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Countering the Menstrual Mainstream

A Study of the European Menstrual Countermovement

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ABSTRACT

Introducing the term the "Menstrual Countermovement": the mass of actions, and agents that purposefully work towards challenging the repressive mainstream menstrual discourse of shame and silence, this research focuses on a spatiotemporal context previously unstudied: Europe, late 2000's - early 2010's. The dual aim of the study is to contribute to a 1) diversification and broadening of the understanding of the movement as a whole, and (2) continuing the work of previous research further exploring the movement's place within feminism. Using autoethnographic methods combined with ethnography adapted to online-research (netnography), the actions, reasoning and strategies of both the researcher herself (who is a member of the movement) and other European Menstrual Countermovers, are explored, described and analysed. Through social change-work based on consumerism, knowledge production, and the challenging of taboos the Menstrual Countermovement works towards challenging the repressive mainstream menstrual discourse of shame and silence. Through strategies of abjectification/attractification and hyper-personalisation they're breaking boundaries of purity and filth as well as private and public. The European Menstrual Countermovement is found to be a highly personalised contemporary feminist/social movement which is struggling with finding a place within feminism. It is argued that the Menstrual Countermovement is doing Post-Constructionist feminism in practice.

Title: Countering the Menstrual Mainstream - *A Study of the European Menstrual Countermovement*

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DEDICATION

To Helena Stjernström and Per Nilsson, who raised me to be loud.

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List of Abbreviations

CMR - Complete Member Researcher

MCM - Menstrual Countermovement

MCM'ers - Menstrual Countermovers

PMS - Premenstrual Syndrome

List of Definitions

Menarche - Menstrual debut

Zines - from Fanzines

1. Introduction

1.1. How Things Come to Matter

For me, it started seven years ago on an art-fair. My paintings were humorous and rather provocative and I was used to reactions. But the ones I got from my premiering "tampon earrings" were unprecedented. People crammed around my little stall. The reactions spanned from "eww, that's disgusting" to "ooh – that's amazing". Many just giggled. Some drunk yelled "Do you call this is *art!*?" An elderly hunchback woman stood gazing through the various shapes and models of earrings for a long time. I was sure she would tell me off too. But instead she looked up to me and said in a soft, slow voice: "This could never have been done when I was your age. Don't you *ever* stop doing what you do." Then, only a couple of hours in, I had to sell them under the counter. My fellow vendors thought they scared off their costumers. It was obvious that I'd struck a societal nerve. From then on I've continued to explore the politics, the norms, the attitudes, the products, the actions, the feelings and beliefs surrounding menstruation. I've tried to inspire attitudinal change in others through blogging, drawing, and crafting. Over the years I've gotten more sure of the importance of menstruation, and less embarrassed of bearing the standard.

Though I proudly call myself a Menstrual Activist today it took several years before I understood that I am part of something substantially larger than myself. I knew there were others, but I didn't really feel it until I read Chris Bobel's *New Blood - Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation* (2010). Then began a keen sociological interest in *the movement* as such. What I thought to be rather personal and unique ideas and actions, was actually a social movement dating back to the roots of feminism. And not only did I have predecessors, there were others like me fighting the same cause on the other side of the Atlantic Sea, right now. I met Bobel in Pittsburgh at the 2011 Society for Menstrual Cycle Research conference. A shaky hand shook hers. I remember thanking her for giving me context, which moved her. The conference was informing and inspiring; to meet the flesh and blood of so many menstrual researchers, students and activists. But it didn't take long before I felt alone all the same. It seemed all was American, nothing European. The history of the FemCare industry (from feminine hygiene care) referred to in talks was the *American* history. The number of victims of Toxic Shock Syndrome were the number of *American* victims. The Menstrual Activists in Bobel's work were *American* activists. It all seemed little connected to *my* socio-menstrual context. So I started wondering: How does Europe act out against the menstrual taboo? Where and what is the *European menstrual countermovement*?

Looking back to when it all began I also see how menstruation played a crucial role in my feminist journey. I didn't have words for it at the time, but what attracted me with menstruation was its *materiality*. One year into sociological studies I stood knee deep in "butleresque" queer theories, prepared to the teeth to fight anyone who claimed there were any actual differences whatsoever between the sexes, that *all* was socially constructed. As I understood it, it was considered the *crème de la crème* of feminism to abolish the body all together. A strenuous exercise which conflicted the real with the theoretical; the physical with the hyper abstract. But then I realised I menstruate. Menstruation could not be abolished by redefining the concept of gender. Women menstruate. I am *not* saying *all* women menstruate. A *menstruator* is not necessarily a woman, and neither is a woman necessarily a menstruator.¹ But still, the blood forced me to conclude: menstruation is – in some way – a female experience. It was not until I had already begun the work on this thesis I encountered Post-Constructionism: a set of feminist theories apt to handle this fact, and still not fall into biological determinism or cultural essentialism.

1.2. Positioning Menstruation and the Menstrual Countermovement

Menstruation has long been a key player in women's movements and feminism. Simone de Beauvoir wrote about the importance of menstrual matters in her classic *Le Deuxième Sexe* in 1949. Germaine Greer, still shockingly to many, dared women to taste their menstrual blood in *The Female Eunuch* in 1970: "If you think you are emancipated, you might consider the idea of tasting your own menstrual blood – if it makes you sick, you've got a long way to go, baby" (1970:57). In Gerd Brantenberg's classic matriarchal feminist novel *Egalias døtre* (1977) the Olympic Games are replaced by the Menstruation Games.² Apart from feminism, menstruation has been a part of overall society for as long as women have menstruated (Knight 1995). The Society for Menstrual Cycle Research argues that menstruation is one of the key biological differences between the sexes, and that it hence can be viewed as a *fundamental arrangement of human society* (SWS 2011). Though a natural, important – and perhaps even fundamental – part of life, menstruation is often considered shameful and taboo (Kissling 2006, Shail & Howie 2005, Rembeck 2008, Malmberg 1991, Houppert 2000, Thurén 1994, Johnston-Robledo et al 2007, Stubbs 2008, DeForest 2007, Lee 2008). Secrecy and silence surrounds it. What I have chosen to call the *Menstrual Countermovement* (hereafter MCM) is a social movement that resists this silence; believe it has a negative impact on our lives, bodies and the planet; generating ignorance, suffering and repression. Through engaging openly and loudly with various aspects of menstruation the Menstrual Countermovers (hereafter MCM'ers) resists this silence, and thereby – however megalomaniac it might sound – try to change the world.

¹ There are women who don't menstruate because of e.g. pregnancy, illness, medication, physical activity, their biology doesn't enable them (e.g. transwomen, or they're post-menopausal), and there are e.g. transmen who have menstruating bodies though they don't identify as women. See Bobel 2010.

² See Bobel 2010 and 2008 for a further historical overview of menstrual activism in feminism since the 1970's.

1.3. Research Problem and Aim

While there has been some previous research (mainly Bobel 2010, Kissling 2006) and coverage in international media (e.g. Cochrane 2009, Kelleher 2010) of the movement in USA (and some other anglophone countries), it remains seriously understudied and only very partially described. Though the movement is global I address the fact that the *European* part of the movement has escaped scholarly attention. The aim of this study is twofold: to 1) *diversify and broaden* the understanding of the movement *as a whole*, and continuing the work of previous research 2) further exploring *the movement's place within feminism*.

This study has been carried out in a different spacial and temporal setting compared to previous studies: USA, late 1990's to early 2000's – Europe, late 2000's to early 2010's. Thereby I hope to contribute to a diversification of academic and in-movement understanding of the MCM and contemporary European feminist movements in general. The MCM is of relevance for several of academic disciplines; social movement studies and gender studies in particular. Studying the MCM can tell us much about how contemporary social/feminist movements function. It can tell us something about contemporary feminism, and perhaps it could inspire others to further explore menstruation as a theme. As this is a study of the *European* MCM it's also of relevance to European studies as an attempt to capture a social creature on this continent.

1.4. Research Questions

What is the menstrual countermovement in Europe today? Who is part of it and what different positions are there? What are the key challenges for the movement? What strategies do they employ in their social change-work?

What are the feminist foundations of the movement? How does the MCM relate to core feminist issues such as the materiality of sex and the discursiveness of gender?

1.5. Outline of the Thesis

In Section 2. Previous Research and Theoretical Discussions, I discuss the work of the two main scholars that have previously studied the movement, and discuss theories, concepts and definitions relevant to this study. In Section 3. Design and Methodology, I discuss methodological choices, procedures as well as ethical considerations. In Section 4. Results and Analysis, I first draw a broad image of the movement as found in this study and present the participating MCM'ers within three positions. Then I discuss their main strategies, and last I dig deeper into the challenges of the MCM and try to position them within feminism. Finally, in Section 6. Conclusions and Reflections, I sum up my findings, discuss their potential significance, and provide recommendations for future research.

2. Previous Research and Theoretical Discussions

2.1. Previous Research: Chris Bobel and Elizabeth Kissling

Women Studies professor Chris Bobel has described and analysed *menstrual activism* from the 1970's to the mid 2000's. In *New Blood: Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation* (2010)³ she portrays the movement in North America, and to some extent the anglophone world. Her research included years of ethnographic participatory observation in activist events and interviews with activists, combined with textual analysis of zines, websites (blogs were only on the uprise) and historical analysis of archives encompassing a numerous and rich variety of cases. Though her findings of relevance are too many to mention, I focus on her description of menstrual activism's two "wings": *Feminist Spiritualists* and *Radical Menstruators*. The Feminist Spiritualists, are "menstrual activists who work to reclaim menstruation as a healthy, spiritual, empowering and even pleasurable experience for women." (Bobel 2010:66) They are described as typically working with concepts such as body literacy and living with the cycle, and often present menstruation as mythological or even magical. "The Feminist Spiritualists do not trouble gender" writes Bobel (ibid:167) and they're often described as "cultural feminists" or "essentialists" (ibid:70f). The Radical Menstruators on the other hand are described as "challeng[ing] not only only the menstrual status quo [...] but also the dichotomous gender structure at the root of gender based oppression" (ibid:99f). A majority of them identified as genderqueer, anti-corporate, environmentalists and anti-essentialists. Further, many of Bobel's Radical Menstruators were largely inspired by Judith Butler and queer/Constructionist feminism, and rejected Sexual Difference feminists (such as Braidotti) (ibid:166). According to Bobel, the Feminist Spiritualists were not particularly theoretical in their feminism, but were categorised as essentialists feminists because of their actions and reasoning (ibid, 2013).

Communication and gender studies professor Elizabeth Kissling's book *Capitalizing on the Curse - The Business of Menstruation* (2006) is less about the movement as such, but on how capitalism and consumerism forms the mainstream menstrual discourse as well as those who challenge it. She calls these challengers "a small but thriving menstrual counterculture" and include e.g. online menstrual activism and online menstrual museums (Kissling 2006). Kissling uses Beauvoir's theories as a basis for her work, claiming that people who "bring menstruation out of the closet" challenge definitions of Public and Private as artificial categories that support a patriarchal hierarchal system where women act in the private, men in the public; where women are seen as inferior to men and hence the Private inferior to the Public. Keeping menstruation in the private sphere contributes to its stigma and shame, as well as to menstrual ignorance (ibid:113). Kissling's main argument is that women's relationships to menstruation has been exploited and disrupted through consumerism (ibid:123). As Bobel, Kissling focuses on the USA, and draws a similar divide in the movement; the retrograde "Celebrate-Your-Cycle Feminists" on one side (much like Bobel's

³ See also Bobel 2006, 2007, 2008.

Feminist Spiritualists and henceforth so called) and the progressive "third wave feminists" on the other (ibid: 121).

Both Bobel and Kissling, and Bobel in particular, have laid an imperative fundament for this study without which I would have been acting in an academical void. I thankfully continue on their trodden path, but challenge their work in four ways:

First, I challenge their dichotomous division of the movement. I claim it is an overly simplified categorisation. Bobel also has subjects that don't fit easily with either of her wings (Bobel 2010:103, 178f, 2013) which clearly speaks to the need to diversify.

Secondly, I argue that they fail to include the alternative FemCare scene (alternative FemCare/ers, see Section 4.1.1) in their understanding of the movement. Kissling described it as a 'shopping for social change vibe that contributes to [menstrual activism's] ineffectiveness" (Kissling cited in Bobel, ibid:95). Bobel has similar objections (ibid:89f). Consumerist solutions to a consumerist problem don't resonate with them. Though both have interesting points in this respect I contest their understanding of consumerism as an ineffective, somehow unworthy method for social change-work. Neither can income-generating activities inherently disqualify change-work. Below I present new theories on how social movements can be understood today, including how consumerism can be understood as change-work and thereby give theoretical ground for an inclusion of consumerist actions into the MCM.

Thirdly, I argue they have both only studied a homogenous segment of the movement. They have been geographically and linguistically narrow; looking only at USA and anglophone countries, and they have looked at only selected representations of the movement rather than *the movement as a whole*. Bobel has looked only at *activists* and as discussed above both exclude persons who do consumerist change-work. This might leave a skew image of how menstrual activism and MCM-work is carried out.

Fourthly, Bobel's and Kissling's research was carried out about a decade ago. Since then much has happened. For example their work has likely influenced the movement, the internet has kept on growing in warp speed perhaps altering movement strategies and methods, and feminism might have taken a material turn.

