back into the mix. If not, consider making an appointment with a sex therapist who can explore the issue with you in more depth.

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**6. CAN KEGEL EXERCISES REALLY MAKE YOUR VAGINA TIGHTER? IS IT BETTER FOR GUYS WHEN YOUR VAGINA IS TIGHT?**

Kegel exercises strengthen your pelvic floor muscles not the vagina muscle. The vagina is not meant to be tighter, it is a muscle that is supposed to relax during arousal to make penetration more comfortable, otherwise penetration would hurt or be impossible. When aroused, the vagina also grips any object that may penetrate it. After penetration, the vagina returns to its original size. It's a myth that vaginas become loose the more often you have sex or the more sexual partners you have.

**7. I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT GETTING PREGNANT, COS I'M LESBIAN, BUT I STILL WANT TO BE SAFE – HOW**

## ***WILL I TELL MY PARTNER THAT I WANT TO USE PROTECTION?***

Yay for wanting to look after your sexual health! Remember, it's both of your responsibility to make healthy decisions for your sexual health, so don't think of this conversation as a burden or offensive. It's just like talking about the exercise you like doing for physical fitness or what kinds of foods you eat to keep healthy. Think about it as a discussion about your own boundaries, what your partner's are, and what you practically need to make sex comfortable and safe for both of you. When you're both feeling relaxed, ask her what her thoughts are on safer sex and her strategies for protecting herself from STIs. When you've heard her out, tell her what your strategies are and come to an agreement about what you want to use (such as dental dams, testing, and gloves). Perhaps watch the Vagina Varsity episode on STIs with your partner which can get the conversation started. It's okay to giggle and laugh, humour can help reduce the awkward!

(Let me bust a myth quick – sometimes lesbians do have sex with men, just like sometimes straight women have sexual experiences with other women. This is because sexual orientation and sexual behavior aren't always in line.)

## ***8. I'VE BEEN ON THE PILL FOR YEARS (MORE FOR MY SKIN AND HEAVY PERIODS) SO I'M REALLY GOOD AT TAKING THEM AND I DON'T THINK I HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT FALLING PREGNANT BUT I DO WORRY ABOUT STDS, HOW CAN I CONVINCING MY (VERY NEW!) BOYFRIEND TO WEAR A CONDOM ONCE WE START HAVING SEX?***

Yay for wanting to look after your sexual health! Remember, it's both of your responsibility to use condoms during sex, so don't think of it as convincing your boyfriend to use condoms. Rather think about it as a discussion about your own boundaries, what his are, and what you practically need to make sex comfortable and safe for both of you. When you're both feeling relaxed, ask him what his thoughts are on safer sex and his strategies for protecting himself from STIs. When you've heard him out, tell him what your strategies are and come to an agreement about how to get condoms. Perhaps watch the Vagina Varsity episode on STIs with your partner which can get the conversation started. It's okay to giggle and laugh, humour can help reduce the awkward!

**9. I TESTED POSITIVE FOR AN STI, I HAVE NO SYMPTOMS SO NO ONE CAN TELL - DO I REALLY HAVE TO TELL FUTURE PARTNERS, EVEN IF WE ALWAYS PRACTICE SAFE SEX?**

Even if you're taking precautions to protect your partner, there's always a chance something may happen. That's why we use the phrase safer sex rather than safe sex. The real issue here is one of informed consent – even if you practice safer sex, the other person has a right to have all the facts at their disposal so they can make decisions for themselves. It can be scary to tell a partner that you've tested positive for an STI because you don't know whether they're going to reject you or be cool with it. If you're feeling any shame or embarrassment, please consider chatting to a mental health professional or trusted friend who can help you process any negative feelings and help you feel more comfortable and confident disclosing your STI status to a partner.

**10. I HAD UNPROTECTED SEX BUT THE GUY DIDN'T HAVE ANY SORES ON HIS PENIS AND HE DIDN'T COME INSIDE ME. COULD I STILL GET AN STD FROM HIM? HE SAID HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY STDs, BUT I'M OBVIOUSLY NERVOUS AND HE COULD'VE BEEN LYING. IF YOU HAVE UNPROTECTED SEX, HOW LONG SHOULD YOU WAIT TO HAVE A TEST DONE TO GET THE CORRECT RESULTS? IS FOUR WEEKS LONG ENOUGH? IS ONE WEEK TOO SHORT?**

The short answer is yes – there are some STIs that may show no symptoms or symptoms which may not be visible to the naked eye. Chlamydia, for instance, may show no symptoms whatsoever. STIs can be detected between 1 week and 3 months, depending on the STI. If you're concerned about exposure to HIV, PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) can be taken up to 72 hours after exposure. If you develop any symptoms such as fevers, itching, burning or sores, book an appointment with the doc immediately. If you don't develop any symptoms, book an STI screening 3 months following exposure. Whatever the outcome, remember STIs are treatable and manageable.

**11. MY QUESTIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS: 1). IS IT ALRIGHT TO HAVE SEX DURING ONE'S PERIOD? I MEAN, THE MALE PARTNER ACTUALLY EJACULATING INSIDE ME? I'VE BEEN DOING THIS FOR A WHILE NOW AND NOTHING HAS HAPPENED (PREGNANCY). MY BOYFRIEND STILL EJACULATES A DAY OR TWO AFTER I'VE STOPPED BLEEDING. I'M STILL STRUGGLING TO UNDERSTAND MY PERIOD (AND THE WHOLE MENSTRUATION CYCLE) EVEN TILL NOW AND IT'S REALLY FRUSTRATING ME. HELP ME! MY BOYFRIEND SEEMS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT MY BODY THAN WHAT I DO. I FEEL THAT I'LL STOP WORRYING ABOUT FALLING PREGNANT AND HOW AND WHEN I GO ON MY PERIOD ONCE I ACTUALLY KNOW WHAT IS UP WITH MY CYCLE)**

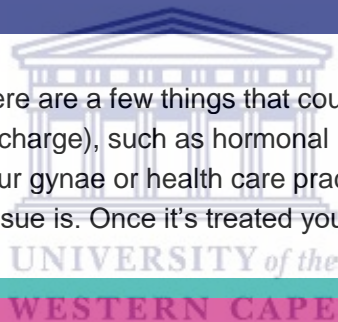
Thanks for your questions. Sperm can live inside the body for up to five days so there's still a risk of falling pregnant if your male partner ejaculates inside you when you're on your period or just after your period ends. Even if you're very familiar with your period, unprotected sex carries a risk of pregnancy. If you want to put your mind at ease so you know you won't fall pregnancy, consider going on some form of contraception such as the Pill, injection or IUD. It's very empowering to become the expert of your own body – because no one can know your body better than you! Consider downloading an app that can help you track your period so you're more familiar with your own cycle, watch the Vagina Varsity episode about periods, and ask as many questions as possible when you see your medical professional. Knowledge is power!

**12. WHAT ARE THE BEST CONTRACEPTIVE INJECTIONS IN THE MARKET THAT YOU GUYS COULD RECOMMEND? WHEN SHOULD I GET IT DONE? BEFORE OR AFTER THE PERIOD? OBVIOUSLY, I WANT TO BE SAFE, WE'VE TRIED THE CONDOM-LIFE AND IT'S REALLY UNPLEASANT. PLUS, I WOULD LIKE TO GAIN WEIGHT, BOOTY, BOOBS AND CURVES MAN, LOL. YOU KNOW, JUST TO LOOK MORE 'WOMANLY". WOULD THE HORMONES IN THE CONTRACEPTIVES ASSIST IN THAT?**

Depo-Provera and Nuristerate are the two available contraceptive injections. Chat to your health care provider about which one would work best for you. Manage your expectations, a contraceptive is designed to prevent pregnancy from occurring rather than making you put on weight (although this may be a side-effect in some women). Since it's not specifically designed to give you larger breasts, bum and curves, it may not do so. Weight is more about health than appearance – if your body is healthy at its current weight, gaining weight for the sake of appearance may put your health at risk. If you're set on gaining weight, do so under the supervision of a dietician.

**13. I'M 21 YEARS. I'VE BEEN ON MY PERIOD ONCE THIS YEAR WHICH WAS IN JULY AND I'M A VIRGIN. I WEAR A PANTYLINER BECAUSE MY DISCHARGE IS BROWN AND SOMETIMES IT HAS A BIT OF BLOOD. SO I'M SCARED OF GOING TO THE LOCAL DOCTORS OR CLINICS AROUND WHERE I STAY. SHOULD I BE WORRIED? IS THIS NORMAL? PLEASE HELP.**

Thanks for your question. There are a few things that could stop your period or just cause spotting (the brown discharge), such as hormonal imbalances, diet and stress. Make an appointment with your gynae or health care practitioner who will be able to identify what the underlying issue is. Once it's treated your period should return.



**14. HELLO TEAM VAGINA VARSITY. I HAVE AN IMPLANON INSERTED IN MY ARM AND SOMETIMES MY DISCHARGE IS BLOODY AND SOMETIMES A BIT BROWN, IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME?**

Spotting (which can include brown discharge) on hormonal contraceptives is a common side effect. If you're concerned, or develop other symptoms such as pain, book an appointment with your health care provider to see if there is something else causing the spotting.

**15. GOOD DAY. I AM 16-YEAR-OLD AND I NEVER HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE. THE AREA AROUND MY VAGINA IS**



***SOMETIMES WHITE AND THE SKIN LIKES TO PEEL OFF. I AM SCARED. I THINK THAT I MIGHT HAVE A STI BUT I FIND IT WEIRD BECAUSE I AM A VIRGIN. PLEASE HELP ME. WHAT SHOULD I DO?***

Thanks for your question! We suggest asking your parents to book you in for a gynae appointment (you can do this yourself too) – it sounds like something may be up with the skin around your vagina. Vaginas, just like other parts of the body, can sometimes have dermatological (skin) issues such as excimer or acne. This is not an STI, so don't stress, but get it treated so it doesn't get worse.

***16.HI, BEFORE MY PERIODS, I SOMETIMES HAVE A PIMPLE RIGHT ON MY MONS VENUS THAT FEELS HUGE AND PAINS WHEN FIDDLING WITH IT. WHAT MAKES IT COME OUT? I HAVE THOUGH NOTICED THAT IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO COME BACK ONCE I'VE SQUEEZED IT HARD ENOUGH TO POP OUT THAT GROSS YELLOWISH LIQUID. PLEASE HELP ME UNDERSTAND WHAT CAUSES THIS TO HAPPEN.***

Thanks for your question. Before, during and after your period, your body is undergoing hormonal changes which can result in pimples – and pimples can happen anywhere on the body. This may explain why you get a pimple just before your period starts. Chat to a skin expert to find a regime that helps keep your pores clear or for suggestions of something that will help dry out the pimple once it starts forming.

## ***QUESTIONS?***

If you have any questions send them to our expert at [questions@vaginavarsity.com](mailto:questions@vaginavarsity.com). Once the course is over you'll receive a special edition Q & A class. Only questions related to the syllabus will be considered and questions selected will be at the discretion of the moderators and expert\*

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\*Our expert is not in a position to answer every single question submitted. Please note that by submitting your question to Vagina Varsity, you are giving your permission for her to use your question as the basis of our communication, published online and sent via email to our database.

All questions will be kept anonymous and key details, facts and figures may change, at our discretion, to protect your identity. Our expert's answer is based on the information you give her and her advice is not a substitute for medical, therapeutic or legal advice. It is recommended that you seek personal advice from an appropriate practitioner who are availed of all the relevant facts and considerations.



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## APPENDIX C – VIDEO TRANSCRIPTIONS

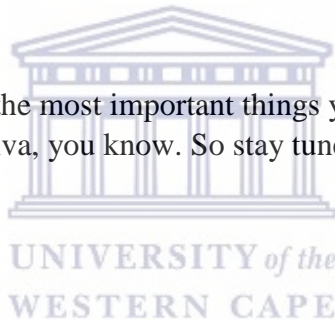
### Lesson 1 – Say hey to your va-jay

1. Nwabisa: Hi guys, my name is Nwabisa.
2. Thembe: And I'm Thembe.
3. Nwabisa: With the help of experts, we're here to host you at Vagina Varsity.
4. Thembe: Did you know that more than half of women lack the basic understanding of their female genitalia? But don't worry. That's why we're here. The next four weeks, we're going to be talking everything vagina-related.
5. Nwabisa: We can definitely be using the words Vag Minaj, Va jay-jay, Down There.
6. Thembe: Uh, no. We're going use the correct terms, because things like euphemisms: cookie, flower, enough. We need to know the correct terms so we know what we talk about.
7. Nwabisa: That's fine for you, but I can guarantee you that there are ladies out there, even men, even me, who are uncomfortable talking about this stuff.
8. Thembe: We're gonna get to a place where we can talk about our vaginas same way we talk about our hands, our feet, and do you know what's great? We're gonna get to a point where we're empowered. We get to talk health and pleasure.
9. Nwabisa: Tomorrow, we're taking a tour of my crib, so you might wanna take a mirror, get familiar with your lady parts.
10. Thembe: When she says "a tour of her crib", she means a tour of the vulva. We're gonna be talking vulva and vagina kind of interchangeably. We're at your cervix.

### Lesson 2 – My bits, my bits, my lovely lady bits

1. Thembe: So, remember in the last episode, she said that she would use a mirror to "visit her crib"? Did you do it?
2. Nwabisa: I did. I hope you guys did too. Because I mean, I saw some stuff. There's a space at the top there, which has the pubic hairs. Uhm it's called the =
3. Thembe & Nwabisa: mons venus
4. Nwabisa: I knew that.
5. Thembe: So that's a mound of skin that's above the pubic bone.
6. Nwabisa: What about the entrance gates? The – the lips?
7. Thembe: So those are separated into two parts. You have the external lips, the labia majora and then you have the internal lips which are called the labia minora.

