

“IT IS RED. IT IS GOOD. IT GIVES NEW ENERGY.”

REPRESENTATIONS OF MENSTRUATION, WOMEN’S BODIES AND
HEALTH IN DANISH MEDIA AND THE REDSTOCKINGS MOVEMENT,
1970-1985

By

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, situated within the field of Gender History and Critical Menstruation Studies, I explore the history of Danish menstrual activism, as well as the changes in representations and discourses around menstruation, women's bodies, and health from 1970 to 1985, focusing specifically on Danish newspapers and the Danish Redstockings movement, a leftist and influential group within the Danish Women's Liberation movement. I argue that the Redstockings put women's bodily autonomy on the public agenda, by countering the menstrual stigma and medicalization of women and giving women greater knowledge about their bodies and health. By exploring a wide selection of Danish newspapers and internal and external Redstockings publications, I trace how menstruation entered the Danish newspapers outside the doctors columns and the impact the Redstockings had. I argue that they did so by insisting that 'the private' was political and that the medicalization of women and menstrual and health issues was related to societal structures participating in women's oppression. While the Redstockings' feminist and leftist ideology shaped their activism, they often lacked class-based analysis of menstruation, women's bodies, and health. Ultimately, I show that despite the Redstockings' attempt to highlight how representations and issues of menstruation, women's bodies, and health were related to structural issues, the 1980s saw a greater move toward viewing menstruation, women's bodies, and health as individual issues rather than collective (societal) issues. As the history of menstrual activism in Denmark has not been examined before, this thesis highlights a new aspect of the Redstockings movement and contributes to the historical research of women's movements and menstrual activism.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed _____ (Anna Terese Kofoed-Ottesen)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IWY: International Women's Year

KKDK: *Kvinde Kend Din Krop* (Women Know Your Body)

OBOS: *Our Bodies, Ourselves*

PMS: Premenstrual Syndrome

PMT: Premenstrual Tension

TSS: Toxic Shock Syndrome

UN: United Nations

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, menstrual activism and advocacy have become a global phenomenon. They have gained the attention of mainstream media, politicians, and even royals.¹ In academia, the field of Critical Menstruation Studies has been formed, covering a huge variety of topics related to menstruation.² Menstrual activism and advocacy are found all over the world and come in myriad shapes and forms, from the fight to end menstrual stigma and taboo, to access to toilet facilities and menstrual products.³ From the legal fight to end taxation on menstrual products, to ensuring menstrual education for everyone.⁴ Due to its various methods, the movement has been given many names such as the menarchist movement, menstrual counterculture, or menstrual countermovement.⁵ However, the most common is the menstrual activism movement, or simply the menstrual movement.⁶ Whatever the name given,

¹ Lauren Young, "How the Royal Wedding is Fighting Period Poverty," *Ms. Magazine*, 18/05, 2018, <https://msmagazine.com/2018/05/18/royal-wedding-fighting-period-poverty/>; Remy Tumin, "Scotland Makes Period Products Free," *New York Times*, 15/08 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/15/world/europe/scotland-free-period-products.html>; Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, *Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2019); Emma Barnett, *Period: It's about bloody time* (London, United Kingdom: HarperCollins Publishers, 2021).

² Chris Bobel, "Introduction: Menstruation as Lens — Menstruation as Opportunity," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Chris Bobel et al. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

³ "Youth Activist Calls for an End to Period Stigma," (2021). <https://plan-international.org/nepal/case-studies/youth-activist-calls-for-an-end-to-period-stigma/>; Aino Koskenniemi, "Say No To Shame, Waste, Inequality - and Leaks! Menstrual Activism in the Market for Alternative Period Products," *Feminist Media Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1948885>; Chandra Bozelko, "Prisons That Withhold Menstrual Pads Humiliate Women and Violate Basic Rights," *The Guardian* (2015). <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/12/prisons-menstrual-pads-humiliate-women-violate-rights>; Chris Bobel, "Menstrual Pads Can't Fix Prejudice," *The New York Times* (2018), <https://doi.org/https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/31/opinion/sunday/menstrual-periods-prejudice.html>.

⁴ "About Us," PERIOD., accessed 3/6, 2024, <https://period.org/who>; Alhelí Calderón-Villarreal, "Taxing Women's Bodies: The State of Menstrual Product Taxes in the Americas," *The Lancet Regional Health Americas* 29 (2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2023.100637>; "About Us."; "About MH Day," accessed 3/6, 2024, <https://www.menstrualhygieneday.org/about>; "Period Poverty Costs Too Much, Take Action to End It," (2024). <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2024/05/period-poverty-costs-too-much-take-action-to-end-it>.