2.2. Theoretical Discussions and Definitions

2.2.1. (Re)definitions of Social Movements, Change Personalised

Social movements, as most social creatures, are in a state of constant flux. The term "social movement" was coined in mid 19th century with the birth of social science and has since evolved together with societal shifts as a central part of the modernisation process (Thörn 1997). Collective identity has long been seen as a *sine qua non* of social movements and in other research fields (ibid 108f) but in recent years its necessity has been contested as new theories of how social movements act collectively have been developed.

Contemporary social movements commonly display a sort of individualised, or perhaps personalised, collective identity. Social change-work and political agency often take the form of personal choices and lived embodied resistance in private everyday life. Participants need not unite in one formal collective identity or organisation in order to act together towards the same goal (Brown & Pickerill 2009, McDonald 2002, 2004, Wettergren 2005, Bobel 2007, Haenfleur et al 2012, Cherster & Welsh 2005, Micheletti 2002). Herein lies also a new understanding of how everyday consumerist choices can be regarded as social change-work. As previous scholars have largely excluded the consumeristic parts of the movement this is of special importance. Political participation scholar Michele Micheletti (2002, 2010) argues that consumption as a political act has been a creative method of political expression and resistance for centuries, for women in particular. Through *political consumerism* women have been able to exercise political power in societal contexts where they were otherwise restricted.

Many social movement scholars underline the impact of the internet on contemporary social movements. It's "changing the social perception of self and others in a way that opens up new areas for conflict and new roads to collective identification" (Wettergren 2005:71). Also recent research has reported on how online life (on blogs, social media etc.) blur the public-private dichotomy by sharing private, personal and intimate information publicly (Bronstein 2013, Child et al. 2011, Lövheim 2011, McCullagh 2008). Bobel also shows that the 70's feminist parol "the personal is political" is used in contemporary feminist movements as their political texts often take the form of personal narratives (Bobel 2010:19).

Hence contemporary social movements are often fluid in their structure and could be understood as personalised on at least two levels: Both as personalised collective action – where individuals' consumerist choices are elevated to the status of social change-work, and as personalised modus – as in e.g. writing political texts with a very personal and intimate tone. The personal is political, but more personal than ever.

2.2.2. Defining the Menstrual Countermovement

Previous research haven't worked with the movement *as a whole*. I argue that there is a need for a new and broad definition of what counts as the MCM. Otherwise we risk excluding relevant movement representations.

I have for the purpose of being able to study the movement as a whole, developed the term "*menstrual countermovement*". The term is, in all its simplicity, quite revolutionary as this has never been done before. The movement is very diverse and has tellingly been called many different things such as the "menstrual

activist movement” (Bobel 2010), ”menarchist movement” (Docherty 2010), or ”the menstrual counterculture” (Houppert 1999, Kissling 2006). I could also mention ”alternative menstruation”, ”menstrual anarchy”, ”menstrual evangelism”, and ”le mouvement pro-menstruation”. Then we have the ”menstrual cup evangelists”, and the ”DIY-menstrual pad’ers”. And there are many more. Perhaps this diversity in labels plays part in why it’s not so visible. It might also be a characteristic of a contemporary social movement in its heterogeneity and refusal of (or strong ambivalence towards) being labelled (see Bobel 2007, 2010, Wettergren 2005). And therefore, I argue, it’s important to be broad and wide; one has to build a box large enough for all who work towards the same goal, irrespective of tactics, arena or ideological foundations. Previous framings have either been too vague or too precise and has excluded vital representations. Bobel’s ”menstrual activism” connotes only the extreme or radical, whereas Kissling’s ”menstrual counterculture” is too passive. I define the MCM as *the mass of actions, and agents that purposefully work towards challenging the repressive mainstream menstrual discourse of shame and silence.*

Social movement scholars have pointed to the importance of social movements to be understood in their own terms, that ”they are what they say they are” and that labelling is an act of dominance towards them (Castells 1997:69f). Though I agree, I still find there is a need for an umbrella term, both for academic purposes and for the movement. Contemporary definitions of the term ”movement” allows inclusion of a wide range of actions and representations. In this definition, everyone who in some way purposefully challenge the mainstream menstrual culture with their actions is part of the movement. It includes the devoted menstrual activists, the alternative FemCare industry, as well as the everyday acts of those who are annoyed by the stupidities of tampon-commercials. But would all those that I define as part of the movement identify as such? Maybe not. But I hope they feel it fits them to some extent.

The term MCM pose a case for broadening the definition of what a social movement is, and it’s a case for large inclusive categories that makes it possible to speak of diverse social change actions and agents as one. It is likely this term engender insights previously unreachable.

2.2.3. Post-Constructionism, Breaking Feminist Waves

Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture Matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that doesn’t seem to matter anymore is matter.” (Barad 2007:132)

”One is not born a woman, but becomes one”, wrote Beauvoir (1949), building fundamentals for contemporary feminist thought. Since the 1970’s this understanding of sex as a social construction has had an enormous impact on women’s movements and feminist theorists alike. Seeing gender (culturally socialised sex) as something that is created through societal structures and discourses instead of determined by our biology (biological determinism) engenders the fundamental idea that it is possible to change what it means to be a man/woman (Lykke 2009). In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s feminism experienced a so called ”linguistic turn”, represented by Judith Butler in particular but also e.g. Candace West and Don Zimmerman (Lykke 2009, Lam 2012), further elevating the importance of language in the construction of the gendered subject. Butler’s queer-feminist concept *performativity* is especially telling. Put simply she claims that gender identity is an effect of repeated speech-acts, and that there is no pre-discursive subject (Lykke 2009, Butler

1990). In previous research Butler's ideas, and performativity in particular, are shown to have had a large impact on the MCM as well as on the "third wave feminists" in general (Bobel 2010:166).

Post-Constructionism is an umbrella term coined by gender-studies professor Nina Lykke, for the reasonings of contemporary feminist theorists and philosophers such as Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray (Lykke 2010) who's work is criticising Butler and other contemporary constructionists/queer-feminists (henceforth called Constructionists/Constructionism), through arguing:

...there is a pressing need for theories of sex/gender that can relate to pre-discursive "facticities" [...] of bodies and transcorporeal relations. [...] [A]rticulating that feminist tools are needed which can approach the agency of matter, including that of sexed bodies and bodily differences, in a non-deterministic and non-essentializing mode. The aim of these endeavours is to theorize bodily and transcorporeal materialities in ways that neither push feminist thought back into the traps of biological determinism cultural essentialism, nor make feminist theorising leave bodily matter and biologies behind in a critically under-theorized limbo. (Lykke 2010:131f)

The theories included in Post-Constructionism are also often called *New Material Feminisms* (Lam 2012, Lykke 2010), but the term Post-Constructionism is beneficial since it's so explicitly based in Constructionism, signalling that it's the next step after Constructionism, not a step backwards to biological determinism or cultural essentialism: the Post-Constructionists argue the need to (re)focus on the material side of things, but they *also* acknowledge social construction (Lykke 2010). By using and acknowledging both perspectives, explicitly viewing sex/gender as a hybrid (Lykke 2009) they're bridging feminist bipolarities and schisms such as "essentialist versus constructionist" feminism (Lam 2012:1); "French" versus "Anglo-American" feminism (Butler 2004, Gambaudo 2007, Nussbaum 1993) and as in previous research of the MCM: "second" versus "third wave" (Bobel 2010). Bobel argues there is "a palpable tension between those who wish to preserve womanhood as a core category of feminism and those who want to explode [...] that category" (2010:171). While an interesting finding, several menstrual activists in previous research, as well as the participants of this study do not fit easily with either of these feminist positions/"wings"/"waves". I argue they instead fit into Post-Constructionism.

Post-Constructionism is providing theoretical bases for analysing the agency of sex *and* the discursiveness of gender. With Post-Constructionist theorising it's possible to talk of "women" and mean not only the biological, but also the socialised. Womanhood is recognised as an actual reality, a mater-reality, which is both pre- and post-discursive. Within the Post-Constructionist flora of theoretical think-technology some are especially interesting in the MCM context: Barad's *agential realism* is a concept built to elevate the agency and power of matter. Barad claims it is the *intra-actions* (contrasted to *interactions* which are more separatist) between human and non-human agents which produces meaning, in a sort of cooperation between the "it" and the "I" (Barad 2007:139). Similarly, in Haraway's (1991) writing of the bodily apparatus, the body is to be understood as both discourse (socially constructed), the result of intra-action, *and* as a "trickster" or a "witty agent" that kicks back, that have agency outside human control (Haraway 1991:225-246). Also Braidotti's (1994) three levels of sexual difference should be mentioned. The *Difference Between Men and Women* (level 1), the *Differences Among Women* (level 2) and the *Differences within Each Woman* (level 3). Sexual difference level 2 is based on intersectional thought (seeing women as different from each other as they're classed, racialised, sexualised, aged, etc). Sexual difference level 3 is understood through post-modern philosophy: the subject is fluid and changes in different contexts (Lykke 2009).

2.2.4. *Abjection*

Menstruation is often perceived as disgusting, as *abject* (Kristeva 1982). The abject is "what is considered vulgar, defiled and *disgusting*" (Blackman 2008:93f), that which *should* be hidden, but comes out and is made into an "Other"; an abject (Butler 1990). The abject is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982:4). The abject does not exist, but *comes into being*: A hair is not abject when on one's head, but it *becomes* abject when found in one's dinner. The abject is what's *perceived* as filthy and disgusting (Wasshede 2013).

Sociologist Cathrin Wasshede has recently created a verbalised form; *abjection* (Swedish: *abjektifiering*) explaining activism that *uses* the abject position with the purpose of destabilising and changing societal structures and boundaries between the normal and the abnormal; between purity and filth. The abject status of menstruation makes abjection a key strategy for MCM'ers. When menstruation's put on display, brought "out of the closet", it creates disorder, makes change-work and activism of even the smallest actions (ibid). While the concept is not directly connected to Lykke's Post-Constructionism it has an apparent connection to e.g. Barad's agential realism: dealing with the *creative powers* of "filthy" materials; *of the agency of the abject*.

3. Design and Methodology

As I am myself a part of the movement I have included my own work in the study. My methodological choices could be summed in my term *Autonetnography*; combining *autoethnography* and a specific internet-version of ethnography called *netnography*. I have chosen to focus on Europe and primarily on the online activities of the MCM, for reasons explained below.

3.1. Autonetnography

Exploring a movement oneself is a part of could be considered problematic. Some years ago I actually thought it impossible. But the work of many autoethnographers before me have proved me wrong (e.g. Anderson 2006, Taber 2010, Ellis et.al 2010). Through autoethnography the researcher's complete membership status of the studied group is turned into something valuable: utilised as a tool and as part of the empirical data. Autoethnographers differ in where they lay their focus. I join Taber (2010), Walford (2004) and Anderson (2006) in their view that autoethnography must do more than just focusing on the self, that it should be about exposing both the observations of the self *and* others to scientific analysis, connecting the self to the social in theoretical analysis.

The ethnographer do not set out to falsify or confirm a given hypothesis or to test a particular theory, but instead lets the data - the actions and accounts of the subjects - steer the way in choosing categories of interpretation. The research is initially relatively open-ended, but as the research progressed it narrowed (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008, Aspens 2011). I have chosen to analyse online MCM-work and for that I needed specialised tools and concepts adapted to the distinct nature of the internet. Netnography does just that. The netnographer views the internet as a medium for communication, a venue to connect across physical borders and socially constructed space. It uses the online interactions that are already out there, and - as regular ethnography - comprises analysis of several kinds of sources (Kozinets 2010).

3.2. Fields

3.2.1. Europe

The main reason for searching for the movement in Europe is quite simply that it has not been done before: there is an obvious gap in previous research. But why Europe and not somewhere else? And why choose a region as large and diverse instead of focusing on one part of Europe or even one country? The answer is in the question. It's because of size and diversity. The devoted individuals in the MCM aren't that many, and there are certainly not that many per country. Hence I deemed a smaller geographical area insufficient. I also view Europe as an area particularly suited for searching for diversification. Europe is in parts united by the European Union (EU) and other cooperations, but is still so *very* diverse. The differences are everywhere, which gives it's difficult to talk of *one* European women's movement, or *one* European feminism (Bull et al. 2000), and in order to be able to speak of *one* European MCM it's important to have a broad and inclusive definition (see Section 2.2.1). I considered Europe particularly probable to give me something that differed from the previous *and* that differed from one and other. If one narrows the definition of Europe to only the current EU member-states there are more than 500 million inhabitants who speak more than 23 different languages (Eurostat). The wider European area is naturally even more diverse. All the different nations have different historical, religious, social and *socio-menstrual* contexts; birthing different kinds of MCM-work; different sources for knowledge, thought and method. For researchability I chose to focus on the EU member-states, but remained open to MCM-work in other European countries, especially from countries in close cooperation with the EU (see also Section 3.3.1 and 7.3).

3.2.2. The Internet

I argue online-research is particularly suitable for studying the European MCM. Partly because of the issue's sensitive nature, and partly because the low number of individuals involved. On the internet one can act anonymously on issues that might be considered stigmatising offline (Kozinets 2010:28) and individuals with a special interest, be it menstrual matters or star trek figurines, can easily interact online - bridging geographical and social hindrances. Previous research include participatory observations of offline activities, travelling all over North America (Bobel 2010). In theory I could have attempted a similar design, as few social phenomena exists solely online (Garcia et al. 2009) but that would have been unwise considering available resources. Travelling costs both time and money, none of which a Master's student has plenty. When one, despite of ones meagre resources, choses to cover such a large area as Europe, the accessibility of the internet is key. Through the observations has been carried out online, the interviews regarded the participants' offline activities also.