8. Nwabisa: Your labia isn't supposed to be symmetrical. Uneven, pink, or brown, wrinkly, or smooth, tucked in, poked out. I mean, your labia is beautiful, so stop stressing. Then I know that there's like the doorknob, the B and the P, you know? The peeping Tom.
9. Thembe: Please, again. This is the internal clitoris. The internal clitoris is shaped like a wishbone. And get this, it approximately has 8000 nerve endings, which is twice as many as the head of a penis, and its sole purpose is pleasure.
10. Nwabisa: Then we move further down. Uh, the urethra opening. It's pretty much where we pee from, right?
11. Thembe: Right.
12. Nwabisa: Then below that is the vagina opening.
13. Thembe: Okay! Okay gal.
14. Nwabisa: I know this one. Uhm, the perineum. That's the skin between, or the space between the vaginal opening and you anus. I mean.
15. Thembe: Also called the taint, 'cause it ain't your anus and it ain't your vagina.
16. Nwabisa: You have got to stop.
17. Thembe: Okay. The next other thing is the fourchette. The part where your vulva ends.
18. Nwabisa: Fourchette.
19. Thembe: It's fine.
20. Nwabisa: Wow.
21. Thembe: Those are the most important things you need to know about your vagina, vulva, you know. So stay tuned for more Vagina =
22. Nwabisa: Varsity.



### Lesson 3 – Step inside my crib

1. Thembe: Okay, let's jump right into it.
2. Nwabisa: Welcome to my crib. So the vagina is the hallway to my crib. And then a few centimeters down, same size as your bellybutton, that is the G-spot. Then at the end of the hallway, there's this little sort of like keyhole-vibe that's there.
3. Thembe: Okay so the little key-vibe that she's talking about, is the cervix. Think of it like a doughnut, with a hole in the middle, you know?
4. Nwabisa: Now my favorite room in this house is the nursery. That's where the baby grows.
5. Thembe: Also called the uterus. That's where the foetus grows, and it's the size of a fist, and when the baby's growing, it expands.
6. Nwabisa: Now, I remember the expert mentioned like that thing. It's like, that thing, uhm.
7. Thembe: Those are the fallopian tubes where fertilization and conception happens, and the egg is released or produced in the ovaries. Now that

we've learned the ins and outs of the vulva, stay tuned for some more information.

#### Lesson 4 – That time of the month

1. Nwabisa: You know that time of the month when you're on your period? Now I never know when I start my period. Is it day 26, day 28, 31? Like it's always like confusing.
2. Expert: Day 1 to 8, the menstruation phase is when the uterine wall starts to shed its lining and can last 2 to 8 days.
3. Nwabisa: I've been thinking about getting a calendar, like the app vibe, uhm I probably should get an abacus. Do they still sell those?
4. Expert: From around day 8 is the proliferative phase, when the uterine wall starts to build up again.
5. Thembe: Ah babes, you didn't tell me you guys were filming!
6. Expert: From around day 14 your ovary will release an egg and this is called ovulation.
7. Thembe: I heard you guys talk about periods. I always get mine like on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Boom, there it is. It comes.
8. Expert: If your egg is fertilized it will then plant itself in your endometrium. If not, it will dissolve, and you will have your period. This is called the secretory phase.
9. Thembe: You know obviously we're not all the same. We're different and stuff. It's fine.
10. Nwabisa: Mina, I'm trying to talk to the ladies and gentle brothers out there. If you could just =
11. Thembe: Okay.
12. Nwabisa: We spoke about this yesterday. Thank you.
13. Expert: The menstrual cycle is governed by a complex system of hormones, but remember, we're all affected differently by them.
14. Nwabisa: It's very important to know your cycle. Obviously I don't know mine. Thembe just won't stop talking. Thank you guys so much for watching another lesson of Vagina Varsity. It's ALWAYS a pleasure having you here. You can... ja. Cool.
15. Thembe: Are you...? Babes. Periods can start from the age of 12 or 13. But that's not the only age. Younger, older, you don't need to stress. I'm about to show you a quick tutorial on how to use a pad. And don't be scared. I know for some, this might be something that you have not done before. Don't worry. I'm gonna help you through. So there's a long piece, it's gonna go on the longest space of your panty. There are also wings that have sticky bits. We're gonna rip those off too, and just stick those on the back of your panty, and voila, here we have a padded panty. An awesome advert that I think you guys all should go through and watch is the Blood advert. Really empowering and it's really showing that girls can do just about anything, even when you're having your period.

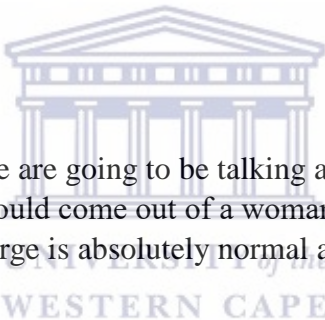
- Lovely girls coming out, showing that they're fearless, and no one like having blue blood on their pad.
16. Nwabisa: What is happening? What is happening today? Why wasn't I-? Let me see?
17. Thembe: Thanks guys. Thanks.
18. Nwabisa: Thank you.

## Lesson 5 – Let's keep it clean

1. Nwabisa: Today we're gonna be answering a couple of burning questions.
2. Thembe: Hoping that nothing is actually burning, of course.
3. Nwabisa: So I mean the expert has come on board today and is gonna do a pop quiz to test us about our vaginal hygiene knowledge.
4. Expert: All right, ladies. First up, douching and chemicals aren't good for the PH of the vagina.
5. Thembe: Uh, fact.
6. Expert: Perfect. The vagina is a self-cleansing system with its own acidic PH level and good bacteria that fight off infections. Douching and chemicals aren't good because it can destroy the natural PH and good bacteria. Myth or fact? Wash your vulva every day with warm water.
7. Nwabisa: Nwabisa.
8. Expert: Nwabisa.
9. Nwabisa: Fact.
10. Expert: Correct. Wash your vulva every day including the inner and outer lips and generally keep your vulva dry. Bad bacteria thrive in warm, moist environments. Question three. What products can you use on your vagina?
11. Thembe: Thembe!
12. Expert: Thembe.
13. Thembe: Ones that are PH friendly and uhm=
14. Nwabisa: Nwabisa!
15. Expert: Nwabisa.
16. Nwabisa: Non-perfumed products that are good for your PH levels.
17. Thembe: But like that was what I was=
18. Nwabisa: That's not what you said.
19. Thembe: But I=
20. Expert: Yes Nwabisa. Gentle products which maintain PH levels and good bacteria. Question four. Myth or fact. After going to the toilet, you must wipe from front to back.
21. Thembe: Thembe! Fact. Yes. What was...I don't. No.
22. Nwabisa: Which is it?
23. Thembe: I don't know.
24. Nwabisa: Nwabisa.
25. Expert: Nwabisa?

26. Nwabisa: It's a fact. You have to wipe from the front to back. From the front to back. That's definitely right.
27. Expert: Wipe from front to back to avoid transferring bad bacteria which can cause infections. Do you need to wash your hands before handling your vagina?
28. Nwabisa: Nwabisa!
29. Expert: Nwabisa.
30. Nwabisa: Fact. It's very important to have clean hands when handling the vagina. Right? Yes. That's right.
31. Expert: Perfect. Well done. You've passed this test, but you've got a lot more to learn before you're pawsome.
32. Nwabisa: I thought we did well. We did very well.
33. Thembe: I passed. I passed.
34. Expert: That's right.
35. Nwabisa: I think I won.
36. Thembe: I'm very sure I got it.
37. Expert: Okay, thank you. That's enough.
38. Thembe: Thank you for watching Vagina Varsity. We will see you in the next lesson.

## Lesson 6 – Honorable discharge



1. Nwabisa: So today we are going to be talking about discharge.
2. Male voice: Nothing should come out of a woman's vagina apart from a baby.
3. Thembe: No! Discharge is absolutely normal and healthy and it happens to all of us.
4. Nwabisa: Ya.
5. Thembe: And it's a way for the vagina to clean itself.
6. Nwabisa: Ya it's pretty much there to regulate itself.
7. Male voice: Women's vaginas smell like fish.
8. Thembe: Dude, whoa! You have got to just dial it back. Yes, discharge has a slight odor, but it's nothing "fishy". And all our discharge doesn't smell the same.
9. Nwabisa: It's white in color and slightly yellow and thick in texture. It's clean and clear during the time of your ovulation and a tint of brown before or after your period. It's totally healthy and normal so don't stress.
10. Male voice: Arrrggg! Stop! That's disgusting!
11. Thembe: Whoa, I have just about had it with you, old man.
12. Nwabisa: Panty liners are a great product to use to capture your discharge, and just to help you, you know, feel fresh. It's very important to look after the va jay-jay.
13. Thembe: No. Vagina. Say it with me. Va gi na.
14. Nwabisa: Va gi na. Vagina. Vagina. Vagina.

## Lesson 7 – Call a doctor!

1. Thembe: So today we're gonna be talking about mayday mayday! When you need to call the doctor. First rule: Any changes in your discharge, like smell, consistency, that MIGHT be a sign of an infection. These changes they might like include like a watery substance, little curds that might look like cottage cheese, a strong smell, and changes in colour, like yellow, pink, grey, green.
2. Nwabisa: Detecting that you have a problem might come in four different ways: Discomfort, pain, burning, or even itchiness. This might mean that you have an infection. So there are three types of infections that you could be infected with: Yeast infection. This you will see with your discharge changing in like texture. That could probably be like a cottage cheese like vibe. It's not the one. Number two could be bacterial vaginosis. This is when your vagina or your vulva smells very fishy. And then the third one is definitely STIs. This one you will detect through pain, burning, itchiness. This is very important that you know. What is happening?
3. Thembe: [laughing] I was bringing the fishy smell closer, but don't worry. Not all of these things that are mentioned might be an infection. Sometimes changes in like your diet, stress, maybe using a new soap, might result in these symptoms that we've mentioned, but don't worry. The vagina is a self-regulator. Things will go back to normal. But if you are feeling uncomfortable and maybe like "maybe this might be", definitely go to a doctor.
4. Nwabisa: But please, do not medicate or treat yourself. Especially one thing to remember, don't leave your infections untreated, because what happens is it's just gonna get worse, and that's not what you want. So to summarize, vaginas do not look, or smell, like roses, but what we are going to display here, mayday, mayday, mayday.
5. Thembe: Call a doctor!
6. Nwabisa: Remember. Liquid, liquid, liquid. Cottage cheese. This is a yeast infection happening.
7. Thembe: And then the grand master. This, this is, THIS!
8. Nwabisa: The biggest biggest problem.
9. Thembe: This!
10. Nwabisa: Fishiness, fishiness, fishiness.
11. Thembe: This is what you DON'T want.
12. Nwabisa: Just put it in.
13. Thembe: Okay. Just gotta bend it through.
14. Nwabisa: Just close it.
15. Thembe: It's a lot to take in. Whoo! This!
16. Nwabisa: Problem! Problem! Itchiness! Pain! Burning sensation! Problems!
17. Thembe: Okay. This, I think you should open it.
18. Nwabisa: By this point you should have left the house. Do everything you need to do but this is a problem.



19. Thembe: Whoo! Thank you guys for watching.

## Lesson 8 – Be careful of the camel

1. Nwabisa: So today we're gonna be talking about the camel toe.
2. Thembe: Don't worry guys. Camel toe happens to the best of us. It's nothing to be ashamed about. The camel toe is the colloquial term used when a labia majora is outlined by tight pants or underwear. Often it's worse when the material is not cotton.
3. Nwabisa: So today we're gonna be taking a couple of questions regarding the camel toe, starting with [ ] from Durban. "Hi guys, I love wearing jeggings, but my friends always make fun of me, saying I've got chronic camel toe." Babes, tip number one, find new friends. The thing is, wearing tightfitting pants tends to cause chaffing, and it doesn't allow for airflow. And now what happens with warm and moist environments, that tends to be a breeding ground for bad bacteria. So you don't want that to happen to you.
4. Thembe: We have [ ] from Cape Town, who also says: "In winter, our uniform consists of stockings. Is that bad for my vagina?" Baby, don't worry, but for optimal vaginal health, try and find stockings that will have a cotton crotch. You know why? Cotton is natural and porous.
5. Nwabisa: That basically means it allows for good airflow.
6. Thembe: Our last text is from Anonymous. She says: "My partner likes it when I wear lingerie, but sometimes over a long period of time I feel uncomfortable." Remember Anon, rule number one, do it for yourself. If you don't wanna do it, babes, it's okay. But if you're gonna, remember, cotton is our friend. Cotton allows for the vagina to breathe, which is the most important thing.
7. Nwabisa: And one other important thing to remember, ladies. Make sure to always wear a clean pair of underwear every single day. Thank you so much for watching this lesson of Vagina Varsity.

## Lesson 9 – Going to the gynae

1. Nwabisa: So today we're going to be talking about everything related to going to see a gynae. Bestie is going for the first time today, so I'm gonna walk you through just three things that you need to be aware of when preparing for the gynae. So number one, you probably want to just get to a place where you feel the most comfortable, probably taking a shower before you go, waxing your legs, under your arms, and I mean, probably going or scheduling an appointment when you're not on your period. In this instance, Thembe has opted to take a friend. You could do that too. So number two is now when you're at the gynae. They're

gonna ask you about your medical and sexual history. It's not a crisis. Remember that these are doctors that are trained and they know exactly what it is that they are talking about. They will also then ask you to get naked, but you're gonna get a gown, so you'll feel very comfortable in that space, and again, remember, talk to your doctor if you're feeling uncomfortable. Okay? Talk to the doctor.

2. Thembe: Mmm. Yes.
3. Nwabisa: Yes. Great. Number three is the actual procedure that you will be going through. So the doctor is going to be using a tool called the speculum. They're going to lubricate that and that's what the doctor will basically use to open up your vagina. It's gonna be okay.
4. Thembe: Mmm mm.
5. Nwabisa: Now what they're gonna be doing here is to test to see if there are any abnormalities that are in there. The Pap smear. So they're gonna use a Pap brush which they will use to sort of scrape inside the vagina. They will take those cells to a lab and again test for any kind of abnormalities. It's really for your health. For your benefit. That's why you are going to see the gynae.
6. Thembe: I'm still just a little scared.
7. Nwabisa: And that's okay.
8. Thembe: So I really need you to come with me.
9. Nwabisa: I will do that.
10. Thembe: So uhm if I start crying or anything like that, I need you to just hold my hand.
11. Nwabisa: But you guys out there as well need to feel comfortable. Take a friend. Maybe talk about it before as well, but you need to be as comfortable as you possibly can be. But thank you so much for watching this lesson of Vagina Varsity. You guys are great.
12. Thembe: She's gonna hold my hand while we go, because I know I'm like 23 and stuff but I need- I need.
13. Nwabisa: Moral support is powerful. Do you want us to stay, or...
14. Thembe: I'm ready.
15. Nwabisa: Okay. Cool.

## Lesson 10 – All the hymen hype

1. Thembe: Welcome to another lesson here at Vagina Varsity, guys. Today we're gonna be dropping some real truth-bombs and myth-busting that old man again.
2. Old man: Women can lose their virginity by riding a bicycle or a horse.
3. Thembe: Absolutely false. A hymen, medically known as a corona, think of it like a scrunchie. So it expands and retracts. So you can't really "break it" or "lose it" during horse riding, riding a bicycle, yoga, or even sex.
4. Old man: The hymen is a big entrance gate at the entrance of the vagina.

5. Nwabisa: It's actually a ring of elastic and folded mucous tissue that's two centimeters inside your vagina.
6. Old man: When women have sex for the first time, they bleed and experience pain.
7. Nwabisa: That is a myth. I mean, some girls do bleed, but if you are sufficiently lubricated and aroused, you should not feel any pain or bleed.
8. Old man: You can tell if a woman is a virgin by checking her hymen.
9. Thembe: Again, another myth. Like I said before guys, the hymen is like a scrunchie. It expands and retracts.
10. Nwabisa: The more you know, the less you fear. And thank you so much for watching this lesson of Vagina Varsity.
11. Thembe: I think we should go try out horse riding.

### Lesson 11 – Where do babies actually come from

1. Nwabisa: Hello hi guys. It's Nwabisa.
2. Thembe: And it's me, Thembe. Today we are doing something TOTALLY different. We're playing a game "Guess what I'm thinking".
3. Nwabisa: And it's gonna be themed around my favorite thing in the world. Babies! The reason why we're doing it is because by now we know everything about each other and we know exactly what we are thinking.
4. Thembe: Let's go.
5. Nwabisa: It's the little hole that you also described as it's like a doughnut with a hole in it at the end of the hallway at my house.
6. Thembe: Cervix.
7. Nwabisa: Yes.
8. Thmebe: Okay so this is when you have a baby and the- the thing that tells you that you're about to have a baby. When your amniotic fluid, amniotic fluid =
9. Nwabisa: = Contractions?
10. Thembe: Amniotic fluid, the other word.
11. Nwabisa: I don't know.
12. Thembe: Okay. The act when your amniotic fluid =
13. Nwabisa: I said I don't know.
14. Thembe: Next one.
15. Nwabisa: Okay, but what was it?
16. Thembe: It was water breaking.
17. Nwabisa: Ah, okay cool. It's another- it's another word basically for fertilization. It's the process when the egg and the sperm meet in the fallopian tubes =
18. Thembe: = Conception?
19. Nwabisa: Yes. Yes. Uhm, if it ain't an anus. No. That was - You see. That's why I don't know your lines. If it ain't a taint, it ain't your anus.
20. Thembe: That's a perineum.
21. Nwabisa: Yeah. Usually this happens when women aren't feeling too well when they're pregnant. It's like ugh=

22. Thembe: Morning sickness!
23. Nwabisa: Yes.
24. Thembe: Yes. Okay, so. Okay cool. Uhm the stages when you're a little uhm egg, and you've been fertilized, and then you are moving through the fallopian tubes. Uhm what is the next stage that you become?
25. Nwabisa: An embryo.
26. Thembe: Yes.
27. Nwabisa: Cool. This is the home for the eggs. It's the ( ) =
28. Thembe: Ovaries! Fallopian tubes!
29. Nwabisa: Gosh, I was about to be like "Girl, you're failing me."
30. Thembe: [giggle] Okay cool. Uhm so this is when you are still in your- you've moved from the- from the- from the being fertilized, to- to being an embryo, and so now this is just before you actually become a baby.
31. Nwabisa: Foetus.
32. Thembe: Yes.
33. Nwabisa: Cool. Oh my last one is my favorite thing in the whole wild- It's not wild.
34. Thembe: It's wild. It's a wild thing. It's wild when it's young. It's a baby.
35. Nwabisa: Yes.
36. Thembe: Yes. Okay cool. So my next one is when the act- now this is when =
37. Nwabisa: = Sex.
38. Thembe: No! This is when =
39. Nwabisa: = Birth.
40. Thembe: Yes. Yes. Yes.
41. Nwabisa: Oh. Yes.
42. Thembe: Yes. Okay cool guys. Thank you so much for watching this lesson with us here at Vagina Varsity. We hope that you've learned a little bit more about babies and the whole process that that entails. Keep watching. Stay tuned. We're gonna learn some mo'.
43. Nwabisa: Bye guys! Play the game at home as well. So much fun.
44. Thembe: ( ) remember! Blastocyst.

## Lesson 12 – Preventing pregnancy

1. Nwabisa: Hi guys. It's Nwabisa.
2. Thembe: And it's Thembe. Welcome to another lesson here at Vagina Varsity.
3. Nwabisa: So today we're gonna be talking about contraception. So you're probably familiar with this word or this term. If you've been thinking about having sex, but without the baby. But now I want us to take a step back. What is contraception?
4. Thembe: Contraception is a device, medication, or behavior where you intentionally prevent yourself from getting pregnant. The BEST part of this is that we get the power back, and we determine WHEN we wanna become parents.

5. Nwabisa: That's truly amazing. But now you're probably wondering "which contraception should I be using?" That is totally up to you, based off of what you can afford, based off of what you're also just able to consistently use all the time, as well as your lifestyle and many other lovely things, but I think it's probably best if you go to a medical practitioner who will help you decide, you know what I mean, what suits you, what will work for you, and what you can work with going forward.
6. Thembe: So there are three main headings underneath contraceptives. One is the medical one. So, these three have the contraceptive pill, locally known as "the pill", the injection, and spermicide.
7. Nwabisa: There's also condoms, which you guys are probably very familiar with. The ones for men and the ones for women. So what we have here today are the different examples. But I want us to look at the female pill, I mean the=
8. Thembe: Ja, 'cause, you know, we're women=
- Nwabisa: =female condom. Oh my.
9. Thembe: Let's have a looksee.
10. Nwabisa: Cool. So this is pretty much what it looks like. There's a sponge inside this one. Obviously the condom. Read the instructions before you use these condoms. It can get a bit complicated if you're unfamiliar with it, so read, read, read.
11. Thembe: So the last one we have is the behavioral uhm kind of contraceptives. There are also three things here as well.
12. Nwabisa: Mmm mm.
13. Thembe: So we have the rhythm method, abstinence, and we also have withdrawal.
14. Nwabisa: So it's important to remember that contraceptives are not always 100% risk-free. Some of them are definitely better than others, but you need to go to a medical practitioner who will give you all the facts to suit your specific need.
15. Thembe: So before we say goodbye,
16. Nwabisa: Mmm mm.
17. Thembe: Listen to this. I know traditionally obviously the domain's been given to the female to take birth control, but this just in, in the next couple years, the male oral contraceptive pill is **COMING TO OUR SHORES!**
18. Nwabisa: So what does this mean? You getting one, you getting one, you getting one. Look under your seat. Everybody's getting one. Thank you so much for watching this lesson of Vagina Varsity. It's always a pleasure hosting you here. Remember to keep watching, keep reading and keep learning.

### Lesson 13 – Better safe than sorry

1. Nwabisa: Today we're gonna be talking about STIs. It's important to know you don't only get STIs through sex, BUT there are preventative measures that are available to you guys.
2. Thembe: And remember guys, you obviously don't want one, but if you do have, there is no shame in your game. Do note though, that if you DO have one, it is treatable. And if you have one that is lifelong, all manageable.
3. Nwabisa: Obviously the solution there is to make sure you are going to a medical practitioner, especially to understand what you have, how to treat it, how to manage it. So we do know that there's a big 5 that we wanna talk about today.
4. Thembe: HIV, herpes, syphilis, gonorrhoea and bang bang, chlamydia.
5. Nwabisa: But remember we spoke about prevention. So we do have condoms that are available. Both male and female condoms, but we also have dental dams.
6. Thembe: Dental dams. So dental dams are latex sheets used and placed over the whole vulva during oral sex.
7. Nwabisa: So in order for you guys to know what is actually going on, testing, testing, testing is very, very important. It's very important for you guys to test every 6 months to a year. Knowing your status, allows you to know what you need to do.
8. Thembe: The vagina's not the only place you can get an STI. The anus and the mouth is also a place that's very vulnerable. So guys, like we said, cover up and use the precautionary measures.
9. Nwabisa: And test, test, test. Thank you so much for watching this lesson of Vagina Varsity.
10. Thembe: It's been dope. Wrap it up.

### Lesson 14 – What to wear, down there

1. Nwabisa: So today we're gonna be talking about grooming and styling the vulva.
2. Thembe: Don't worry guys. This is ONLY if you're feeling festive. And if you don't want to, you can stay all natural.
3. Nwabisa: But there are many ways of shaping your pubic hairs. Waxing, shaving and hair removal cream, like =
4. Thembe: = Bikini, Brazilian, Hollywood, Bloemfontein.
5. Nwabisa: Mina, I don't know about the Bloemfontein. There's a number of ways of decorating your vulva, such as vajazzles, which are press on diamantes that can be arranged in a variety of ways like
6. Thembe: Stars, diamonds, cats, mats, Chris Pratt, Zach Braff.
7. Nwabisa: But it's very important to remember that if you are gonna wear your underwear for a long period of time, we recommend that you please wear 100% cotton.

8. Thembe: Bikinis, briefs, G-strings, thongs. Thanks for watching this lesson with us guys. Remember, if you're gonna do it, do it for yourself and have fun.

## Lesson 15 – Sexy time

1. Thembe: Hi guys. Welcome to another lesson here at Vagina Varsity. Continuing the education of our vulvas and our bodies, we have here Dorothy Black, who is an author, columnist, and sexpert. So Dorothy, when you say sexpert, what is that to us that might not know?
2. Dorothy: Uh well I write and talk about sex. I've been doing that for quite a long time, which means I know quite a lot about it because I've spoken to quite a lot of people, and I've had a lot of sex.
3. Nwabisa: Oh my.
4. Dorothy: That's a joke. Anyway, carry on.
5. Nwabisa: So when you say uhm sex obviously, what does that actually mean? What is sex?
6. Dorothy: I love that question and I love that question because uhm for the longest time we've thought of sex as PIV sex. When there is a penis inserted into a vagina. That's how we've always thought about sex. That's how society has promoted it as being, and yet sex is so much more than that.
7. Nwabisa: Mmm.
8. Dorothy: It is every physical sexual consensual engagement that we have with someone, where we get sexy, whether it is with our mouths or our genitals or our hands, or even just our bodies.
9. Nwabisa: How do men and women or young girls kind of prepare themselves for that? Because I think it's quite a big- uh it's not as easy as just saying "when you're ready" you know what I mean? So how do you get into that?
10. Dorothy: Ideally, you want somebody that feels that she is in the position to choose the moment, and to want the moment and to desire the moment, and not to just simply be, you know, an object of somebody else's pleasure, that she feels she just has to do this, and certainly not if it's not consensual.
11. Nwabisa: So when it comes to foreplay, I've heard that uh it tends to for women it often could start before it gets to the bedroom.
12. Dorothy: So I just want to take the idea of what foreplay is in the old uhm paradigm where we thought of sex as "penis and vagina", that was sex, and everything around it was foreplay. So whether he kissed your neck, you know, touched your breasts, gave you a massage. That was foreplay. But if somebody is giving you manual stimulation or oral stimulation, that is sex. The entire thing is sex. So when we think about foreplay now- for me, I like to think about foreplay as everything that happens outside of that, and so you're right. What leads into that- that attraction,

- that chemistry with someone, and so does it start outside the bedroom?  
Of course it does.
13. Thembe: So what is an orgasm? Like when do I know that it's happening?
14. Dorothy: You know, the physiological part of an orgasm is simply uhm you know the blood flow to your genitals, the uhm the constriction of your muscles and then the release of that. Uhm that's the physical part of it. But there are- there are different experiences of orgasm for- for different people and not all orgasms is the same.
15. Thembe: Okay cool.
16. Dorothy: We're used to seeing the experience of orgasm where a woman you know, loses her bananas and screams =
17. Nwabisa: = But in movies they make it dramatic.  
[laughter]
18. Dorothy: and sometimes it is like that and sometimes it isn't.
19. Thembe: But I also wanna find out about masturbation. How do you advise or suggest that we kind of get ourselves either ready or mentally prepared? Try maybe have a conversation with someone, to kind of try it out, you know? Because I think it might be something important.
20. Dorothy: Oh, it's absolutely something important, and what's so difficult about this is that uhm you know, when somebody has to- or approaches the idea of- of self-love, of touching themselves, masturbation, uhm quite a lot of the times, they have to deal with uh their entire lifetimes worth of shame and guilt that's been plastered on them, either from well-meaning parents or from uhm really conservative culture or religion, and so most people who have to learn to masturbate, still have to start moving through the shame and guilt around it. We talk about orgasm, or what feels good and uhm a lot of our media is- focuses on what the other person needs to learn in order to make you feel good, but if you do not know how to touch yourself and to bring yourself to orgasm, why do you expect somebody else to know what to do with your body?
21. Nwabisa: Often it's not just about the fingers. People obviously use toys and things so what does- how do those play in the mix?
22. Dorothy: Right, so let's look at that. So when we also think about masturbation, we think about =
23. Thembe: = Next step, I think this- for me.  
[laughter]
24. Dorothy: Is uhm, using hands or toys, but I've always told women that if you want to learn how to masturbate, if you're very new to it, you put a pillow between your legs and you grind it.
25. Nwabisa: Oh my.
26. Dorothy: So that's [laughing] you learn how it feels. I don't know if this is a bit =
27. Thembe: = No, we're learning. Everyone here is learning,
28. Nwabisa: Interesting.
29. Thembe: so don't worry.