3.3. Methodological Procedures

I divided the activities of the research into four phases: 1) the Preparatory phase focused on a pre-study; 2) the Field Work phase focused on observations and data generation; 3) then followed Coding and Analysis. 4) Writing was initiated at the start but intensified in half-time. The phases were sequential in time but iterative in nature and content.

3.3.1. Preparations

Since the European MCM has never before been studied the research began with a small pre-study of the movement where I searched for online MCM representations (blogs/sites/tweet accounts etc.), based in Europe. While I did have some previous knowledge of the movement I deemed a systematic pre-study imperative as I did not want to study MCM'ers in my own network only. The searches were multi-traced: carried out in several national/linguistic contexts, one at a time and my own network was only marginally utilised (described further in Appendix 7.3).

The pre-study constituted the basis for sampling of participants (i.e. individuals/companies behind the representation) to take into the main study. 78 MCM representations were found in the pre-study of which 20 were considered highly active (so called "intensity sampling", see Marchall & Rossman 2011); showing a rich material on their sites/blogs, seeming to be spending (or having spent) *a large amount of time and energy* on MCM-work. Those were contacted and asked of their interest in participating. 13 responded and agreed to participate. Including myself, the main study thus comprised a total of 14 participants who were all quite "hard-core" MCM-ers.

It is important to consider what my selection excluded. First, it is e.g. likely that it meant a loss of cases that are inactive online, but very active offline. There are more "library persons" (as one participant called herself) than "street activists" in the material, which might not represent "reality", but interestingly it is different compared to previous research (Bobel 2010) and thus contributes to the understanding of the MCM. Secondly, for researchability I chose to focus primarily on the EU, and only a selected number of countries were included in the study (see Figure 3.1 and Appendix 7.3). Though care was taken to include a large proportion of the EU-population, as well as varied countries and regions I did not manage to include all of Europe. While one should be careful to claim the findings of this study generalizable to *all* MCM'ers in *all* of Europe, it should still be possible to speak of the findings as *part* of it. Thirdly one should consider why some representatives did not reply to my enquiry. It might have been because of practicalities: out-of-use email-addresses, emails stuck in spam-filters, etc. Or it could have been a question of language. Most of those who agreed to participate were quite fluent in English, perhaps some of those who didn't reply weren't.



Figure 3.1. Countries included in the prestudy search process

The preparatory phase also included a so called "Confession": a written "interview with myself" about my MCM-work in order to "come clean" and be able to analyse my own actions and reasoning (Marshall & Rossman 2011, Ellis et al. 2011).

3.3.2. Field Work

The field work consisted in part of *observations* (i.e. gathering and reading online material such as texts, images, screen shots, movies etc.) and in part of *interviews* and *questionnaires*. Most of the interviews were carried out through Skype video chatting, and one through text chat. When an interview was inconvenient for the participant they instead answered a written questionnaire. Each interview/questionnaire was preceded by observations of the participant's online material after which the interview guide (or the questionnaire) was adapted to fit the participant in question. As I had access to large amounts of information about the participant, it was possible to ask only (or mainly) the questions for which I have not received an answer to from their online-work. Also, the interview guide got more concise and specific over time as the research focus narrowed. Find an example of a general interview-guide in Appendix 7.4.

The material was gathered from the participants' online MCM-work together with interviews and questionnaires. Additionally the Confession, all email-correspondence and my analytical notes form part of the empirical material (Aspers 2011). See Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Empirical Materials

Method of data collection	Material generated
Observations of online-work	Field notes, (and selected material, as below)
Collecting online material	Downloaded texts, images, videos, etc.
Watching videos	Notes, transcripts of key sections
Interviews	Interviews carried out through Skype video chat, and text chat, transcripts, notes
Other	Confession, answers to Questionnaires, email correspondence

The participants originated from Denmark (1), Finland (1), France (3), Slovakia (1), Spain (1), Sweden (4), Switzerland (1), United Kingdom (1) and Poland (1), though several lived in other countries and had other national identities. All participants were women (by identity and biology). I tried to find men during the prestudy but couldn't. This is of interest compared to previous studies where men have either been overrepresented (Kissling 2006) or - as here - underrepresented (Bobel 2010). The lion share of the participants identified as heterosexual (all but two who identified as bisexual and "poly/queer"), which is interesting in comparison to Bobel's work where a majority identified as queer. The participants ranged in year of birth between early 1970's to early 1990's. Some were single, some had partners, some had children. Most of them identified as middle class. Though I did not ask all of them, many said they were quite non-political, whilst one of the participants identified as anarchist, one as a democrat (on the French political spectrum), one as left wing (Swedish political spectrum), one as liberal (as in non-conservative) and one preferred not to say. I asked about half of the participants of their religiosity. Some were non-religious and the others explained their religiosity as spiritual, and one was Buddhist.

The benefits of the interviews compared to the questionnaires were many. I got to know the participant and her reasoning better, it was easier to ask follow-up questions and to let the interests of the participant lead the way. I also think it took less of an effort for the participant compared to writing answers. Seven participants were interviewed and seven filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix 7.2). I presented the subjects with a range of possible interview methods to avoid skews in the material: accommodating the individual needs and possibilities of the participants. Those who were uncomfortable talking english, or had little time answered my questions in written. In one case the participant answered the questionnaire in her native tongue and I translated. The questionnaires had the benefit that the participant could sit down and think about the questions. In some cases it generated very rich material comparable to that of interviews, but generally the replies were shorter. The interviews were carried out in English or Swedish. The observations and readings of material were done in English, Swedish and Polish. The work of five participants was translated with the help of Google translate to English. Cross-lingual and cultural research demands caution and care, and attention was given to carefulness in interpretation and translation in particular (Aspers 2011).

Though online ethnography suffer less from common ethnographical problems such as the observer-expectancy effect, there are certainly problems associated with it. If I would only study the online texts and artefacts interpretations would likely be arbitrary and far from the understandings of the persons who created them (see Aspers 2011, Marshall & Rossman 2011). The fact that I am a "Complete Member Researcher" (CMR, Anderson 2006), poses a risk of personal experiences distorting interpretations and thereby making claims of generalizability impossible. The prime reasons for combining the observations with interviews were hence twofold: (1) to get a richer and deeper understanding of the observed and, (2) to balance my bias.

3.3.3. Coding and Analysis

I emerged with the data in five stages: (1) Initially I analysed and coded inductively by "row-by-row" coding of selected samples which resulted in a list of *in vivo* codes (codes taken directly from the data) (Aspers 2011, Marshall & Rossman 2011): When the participant spoke of menstrual cups I coded that row "menstrual cup"; pictures of pregnant women were coded "pregnancy", etc. The *in vivo* codes were then (2) sorted into clusters reflecting similarities and differences among the codes (Marshall & Rossman 2011:215, Kozinets

2010). Clusters of relevance to the research aim were selected, and (3) developed into theoretical categories in an abductive process where I pended between letting the material generate/decide theory, and letting theory and previous research generate codes (Aspers 2011). See example of this process below (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Analysis Process

Observations during data emersion		Theoretical categories for analysis	
PREVIOUS RESEARCH: Movement divided between feminist dichotomy	→	MATERIAL: MCM'ers speak of other ideological foundations than found in previous research	→
		Ideological Foundation	Feminist <i>Essentialism</i> <i>Constructionism</i> <i>Post-Constructionism</i> Other <i>Environmentalism</i> <i>Spiritualism</i> <i>Anti-capitalism</i>
MATERIAL: MCM'ers struggle with menstruation perceived as disgusting	→	THEORY: Abjectionification	→
		Strategies to manage the abject	Abjectionification <i>Talk of disgust</i> <i>Provocation</i> Attractionification <i>"Packaging"</i> <i>Humour</i>

The categories were put in a coding-scheme (see Appendix 7.5) with which (4) all material was re-coded (Aspers 2011). The coded material then formed the main basis for the remaining analytical work. (5) Each theoretical code was analysed separately. In accordance with ethnographic principles the analysis focused on *the activities* of the participants: what they do; why they do what they do; and behaviours/rituals and strategies repeated in the material (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). When analysing, care was taken to include the whole spectrum of the participant's actions into each category and to let the material "kick back" and steer/change theory (Aspers 2011). Analytical notes were taken throughout the whole coding and analysis process.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Devoted attention to ethical considerations throughout are crucial in social research. I touch upon a couple of points of particular importance below.

3.4.1. Informed Consent

The academic community has yet to produce agreed on research ethics in online-research on issues such as privacy and informed consent. It's still unclear if the researcher has the right to extract texts from e.g. blogs without permission (Marshall & Rossman 2011). Commonly netnographers view the material as public, since it's published publicly, but there is a "public-private fallacy": the internet is not either public or private (Kozinets 2010). I have viewed the work of the participants as a private garden that is open for the public. Anyone is welcome to go in: look, sit, be inspired, dislike, or just pass by. The gardener wants people to see;

to enjoy what she's created. But would a botanist enter and lift the leaves of the plants, inspect the wetness of the soil and even dig a little to see the status of the roots, the gardener would surely consider this a violation of her work. Hence I've chosen to use the principle of informed consent in this study. Naturally, I've "lost" interesting material from this choice, and some might argue I've been overly cautious. I am the first to say that it would have been easier and less time consuming to just select whatever I found most interesting and go ahead with the observations. But respect for the participants is pivotal in social research, and with me being a CMR even more so. I will remain a member of this movement and will likely maintain relationships formed with those studied (Ellis et al. 2011). It would have been unethical *and* unwise of me to stomp into their gardens without asking permission.

3.4.2. Anonymity

Most of the participants expressed they preferred to be open about their identity. Many of them considered it "PR", and as part of their mission. As one of them said "I am kind of proud of my job and also I'm sick of hiding". In most cases the names presented are the actual names of the persons behind the representation, or their companies. But in some cases the participant chose the pseudonym they do online-work under. Though they generally wanted to be open about their identity I was careful when I presented their work and especially when quoting from the interviews, to not display the name of the participant if I deemed the information sensitive. Similarly excerpts from online-work have been cautiously selected and discussed with the participant when deemed necessary.

3.4.3. Being a Complete Member Researcher (CMR)

In the beginning of the research I did not tell the participants about me being a CMR. I thought it would distort and complicate the first impression and that it didn't really matter. Later I realised this should have been handled differently. I planned to tell them if they asked. They often did, but in a couple of cases the participants googled me before asking and then I felt utterly embarrassed; like I'd withheld information from them. In a couple of cases they didn't google, nor ask. This, I found, left an unnecessary distance between us where some benefits of being a CMR were gone. When the participant knew I was a CMR the interview often felt more deep and relevant compared to when they didn't.

Doing an autoethnography I have been able to include and show my own positions, experiences and views. I think that has added depth to this study. Subjective experiences are an inevitable part in all research, and here they're the starting point and part of the material. But autoethnography shouldn't only be about the researcher's experiences. I've tried to focus more on the experiences of the participants than my own (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, Anderson 2006, Taber 2010, Walford 2004). Nonetheless I admit that when they echoed my own experiences I instantly grew more interested. It became a way to find patterns and themes within the movement. Though it's hard to tell one from the other I would say that about two thirds of themes of analysis were derived from themes found first, or solely, in the words of the participants, and one third were derived from my own experiences. But from where ever they stemmed I only analysed categories that were visible in two or more of the participants. My own online-work was included at a late stage of data analysis in order to lessen my influence.

3.5. Validity, Credibility and Significance of Results

While there are many ways to evaluate quality and validity of qualitative research this study has mainly been guided by (the overlapping) principles of *reflexivity* (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2008, Hammersley & Atkinson 2007); *transparency* and *credibility/believability* (Marshall & Rossman 2011, Tracy 2010, Ellis et.al 2010): attempting to "close the gap" between me as a knowledge producer and the knowledge produced, reflecting openly about the complexities and problems throughout the research (Anderson 2006, Tracy 2010) and providing detailed descriptions of methodological choices and the boundaries of the study. This contributes to the credibility as well as the transferability of this study (Marshall & Rossman 2011).

Additionally qualitative method's scholar Sarah Tracy's "criteria for excellent qualitative research" has been at the core of all decisions in this research: Choosing a *worthy topic*; *rigorously* designing, carrying out, and presenting the research; a transparent approach rich in *sincerity*; choosing analysis categories that would likely give *resonance* and be a *significant contribution* both externally and internally; emphasising *ethical considerations*; and present it in a way that is *meaningful* and *coherent* for many different actors (Tracy 2010:839).

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Positions of the Menstrual Countermovement

In the prestudy I found a total of 78 different online representations that I considered MCM-work. These representations were very diverse and spanned from individuals' humorous tweet-accounts to international companies. I developed five different categorical "tags" which were put on all representations in the prestudy. Each tag summed up a key focus of the representation's *actions*, thus seen as representing one position within the movement. Each representation in the prestudy was attributed one tag. Note that the tags do not aim to paint a complete picture of the movement, but are results of the prestudy.

The 14 MCM'ers who agreed to participate in the main study were represented by three tags:

1) *Alternative FemCare/ers*

2) *Menstrual Educators*

3) *Menstrual Talkers*

It should be noted that 79% of the representations found in the prestudy were tagged by these (see Table 4.1). The participants of the study are presented within these three positions below, but could also be attributed additional tags (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.1. Overview of tags in the prestudy

Tag	Representations	% of Total
Alternative FemCare/ers	27	35 %
Menstrual Educators	12	15 %
Menstrual Talkers	23	29 %
Menstrual Spiritualists	9	12 %
Menstrual Scholars	7	9 %
TOTAL	78	100 %
<i>Total representations covered by tags taken into the main study:</i>	62	79 %

Table 4.2. Participants in the main study

Main tag	Title of MCM-work	Description of MVM-work	Country of origin	Name of participant	Add. tags:
Alternative FemCare/ers	Afriska	AF broker, info site, blog	Switzerland	Franziska Neuhaus	ME
	EasyCup	AF broker, info site, forum	France	/	/
	La Fleur De Sang	AF broker, shop, blog	France	/	MT
	Lunette	Menstrual Cup producer	Finland	/	/
	Menstrualcup.co	AF broker, info site, shop, forum.	France	/	/
Menstrual Educators	El Camino Rubi	Workshops, web-seminars, writings	Spain	Erika Irusta Rodríguez	MT
	Jo MacDonald	Workshops, writings	UK	Jo MacDonald	MSp
	Mieziaczka.com, Naya	Workshops. lectures, pad production	Poland	Natalia Miłńska *	/
	The Moon Inside You	Documentary	Slovakia	Diana Fabiánová	MT, MSp
Menstrual Talkers	Arvida Byström	Photographs, Tumblr blog	Sweden	Arvida Byström	/
	Kommiekomiks	Paintings	Sweden	Tinet Elmgren	/
	Moist so Moist	Experiments and blog	Denmark	Miriam Wistreich	MSc, AF
	Sylt i Tratten	Blog	Sweden	Majsan Rosenblom	/
	Vilse i Lingonskogen	Blog and crafts	Sweden	Josefin Persdotter	AF, MSc

AF=Alternative FemCare/er, ME=Menstrual Educator, MT=Menstrual Talker, MSc=Menstrual Scholar, MSp=Menstrual Spiritualist

* This MCM'er is presented as both an Alternative FemCare/er and a Menstrual Educator as her work is equal shares of each.

4.1.4. *Alternative FemCare/ers*

Those that I have chosen to call the "Alternative FemCare/ers" are both the producers and the fans of alternative FemCare such as menstrual cups and cloth pads. The alternative FemCare producers market alternative menstrual management. The alternative FemCare fans promote and spread info, driven by the understanding that every woman has the right to know about these products. The Alternative FemCare/ers' main arguments are that alternative FemCare saves your health, money and the environment and that they create a "[c]hange of attitude towards body and menstruation" (miesiaczka.com). The Alternative FemCare/ers primarily counter the mainstream FemCare industry, but they're also countering menstrual silence and ignorance.

The menstrual cup is a central player (and agent) for most Alternative FemCare/ers. Though it has existed for ages, there has been a boom in the last years as cup companies have mushroomed in Europe and all over the world. The "cup" is often made of medical-grade silicone, is folded and inserted into the vagina, used for up to 12 hours, pulled out, emptied and cleaned and can thereafter be used again. One cup lasts for up to 10 years (menstrualcup.co, afriska.ch). The menstrual-cup fandom in particular are often described as an unusually loud group of consumers (Kelleher 2010). Reusable pads are also quite common on the Alternative FemCare scene. The pads are often made of ecological cotton flannel, washed after use and then reused. Natalia Miłńska produces and sells reusable menstrual pads. Each of her pads lasts for about four years.

I've studied some of the more hard-core fans that have elevated their love for the product to a sort of *brokerage*; a producer-consumer middle-hand if you will. They run websites, wikis, forums, Facebook pages, blogs and even write books devoted to spreading product information, comparing brands, guiding the new consumer into new ways of managing their menstruation. As the founder of menstrualcup.co said:

I really felt there was a whole education to do, behind this, you know. People are a bit like 'WHAT?! Menstrual *what?!*' They just get very skeptical [...] I try to do it in a way not saying its only soo great [...] I'm just saying this is the product and we can talk about it simply and openly. Otherwise people end up alone with their little issues and they go: "This is rubbish...!" and they just crawl back up to what they were using before.

In order to spread info of and/or sell the product the Alternative FemCare/ers have to educate and guide new consumers; change their habits and attitudes. They often advocate a more open, positive, attitude about menstruation and try to break the taboo and negativity that surrounds it. As is written on Easycup.fr:

Without shame, we must talk, suggest, boast about [the menstrual cups]. The topic of menstruation, cycles, rules, bleeding is more taboo than contraception and other women's issues. I therefore propose to communicate about this site, different types of cups, and convey the ecological and ethical ideas that accompany it. (translated from French)

Some of these brokers have webshops that generate an income (like menstrualcup.co, lafleurdesang.com) but many of them are non-profit (like afriska.ch, easycup.fr). No matter if they're profit based or not they have made it their business spread the word of these products, and help others change their menstrual lives as they have. Likewise it's the alternative FemCare producers' business to change how women manage their menstruation. Their products demands a certain shift in how women think, and what they know, about their bodies. With Barad's (2007) reasoning the product has an agency: an inherent power to change. The products create a more intimate physical contact with the blood and in order to use the cup one needs to understand some things about how women function inside:

Lots of women in the forum say that using a menstrual cup helped them to know how their woman body works, where the cervix is and to understand how this protection works without leaking. I believe [that makes] lots of women feel better with their bodies. (Interview, Easycup)

The founder of the Lunette told me how they devoted large sections of their website to explaining the anatomy of the female body in new ways. They realised their costumers had a need for information that was previously not easily available, it was "quite 'polished' [...] [and] natural ways [we]ren't told". When one visits the more graphic sections of their website this warning welcomes you:

Just to let you know, this site contains lifelike graphics of female reproductive organs. Because Lunette believes a woman's anatomy is truly remarkable, we felt it was important to use medical illustrations to guide the viewer. Although these graphics are clinical in nature and are intended for educational purposes, some may feel uncomfortable with the level of realism. (lunette.com)

Lunette's images are in deed very realistic and (though hairless) miles away from those of your usual FemCare producers.⁴ The warning is telling of how Alternative FemCare/ers do menstrual education and challenge the norms of the menstrual mainstream.

⁴ I compared it to the Swedish FemCare sites libresse.se, always-info.nu and ob.se, 23 april 2013

I argue that the Alternative FemCare/ers are important players in the MCM, and that they have been pushed to the sidelines of the MCM in previous research because of their consumerist strategies (esp. Kissling 2006, also Bobel 2010). But as Micheletti (2002, 2010) has pointed out it's important to recognise consumerism as political- and social change-work. I think the Alternative FemCare/ers are excellent examples of political consumerism as their work focuses on individual consumerist choices which are seen to have an impact on a global scale (e.g. environmental aspects). Additionally the Alternative FemCare/ers consider the products they market agents for change, which is an interesting example of Barad's agential realism.

4.1.5. Menstrual Educators

The Menstrual Educators have a pedagogical approach to changing how menstruation's perceived. They do e.g. on- and offline workshops, documentaries, lectures, write books, blogs, and run info-sites. They're also active in all kinds of social media venues. None of them do all, but most do many, of these things. They're all largely driven by the idea that people (or women) today are uninformed about, and disconnected with, their bodies. In living with the cycle the Menstrual Educators work to help women feel better in their bodies; lessening e.g. menstrual pain, PMS, irregular flowing, and even problems with fertility. The Menstrual Educators argue that the mainstream menstrual discourse paints a pathologised image of a healthy aspect of life, and a demeaning image of a powerful aspect of womanhood. They're countering a menstrual-ignorance and the mind/body disconnection and dichotomy (see Grosz 1994, also elaborated in Section 4.4.3).

More than other MCM'ers, Menstrual Educators put a lot of effort into developing a "new knowledge" about menstruation and the female body. As they teach something that does not have a given curricula, it demands a search and construction of alternatives. These are often inspired by (past and present) foreign cultures, medical traditions, religions, and are adopted to present day and their respective cultural contexts. Natalia, for example, builds from asian medicinal traditions, Buddhism, dancing methodologies, and anthropology. She also proudly announces on her site that she is the "owner of probably the biggest collection of books on menstruation in Poland". Others build their knowledge from e.g. celtic traditions, and feminist University studies. As Erika said:

...there is no academical knowledge about it here [in Spain]... or anywhere.. but definitely not here [...] science is important in order to understand one's body but it should not be understood in the way that is pathology! And in the science in our western culture the idea is always that the menstrual cycle is an illness! There are no studies about the benefits of the menstrual cycle, and that the menstrual cycle is a symptom of good health in a woman. So I have to study different other cultures and indigenous cultures, native cultures, to develop a different point of view and mix it with my European culture and my "western way of life".
(Interview Erika)

Also the involvement of personal experiences are imperative in the knowledge development. They use their own experiences in their work, and they focus on helping women on their *personal* way of living with the cycle. Erika says there is no one goal to achieve, but rather it's a journey: "there is no such thing as the 'perfecta menstruanta'".

The Menstrual Educators teach and advocate living with and acknowledging the changing, cyclic nature of the female body. Challenging the (patriarchal) understanding of the female body as linear they instead argue it's variability in the "four phases of the cycle". They claim women of today need to (re)connect to their bodies; listen to what it's communicating. To create when you (and your body) are creative, to rest when you (and your body) are tired.

Knowing [the menstrual cycle phases] lets us know when is the best time to detail a planning (pre-ovulatory phase); when best to write an email to a possible collaborator (ovulatory phase); when to make a fruitful brainstorming (premenstrual phase) and when to rest and contemplate all work already done (menstrual phase). (Irusta Rodríguez 2012:65, translated from Spanish)

This approach also affects their daily work. If you would want to contact Jo MacDonald you should for example note the following written on her contact page:

Please remember that I 100% practice what I teach and, as a mindful menstruation teacher, I live in harmony with my menstrual cycle, so if I don't answer right away it may just be because I am listening to my body and having a few days of quiet pleasure. (jomacdonald.com)

The Menstrual Educators share a keen focus on teenage and pre-menarchal girls (though they all also do work directed to older women). They regard menarche as "a unique marker of female maturation representing the transition from childhood to womanhood" (Rembeck 2008:9) and hence as a formative moment, where educational contributions have particular effect, able to make the girls feel better about themselves; their bodies and their womanhood.

...it isn't taught properly in schools and parents don't get enough support for helping their daughters feel good about periods and being female. As long as adverts and society in general encourage us to feel ashamed of our periods and ignore or get rid of them then there is a need for this work. [...] I do what I do because I think every woman and girl deserves to feel good about herself as a woman and understand the magic of her own body. When women and girls see periods as a positive part of womanhood they become more confident and accepting of themselves. (Jo MacDonald, questionnaire)

Fabiánová's upcoming movie "Monthlies" is directly targeted at young girls. Intended to "raise their interest in exploring about their own nature. To free them of the false burden that 'the pain is part of being a wom[a]n'" (mooninsideyou.com).

When I first encountered the Menstrual Educators I thought they were what Bobel (2010) calls Feminist Spiritualists. But the more I got to know their work and reasoning and I realised they were something else. In deed, there are similarities: they *do*, as Bobel's Feminist Spiritualists "work to reclaim menstruation as a healthy, spiritual, empowering and even pleasurable experience for women" (Bobel 2010:66) and they *do* work with *some* spiritual elements. But in large, there ends the similarities. It should be mentioned that there certainly are spiritual MCM'ers in Europe, though I called them "Menstrual Spiritualists" in the prestudy instead of "Feminists Spiritualists" as I was not sure they were at all feminist. Though there are similarities between them and the Menstrual Educators (as well as other MCM'ers), such as talk of the moon, goddesses, innate female powers and energies, the focus lay on the spiritual side of thing for the Menstrual Spiritualists, and of the educational side of things for the Menstrual Educators. However the most important difference is that the Menstrual Educators in contrast to the Feminist Spiritualists *do*

”trouble gender” (compare Bobel 2010:167). They *both* celebrate and challenge what it means to be a woman. Erika e.g. told me she’s making a ”space in which women can question the culture in their bodies.” The Moon Inside You is described as ”[f]acing the menstrual etiquette with doses of humour and self-irony [...] [and] challenging our preconceived idea of womanhood” (mooninsideyou.com).

Similarly to the Alternative FemCare/ers the Menstrual Educators’ MCM-work risks being disregarded using the glasses of previous research: carried out with tools and themes previously perceived as a-political or outdated (Bobel 2010, Kissling 2006). The spiritualist aspects of the Menstrual Educators might look like mere spiritualism, as the Alternative FemCare/ers work might look like mere consumerism, but I argue they’re doing contemporary, innovative, and progressive feminist social change-work.

4.1.6. Menstrual Talkers

The Menstrual Talkers focus their work on talking, often from (very) personal experiences, about periods (and related issues). Within ”talking” I also include production of texts, images, videos and other cultural artefacts. The Menstrual Talkers have an overall drive to share what’s not shared. They talk for the sake of talking, write for the sake of writing, photograph for the sake of photographing. Many Menstrual Talkers are highly active in social media. They are driven by an idea that people need to talk more about menstruation, primarily countering the menstrual silence, and the culture of concealment. Many Menstrual Talkers are also advocating alternative FemCare as well as informing (rather than educating) their audience.

The Menstrual Talkers do what they do because they feel it has not been done. Perhaps they could, more than other MCM’ers, be called *provokers*. They urge people to talk, react and to question the menstrual mainstream. Menstrual Talkers focus less on giving answers, and more on asking questions. Oftentimes they make menstrual blood a public (instead of a private) matter. As my own motto goes ”Out of the panties! Into the public!”