30. Dorothy: I would say if you're new to it, you move onto a pillow first. Learn how to hump. Uhm, do the hump, then go onto your hands. A lot of women uh feel nervous about their hands because they don't know what to do, and also they're scared to touch themselves because they've been taught that it's dirty and bad and awful. And then of course there's sex toys, which I love. I also have some sex toys.
31. Thembe: Ooh.
32. Nwabisa: Oh my.
33. Dorothy: Some of your- some are vibrators, some are dildos.
34. Thembe: That.
35. Dorothy: Pop those right up there. Little butt plug, uh little anal beads. Uh here's a little straight-up clitoral vibrator, another little clitoral vibe. These are for external. Here is the famous rabbit that was made famous with Sex and the City.
36. Nwabisa: That's a Transformer.
37. Dorothy: Clit thing. You'll see these quite often. DO NOT insert these=
38. Thembe: This one's called a bullet. Yes.
39. Dorothy: Yes! Well done! Uh and then sometimes you get these little sex toys that looks like=
40. Thembe: It's so cute! Little cupcake. Remember, cookie.
41. Dorothy: No.
42. Nwabisa: What do you- what do you do with this? I don't understand.
43. Thembe: Absolutely not.
44. Dorothy: These ones, you get different sort of bullet types, uhm some people put little fingers on them so =
45. Thembe: = Is that tryna keep it handy?
46. Dorothy: Keep it handsy. Nice. Uhm so these will be your clitoral vibes and they come in all different shapes and sizes.
47. Nwabisa: I don't get- I don't- I don't get it. So you switch it on.
48. Dorothy: And this will vibrate.
49. Nwabisa: Got it.
50. Dorothy: And the reason people want these sort of things is that they don't look like vibrators. Some people are quite shy of them, so they'll have things that look like little duckies or cupcakes or=
51. Thembe: Put this on your counter. No one's asking questions.
52. Dorothy: Yeah, exactly. And this is- there's a difference between a vibrator and a dildo. A dildo is just a straight-up uhm toy. There's no motor in it, so it doesn't buzz.
53. Thembe: So you're kind of in full control of what is happening.
54. Dorothy: Correct. The point is that if you're gonna put anything up your bottom, please use a stopper, because things can actually get lost up there,
55. Nwabisa: Okay
56. Dorothy: uh which is why you have a stopper, why you have a stopper.
57. Nwabisa: But thank you so much for watching this lesson of Vagina Varsity. Thank you so much Dorothy for coming in.
58. Dorothy: Thank you very much.

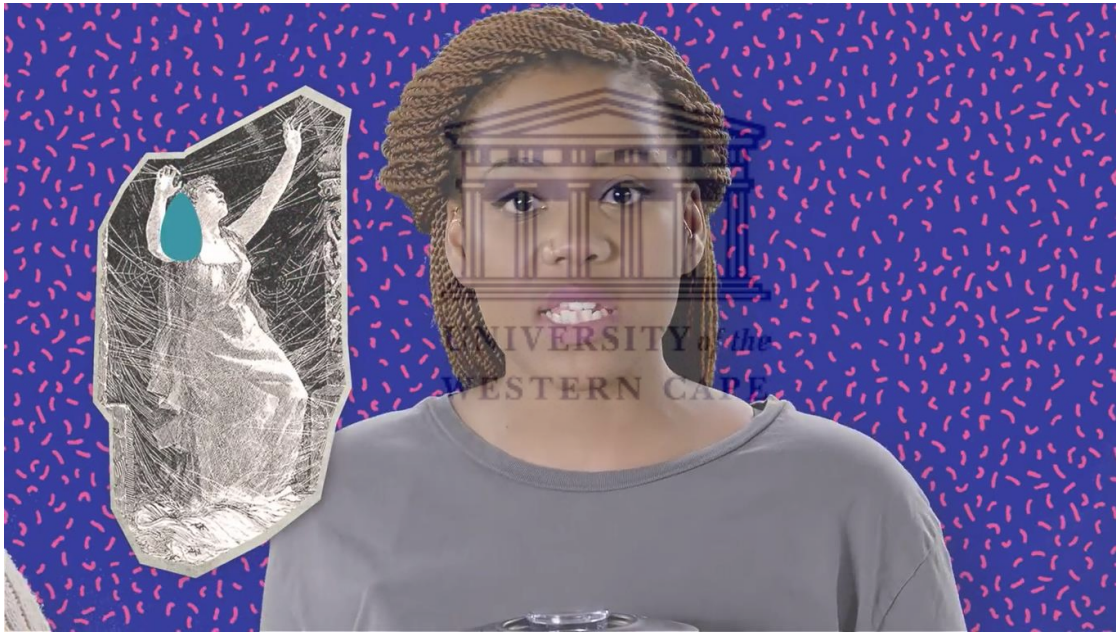
59. Nwabisa: And ya I hope that you guys learned a lot and please do check out Dorothy on Twitter to learn more information about everything you need to know about sex.
60. Thembe: Stay tuned.
61. Nwabisa: Oh okay.

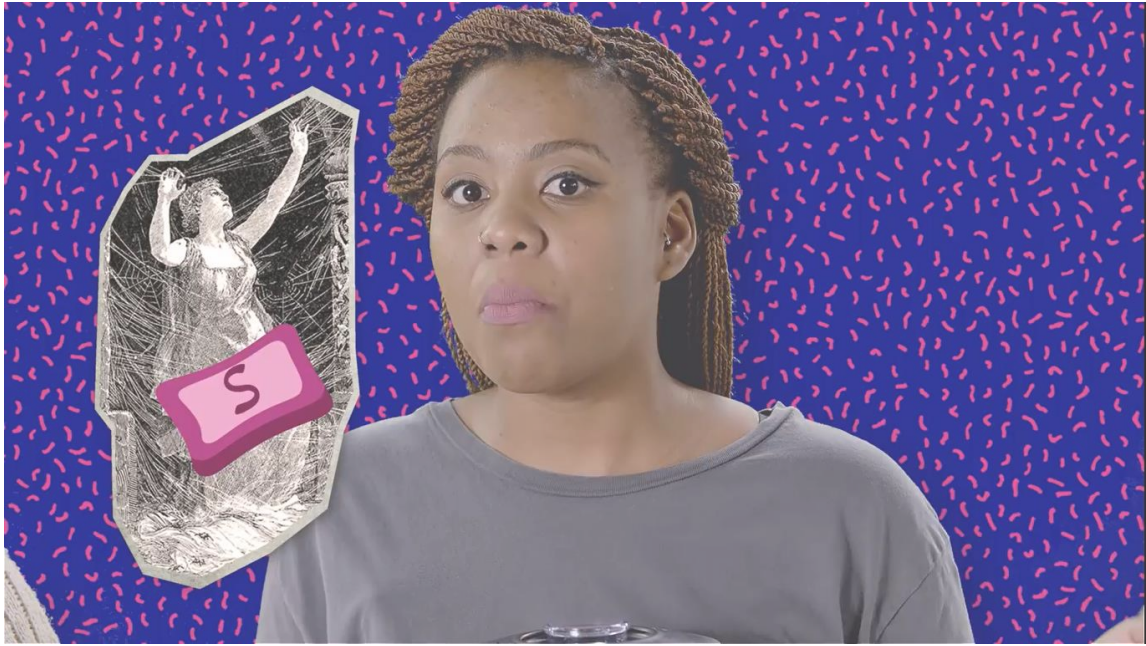
## Lesson 16 – All vaginas are amazing

9. Thembe: Guys, it's the last lesson of Vagina Varsity!
10. Nwabisa: I know guys, it's been a whirlwind of ups and downs, ins and outs. I mean I've learned so much on this journey. It's been a bit crazy. I can now say "vagina". It's my new best friend.
11. Thembe: Say it again. Say it again.
12. Nwabisa: Vagina.
13. Thembe: Say it again!
14. Nwabisa: Vagina.
15. Thembe: Ah! Lovely.
16. Nwabisa: Thank you.
17. Thembe: Guys, if you remember, Nwabisa started a little scared in the beginning, but now over the course of this journey, she's even able to say vagina more than three times. Oh my goodness.
18. Nwabisa: So I mean, we wanted the same for you guys. To feel empowered, to love your vagina, to talk about it, and just be comfortable with it, 'cause it's yours, so you have to love it.
19. Thembe: Guys, and don't worry, all the vaginas that you might be seeing in movies, and you're feeling like "Oh my God, maybe that's not mine!" All vaginas are unique. Different in smell, different in color, and different in sizes.
20. Nwabisa: And I think the one thing that you guys always have to remember is that the more you know, the less you fear. So if you are unsure about some stuff, check out the link here, take the lessons from the top, search for your favorite video, and just, you know, learn more, learn more, and learn more. Love your vagina. Every day. All day.
21. Thembe: Thank you so much for taking this journey with us guys. I miss your faces already.
22. Nwabisa: Bye guys. Thank you so much for watching Vagina Varsity.

APPENDIX D – BLACK AND WHITE CARTOON IMAGES







## APPENDIX E – YOUTUBE COMMENTS

### Lesson 1

#### Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

Thembe - we're at your cervix



#### Comment 2



[1 year ago](#)

I'm so looking forward to learn a lot from this series....



#### Comment 3



[1 year ago](#)

Nice ladies! Looking forward to the series.



#### Comment 4



[1 year ago](#)

LOVE THIS!



#### Comment 5



[1 year ago](#)

Let's do this ladies. Can't wait to learn more about my special Lady...

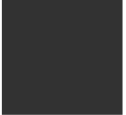


Comment 6



[\[redacted\] 9 months ago](#)  
ladies first, whoop whoop

Comment 7



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)  
Awesome. I can't wait to become a vagina expert!



Lesson 2

Comment 1



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)  
Nwabisa and Thembe are sooo awesome :)



Comment 2



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)  
Fourchette. I learned something new today! Awesome.



Comment 3



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)  
This is actually super helpful



Comment 4



[1 year ago](#)

This is the greatest thing!



Comment 5



[1 year ago](#)

these ladies are too cool :)

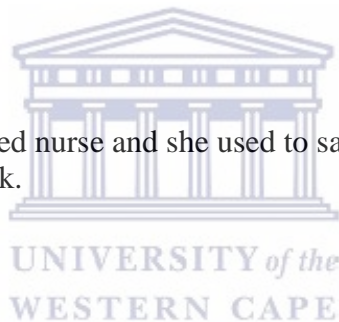


Comment 6



[1 year ago](#)

lol i love this!! my mom is a retired nurse and she used to say these words all the time....ahhhhhh this takes me back.



Comment 7



[1 year ago](#)

Interesting! Thank you.



Comment 8



[5 months ago](#)

Fourchette is such a pretty word. Like it should be a perfume or something....but, umm, noooo. Thanks for the education ladies!!



Comment 9



[1 year ago](#)

This is soo cool

Comment 10



[1 year ago](#)

I love it! You ladies are doing a great job at this edutainment thing♥️☐

### Lesson 3

Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

thx guys , really enjoying your vids



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

Comment 2



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

We're so happy to hear that, and we're just getting started!

Comment 3



[1 year ago](#)

Love this series. wish more women would watch it.



Comment 4



[10 months ago](#)

I am so enjoying each and every lesson .....

Comment 5



[Libresse South Africa 10 months ago](#)

We're so happy to hear that!

Comment 6

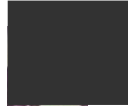


[\[Redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

AH man you guys are deeply appreciated. thanks a mill for the info and the comedy 😊  
Thembe....doing pghs proud hun!! keep it up ladies

#### Lesson 4

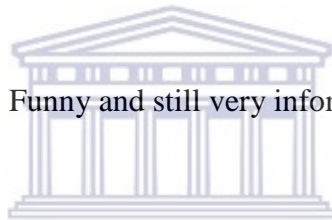
Comment 1



Pinned by Libresse South Africa

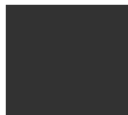
[\[Redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

YOU LADIES ARE AMAZING, Funny and still very informative, Love it.



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

Comment 2



[\[Redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

I love this! You guys are really funny, this is so much fun! Enjoy the course...



Comment 3



[\[Redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

I love Nwabisa. Lols for days



Comment 4



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

They're both too amazing!

Comment 5



[\[Redacted\] 1 year ago \(edited\)](#)

I love these and wish they existed when I was first learning about this stuff in LO. I just wish it was a little more trans inclusive in the language <3

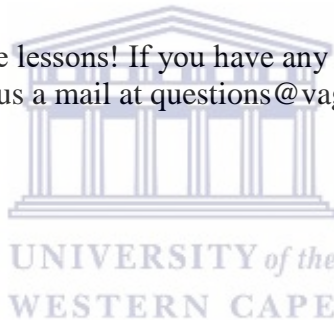


Comment 6

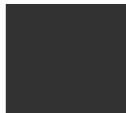


[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

We're so glad you're enjoying the lessons! If you have any specific tips for us about being more trans-inclusive please send us a mail at [questions@vaginavarsity.co.za](mailto:questions@vaginavarsity.co.za) :)



Comment 7



[\[Redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

I love how we are getting familiar with our vaginas. its about time. so happy.



Comment 8



[\[Redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

Seriously necessary!



Comment 9



[1 year ago](#)

Loooooovvveeee!!!!



Comment 10



[1 year ago](#)

this is cool, would have been better if you spoke about tampons too..

Comment 11



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

Thank you! Because we're experts in pads we decided to stick with what we know best :)



Comment 12



[9 months ago](#)

fabulous, i want a tutorial on how to use a tampon, 10 years later after my 1st period that would be great in SA :D , -vagina varsity how do you use a tampon



Comment 13



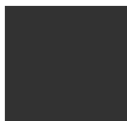
[Libresse South Africa 9 months ago](#)

Hi ! Libresse doesn't produce tampons in South Africa but we can share this guide with you, just choose the 'translate to English option' and you should be able to follow easily! :)

<https://www.libresse.nl/mijn-menstruatie/advies-voor-tieners/hoe-gebruik-je-tampons/>

## Lesson 5

Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

This series needs more advertising. especially because I know so many girls out here who do not have this knowledge.



Comment 2



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

Thanks [REDACTED] we'd love for everyone to be students at Vagina Varsity, so share and invite your friends to join you in class too!

## Lesson 6

Comment 1



[\[REDACTED\] 1 year ago](#)

I have heard that pantliners also increase your chances of having infections because your vaginah cant breathe thru , since the pantiliner has a plastic convering beneath, meaning no ventilation ....how true is this..That liners shoul donly be used when your period ends for spotting...



Comment 2



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago \(edited\)](#)

Hi [REDACTED], thank you for your question! Libresse liners are specifically designed to be worn every day and allow your vagina to breathe. Our 'under' or back material consists of a thin plastic film with pores. These pores let your skin breathe. Breathable back material is very important for ventilation, reducing humidity and minimizing heat! Libresse liners maintain the vaginas natural balance, so you can wear them every day (not just for spotting). You can go here for more information: <http://www.libresse.co.za/our-products/what-is-what/>

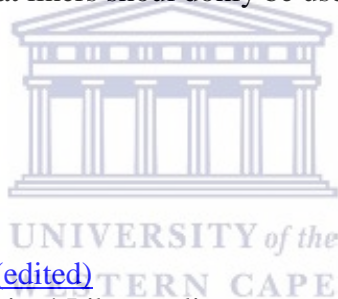


Comment 3



[\[REDACTED\] 1 year ago](#)

[#VAGINA!!!!!!!!!! :\)](#)



Comment 4



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

I'm loving this ladies



## Lesson 7

Comment 1



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

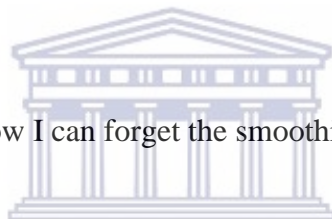
so hilarious! these videos are beneficial!

Comment 2



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

lol, so practical hey, I dont see how I can forget the smoothie right there



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

Comment 3



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

I really enjoyed this one and found it very beneficial because I've had re-occurring incidents of infections and I'm very weary of them. Thank you and keep up the great work.



Comment 4



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

Thank you so so so much, Libresse!

1

Comment 5



[1 year ago](#)

Thank you guys...very serious topic. Love you guys.



Comment 6



[1 year ago \(edited\)](#)

i love you guys! you are absolutely amazing :)



**Lesson 8**

Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

guys should try wearing lace underwear all day yazi...



Comment 2



[1 year ago](#)

Wow...guys this is good. I'm a biggest fan. 



Comment 3



[1 year ago](#)

Can't get enough of this. #1 fan



## Lesson 9

### Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

LOVE THIS EPISODE, MIND YOU I STILL HAVE NOT GATHERED THE COURAGE TO SEE A GYNAE. EIISSSSHHHHHHHHH.....



### Comment 2



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

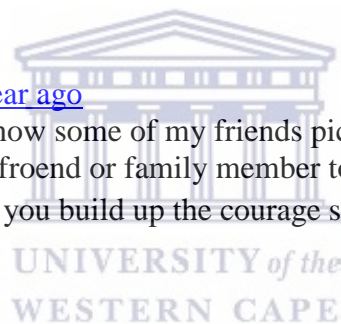
You can do it!

### Comment 3



[year ago](#)

It usually goes by so quickly, I know some of my friends pick female doctors for comfort, for me it's all the same. Maybe ask a friend or family member to recommend one close to you that they are comfortable with? Hope you build up the courage soon 😊. It's so good for you to go.



### Comment 4

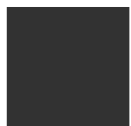


[1 year ago \(edited\)](#)

[2:01](#) hahahaha omg im so scared.. hahaha Thumbs up to Libresse for this initiative !



### Comment 5



[year ago](#)

Don't be scared. :)





Comment 6



[1 year ago](#)

something i need to do since forever. I need me a Nwabisa



Comment 7



[1 year ago](#)

Grab a friend:) it honestly goes by very quickly.



Comment 8



[1 year ago](#)

No. I had to do this when I was small for some reason... and I hated it. I felt so exposed.



Comment 9



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago \(edited\)](#)

We're sorry you had a bad experience with a gynae, especially since this is such a vitally important relationship for your health. If you feel like you can't rely on a doctor to give you good advice, or you don't feel comfortable sharing with her (or him), find someone you can trust. You owe it to yourself.... Why not chat to friends for a recommendation?

Comment 10



[1 year ago](#)

Libresse South Africa Hopefully now that I'm older, it'll be fine. I'll just have to suck it up for the sake of my health.



## Lesson 10

### Comment 1

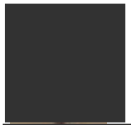


[1 year ago \(edited\)](#)

ONCE AGAIN, THANK YOU FOR SHARING LIGHT UPON THIS ISSUE. VERY CRITICAL! I really really love this varsity.



### Comment 2



[1 year ago](#)

I desperately needed this lesson!!!!Thank you!



### Comment 3



[1 year ago](#)

You guys are awesome!!! I can't even miss an episode. Keep it up!!!



## Lesson 11

### Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

A very interactive way of explaining pregnancy! Nice!



### Comment 2



[1 year ago](#)

Love it. Thank you



Comment 3



 [1 year ago](#)

Awesome stuff...thank you



## Lesson 12

Comment 1



Pinned by Libresse South Africa

 [1 year ago](#)

What a lesson...I'm always saving the videos to show my daughter when she grow up...simple and straight forward. Thank you guys. You are the best.



Comment 2



 [1 year ago](#)

I have actually created a Vag University folder in my emails so that I can show my little sister when she is a bit older too! So educational and funny too!



Comment 3



[Libresse South Africa](#) [1 year ago](#)

We're so happy to hear that, what a great idea, she's very lucky to have a mom like you! The mailers also have lots of important information so they're worth saving too :)

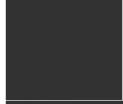
Comment 4



[Libresse South Africal year ago](#)

So great!

Comment 5



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

I think schools should use them too



Comment 6



[Libresse South Africal year ago](#)

Thanks for your comments [redacted]! We're working on getting the lessons to schools too!  
You can keep up to date with news through our FB page :)

Comment 7



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

Why were IUDs left out of the video?



Comment 8



[Libresse South Africal year ago](#)

Hi [redacted], because there are so many options available we just wanted to highlight a few of the most common and accessible ones, but they would fall under the medical category :)

### Lesson 13

Comment 1



[\[redacted\] 1 year ago](#)

You guys are way too vague. your videos need to be more in-depth. you guys are awesome and funny and make it fun to listen to this stuff, but you need to give more details especially when you are explaining stuff Cz we want to know and learn hence watching the video



Comment 2



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

Hi [REDACTED], we're glad you're enjoying your episodes! Most of the topics we're covering are very broad and to get into it in-depth would result in 2-3 hour episodes, which is why the emailers also contain lots of information. We wanted the episodes to touch on the most important facts to encourage people to read up more, and you're welcome to send us any questions you might still have at [questions@vaginavarsity.co.za](mailto:questions@vaginavarsity.co.za) :)

Comment 3



[REDACTED] [1 year ago](#)

I love the two beautiful ladies and their 'teaching methods'.

Comment 4



[REDACTED] [1 year ago](#)

I didn't get episode 12 in my emails. was it intentionally omitted?



Comment 5



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

Hi [REDACTED], that's very strange, you should have gotten it if you have been getting all the rest! If you send us your email address (either with a comment here or a private message on our FB page) we will get our technologists on the case and get back to you ASAP :)

Comment 6



[REDACTED] [1 year ago](#)

Libresse South Africa [REDACTED] thank you

Comment 7



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

We're on it!

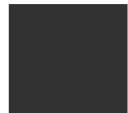
Comment 8



[1 year ago](#)

Thank you

Comment 9



[10 months ago](#)

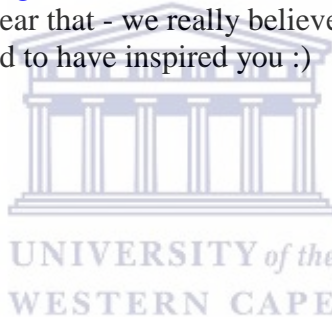
This video inspired me to get tested immediately after i saw this video!! Thanx so much!!! I am HIV negative. The emphasis at the end of testing! Testing! Testing! ...made me stand up and GO!!!! I will defiantly try to test every six months to a year.

Comment 10



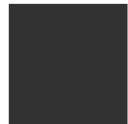
[Libresse South Africa 10 months ago \(edited\)](#)

That's great, we are so happy to hear that - we really believe that the more you know the less you have to fear, and we're so glad to have inspired you :)



Lesson 14

Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

interresting



Comment 2



[1 year ago \(edited\)](#)

aaahahahaha. This is really new, apart from the shaving - of course. lol Thanks!



Comment 3



[1 year ago](#)

Chris Pratt, Zach Braff LOL



Comment 4



[1 year ago](#)

Lol...thanks guys



Comment 5



[5 months ago](#)

😊😊 Thembe is so extra though. You ladies make me so comfortable with myself.



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

**Lesson 15**

Comment 1



Pinned by Libresse South Africa

[1 year ago](#)

Thank you Dorothy that was helpful...you guys rock.



Comment 2



[1 year ago](#)

such a necessary and relevant conversation



Comment 3



[1 year ago](#)

awesome and insightful interview!!!



Comment 4



[1 year ago](#)

I did the pillow grind, that was my first "toy" I recognize all these toys😁😁😁 except the cupcake

Lesson 16

Comment 1



[1 year ago](#)

I'm really going to miss this varsity. Literally, the best I've ever attended! Thank you so much for sharing knowledge with us. It has definitely being a journey! VAGINA,BWABY!



Comment 2



[1 year ago](#)

IM DEFINITELY SAVING THESE VIDEOS FOR MY DAUGHTER(S) ONE DAY.



Comment 3



[1 year ago](#)


I'm going to miss these faces!!!! #VAGINA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! thank you guys for keeping me educated and informed. this was way too short.





Comment 4



 [1 year ago](#)

I'm going to miss u guys



Comment 5




 [1 year ago](#)

I have really enjoyed this so much! You girls were amazing. Made me laugh so much that my tummy hurts, especially with the dildo's! I really hope you come up with another university. Maybe for the boys... (not that there is really a lot to learn). Hope too see you soon! Definitely be on the look out! My daughter will go through this episodes, you really made life a bit easy for single moms.



Comment 6



 [1 year ago](#)

thank you Libresse SA. its a shame that we go through our whole lives and we have limited information about our vaginas. This is really empowering and it should just be widespread to every man and woman out there. Knowledge is power!!!!!!!



Comment 7



 [8 months ago](#)

The best ever! I'm feeling much more confident with the knowledge I gained, honestly wish I had someone talk to me about such but hey Libresse to the rescue! Thank you! Going to watch these over and over



Comment 8



[1 year ago](#)

Ahhhhhhhh are we done already! come onnnnn! i was just getting all my friends hooked!