Arvida Byström’s photographs of young women in everyday situations ”leaking” menstrual blood published as hipster fashion shots in Vice Magazine created quite a stir in social and regular media last year (e.g. Gray 2012, Samuelsson 2012, Feminism Online 2012). I think even I was a bit ”grossed out” when I first saw them, and from reading the commentaries on vice.com, one can conclude that so were many others. Mirroring people’s reactions to my tampon earrings they spanned from utter disgust to complete appraisal.



Figure 4.1. Selection of photos from "There Will Be Blood" (2012), by Arvida Byström

Arvida did not use real blood, but there are several Menstrual Talkers that do. Those painting with real menstrual blood are commonly called *Menstrala artists*. A couple of years ago Tinet Elmgren published a series of paintings made with her menstrual blood on her website together with funny and edgy texts where she, among other things, writes of her aim to provoke:

I know quite well that not everyone can be at peace with these doodlings of mine. And, indeed, they were not made with the intention to please everyone, but with the intention to please *me*. There is an obvious element of disgust in these pictures, which is fully intentional. There is so much hush-hush and embarrassment surrounding the whole theme of menstruation, that it's interesting to do something with it that shocks many people. The reactions so far have been quite intriguing. (kommiekomiks.com)

She's abjectifying; uses the disgusting nature of the blood as a strategy for change (discussed further in Section 4.2.1).



Figure 4.2. From left: Menstrala art by Tinet Elmgren, 2003, 2004, 2004, no titles.

While it's difficult to say exactly what Miriam Wistreich does (she makes a point of being elusive) one could say that her research project and blog *Moist so Moist* (moistsomoist.org) explore the agency of

menstruation; the boundaries of the self and menstrual blood, as well as the boundaries of menstruation and society. In her own words:

Moist So Moist is a research project focusing on giving agency to menstruation. [...] Operating on levels of writing, experimentation and engagement, the project seeks to open new material discussions and debates whilst aiming to subvert body paradigms that engender ontologies of shame and repression. (moistsomoist.org)

In one of her "experiments" she urged people to put their menstrual blood in transparent containers instead of the regular sanitary disposal bags. In another she lets people collect their own blood, and then tell of their experience. But perhaps foremost, she writes open, complex, reflexive and humorous accounts of her experiences doing these experiments, and of being a Menstrual Talker and a public feminist in general.



Figure 4.3. From left: Experiment depicted at universitypost.dk, Experiment depicted at moistsoimoist.org

With my tampon earrings I urge people to proudly wear a symbol of menstruation as jewellery, turning boundaries of beauty and disgust inside out, turn shame to pride. I also have a blog, and do social media under the name "Vilse i Lingonskogen" (English: Lost in the Lingonberry-forest). While the blog posts are often longer, humorous (and rather angry, I've come to realise) accounts of my personal menstrual thoughts and experiences, social media's used for shorter messages, and for sharing what other MCM'ers do. This year I started a "thing": where I urged people to "wear menstrual red" and talk openly about menstruation on International Women's Day. It had quite a far reach and people from all over "attended" the "event". When the day came the event overflowed with pictures of people wearing red for the sake of menstruation.



Figure 4.4. From left: Pictures from the "wear menstrual red"-event site; selection of tampon earrings

In general, Menstrual Talkers are funny. At least *we* think we are. Miriam said "I try to be funny (laughing), *I* think I'm funny" (interview). The blog "Sylt i tratten" (English: "Jam in the hopper") focuses solely on comedy, as it's about telling humorous menstrual stories from real life:

I think if they see themselves in the story and see the humour in it, it helps to remove some of the shame factor, which is part of the whole idea of SiT. (Sylt i Tratten Questionnaire, my translation from Swedish)

She's using humour as a strategy. This is discussed further in Section 4.2.1.

Perhaps the Menstrual Talkers studied here resemble the so called Radical Menstruators in previous research (Bobel 2010), though their feminist foundations differ.

4.2. Overarching Strategies

Two main strategies were found as overarching the MCM positions: All MCM'ers manage the abject status of menstruation (challenging the boundaries between purity and filth); and their work exhibit very high levels of personalisation (challenging the boundaries between private and public). These will be further explored in this section. Additionally many of them have strategies to cope with a certain "loneliness" in feminism, see Section 4.3.

4.2.1. *Abjection as a (Queer) Strategy*

Miriam calls her work "queer", in the sense that it's a "queer strategy" to speak openly about something that is shameful and rendered disgusting by many. Also she underlines how she insists on the "grossness of menstruation". She, as other MCM'ers, tears down mainstream boundaries of what is considered normal and fit for public. Arvida (who also calls herself a queer feminist⁵) partly does a more obvious genderqueering in her work. Alongside her "leaking girls" she posts pictures of herself wearing a strap-on together with a male with his genitals tucked in. As the MCM'ers explored above she also celebrates femininity but in a more queer way, with e.g. quite extremely "girly" symbols and colours (tiaras, pink, glitter, etc), combined and contrasted through insisting on the grossness, the breaking of boundaries (see Dahl 2008). They do *abjection*; "us[ing] the abject position with the purpose of destabilising the heteronormative order and the borders between purity and filth" (Wasshede 2013, my translation).

All MCM'ers have to manage menstruation as abject, in one way or another. Some, as Miriam, Arvida and myself embrace it very openly, play with it, explore it. Other's are less explicit in their abjection, but still use menstruation's abject powers to shock and provoke. Many seem to be both disappointed and amused by the automatic shocking quality of their work. Menstruation becomes abject as soon as it's public, to talk openly of menstruation is to abjectify. Hence there is no way around abjection for the MCM. It is the starting point. The MCM'ers' *raison d'être* is valuing something that is commonly seen as garbage;

⁵ Or exactly: "I usually define myself as a queer feminist, if one want's to simplify things" Email correspondence, translated.

abject, private and best hidden from view, lift it out in public in a pursuit of social, environmental and individual change.

Many of the MCM'ers do a kind of *attractification* to balance their abjectification; to make it more digestible, more attractive; to not scare readers/viewers/participants/costumers. In part this attractification is done by "packaging it nicely", working with colours and symbols that are considered pretty. Many of the Alternative FemCare/ers' sites, for example, have light pastel colours and flowers in their logo's and names. Arvida does it through focusing on making beautiful pictures, though the menstrual blood might be perceived as grotesque:

I still want to do pictures that, that I find beautifully composed and sort of... pretty [...] I guess it [my menstrual photos] began in this kind of question "can I make it pretty?" I always want to try to do things pretty, even if I don't.. [think it is]. I thought this was a a real sensitive issue, people really do consider it almost grotesque [...] but I wanted to phrase the question: *can* this be beautiful? (Interview, Arvida my translation from Swedish)

As Arvida tries to create something pretty she is also very much aware of the abject-ness of her subject. As an onlooker I find it's in the contrast between the abject and the attractive, in the balancing act where the "magic happens". That's where it strikes a societal nerve. Hence the attractification needn't only be a method to cover up the abject-ness, but also to illuminate it.

Apart from "packaging" the MCM'ers attractify with humour. Humour attracts, makes it easier for the reader. Like the animations in *The Moon Inside You*, with an egg illustrated as a funny little lady who stroll down the fallopian tube. Or Sylt i Tratten's funny menstrual stories, or Moist so Moist's witty irony. I personally work with comedy because I think it creates a shortcut to menstrual preconceptions. As Fabiánová puts it, humour is one of the most effective "weapons" in the fight of menstrual prejudice (mooninsideyou.com). Humour and the packaging are part of the MCM'ers' balancing act between abjectification which aims to shock (repel), and attractification which aims to attract.

Another strategy for the MCM'ers to not "scare people off" is being open about their own feelings of disgust. Miriam blends humour and full disclosure of personal reactions of disgust in order to bypass the possible repulsion by the reader; to let the reader understand that "what is weird for them is *really* also quite weird to [her]". In one blogpost she's reflecting on collecting ones own menstrual blood in a jar; alternating between analytical and funny imageries, and meanwhile doing abjectification; overtly recognising the abject status, but also gleefully playing with it as an act of liberation.

...it's really super weird having a glass of your own menstrual blood stand next to you. Not so much 'cause it's gross, although I'm sure most people would think it was, but because it felt distinctly like I had deposited a part of myself in that glass. So while I was sitting at the breakfast table I was simultaneously placed on a shelf in the next room. Yes, this sounds weird, but it really did take me a while to stop feeling like a bit of me had been deposited into a jam jar. I don't mean that a little Miriam was trapped inside a glass screaming to get out. What I mean is that the 'me' 'not me' dialectics that is a core psychoanalytical argument when dealing with abjection didn't feel very relevant – it was very much still me. [...] I bore a constant grin on my face throughout those couple of days, by the way. Collecting my blood felt super cheeky, a bit forbidden and really liberating! (moistsomoist.org)

I blogged about feminist writer Charlotte Roche's *Wetlands* some time ago where I pondered on the powers and limitations of abjectification, though I didn't use that word. There I recognised the abject status of

menstruation (and my MCM-work) and openly discuss my strategic balancing act between abjectification and attractification, in a sort of *overt abjectification*:

The private is political, but when does one cross the border that just makes it disgusting? [...] Don't get me wrong. I am completely pro disgust. On the right level and performed correctly, it can provoke change, strengthening and improvement. [...] Charlotte Roche is disgusting. I'm disgusting. Periods are disgusting, said someone. Menstruate more, said I. But it's also important to be careful with the people, said my alien overlord and mentor. Yes, it is important to be just disgusting *enough* I said. It nodded and retreated to the shadows.

It's liberating and invigorating to be disgustingly honest with the most private. And while it is, in all truth and honesty, it's also really embarrassing. (vilseilingonskogen.blogg.se translated from Swedish)

Many MCM'ers hold the discharged in their hands and proclaim: "This disgusts me!" Therein overtly *making* it abject at the same time as they're abjectifying, recognising, using and playing with the abject position. Thus preventing others from making them (and their cause) abject, or perhaps *too* abject (compare Wasshede 2013). I view this this recognition of the abject-ness, this "overt abjectification", as a strategic choice. In all my own MCM-work I have gradually grown accustomed to most aspects of menstruation, and though I do still have boundaries, for sure, in many cases I confess I choose to appear more disgusted than I am. Because I think that helps the cause. It makes it readable. Similarly Miriam told me how she makes sure to not seem "too un-normal" and "like a relatable person" as that makes it easier for her audience to accept what she has to say if they can relate.

4.2.2. Hyper-Personalisation as a (n Intersectional) Strategy

As many other contemporary social movements the MCM is very much personalised. In part because individual personal choices in everyday life (like choosing a reusable FemCare products) are elevated to social change-work towards one common goal, or a set of common goals (e.g. Micheletti 2002, Wettergren 2005, McDonald 2004), but also because their texts and talks are very personal, private and intimate in nature. They share personal stories of their menstrual life; talk about their personal opinions and intimate experiences. As Kissling (2006) shows, the MCM'ers inherently challenge the boundaries between the public and the private. Additionally this is one of the features of internet life (e.g. Bronstein 2013, Lövhelm 2011).

While the personalisation is a common for contemporary social movements, it seems MCM'ers go further than most, and often well beyond the borders of the personal, to that which considered private. Some accounts even surprised me in their intimate and *hyper-personal* nature. They're willingly flaunting stories that are so private that I actually find it hard to mention them here. Personal experience spanning from diarrhea or odd sexual endeavours, all the way to infertility and being subject to child abuse. Things that people might normally feel is only fit to share with those closest (if at all) are displayed on publicly open sites with real names in full view. I have to say I applaud the bravery, but also I have long wondered, why (on earth) we do this? In my personal pursuit of challenging the menstrual taboo I see it as a duty to dare to go further than others: to stretch the rubber that is menstrual mainstream discourse. Other MCM'ers told of similar reasons, but they added several new levels. Being hyper-personal has multiple functions apart from the obvious taboo-breaking.

For one thing personalisation is a way to avoid coming off as judgemental. Arvida always includes herself into her art by posing as her own nude model, exploring only issues that are close to herself in order to avert the risk of people perceiving her as judgmental (Interview, Arvida). Many of the Alternative FemCare/ers do this on a smaller scale: proclaiming their *personal* love for the reusable products but carefully avoiding pointing fingers at those who use disposables.

Secondly it's a method of overcoming essentialist charges and intersectional complexities. Both through focusing only on that which oneself has experiences of, and through seeing the hyper-personal as a space where we're stripped from structural differences. Arvida's avoiding issues that surrounds race, "'cos [she's] privileged there" (as white):

I wouldn't wanna take pictures that dealt with racism, that connected to skin colour. That's not my thing to do, 'cos I'm privileged there. [...] I don't have experiences of discrimination based on the colour of my skin, and for that reason I don't want to do something that directly deals with that." (Interview, Arvida, translated from Swedish)

Erika's e-book was so personal that reading it at times even felt overpowering. So I asked her why she choses to be "so naked". She smiled and quickly replied "I am naked in front of others because I feel that clothes are really dangerous." And then she grabbed different pieces of her clothing saying:

When I have got this (grabbing her hoodie) you have an idea of who I am. Because I've got this (grabbing her shirt) and I've got these (touching her glasses) and I've got this (touching her nose) and my hair.. But when I am naked I.. I am not *exactly* the same as you but.. I have the same *condition* as you... [...] [and] I DON'T have the *truth*... sometimes I want to have it.. but I won't get it ever. And I think that is not the point. I think that for me, it is important to make from my own body.. a word.. a word to [make others] understand me.. to put me in words, in a corporal way. (Interview, Erika)

Personal disclosure is used as a method to level with the readers. To show them that she is no better, or worse than they are. In contemporary feminism intersectional and relativist understandings are a fundament, the starting point. Arvida avoids themes that she considers "not [hers]" as Erika strips of her "social" clothes because they recognise the many social differences and in-equalities between themselves and their audiences. It seems understandings of complex societal structures of oppression and individual differences blocks areas of action outside the own personal realm, making the Hyper-Personal the one space where they allow themselves to act politically.