Comment 9



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

We know, it went by so quickly! We love that you're getting your friends hooked, if they just signed up they'll still get all the episodes from the beginning :)

Comment 10




[1 year ago](#)

Knowledge is truly power, at age 28 I still learnt some new things...also, I was inspired (that took long) to actually talk openly about what I know, like, fear, think and want for my vagina with my partner. I hope that Libresse can take this content further and share it in school Life Orientation program's and with Facebook mom-groups who are going through raising young girls and need some funky, accessible, appealing help/inspiration.

Comment 11



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

Hi , we are so happy that you've been inspired, that really is our wish for all women! We are working on a school's program and will look into mom's groups too, thank you for your comment :)

Comment 12



[1 year ago](#)

you guys are absolutely amazing! thank you for taking this journey with us to become the ultimate vagina experts! vagina vagina vagina!! hahaha

Comment 13



[Libresse South Africa 1 year ago](#)

Thank you, we're so glad you've enjoyed learning with us! :)

## APPENDIX F – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

### Participants watch videos of week 1

1. Interviewer: Okay so that was the first four videos, the first week, right?  
Uhm is there anything that you want me to play again or you want me to ... no? Is it fine? Can we go on to questions? Okay so what did you find interesting about these videos?
2. Leigh: I like how they spoke about it like it's such a normal thing 'cause it's seen as very taboo to talk about the vagina [giggle] ja==
3. Stacy: == they spoke about like it casually, made it more casual==
4. Leigh: == Ja.
5. Stacy: Not so formal.
6. Interviewer: Mmm?
7. Mpho: They talk about important issues like how to use pads for young uhm adults and they make it look uhm something that you don't need to be afraid to do and they also talked about... what else? menstruation cycles and all those things and I kinda had a problem knowing when my period should start so that was really helpful for me.
8. Interviewer: Okay. Anything else? Guys if you're talking just talk a bit louder so that I can get it on the ... it's fine. Anything else? Uhm... uhm did you learn anything new?
9. Leigh: I – I {speak} for myself but I knew most of that things already,
10. Interviewer: Mmm?
11. Leigh: Ja.
12. Interviewer: Guys did you learn anything new?

[Laughter]

13. Chad: Uhm outside the context of like learning it in Biology, like it's very formal, you just learn about like the vagina in general, and the conception part of it but you don't learn about the menstruation part of it so I think like it's really important and they make it – the videos made it very casual and just like it's out there. It's a topic that we should talk about. We shouldn't use like different words to describe the vagina. We should say "vagina".
14. Interviewer: Ja.

15. Mpho: They talked about parts of the vagina [giggling] which I- I don't think we know [giggling] you know, so.
16. Stacy: Mmm. Ja I also didn't know all the parts [giggling].
17. Mpho: Ja.
18. Leigh: Uhm, I also like how they emphasise that everyone's different. 'Cause you know when you're growing up – for me, I was like “does my vagina look like everyone else's?” [laughing] ( ) It was weird like you know, it's something you think about.
19. Stacy: And also the age when you get your period. I know a lot of girls stress about it when they don't get it when their friends get it but they also said that everyone's different, like it's not a competition.

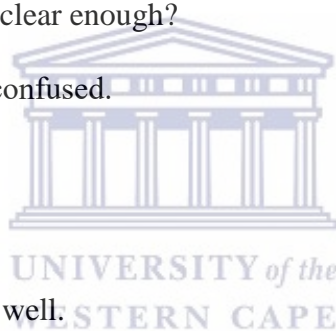
[Laughter]

20. Interviewer: Ok, can we move on to the test? Okay so this is the test of week one. Uhm you'll see that there is I think one question or two of the questions that they didn't deal uhm with in these videos but it was in the email so just guess then.

### Participants do quiz 1

21. Interviewer: I actually forgot two questions. I was too eager now. [Pause] Okay so still on the on the four videos. Uhm what aspects of the videos did you like?
22. Mpho: Can you repeat that?
23. Interviewer: What aspects of the videos did you like? Is there anything that you liked?
24. Leigh: Uh I like how visual it was. They showed everything as they were explaining it so you could picture that inside your body [giggling] you could see what- what's going on uhm during the menstrual cycle. Ja I liked how everything was very visual.
25. Interviewer: Mmm. Anything else?
26. Aabid: I like the sense of humour in the videos as well.
27. Interviewer: Mmm. Anything that you didn't like?
28. Leigh: How quick it was. It was very short and it was very fast as well so there was a lot of information you had to process really quickly, I think. Ja it was very short.

29. Stacy: It was.
30. Interview: So I'm just gonna- let's go through the test. Question one was which of the following statements is false? Uhm the vagina is the name which is used to refer to what is actually the vulva? The vulva is the whole external female genital area? The vagina is the passage between the vaginal opening and the cervix, and all vaginas look exactly the same. So which one was false?
31. Participants: D.
32. Interviewer: Okay. It is D, all vulvas are different. Uhm, number two. They have a picture there, and they wanted to know what the hole is called that they pointed to. And what is the hole called? Is it A, B, C, or D?
33. Mpho: D?
34. Aabid: I wanted to==
35. Leigh: == I was confused.
36. Interviewer: Was it not clear enough?
37. Mpho: No, she's confused.
- [Laughter]
38. Chad: I said D.
39. Aabid: I said B as well.
40. Leigh: I just said A 'cause I'm certain it's a vagina
- [Laughter]
41. Leigh: It's a vagina, so
- [Laughter]
42. Leigh: It's correct, kinda
43. Aabid: I didn't see the hole
44. Mpho: It's like a dot in the==
45. Interviewer & Stacy: ==Yes==
46. Stacy: == the dark circle==
47. Interviewer: == so that is the==



48. Leigh: == Oh! Hi.
49. Aabid: I only noticed when you asked “is it not clear enough?” then I looked closer I was like “okay”.
50. Mpho: Yoh.
51. Chad: I saw it.
52. Leigh: Okay.
53. Interviewer: I didn’t have colour ink, guys.
54. Aabid: I understand.
55. Interviewer: So otherwise you would be able to see it but uhm it is B, the urethra, so it’s where {we} urinate from so that’s the hole where the urine comes from okay and then C approximately how many nerve endings does the clitoris have? A, 8000, B, 200, C, 8, or D, 400?

56. Participants: A.

57. Interviewer: It is A, 8000, and it’s all for pleasure. Uhm number 4.

[Laughter]

58. Interviewer: That’s the purpose, okay. Number 4 is where did the G spot get its name from? A, it stands for gynaecologist, B, it’s named after Doctor Grafenburg, C, it’s shaped like a wishbone, and D, it’s short for German spot. What was the- what did you guys...

59. Aabid: I said B.

60. Chad & Leigh: B, ja.

61. Interviewer: B? That was in the email so you ( )

62. Leigh: [Giggling]

63. Interviewer: You can’t change your answer now!

[Laughter]

64. Interviewer: So the answer is B, it is Doctor Grafenburg, I guess he... found it.

[Laughter]

65. Interviewer: Five, how long is the average menstrual cycle? 30 days, 25 days, 22 days or 28 days.

66. Participants: 28 days.
67. Interviewer: It is 28 days.
68. Aabid: {I thought} I got it all wrong. [laughing]
69. Interviewer: A cycle is counted from the first day of one period to the first day of the next period.
70. Aabid: Okay.
71. Interviewer: Okay so ja, that was all the questions.
72. Aabid: Awesome.
73. Interviewer: Okay that's test one done, week one done. Let's move on to week two. Start off with lesson 5.

### Participants watch videos of Week 2

74. Interviewer: Okay so that was the end of week two's videos. What did you guys find interesting about these four videos?
75. Mpho: I think week two when they were talking about how to cleanse and take care of the vagina was uhm more informing for me.
76. Interviewer: Mmm?
77. Mpho: How they talk about the products you can use, that you should use PH-friendly products and non-perfumed [giggling] products.
78. Stacy: And I said that the the old man, he was like, he presented stereotypical comments or myths that uhm we hear all the time about the vagina and it was nice that they addressed those uhm stereotypical comments or myths in the video.
79. Leigh: Ja, that was cool.
80. Stacy: And I also didn't know the – I knew the the types of the uh infections but I didn't really know the details of the type of yeast infections and that- that was also==
81. Leigh: == and like how to distinguish them from each other ==
82. Stacy: == between the three ja.
83. Leigh: Ja I like that as well uhm [giggling] and when they mix it all together

[Giggling]

I like that part. The comedy [giggling]. Uh ja and like Mpho said. How to take care of it, 'cause especially women products, it's mostly perfumed and scented and you just think you can clean yourself with anything [giggling], that smells good.

84. Interviewer: So did you learn anything new?

85. Leigh: Yes.

86. Interviewer: What did you learn?

87. Chad: Uhm the videos are breaking a lot of stereotypes about like healthcare and especially like the whole entire- the forum that this videos are doing like I learnt a lot about- again like, you don't learn this stuff like in social aspects no one wants to talk about like the genitals or their genitals or vagina, and I think it's really important that this platform is a- and I also enjoyed like the fact that people are responding with questions, asking the questions so I think like it just shows that there are people that are a bit shy perhaps to talk about it but I learnt a lot about STIs and it's really cool. Not STIs, the videos.

[Laughter]

88. Interviewer: Uhm==

89. Leigh: Ja and it's very- it's very pro-women. Like when the one question came in about her partner likes it when I wear lingerie, uhm they say again like "do it for yourself" uhm and like women are supposed to smell like nice all the time but those are harmful to your vagina, just things that women are expected to do and look like and smell a certain way but ja like it breaks- it breaks lots of stereotypes as well.

90. Interviewer: Okay you guys mentioned uhm now what aspects you like. Is there anything else that you liked? That stood out for you? [pause] What didn't you like?

91. Stacy: I liked week 2 better than week 1 'cause I said week 2 is a bit more interactive than week 1. It was more like quiz whereas week 1 it was more like just throwing information at you. Week two is a bit more-felt more interactive. And I like the fact that they use that old man when they – for addressing the stereotypes to show it's kind of old outdated stereotypes.

92. Leigh: Ja. 'Cause you do- you do still find it in movies even like {I} say like "something smells like fish"

[giggling]



or if like you know those jokes that like if something smells really bad then like maybe one of your friends of your friends are like “close your legs!”

[Laughing]

93. Leigh: So ja it's ==

94. Stacy: ==old stereotypes==

95. Leigh: == it's all old things. Old sayings. There's nothing I really didn't like, to be honest.

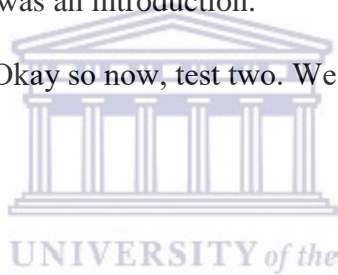
96. Mpho: In week one I think they were just talking about the vagina and parts of the vagina and all of that but in week 2 they start to actually tell you how to clean the vagina, how to take care of it and the disease [giggling] that come out of a vagina if I may say it.

97. Interviewer: So it is progressing. You start learning more and more.

98. Stacy: Week one was an introduction.

99. Interviewer: Yes. Yes. Okay so now, test two. We'll do a quiz.

## Participants do quiz 2



100. Interviewer: Okay, so the first question why aren't douching and chemicals good for the vagina? Uhm the vagina is a self-cleaning system, uh B, the vagina has its own good bacteria that fights off infections, C, it can change the PH level of the vagina, or D, all of the above.

101. Participants: All of the above.

102. Interviewer: D? Okay good. Uhm what should you wash your vulva with every day? A, warm water, B, aqueous cream, C, hand sanitizer, or D, honey.

103. Participants: A.

104. Interviewer: A, warm water. Okay uhm which of the following is a sign that you need to see the doctor? Clear discharge, discharge with a cottage cheese texture, or slightly brown discharge just before or after your period or D, none of the above.

105. Participants: B

106. Interviewer: B?

107. Mpho: D.

108. Interviewer: Discharge with a cottage cheese texture. It can indicate a yeast infection. Uhm 4, which kind of underwear fabric is best for your vagina? A, lycra, B, lace, C, cotton, or D, spandex.
109. Participants: C.
110. Interviewer: C, cotton. Okay. Uhm 5, which type of infection is indicated by a strong, fishy smell? A, yeast infection, B, bacterial vaginosis, C, STIs or D, UTI.
111. Participants: B.
112. Interviewer: B, bacterial vaginosis. This happens when there isn't enough good bacteria and too many bad bacteria.
113. Aabid: Awesome.
114. Interviewer: Yay! So that's week two done, guys.

## Break

### Participants watch videos of Week 3

115. Interviewer: Okay so that was week three's videos. Uhm what did you find interesting about these videos?
116. Leigh: I really liked the gynae one.
117. Interviewer: Mmm?
118. Leigh: They spoke about the gynae. 'Cause uhm apparently we or most females should have a gynae especially when they start having uhm sexual intercourse uhm but like you don't know what to really expect, you don't know who to talk to, you don't like {talking to} your mother uhm and I think they kinda answered a lot of questions that is not easy to find like on the internet 'cause everyone's different but I like how they gave you kinda like what points to prepare for if you're actually gonna go to a gynae. I like that, and I also like how they spoke about virginity uhm in not this idealistic way like they didn't put it on a platform you know like. They just spoke about this is virginity, this is how you lose it uhm but they didn't like say that you're better if you are a virgin, but a lot of videos on YouTube do, or they romanticize breaking your virginity a lot as well so I liked how they kept it very neutral, uhm ja.
119. Interviewer: Anyone else? That you find interesting?