4.3. The Lonely Menstrual Countermovers

While there are clear similarities within and crossing the tags presented above, this study has revealed a quite fragmented movement, where only small islands cooperate (the Alternative FemCare/ers in particular), though all are working towards the same goals. While recent social movement theories shows contemporary social movements are often individualised/personalised it seems many MCM suffer from this. A majority of the participants voiced a feeling of *loneliness*. Is this an unwanted side-effect of the nature of contemporary social movements? Of being European? Or of working with menstruation? In part I argue it could be attributed to the many linguistic, as well as the many cultural differences between European countries. And partly I argue it has to do with the fact that the MCM (and menstrual issues in general) has an uneasy place within contemporary feminism.

4.3.1. European Disadvantages

As discussed above the diverse linguistic and cultural entity that is Europe likely create many different kinds of MCM-work. The European MCM'ers often act locally, and in their local languages. And very few of them seem to know much about other MCM'ers. When they do they feel they can't really relate. Though several do their MCM-work in languages understood by many (e.g. English, German, French, Spanish) they still exclude everyone who don't speak these languages. I've chosen to blog in Swedish, and hence only people who understand Swedish can read my posts, only people who understand Polish can attend Natalia's workshops, etc. This poses a challenge to the European MCM. The languages creates walls around their work. Cultural and historical differences naturally also come to play. The feminist setting in Italy and France differ from that of Denmark and Sweden. Even Denmark and Sweden differ. Europe is diversity. And this shows in the material: Erika borrows from her Basque cultural heritage when she creates her "new knowledge"; Natalia has to navigate the ongoing pro-life v.s. pro-choice debate in Poland when she lectures. Take also the simple example of my own blog-name (Vilse i Lingonskogen), which is built from a Swedish classic children's book, a cult Swedish TV-show, and the fact that in Sweden menstruation's called "Lingonberry week", since - I guess - we've got a lot of Lingonberries. This exemplifies how very nationalised European MCM-work can be, drawing from literature, television and nature specific to one national context. While it might be a guarantee for diversification, the European MCM has apparent disadvantages compared to USA and the anglophone world. There people with unusual interests can connect and integrate more easily. No matter how few likeminded there might be in close geographical proximity - the likelihood of finding someone who share your ideas and beliefs is far greater. I argue that the linguistic and cultural differences of the European MCM'ers are part of why they feel lonely.

4.4. Finding a Place within Feminism

The MCM seem to have difficulties finding a place in feminism and women's movements. Most of the participants in this study said that they were feminist, but they each had their individual versions. Some had eclectic feminist reasonings that cannot be easily put in one feminist box, and a couple of them adhered to queer feminism but, so to say, with a twist. Many (but not all) of the participants underlined two things about their feminism: that 1) they don't hate men, 2) they aren't aggressive.⁶ They said that they're "moderate" or "reasonable" feminists.

Feminists who talk of the category woman have often been blamed of essentialism, biological determinism and of ignoring the heterogeneity within the category intersectionally (Gunnarsson 2011, Lam 2012). Though there are MCM'ers in this study that very clearly state that their work is founded on an understanding that not all women menstruate and "not everyone who menstruate call themselves a woman" (Interview, Miriam), many of them do talk of women rather than menstruators. Womanhood and the category "women" is central regardless of if they talk of menstruators or women. Menstruation is tightly linked with womanhood (SWS 2011). Thus the MCM has an uneasy position within feminism.

4.4.1. Fending off Essentialist Charges

Here in Spain there is a real distance between being a menstrual cycle educator and a feminist. Sometimes I feel really, really alone in some feminists spaces, cos a very important.. review... that meet my work is that they think I am essentialist, and I really HATE that. Because I don't think that trying to understand that you've got a body with difference, that we feel different stuff in different bodies, or inside your own body, is essentialist. Sometimes I feel really lonely within that part of feminism that is pointing at me like "You're an *essentialist* feminist!" (Interview, Erika)

Erika tells us that in some feminist "spaces", she feels misunderstood and judged as a lesser, bad feminist. Other participants have told similar stories. The founder of La Fleur de Sang said some feminists consider her work a "retour en arrière" (English: a step backwards):

Yes, it is a [feminist] job, that puts women in the spotlight and wants to convey a message of respect for women as a whole and their reality. But some feminists do not like my work and consider it a "retour en arrière". (Questionnaire, La Fleur De Sang, translated from French)

In many ways this is also what previous research does to the Feminist Spiritualists. Bobel and Kissling call them remnants of the 70's; an older, outdated essentialist feminism, whereas the Radical Menstruators are said to represent a progressive, anti-essentialist, post-modern, queer-feminism. The founder of Moist so Moist (who views her MCM-work as queer while working with concepts and theories from Post-Constructionists such as Haraway and Barad) said people often either view her work as not feminist at all, or they view it as extreme essentialist feminism:

⁶ Similarly there is a general avoidance of "angry" feminism in Bobel's participants (2010:23). Similarly to Bobel's participants some of mine attributed this anger to a previous generation of feminists, or the "second wave".

I went on the radio, and the first thing he [the host] said was "You look really normal!" (laughing) which I think was funny. And then he ended the interview by saying: [...] "but its not like a feminist project?" [...] And I was like: Yes it is! It's TOTALLY a feminist project! And I think you're always in that paradox, doing this kind of work.. They can't recognise it as feminist or they recognise it as INSANELY feminist, I mean essentialist feminist. (interview, Miriam)

The MCM'ers often occupy this paradox, this feminist limbo, where they either feel they're rejected, placed in the wrong box, or that they don't really belong anywhere. Another related reoccurring story from the participants is how they encounter feminist women who consider menstruation disgusting and taboo. They marvel at the fact that menstruation is such a taboo in places (like feminism), where they think it ought to have a given place.

I make a lot of workshops with different kinds of feminist women, and I found that menstruation is a taboo! Again! [...] And I'm trying to find a connection with different theoretical currents in feminism and I don't find anyone.. So that's why I feel really lonely because in the science.. I.. don't find anyone.. and in the feminism I don't find anyone..!" (Interview Erika)

Similarly many who's commented on Arvida's photos have called her work things like "feminazism", arguing that Arvida's "making the rest of us [normal] feminists] look uncivilized" (Vice 2012). Once I was attending a training for "feministic girl-groups". The trainers talked of creating a space in which the girls could talk of things they couldn't talk of elsewhere. When I brought up menstruation I met with instant opposition. One trainer said something along the lines of: "But *no!* We're talking about things that *empower* the girls!" I stood dumbfounded at the logic, and realised once again, how menstruation seem to fit nowhere. Miriam once attended a seminar on the abject at Goldsmith University, where all kinds of bodily fluids where discussed and explored in depth. But menstrual blood was not mentioned. When she brought it up "the room just went *completely* quiet". So even in a setting where an interest in the abject seemed a common denominator, there was no room to speak about menstruation.

It became evident in the interviews how some MCM'ers position themselves in contrast to an internal "Other" similar to that of Bobel's and Kissling's Feminist Spiritualists. They voiced a strong resistance to being associated with the so called "tampon tea drinkers", or the "essentialist" feminists. Though one could question if such exists (I've not actually accounted anyone in the movement who really does drink hot water with a bloody tampon in it) this positioning is interesting as it makes visible the need within the MCM for defence against essentialist charges. The Other is formed from and within the need to establish ones own work as non-essentialist. It becomes important to distinguish and distance oneself from the "essentialist Other". Or one is essentialist by association. As one of them said:

..it's gonna sound terribly arrogant, but a lot of them [other MCM'ers] I can't be associated with. I can't be associated with people, with menstrual activists, who make tampon tea. Because that totally undermines my work... because it's so uncool. I mean [...] they often operate from an essentialist perspective, [...] I think a lot of people [...] don't understand that my work isn't essentialist. It's a question I'm often given and I try to sort of be clear about about it, but I think its something that you also have to be quite acute, or astute, to see. And so if I were to hang out with people who were all about like "this is the eternal feminine", or "this is like the essential womanhood", and stuff like that... That just CAN'T happen. So those kinds of menstrual activists are a total no-no, strategically, to associate with. (Interview)

4.4.2. *Womanhood Differentiated*

Some of the MCM'ers strategically avoid essentialist themes by focusing only on the materiality of the menstrual blood, and not the persons or categories behind it; speaking only of menstruators and not of women; or explicitly challenging femininity as a category. But many MCM'ers talk of womanhood in a quite traditional way (e.g. motherhood, nourishment) which one could definitely call essentialist. Excluding many identifying as women like those who don't menstruate, those who cannot/don't want to give birth, breast feed etc., as well as many who identify as men (who do, or don't menstruate). But one should take care to see how they're *both* talking of the essential female and *also* differentiate womanhood as a category. Very few MCM'ers are categorically "gender essentialist", but combine it (explicitly or implicitly) with queering or differentiating gender; rejecting the gender binary, using intersectional perspectives.

Franziska has "Happy womanhood" as a kind of slogan. When I asked her what she meant by that she told me how her work aimed to empower and enable women to have a "happy womanhood", about retrieving "our power". Other MCM'ers speak of "female power"; "women's energy, female experiences, women's power". Similarly many of the Menstrual Educators talk of the importance to teach young girls a new, more positive way to look at womanhood. In previous research such actions has been categorised as essentialism (Bobel 2010, Kissling 2006). According to Post-Constructionists, though, it isn't necessarily essentialist to talk about women as a category since one can talk of the experience of "occupy[ing] the [discursive] *position* as woman" (Gunnarsson 2011). With Haraway's reasoning "womanhood" could be understood as a result of discourse, intra-action, and the body's own agency (Haraway 1991). So when those MCM'ers who talk of women, talk of women, they don't necessarily talk of only *one kind of woman*. Many of the participants instead fill the word with a multitude of differences: differentiating womanhood.

The menstrual focus, is a clear example of Braidotti's sexual difference level 1 (the difference between men and women). They acknowledge differences between women (level 2) through e.g. focusing on the personal experiences, the personal paths, and they intersectionalise and queer the concept of women and gender. Also they very explicitly talk of differences within each woman (level 3). E.g. "living with the cycle" implies an understanding of how women have phases in which they're different from themselves. In this way many of the MCM'ers even says that being a woman is about embodying differences.

...the experience of being a woman, is for me [to be] in cycle. You are in a body, and its a female body, so I think that men and women are equal [...] I'm not like "women are SO different from men" and so on, but I feel like we have different bodies.. and you go into contact with this body, discover, that you have a cycle, and in the cycle you have different experiences. (Interview, Natalia)

Erika told me about how she once started out thinking that there were "special abilities for women" connected to traditionally female attributes such as being soft, calm, careful, nourishing and loving. But throughout the years of working with menstrual cycle education (and with input from women and other feminists around her) these ideas have been discarded in benefit of seeing women as *also* violent, aggressive beings who inhabit/embody several "different persons"; different in the four phases of their cycle. Braidotti's sexual difference Level 3 seem very relevant. It also seems the MCM-work engender a differentiated view on womanhood:

[Nowadays] I talk about it [what it is to be female/ a woman] in terms of the four women that we are [in the phases of our menstrual cycle]. The menstruating woman is not a calm woman. No, she is a *warrior*. [...] maybe when you are on your ovulation time you're a more soft, nourishing woman, sociable and loving. But when you are in your premenstrual moment you're different [...] you're even aggressive, you've got your *anger*. [...] most women think being feminine is about being cute, like "Hello Kitty", or be in a pair of heels, with your boobs showing and all glamorous.. And, you can do that - I don't think that it's wrong. You can do it however you want. But I think that you can give yourself the opportunity to experience with different bodies, and different desires. (Interview, Erika)

They also talk of how individuals are different from one and other, no matter what the sex. Franziska, for example views here feminism as being not about equality:

I don't even think it is about equality, because it is obvious that women and men are different, just like every person is different from another. It is more about every single being having the opportunity to safely and happily live up to his or her own very true nature, living up to his or her full potential. (Questionnaire, Franziska)

She talks of the differences between *beings*' individual "true natures"; about multiple (as opposed to binary) differences between *persons* (as opposed to women/men), and how those *individual* differences matter. Again Post-Constructionist reasoning can be used: The MCM'ers "take [their] starting point in corporeality and the body in its individual and multiple (sexed, racialised etc) specificities" (Lykke discussing Grosz 2009:90). For many MCM'ers feminism is not about equality, but about recognising differences; and how these differences matter.

It's also important to underline that they do talk of oppression of women (understood as a differentiated category). They're showing there are still oppressive menstrual taboo's at play in Europe. In *The Moon Inside You* Diana meets a Spanish taxi driver who's convinced menstruating women shouldn't carry infant babies as it could result in infanticide. Similarly the founder of *La Fleur De Sang* told me how people in France think that menstruating women shouldn't enter wine cellars as the wine might sour, or make chocolate mousse as the eggs might spoil. In these examples menstruation becomes an anchor; a symbol, that tells us recognition of sexual differences is important even in this day and age, showing how these differences are still at the root of a persistent oppression of women.