120. Chad: I like the practicality of week 3. Like week one and two you get like theoretical aspects of it and like the background to get to know like your body basically and then in Week 3 basically speaking about hygiene, more on hygiene, more on- not in a sense like who can help you also, also on what Leigh said about the virginity aspect also is very important because I mean like we don't know who's watching these videos. It could be highschoolers, it could be people at varsity, it could be older that are going through these things, that have – having fears of going to a gynae, and also coming from a household where I have a mom and a sister and a brother that's in the medical field. It's very open for the three of them to perhaps talk about like uhm like my brother discussed like he gave a pap smear to a woman and he says like it's the most important thing in the medical field, especially when you have female healthcare. It's very important that you encourage people to go for pap smears, to get checked out, to know their contraceptive methods as well. So ja I think what they're doing, again, is really important and breaking boundaries, breaking the norm of virginity and discussions about the woman- the female body.
121. Leigh: And the- speaking about contraceptives, the female condom. I like how they showed it, 'cause they don't usually show those kind of- female condoms like even on- in media they don't even show that. They don't even show it on sitcoms or videos or movies, or anything. They don't even show it 'cause like the condom's supposed to be for like- not supposed to be but it's mainly aimed at the man, ja. So that was also nice to see in the video.
122. Interviewer: Did you learn anything new?
123. Aabid: Yes. Uhm male contraceptives that are coming. We know now that there is plans for male contraceptives and also on the point now them touching on the female condom uhm they're showing us that it's not only uh males who needs who needs to wear condoms as we see in the media and so forth and men can also uhm ( ) also use contraceptives and it's not up to the females alone to- to use contraceptives.
124. Mpho: There was something interesting about how they- okay, first it was just my curiosity about when someone is pregnant and they say your water breaks, I didn't know that was amniotic fluid coming out. I always thought "okay how is the water coming out of the womb?" type of thing, but now they clarified the whole thing for me.
125. Interviewer: Uhm what did you like about the videos?
126. Leigh: Ja like ( ) said I like how practical it was. It was very straightforward, uhm even though they're joking, there's humor in it, but they're very straightforward with their message.
127. Interviewer: What didn't you like about the videos?

128. Leigh: Uhm I feel like they could have gone into more detail about the contraceptives. Uhm maybe talk about==
129. Stacy: ==I think they just like mentioned the contraceptives==
130. Leigh: ==Ja==
131. Stacy: ==They didn't really like explain it but I think it's 'cause the videos so short they can't really explain it since there's so many but I also would've preferred more details about each method and not just like give you the method- the name of it, basically.
132. Leigh: Ja.
133. Interviewer: Anything else? Nothing else? Okay uhm so let's go to test three.

### Participants do quiz 3

134. Interviewer: Okay uhm question 1, which STI causes cervical cancer? A, HIV and AIDS, B, certain strains of HPV, C, hepatitis, or D, herpes.

[Laughter]

135. Stacy: I said herpes. I said D.

136. Aabid: I wasn't sure.

137. Chad: I said B.

138. Mpho: I said D.

139. Interviewer: All the letters of the alphabet here. Okay so the answer is actually B. Certain strains of HPV. Ja, it can lead to precancerous or cancerous cells on the cervix. Uhm why is a pap smear called a pap smear? A, it's named after someone, B, it's short for paparazzi, C, it was named after YouTube stars Pap Culture, the two of them, uhm and D, you could- you should eat pap before your exam for best results. Which one was it?

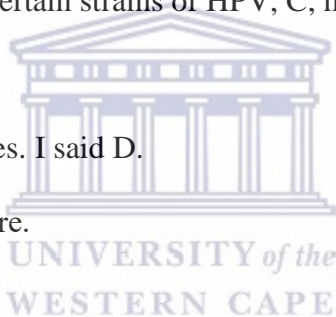
140. Participants: A.

141. Mpho: A or C.

142. Interviewer: It's only one of those hey.

[Laughter]

143. Mpho: It's A.



144. Interviewer: It is A. It's named after Georgios Papanikolaou yes it's named after him. It's a doctor who determined that it's a useful way to detect signs of cervical cancer. Uhm three, what is the hymen made of? A, thin mucous membrane, B, muscle, C, sinew, and D, none of the above.

145. Participants: A.

146. Interviewer: It is A, yes. Thin mucous membrane. Uhm four, the- complete the sentence. The hymen gets lost after you have sex and/or while horse riding, riding bikes, B, it is a membrane that covers the vaginal canal, C, is also called the corona and is located two centimetres inside the vagina, D, has to be popped the first time you have penetrative sex.

147. Participants: C.

148. Interviewer: Cs and A. Okay so it is C... Corona and uhm is located inside the vagina and can't be broken, popped, or lost.

149. Interviewer: Five, which one of the following is the least reliable contraceptive method? A, pulling out, withdrawal, B, the pill, C, the injection, or D, IUD.

150. Participants: A.

151. Interviewer: A, pulling out, yes.



#### Participants watch videos of week 4

152. Interviewer: Yay okay so uhm what did you guys find interesting about these videos?

[Giggling]

153. Leigh: I did not expect that uhm the ==

154. Chad: == Video three ==

155. Leigh: == the video. Ja video three. Didn't expect that uhm to be a segment==

[Giggling]

156. Leigh: ==in Vagina Varsity. So I was surprised.

157. Chad: Uh I think uhm the first two videos were like very informative, but video three broke the boundaries beyond compare because like a friend and I always get tested on campus so obviously you have to go sit in on the visual demonstration of uhm how to put on a condom- female condoms, dental dams and all that stuff so uhm also the media portrayal of it like immediately I thought like the two magazines that

maintain like self- or not self-pleasuring but pleasuring your partner is Cosmopolitan and Men's Health like they're on equilibrium of like "women, this is what men like" and then Men's Health would be like "men, this is what women like" and it's not essentially- they make a dream of the whole entire notion of masturbation and sex and everything when it's not really like that and I understand they have like sexperts and whatever in those magazines but sometimes the sexperts could just be putting their opinion on to- also the cultural backgrounds of it. Like, for me I know like on campus when we spoke about it in undergrad in second year, we spoke about sex in Sociology and a lot of the black guys were like "no, we can't talk about it at all," especially when it came to a topic of discussion in Sociology of Health and we discussed circumcision. A lot of the girls gave their opinions and the guys thought that was like- they shouldn't be giving their opinions at all so, looking at how- especially how Vagina Varsity is still breaking the norm, I think it'll be good if they continued with education and perhaps even make a YouTube channel where they can educate people and get more information on not just the vagina but also on societal pressures of the vagina and sexual things.

158. Leigh: Especially here in South Africa with all these cultures and all these religions in one, where these things are not spoken about. Uhm I like that they're making the videos and that it's South African, especially, ja. So every- lots of people watch YouTube videos and I think it's very accessible like the information uhm and they're not being- there's no bias in it, there's no ideologies or anything. It's very- very neutral, very out- very practical as well for people to understand. Young girls.
159. Chad: And I mean also like the main issue with sexual education is that we always get it from a Western perspective or a Eurocentric perspective and I mean as Leigh said like South Africa is diverse, so having a content show where it's placed in a South African context speak openly about like masturbation, sex, sex toys and it's- consent especially, it's very inclusive in how they have delivered their programming to South Africans, young South Africans, old South Africans, I mean it's really good.
160. Leigh: Ja. Even the the way that media romanticises things and like even the orgasm part like when they're describing what an orgasm is, uhm things like that like they say like it's different for everyone, you know, you shouldn't see something and think this is the way it should be==
161. Stacy: ==I also like how they stuck with the theme throughout the course of it's what makes you feel comfortable throughout the whole-from beginning to the end, it's what you like. Put yourself first.
162. Mpho: For me I just feel like they should have made the videos a little bit longer 'cause it's very informative what they're talking about in each of their videos, and I was interested in the first video when they were talking about STIs and the prevention but they didn't really expand on

it and uh they left me curious 'cause I also wanted to know about the causes of that and everything surrounding STIs and the last video was interesting and very informative for me where they talk about foreplay and sex and orgasm, 'cause a lot of girls are questioning themselves whether they HAVE the orgasm or they don't have during sex so ja.

163. Interviewer: They do give a lot more information in the emails, so if you sign up then you do get a bit more if you read, uhm so ja the videos they just touch on it a bit but... Uhm what aspects did you not like about the videos?

164. Leigh: Just the length of it uhm and the way they- so they went so into so much detail regarding self-pleasure, uhm but ja with the STI video they didn't give as much information, it also wasn't as long as that. I don't know their reasons [laughter] but==

165. Stacy: ==They didn't have an expert.

[laughter]

{ an STI expert }

166. Leigh: Maybe but like just the length uhm they go through information really quickly uhm ja.

167. Chad: Ja like the one- { I can } also say about the first video with STIs uhm they went really fast through it, they like just named the top five most common STIs and they like, you don't know like- there are still people that are naïve I would say about contracting HIV, like a lot of people might not know how to like get herpes and like these STIs. They should have gone more into information like have a doctor there or have a healthcare professional that deals with HIV perhaps or deals with STDs on a daily basis, and just discuss it with them like how do you contract it or how can you prevent it and if you do have it, how do you let your sexual partner know that "look, I'm HIV positive" or "I have herpes" or "I have an STI". Uhm, also like, getting tested together as a couple, they should have presented that also because it makes the relationship strong. It builds on that chemistry that they discussed in video three where they spoke about the whole entire sexual nature of-chemistry of between partners. They should've linked the videos perhaps of video one and video three and made it one long video.

168. Leigh: Ja even- even in the introduction of that video, they- they name the five and they say "we are here to talk about how to live with it if you have a lifelong STI or to like what you can do to prevent it" but prevent it or maybe not cure it per se but they didn't actually go into what they were- what I thought was coming uhm in the video. I think ja they should've touched more on the SERIOUS topics. Not the serious topics but the more...

169. Stacy: Life changing.
170. Leigh: Ja! Those topics. They should've gave more information on those.
171. Interviewer: Did you learn anything new?
172. Leigh: Yes.
173. Interviewer: Okay so what==
174. Stacy: == Throughout- but throughout the thing uhm you think you know so much and that's why you also get stuff wrong in the tests 'cause- 'cause you're always learning new stuff, that's why you get stuff wrong, because- I don't know. You think you know everything but you don't [giggling].
175. Interviewer: Can you give examples to what- what you learnt?
176. Stacy: In week 4?
177. Interviewer: Mmm.
178. Stacy: Uhm the big five, the STI thing. I didn't know that. And I was also a bit like uhm confused about the whole dental dam thing but ja.
179. Leigh: Ja what is that?
180. Chad: Dental dam is basically- so let's think about- you have condoms for obviously penetration sex so dental dam is when you go downstairs and you give oral sensation. So instead of having- perhaps your partner has=
181. Leigh: Is that like a sheet?
182. Chad: Ja. It's a sheet so vagina, mouth, dental dam. It's very stretchy.
183. Leigh: Okay.
184. Chad: So you [illustrates how to use a dental dam]
185. Leigh: Ai, Chad.
186. Chad: There's also anal dams as well. Ja. Guys go on campus and get tested. They explain this to you guys a lot.
187. Aabid: Cool.
- [Laughter]
188. Chad: That's me sponsoring for the HIV unit on campus.



189. Mpho: Represent.
190. Aabid: Learned something.
191. Interviewer: Test 4.
192. Stacy: ( )
193. Leigh: [Giggling]

[Mumbling]

194. Interviewer: Okay so are you guys done? Write your names on top, hey. Okay uhm, question one, which material is a dental dam made of? Latex, lace, gum, or cotton?
195. Participants: A.
196. Interviewer: Latex. Yes.
197. Aabid: I remember Chad said it was stretchy.

[Laughter]

198. Interviewer: Gum is also stretchy yes. Uhm what is Gardosil and Cervarix. Uhm kinds of STIs, condom brands, HPV vaccines or spermicide?
199. Participants: C.
200. Interviewer: It is C.
201. Chad: When in doubt, C.
202. Interviewer: It is HPV vaccines which can be used to prevent transmission of the cancer causing strains of HPV. Uhm which of the following won't make a wax less painful? A, numbing cream, B, going right after your period, C, soaking in a warm bath, or D, putting ice on the area.
203. Chad: I said C.
204. Aabid: I said B.
205. Leigh: I said B.
206. Interviewer: It is actually D.
207. Chad: Ice?
208. Interviewer: Putting ice on the area won't make a wax less painful uhm because ice tightens and closes up your pores, making it much harder to remove the hair. Uhm four, what is the organ of pleasure in the vulva? The vagina, clitoris, taint, or mons venus.