4.4.3. Post-Constructionism in Practice

In contrast to Bobel and Kissling I frame the MCM'ers not in two wings based on two feminist waves (the Spiritualist Feminists as second wave and Radical Menstruators as third), but instead I put them under one umbrella: Post-Constructionism, which manages to "break the waves" and combines the understandings of second and third wave feminisms in a way better suited to how the MCM'ers seem to act and reason as a group (in this spatiotemporal context). While only a couple of the MCM'ers in this study explicitly use theories and concepts from Post-Constructionism, all of them do it implicitly. Foremost by acknowledging the so called prediscursive facticities of the body: that menstruation as a *mater-reality* matters. And as discussed above they often differentiate womanhood and recognise the agency of materials and bodies in a way similar to the Post-Constructionist reasoning. Also, like the Post-Constructionists, the MCM'ers do a feminism that is based in an understanding of both pre- and post-discursiveness, simultaneously.

The founder of El Camino Rubi says she's "not a label feminist" (interview), instead she draws on a multitude of theories and sources in her feminist reasoning. She finds her inspiration from Post-Constructionists (which she calls Sexual Difference feminists) such as Irigaray and Cixous *but also* Butler. Additionally she gets her inspiration from old traditions, some that are quite spiritual and goddess focused. For her, eclecticism is key; to stand outside of "the different roots of feminism" as she calls it:

In my path in feminism I've found so many different women... Because for me is important to be *eclectic*. I don't like ONE [particular kind of feminism], I only know that I am feminist. To force myself to decide like which root of feminism (counts on her fingers) I am.. for me it's impossible. I talked about it last year in a symposium.. I was talking about that feminism for me is *a life*. It's a life because it exists in so many different bodies, that you can't attach it to one and say "HERE is the *true* feminism!" (Interview, Erika)

In a later interview we spoke more on the subject and then she fretted over the binary construction of the contemporary feminist discourse where one is either mind or body. Like Grosz does in *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Erika argues the need to break the dualistic construction of mind/body:

Here in Spain, inside of feminism, [...] the sexuality issues, the menstrual issues, and the maternity issues are difficult, because these issues are not spoken, and they are not spoken through bodies. Instead it's always through *thought* and always with a binomial idea of "pro or against, pro or against". For me the Sexual Difference feminism make the idea that you are body. Not the bi-nodal idea of the patriarchal system that the mind is like GOD and the body is like SHIT. From Sexual Difference I take that idea that you are *a body*; you need a body. [...] You CAN'T give birth with your mind. You *need* to work with your body. And here in the evidential thought in Europe it's really, really difficult because all the women are only here (points to the head). (Interview, Erika)

Similarly Natalia spoke of how many feminists in Poland only work with the intellect, and ignore the body. According to her it has a lot to do with the fiery abortion-debate in Poland. The Polish feminists are often pro-choice and they distance themselves from their female bodies, to resist the other side's arguments of motherhood as women's nature:

"...in my country the women who call themselves feminists, publicly, they are pro choice, so they're against pro life because pro life is a movement that is against abortion so there is a huge, conflict [...] in Poland it's this - let's call it "mainstream feminism"... it's like they had to deny that they are women to be human beings.. so they lost touch with their bodies.. [...] So this is the tradition here you know, so feminism is *very* intellectual" (Interview, Natalia)

They advocate an integration between mind and body, arguing that the intellect is erroneously viewed as the only venue for feminism. Similarly the precedence of mind over body in contemporary feminism has been hotly contested by the Post-Constructionists. As have the Constructionist idea of the body as passive raw material for culture (Lykke 2009).

Notably the MCM'ers present many examples that tell of the body's agency, as well as the agency of other materials (Barad 2007). Miriam told me about her experiences of struggling with Butler, and particularly the idea of *performativity* (that we only *perform* gender), during her gender-studies. She said it didn't make sense to her, since she felt the agential realist materiality of her body.

...when I was studying in Lund, there was this extreme idea of the performative gender, you know, in a very strict Butlerian sense I guess. And [...] when I think about my own life that just doesn't make sense.. When I think about how I move through the world it makes no sense to me that my gender and my self is something that I constantly enact, or is SOLELY something I constantly enact, because I really feel like I'm very very bound personally to the physical world of flesh, like I get tired and my legs hurt and I get crazy when I don't exercise, and you know, there are things that are so, where I feel so heavily *embodied*, that the perspective of COMPLETE performativity just doesn't make sense to me, on a personal level. So that was something I really needed to challenge or think about challenging, I remember my professor in Copenhagen when I was writing my thesis said: "Yes it's an interesting idea about performativity but what about THIS?" and he sort of touched his arm and the flesh of his arm... And that REALLY resonated with me. (Interview, Miriam)

Though not as theoretically grounded many of the other MCM'ers tell of similar stories. Many started working with menstruation because they experiences how their bodies literally "kicked back", was a "trickster"; forced them to think of it. One had a severe hormonal problem causing her to bleed very often and heavily, another had severe cramps, a third just realised she didn't know much about this blood that came leaking out of her. Similarly the menstrual cup, with its agency (Barad 2007), has triggered movement participation through urging the Alternative FemCare/ers to act. In an intra-action of woman as discourse, woman as body and the agential realism of the cup they're processed into MCM'ers (compare Haraway 1994).

5. Conclusions and Reflections

5.1. What the European Menstrual Countermovement Tells us

With the dual aims to 1) *diversify and broaden* the understanding of the Menstrual Countermovement *as a whole*, and continuing the work of previous researchers' and to 2) further explore *the movement's place within feminism*, this study draws a new, more inclusive image of the movement that both includes actions/agents previously excluded and suggests a feminist positioning that transcends the feminist dichotomy between which the movement has previously been divided. This study also explores the MCM in Europe in the late 2000's and early 2010's which is a spatiotemporal context previously unstudied. With hopes of contributing to gender-, social movement-, and European studies in particular this study also intrinsically challenges the secrecy surrounding menstruation: shedding light on a bodily function that is – no matter how abject one might find it – part of why we exist.

5.1.1. What is the menstrual countermovement in Europe today? Who is part of it and what different positions are there? What are the key challenges for the movement? What strategies do they employ in their change-work?

Introducing the term "Menstrual Countermovement" contemporary social movement theories are used to define what could be counted as MCM-work and who should be counted as an MCM'er. I argue that the term is needed as it includes both "hard-core" activism, "smaller" everyday acts of resistance, and consumerist social change-work. If these aren't recognised as movement representations, we risk not seeing what's in front of us.

The intra-European boundaries of language, culture, history etc. have been present throughout this research, and many of the European MCM'ers do very nationalised work. While that may account for part of why the MCM'ers *feel lonely*, it also engenders a diverse and interesting movement, that seems less polarised, more multifaceted than that of the USA. A broad inclusive category like the Menstrual Countermovement is argued to be important to frame this contemporary social movement and could pose a case for use of similar categories in social-movement studies. But I also argue that it's a construction specifically relevant (and perhaps even innate) to the European context, where internal differences are built into the spatial context. To be able to talk of European feminist/social movements as one rather than many (Bull et al. 2000), concepts that (paraphrasing the EU motto:) *unites diversity* might be a prerequisite.

Five MCM positions were found in this study: Alternative FemCare/ers; Menstrual Educators; and Menstrual Talkers were studied in depth while Menstrual Spiritualists; and Menstrual Scholars were only mentioned. While these positions do not aim to paint a complete picture of the movement it does present large parts of it and in parallel suggests a new, diversified way of presenting MCM-work: in several positions based on focus of action rather than in two feminist waves.

The *Alternative FemCare/ers* practice political consumerism and are argued to be a vital and important part of the movement, contrary to previous research (Kissling 2006, Bobel 2010). They also make an interesting example of how products can play a leading role in social change-work through their *agential realism* (Barad 2007). The *Menstrual Educators* educate for change: teaching a "new knowledge" about (re)connecting mind with body, much like the Post-Constructionists (Grosz 1994, Lykke 2010). Though resembling the Feminist Spiritualists of previous research (Bobel 2010, Kissling 2006) it's argued they're not the same because the Menstrual Educators studied here *do* challenge gender. The *Menstrual Talkers* make menstrual noise where there is silence, provokingly breaking the boundaries of private and public, highlighting the agency of menstrual blood when it's displayed openly.

This study suggests two overarching strategies for the contemporary European MCM'ers. 1) *Abjectionification* (Wasshede 2013): challenging the boundaries between purity and filth; and 2) *Hyper-Personalisation*: challenging the boundaries between public and private. Through *abjectionification* the MCM'ers *use* the abject status of menstruation; play with it, illuminate it, joke about it to provoke and shock, while carefully doing *attractification* to balance the repelling aspects of their work. Hyper-Personalisation is mainly used to overcome the risk of paralysis that might be associated with contemporary (reflexive, post-colonial, intersectionally aware) feminism. They focus on personhood instead of womanhood, replace political assertiveness with reflexive, intimate self-disclosure. These strategies are intimately connected, as public=purity and private/personal=filth (Kissling 2006, Lykke 2009). Sharing intimate details of one's menstruation is simultaneously abjectionification and hyper-personalisation, making the MCM an outstanding and illustrative example of how contemporary social movements personalise change on several levels.

5.1.2. What are the feminist foundations of the movement? How does the MCM relate to core feminist issues such as the materiality of sex and the discursiveness of gender?

The MCM'ers have an uneasy position in feminism; often being perceived as a lesser kind of feminists, rendered "essentialist" or "not feminist at all", and many of them voice a feeling of loneliness within feminism. While many MCM'ers are quite traditional (and conservative) in their view of womanhood they *also* simultaneously differentiate, queer, and challenge the category. Previous research has argued that menstrual activism could be seen as either "second wave" or "third wave feminism in practice" (Bobel 2010). I argue that the MCM'ers studied here are something else, as they *both* trouble (queer/differentiate) gender *and* recognise (and celebrate) the specific materiality and agency of sexed bodies. I suggest that they're *breaking the feminist waves, doing Post-Constructionism in practice*.

As the Post-Constructionist theorists, the MCM'ers focus on *both* materiality *and* discourse: they take their starting point in corporeality and its multiple specificities (Lykke 2010); differentiate womanhood (Braidotti 1994); and challenge dichotomies such as sex/gender and mind/body (Grosz 1994). Post-Constructionism also covers a previously "under-theorised limbo" (Lykke 2010) in which the MCM has carried out much of their work. The Post-Constructionist package of theories gives the movement a much needed feminist theoretical foundation – which they seem to have longed for – that covers their whole spectrum of action and reasoning, instead of only parts.

The MCM'ers seem to be done choosing sides in the inter-feminist quarrels. Whether or not the MCM'ers adhere explicitly to Post-Constructionism, many of them showed an eclectic, self-made sort of

feminism where they took inspirations from several different feminist "trenches". Perhaps this is a given logic in contemporary feminism? Like Miriam said: "we have so much to manoeuvre now [...] a *gigantic* feminist sea to make sense of." Could it be the antagonistic positions between the second and third wave (and the French versus Anglo-American, the essentialists versus constructionist, etc.) are, at long last, passé?

5.2. Suggestions for Future Research

This study generated more interesting material than I had resources enough to explore in depth. I killed off more darlings than I had hoped to. Those most sorely missed were:

- A further exploration of the consumerism of the MCM: There were many interesting examples in the material of a sort of "collaborative capitalism". Through brokerage; talking of synergy, promoting one's competitors, etc. it seems the MCM'ers are challenging the rules of capitalism. This ought to be a fascinating subject for economists as well as social scientists. Is the individualism of late capitalism undergoing a collectivisation?
- Previous research has found that social transformation as a goal for social movements is increasingly perceived as vain and trivial (Kissling 2006). Though humble in their approach the participants spoke proudly about their work's change-potential. I think it would be very interesting to explore this further, especially within sociology and social movement studies. Has change-enthusiasm resurrected?
- The material also suggests that a further exploration of intra-European differences in the mainstream menstrual discourse would be rewarding for sociology, gender studies, and European studies scholars alike.

Additionally I have a couple of suggestions for future research that stem from the conclusions of this study, rather than what was not covered:

- Abjection, a concept in its relative infancy, has proved highly functional for explaining the MCM'ers actions. What other social actions could it be attributed to? And is it as effective as some of us think?
- I naturally also recommend further exploration of the MCM. This is just an *attempt* at capturing a *fragment* of a social creature. As a social researcher all one'll ever be able to do is present what's studied as perceived by oneself and a couple of others, at a specific point in time, in a specific setting, from a specific angle. As all social creatures, it changes constantly, all the time rendering new possible insights. I suggest other (larger) temporal studies, perhaps including comparisons between European countries, as well as spatial studies. There are MCM'ers all over the world, and I am sure they have much to tell.

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7. Appendices

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7.1. Lists of Menstrual Countermovers

7.1.1. Participants of this study, and main web representation

Alternative Femcare/ers

Afriska, website <http://afriska.ch>

Easycup, website <http://easycup.fr>

La Fleur De Sang, website <http://lafleurdesang.com>

Lunette, website <http://lunette.com>

Menstrualcup.co, website <http://menstrualcup.co>

Menstrual Educators

El Camino Rubi, website <http://elcaminorubi.com>

Jo MacDonald, website <http://jomacdonald.com>

Miesiaczka.com, Naya, website <http://miesiaczka.com>

The Moon Inside you, website <http://mooninsideyou.com>

The Moon Inside you, movie (2009), directed by Diana Fabiánová, streaming available on site.