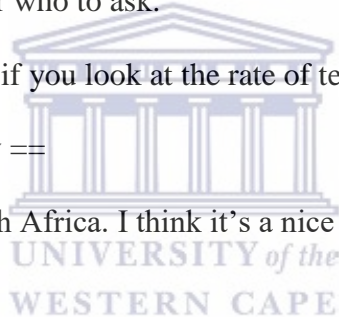
209. Participants: B.
210. Interviewer: B? Ja, so the answer is B. Most women do not orgasm from the penetration of the vagina alone and need their clitoris stimulated as well to reach orgasm. Uhm number 5, which of the following statements about vaginas is true? A, the neat and tiny- tidy, sorry vaginas you see in porn are often surgically altered, B, vaginas are amazing, C, all vaginas are different, and D, all of the above.
211. Participants: D.
212. Interviewer: It is D, yes. Uhm vaginas are amazing and as unique as fingerprints. Each one is different in colour, smell, and taste and what you see in porn is not a realistic representation. Yay! So the course is done. You guys are graduates now.
213. Participants: Yay!
214. Interviewer: So there's just a couple of final questions that I want to ask you guys. Uhm do you think it was worth doing this course in terms of learning about the female body?
215. Participants: Yes.
216. Interviewer: Yes? Wanna elaborate on it?
217. Leigh: Well, I've learned much more in this short time than I like learned in L.O==
218. Chad: ==JA!
219. Leigh: In high school to be honest.
220. Chad: Definitely. I can definitely relate to Leigh about that like in Life Orientation, like in Matric in Biology, like that- that you know from previous years, that you know is like the sex year, basically.
221. Leigh: Ja.
222. Chad: And in high school, they just hush hush. They like "oh okay, this is the vagina, this is the penis, this is what happens, you have sex, this is how babies are born." Like with Vagina Varsity, it's totally different. They go in-depth with it, and I think it's really cool and I hope that they got their message across to a wide audience.
223. Leigh: And I also like the medium that it's on, you know. Everyone's- technology is taking over, or took over already, and lots of people get their information from videos, from the internet. Uhm, so ja.
224. Interviewer: Uhm what do you think about the different modes, like images and sounds, that they used in the videos?



225. Leigh: I think it worked well together.
226. Stacy: It complemented each other also.
227. Leigh: There was an image for everything [giggling].

[Laughter]

228. Interviewer: Uhm, what do you think about Vagina Varsity as a tool for learning? Do you think it is effective?
229. Participants: Yes.
230. Interviewer: Yes?
231. Leigh: Yes especially for maybe a younger audience even, they can't talk to older people about- 'cause lots of- lots of young girls, they are experimenting and they're doing things and maybe like older figures in their life don't even know that, they don't assume, so they can't talk to their mothers or their aunties or their sisters and I- I think it's a nice platform to teach them things uhm they would they would wanna know where to or who to ask.
232. Stacy: Especially if you look at the rate of teenage pregnancies now==
233. Aabid: == Exactly ==
234. Stacy: == in South Africa. I think it's a nice way to uhm combat it.
235. Leigh: Mmm.
236. Aabid: Ja I think it's very enlightening uhm especially on the points they they touch, because like uhm like they said as well, their topics are very taboo and especially in in our society, we have different cultures and so forth that it's not easy for young girls to speak on these topics. But they need to speak to someone, and like like we've also noticed, we haven't learned these things on school, even though we spent twelve years on school. We learned much more in a few minutes of these videos, so I do believe it's very enlightening.
237. Interviewer: What did you guys think about the tests? Did you think it was helpful?
238. Participants: Yes.
239. Interviewer: Learned a lot?
240. Mpho: It made you think about what you watched in the videos, 'cause some of the questions ( ) in the test.



241. Chad: Ja like it's fine and all to watch the video and then you get the test and then it's like "I remember they spoke about this. I remember this image was there and then they said this"==
242. Stacy: == I remembered the images==
243. Leigh: Ja.
244. Chad: Like the visual representation comes through in the test, so I think it's like cues to help you remember, and I think it's really cool that it was visually there. Like they knew that they were gonna speak to a young audience, so having those visuals and having humor, it's like having-like the presenters are two older sisters, perhaps, that you could go to and just speak to them about it and they'll be like "no, it's cool" like "I can explain this to you".
245. Leigh: Ja even that video that pregnancy video=
246. Chad: = Mmm.
247. Leigh: They were quizzing each other.
248. Aabid: Ja.
249. Leigh: Uhm you learned a lot as well. 'Cause like they gave you time to answer the question yourself uhm while they were preparing to answer so that was also very interactive, I think.
250. Interviewer: Final question, uh what do you think about how they handled the taboo topics?
251. Stacy: It didn't really feel taboo in the- in the videos. Like they did it with ease so it didn't feel like a taboo topic here. But I think at school, that's why you learn less 'cause they tiptoe around it and they make you feel like- like you won't raise your hand in class and ask a question whereas here I feel like uhm they made it more comfortable.
252. Chad: Ja, like- like Stacy's saying like in high school you have to accommodate everybody because you don't know what the students- especially 'cause, I quote like "they're underage" in a sense also so you'd have to get consent from the parents. Some parents aren't really liberal about their children learning about exploring their sexual being in a sense so I think that it's cool that they called it Vagina Varsity 'cause I mean when you come to varsity, it's this world where you're exposed to everything and if a high school child is watching it, I think it's very inclusive for them like even though they might be going behind their parents' backs and watching it but it's still like- it's still part of their education like I get that some parents are old school and really like stern in their ways, but eventually your child is gonna come to you and ask you these questions and what if your child has a STI or

something. Like I really think that it's very {productive} in the society that we live in, and it's really cool.

253. Stacy: It shows that there's more harm done if you don't speak about it, so it's better to speak about it.

254. Leigh: And they addressed it like a friend, like they're talking to a friend. They were two friends so when they were talking to you and they were making those eyes, they were still talking about the topics in a very- in a very casual way, but because they maybe show a bit of their own discomfort, but they're not- it's still not stopping them which is kinda showing you like even though you still maybe feel uncomfortable while you're watching it, it's- it's no reason to not talk about it. So ja, I liked that as well.

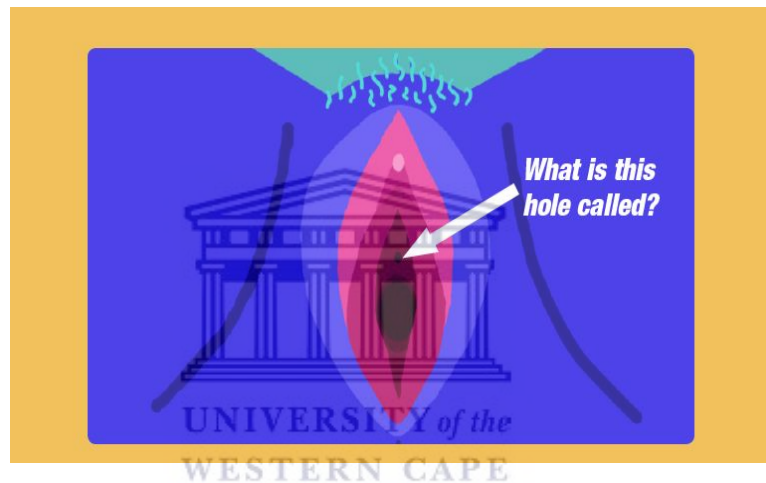
255. Interviewer: Nothing else? Yay! Thank you so much guys.



## APPENDIX G - VAGINA VARSITY QUIZ AND MEMO

### Test 1: You've covered the basics

1. Which one of the following statements is FALSE?
  - A. The vagina is the name often used to refer to what is actually the vulva
  - B. The vulva is the whole external female genital area
  - C. The vagina is the passage between the vaginal opening and the cervix
  - D. All vulvas look exactly the same
2. What is this hole called?
  - A. Vagina
  - B. Urethra
  - C. Anus
  - D. Clitoris

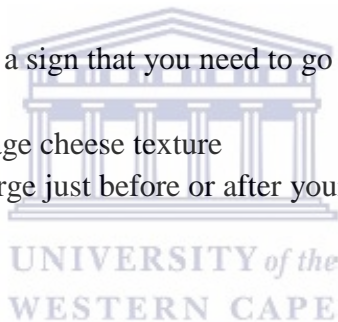


3. Approximately how many nerve-endings does the clitoris have?
  - A. 8000
  - B. 200
  - C. 8
  - D. 400
4. Where did the G-spot get its name from?
  - A. It stands for Gynaecologist
  - B. It's named after Dr Grafenberg
  - C. It's shaped like a wishbone
  - D. It's short for German spot
5. How long is the average menstrual cycle?
  - A. 30 days
  - B. 25 days

- C. 22 days
- D. 28 days

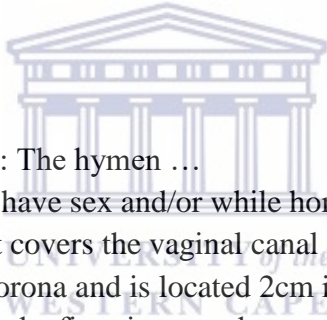
**Test 2: The novice quiz**

1. Why aren't douching and chemicals good for the vagina?
  - A. The vagina is a self-cleaning system.
  - B. The vagina has its own good bacteria that fights off infection.
  - C. It can change the PH level of the vagina.
  - D. All of the above.
  
2. What should you wash your vulva with every day?
  - A. Warm water
  - B. Aqueous cream
  - C. Hand sanitizer
  - D. Honey
  
3. Which of the following is a sign that you need to go see the doctor?
  - A. Clear discharge
  - B. Discharge with a cottage cheese texture
  - C. Slightly brown discharge just before or after your period
  - D. None of the above
  
4. Which kind of underwear fabric is best for your vagina?
  - A. Lycra
  - B. Lace
  - C. Cotton
  - D. Spandex
  
5. Which type of infection is indicated by a strong fishy smell?
  - A. Yeast infection
  - B. Bacterial vaginosis
  - C. STIs
  - D. UTI



### Test 3: The intermediate quiz

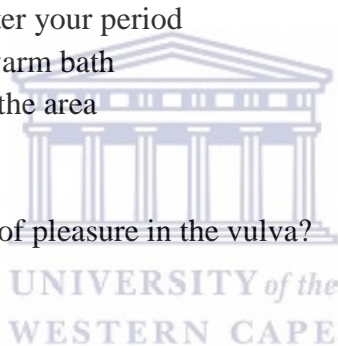
1. Which STI causes cervical cancer?
  - A. HIV/AIDS
  - B. Certain strains of HPV
  - C. Hepatitis
  - D. Herpes
  
2. Why is a Pap smear called a Pap smear?
  - A. It's named after someone
  - B. It's short for paparazzi
  - C. It was named after YouTube stars Pap Culture
  - D. You should eat pap before your exam for best results
  
3. What is the hymen made of?
  - A. Thin mucous membrane
  - B. Muscle
  - C. Sinew
  - D. None of the above
  
4. Complete the sentence: The hymen ...
  - A. Gets lost after you have sex and/or while horse riding/riding bikes
  - B. Is a membrane that covers the vaginal canal
  - C. Is also called the corona and is located 2cm inside the vagina
  - D. Has to be 'popped' the first time you have penetrative sex
  
5. Which one of the following is the least reliable contraceptive method?
  - A. Pulling out/withdrawal
  - B. The pill
  - C. The injection
  - D. IUD (Intrauterine Device)





#### Test 4: You're a graduate!

1. Which material is a dental dam made of?
  - A. Latex
  - B. Lace
  - C. Gum
  - D. Cotton
  
2. What is Gardasil and Cervarix?
  - A. Kinds of STIs
  - B. Condom brands
  - C. HPV vaccines
  - D. Spermicide
  
3. Which of the following WON'T make a wax less painful?
  - A. Numbing cream
  - B. Going right after your period
  - C. Soaking in a warm bath
  - D. Putting ice on the area
  
4. What is the organ of pleasure in the vulva?
  - A. Vagina
  - B. Clitoris
  - C. Taint
  - D. Mons Venus
  
5. Which of the following statements about vaginas is TRUE?
  - A. The 'neat and tidy' vaginas you see in porn are often surgically altered
  - B. Vaginas are amazing
  - C. All vaginas are different
  - D. All of the above



## MEMO

### Test 1

1. D. All vulvas look exactly the same (All vulvas are different)
2. B. Urethra (This is the hole through which urine is expelled)
3. A. 8000 (And its sole purpose is pleasure)
4. B. It's named after Dr Ernst Grafenberg (A German gynaecologist)
5. D. 28 days (A cycle is counted from the first day of 1 period to the first day of the next period)

### Test 2

1. D. All of the above (Douching and chemicals can change the PH levels of the vagina and is unnecessary).
2. A. Warm water (Washing with warm water every day is all you need to keep your vulva clean).
3. B. Discharge with a cottage cheese texture (It can indicate a yeast infection).
4. C. Cotton (Cotton panties are the most breathable and vagina-friendly)
5. B. Bacterial vaginosis (This happens when there isn't enough good bacteria and too many bad bacteria).

### Test 3

1. B. Certain strains of HPV (Some strains of the Human Papilloma Virus can lead to pre-cancerous or cancerous cells on the cervix).
2. A. It's named after someone (It's named after the doctor who determined that it's a useful way to detect signs of cervical cancer, Georgios Papanikolaou).
3. A. Thin mucous membrane (The hymen is a ring of elastic and folded mucous tissue, kind of like a scrunchy).
4. C. Is also called the corona and is located 2cm inside the vagina (The hymen aka corona is located inside the vagina and can't be 'broken', popped or lost).
5. A. Pulling out/withdrawal (Pulling out/Withdrawal is not one of the most effective ways of preventing pregnancy)

### Test 4

1. A. Latex (Dental dams are rectangular latex sheets (kind of like a flat condom))
2. C. HPV vaccines (HPV vaccines can be used to prevent transmission of the cancer-causing strains of HPV)
3. D. Putting ice on the area (Ice tightens and closes up your pores, making it much harder to remove the hair).
4. B. Clitoris (Most women do not orgasm from penetration of the vagina alone and need their clitoris stimulated as well to reach orgasm).

5. D. All of the above (Vaginas are amazing and as unique as fingerprints. Each one is different in colour, size, smell, and taste, and what you see in porn is not a realistic representation)