Menstrual Talkers

Arvida Byström, tumblr blog <http://arvidabystrom.tumblr.com>

Kommiekomiks, website <http://www.kommiekomiks.com/blood-intro.htm>

Moist so Moist, blog <http://moistsomoist.org>

Vilse i Lingonskogen, blog <http://vilseilingonskogen.blogg.se>

7.1.2. For Your Inspiration: Other Menstrual Countermovers

Abbreviations for country of origin/action is put in brackets.

Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research <http://www.cemcor.ubc.ca/> (CA)

Chella Quint <http://chartyourcycle.wordpress.com/> (USA/UK)

Copette, Amore, e... <http://www.ecomestruazioni.it> (IT)

Femmecup <http://www.femmecup.com> (UK)

Ingrid Berthon Moine <http://www.ingridberthonmoine.com> (FR/USA)

Kalíšek <http://kalisek.cz/> (CZ)

Le Sang des Femmes <http://lesangdesfemmes.over-blog.com>, <http://lesangdesfemmes2.blogspot.se> (FR)

Ragnass <http://ragnasses.blogspot.fr> (FR)

Sangre Menstrual <http://sangremenstrual.wordpress.com/> (ES)

Rachel Kauder Nalebuff <http://www.mylittleredbook.net> (USA)

Society for Menstrual Cycle Research <http://menstruationresearch.com/> (USA)

Svenska Menskoppen <http://menskappen.se/> (S)

Our Bodies Ourselves <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/> (USA)

Museum of Menstruation and Women's Health <http://www.mum.org/> (USA)

7.1.3. European Menstrual Cup Producers

As found online April 2013

Lunette (FI)

Mooncup (UK)

Naturcup (ES)

Yuuki Menstrual cup (CZ)

Lady cup (CZ)

Melunas (DE)

Sibell (IT)

Femmecup (UK)

NaturalMamma (IT)

Fleurcup (FR)

Mami Cup (IT)

Ruby Cup (started in DK, now running in Kenya)

IrisCup (ES)

7.1.4. European Cloth Pad Producers

As found online April 2013

Naya Pads (PL)

Imse Vimse (S)

Moon Time (UK)

7.2. Sources & Methods of Data Generation, per Participant

Please find an overview of the methods for data collection in the Table below.

Subject	Type of sources for observations	Type of method for questioning
El Camino Rubi	Website, Book	Interview, skype video
Emma Arvida Byström	Tumblr, blog, published work	Interview, skype video
Menstrualcup.co	Websites, incl forum	Interview, skype video
Mieziaczka.com & Naya pads	Websites	Interview, skype video
Moist so Moist	Blog, paper	Interview, skype video
EasyCup	Website	Interview, skype chat
Jo MacDonald	Website	Questionnaire
Lunette	Website, Pinterest, Twitter	Questionnaire
Afriska	Website	Questionnaire
Kommiekomiks	Website	Questionnaire
La Fleur De Sang	Website, blog	Questionnaire
Sylt i Tratten	Website, Blog	Questionnaire
Vilse i Lingonskogen	Website, Blog	Confession
The Moon Inside you	Website, Movie	
	Total interviewed	6
	Total other	8
	Total participants	14

7.3. Prestudy Process

The prestudy was carried out mainly through google searches but also through emailing with informants. It resulted in a detailed table of a total of 78 different MCM representations (sites/blogs/tweet accounts etc), sorted and tagged as explained in Section 4.1.

The prestudy was guided by two "search principles": 1) *relevance* according to a rough working definition of the MCM, which was later boiled down to: "actions and agents challenging the repressive mainstream menstrual discourse of shame and silence"; and 2) *diversification*: seeking breadth in geography and kind, especially searching for kinds of MCM representations previously unstudied, or that didn't fit into previous definitions of the movement.

Though I did initially plan to do searches for at least all EU countries I soon realised that would take more time than I had. Instead I searched for representations in the six EU countries with the most citizens with internet access (Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain and Poland, see Table 7.1) in order to cover the ground of as many European (or rather EU-) citizens as possible. A high number of citizens with internet access was thought to generate a high likelihood that the MCM would be visible online in the respective national context. Regionally this covered South, Central and West Europe. I made additional searches in smaller countries to give more room to representatives from East and post communist countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, and Hungary) and from North (Denmark). Additionally previously known representatives from my own network were based in Sweden and Finland.

Table 7.1. Internet Usage in the EU

	Population (2012 Est.)	Internet Users. 30-June-12	Penetration (% Population)	Users % in EU
Germany	81 305 856	67 483 860	83.0 %	18 %
United Kingdom	63 047 162	52 731 209	83.6 %	14 %
France	65 630 692	52 228 905	79.6 %	14 %
Italy	61 261 254	35 800 000	58.4 %	10 %
Spain	47 042 984	31 606 233	67.2 %	9 %
Poland	38 415 284	24 940 902	64.9 %	7 %
Netherlands	16 730 632	15 549 787	92.9 %	4 %
Romania	21 848 504	9 642 383	44.1 %	3 %
Belgium	10 438 353	8 489 901	81.3 %	2 %
Sweden	9 103 788	8 441 718	92.7 %	2 %
Czech Republic	10 177 300	7 426 376	73.0 %	2 %
Austria	8 219 743	6 559 355	79.8 %	2 %
Hungary	9 958 453	6 516 627	65.4 %	2 %
Portugal	10 781 459	5 950 449	55.2 %	2 %
Greece	10 767 827	5 706 948	53.0 %	2 %
Denmark	5 543 453	4 989 108	90.0 %	1 %
Finland	5 262 930	4 703 480	89.4 %	1 %
Slovakia	5 483 088	4 337 868	79.1 %	1 %
Ireland	4 722 028	3 627 462	76.8 %	1 %
Bulgaria	7 037 935	3 589 347	51.0 %	1 %
Lithuania	3 525 761	2 293 508	65.1 %	1 %
Latvia	2 191 580	1 570 925	71.7 %	0,4 %
Slovenia	1 996 617	1 440 066	72.1 %	0,4 %
Estonia	1 274 709	993 785	78.0 %	0,3 %
Cyprus	1 138 071	656 439	57.7%	0,2 %
Luxembourg	509 074	462 697	90.9 %	0,1 %
Malta	409 836	282 648	69.0 %	0,1 %
TOTAL EU	503 824 373	368 021 986	63.2 %	100 %

Source: Internet World Stats, Usage and Population Statistics <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm#europe>, retrieved 19 May 2013.

When the search process approached its end I identified geographical gaps (in particular I found very few movement representatives based in Germany) and contacted major sociological/gender studies research institutions in the countries in question. Sadly only a couple replied, just to say that there were none or very few. Whenever a representative mentioned another European MCM'er (often in lists of links) I followed the trail further, which sometimes lead me out of the countries explicitly covered by the prestudy searches.

The searches were multilingual and nationalised. With the help of google's search engine and it's advanced search options I limited the respective searches to material made in the country and the language in question. With google translate I translated search words such as "menstruation", "embarrassed", "proud", "social movement", "shame", "blog", "feminism", "activism", "organisation", "menstrual blood", and "menstrual cycle". Those were combined in various ways, and used flexibly in each search. Each search took about four hours. Google Chrome was used as browser since it allows automatic translation, enabling me to understand enough to judge whether or not it was of any relevance.⁷ Though far from perfect, I must say I was often surprised of the quality of the translations.

After the search process had ended I had a list of more than 120 representations of varying quality and relevance. I sifted through the list, prioritised and categorised to see what representations were of interest, in comparison to others. Primarily those dealing only very marginally with menstruation as well as major FemCare industry webpages were excluded. In other regards I did not discriminate: e.g. companies, organisations, researchers, artists and individuals were included as were all kinds of venues (e.g. websites, blogs, forums, Facebook-groups, twitter accounts, and youtube-videos). 78 representations remained and constituted the basis for sampling of cases for the main study, as explained in Section 3.3.1.

The 78 were prioritised in level of activity/richness of material and 20 representations were deemed to be more "hard-core"/devoted MCM'ers than the others. As explained in Section 3.3.1 they were all contacted and 13 of them replied and agreed to participate in the main study.

⁷ All translations were made from original language to English.

7.4. Example of Interview Guide

NOTE: The general interview guide is to a great extent inspired by Chris Bobel's interview guide (2010, 187f). The guide was adjusted and adopted to each participant.

Date	Date of interview	Place	Place of the interview (both of the respondent's and myself)	Entry	Web-search, informant X etc.
Type	Questionnaire/ interview	Tools	Skype, phone, e-mail, face-to-face etc.	Time	Duration of interview
BASIC QUESTIONS					
<p>What do you want me to call you in the research?</p> <p>When were you born? Where were you born?</p> <p>Where do you currently live? (have you always lived there?)</p> <p>How would you describe your socio-economical status? (Middle class? Working class? Etc)</p> <p>What about your family situation? (Children? Married? Single? etc)</p> <p>Do you identify as female, male, queer or as something else? (if so what?)</p> <p>What's the best way to describe your sexuality? (e.g. hetero/gay/bisexual etc)</p> <p>Would you say that you are religious? If so; what religion are you part of?</p> <p>What is your political affiliation?</p> <p>What's your education?</p> <p>What social movements, if any, do you identify with? How would you describe these?</p>					
DEEPER QUESTIONS					
<p>Tell me when you first became interested in menstrual issues (if possible: date or year). Why do you think you became interested?</p> <p>Tell me about your "menstrual work": When did you start? How would you describe your work? How and where do you do it?</p> <p>Why the name _____?</p> <p>How much of your work is carried out/ based online? (how/where do you do it otherwise?)</p> <p>What about your personal visibility? Are you anonymous or not online? Do you have an alias/ several?</p> <p>How much time do you devote to the site/ your work? (for example every week)</p> <p>Does your work generate an income?</p> <p>How do you view menstruation as a symbol? What does it symbolize?</p> <p>How would you describe the general view of menstruation where you live and work?</p> <p>Why do you think you're doing this special work and nothing else? Why do you do what you do? Who/ what do you target? What do you want to achieve? What do you want to change? How do you think your work affect others? What impact does your work have?</p> <p>Why are YOU needed? (what makes you unique?) What do you give people?</p> <p>Have you ever been ashamed/embarrassed to do what you do?</p> <p>What problems and challenges do do you face in your work?</p> <p>What is the most affirming feedback you have ever received? What did you think about it, and why?</p> <p>What is the most discouraging feedback you have ever received? What did you think about it, and why?</p> <p>What reactions have you received from your close family and friends?</p> <p>Do you consider yourself a feminist? (If yes, could you please describe how you would you describe your feminism and what is the difference from other types of feminisms? What are the most important issues for you in feminism?)</p> <p>Do you consider your work feminist? If so, how?</p> <p>Would you say that there is a Menstrual Countermovement? If not, why?</p> <p>If yes: How would you describe it? How would you characterize people who are active in the movement? Is there a type of person who takes on some issue? A couple of different types? Can you describe the "typical" active person?</p> <p>Would you call yourself a part of the Menstrual Countermovement? If not how would you change it to better suit you? What would be a suitable "tag"/label for you?</p> <p>What do you think is the future of your work? Will you keep doing it? Do you have any plans and/or dreams for the future?</p> <p>What else would you want me to know?</p>					

7.5. Example of Coding Scheme

NOTE: the Coding Scheme was adjusted during the process of analysis. Consider this a draft, an example.

BASIC CODES	NAME	CODE	DESCRIPTION
TYPE OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE	Observation of online representation	OBS	Material generated through observations/ downloads of website material
	Interview	INT	Material generated through interviews
	Questionnaire	Q	
TOOL	Skype video	Skype	Material generated through video chatting on skype
	Email	Q	Material generated through email correspondence
	Chatting	Chat	Material generated through text chat
ACTOR	Country of Origin	S	Sweden
		UK	The United Kingdom
		ES	Spain
		Etc	
	Gender	(F)	Female
		(M)	Male
(Q)		Other/Queer	
CATEGORIES			
1. Ideological Foundations			GREEN
1.1 Feminist	Sexual Difference feminism	---	Underlining differences between the sexes
	Constructionism	//////	Underlining the discursiveness of gender
	Post-Constructionism/ New Materialism	Underlining materiality
	Other feminist	XXX	Previously undefined feminist foundations
1.2 Other	Environmentalism	E	
	Spiritualism	S	
	Anti-capitalism	AC	
	Additional ideological foundations	+	Previously undefined other ideological foundations
1.3 Approach to ideological foundation	Approach	Ap	E.g. eclecticism, difficulties with being labeled etc.
	Other related	O	
2. Strategies			BLUE
2.1 Attractification vs Abjectionification	Appeal/ Attraction	Attractification: "packing it nicely", humour
	Abject, Abjectionification	//////	Abject, Abjectionification, provocation, disgust
	Other related	+	
2.2 Personalisation?	Personal experiences	P	Talking of personal experiences
	Full disclosure	P+	High level of personal disclosure
	Keeping it cool	P-	No personal narrative
	Other related	P xxx	
3. The feminist Others	Countering other feminists, ext. or int.		YELLOW
	The others outside the movement	Ext	Talking of other feminists
	The others in the movement	Int	Talking of other MCM'ers
	Other related	XXX	
4. Feminist categories, potential relevance			VIOLET
	Essentialism vs anti-essentialism	E	Essentialism discussed explicitly
	Mind/body duality	MB	Mind/body duality discussed
	Agential realism	AR	Body talk, body's way of communicating etc
	Affirmation of the Feminine	A	Talking affirmatively about menstruation (and the female body).
4. Extra	EXTRA theory	////////	Code for new thoughts, new codes/theories