⁵ Josefin Persdotter, "Countering the Menstrual Mainstream: A study of the European Menstrual Counter Movement" (Master University of Gothenburg, 2013), 12-13.

⁶ Chris Bobel, "From Convenience to Hazard: A Short History of the Emergence of the Menstrual Activism Movement, 1971–1992," *Health Care for Women International* 29, no. 7 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399330802188909>; Chris Bobel and Breanne Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Inga T. Winkler Chris Bobel,

there is no doubt that it is considered to be a global movement today. In approximately the last 10 years, this global movement has also reached Denmark.

These developments and attention could easily make it look like menstrual activism and advocacy were a relatively new topic. However, this is not the case: indeed, it reaches back to at least the 1960s and 1970s women's movements in the United States (US).⁷ Although there is some research on the early days of menstrual activism in the US, there is a lack of historical research on menstrual activism in other contexts and a general lack of historical research in the field of Critical Menstruation Studies.⁸ Considering that menstrual activism has especially grown in Denmark since 2020, it made me curious about the history of menstrual activism in that context. I started to wonder whether the Danish women's movement in the 1970s also engaged with the issue of menstruation. I already knew that an area of interest for the Danish Redstockings Movement, a leftist group and the main actor in the Danish Women's Movement of the 1970s, were women's bodies and bodily autonomy.⁹ In the US, early menstrual activism was closely linked to debates and activism around women's bodies and health issues.¹⁰ Furthermore, in Denmark, menstrual issues have been reported extensively in the media showing both support and ridicule.¹¹ Thus, I continued to wonder: if the Redstockings dealt

Breanne Fahs, Katie Ann Hasson, Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, Tomi-Ann Roberts (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). In this thesis I will use the term The menstrual movement.

⁷ Bobel, "From Convenience to Hazard."; Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism."; Jennifer Nelson, "Historicizing Body Knowledge: Women's Liberation, Self-Help, and Menstrual Representation in the 1970s," *Frontiers (Boulder)* 40, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.40.1.0039>.

⁸ Chapter 2, this thesis.

⁹ Drude Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne: Den Danske Rødstrømpebevægelses Udvikling, Nytænkning og Gennemslag 1970-1985*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Denmark: Gyldendal, 1998), 514-33.

¹⁰ Bobel, "From Convenience to Hazard," 739-45; Nelson, "Historicizing Body Knowledge."; Chris Bobel, *New Blood: Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation* (US: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 42-57.

¹¹ Pia Kjærsgaard, "Der Er Altså Større Problemer I Danmark End Kvinders Menstruation," *Politiken* (2016). <https://politiken.dk/debat/art5623746/Der-er-alt%C3%A5-st%C3%B8rre-problemer-i-Danmark-end-kvinders-menstruation>; Silje Qvist, "Endelig. Første Spillested i Danmark Giver Nu Gratis Bind og Tamponer," *Elle* (2023). <https://www.elle.dk/agenda/krop/endelig-foerste-spillested-i-danmark-giver-nu-gratis-bind-og-tamponer>; Erna Boejesen Rosenqvist and Mark Lindved Norup, "Skal Tamponer og Bind Være Gratis? Ny Skotsk Lov Deler Vandene," *DR.dk* (2020). <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/skal-tamponer-og-bind-vaere-gratis-ny-skotsk-lov-deler-vandene>; Peter Breitenstein, "Tænder af Over Menstruationsforslag," *Ekstra Bladet* (2021). <https://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/politik/danskpolitik/taender-af-over-menstruationsforslag/8586873>; Emma Libner and Mary Consolata Namagambe, "133 Kvinder i Fælles Opråb: Menstruation Er Politisk, Peter Hummelgaard," *Information* (2020). <https://www.information.dk/debat/2020/11/133-kvinder-faelles-opraab-menstruation-politisk-peter-hummelgaard>.

with menstruation, in what ways did they approach it? How was menstruation represented in the Danish media, and did the Redstockings' approach to menstruation correspond to the media's representation? And how was menstruation linked to other issues of women's bodies and health both in the media and in the Redstockings movement?

1.1 Aims and Arguments

What I hope to show with this thesis is that menstruation matters. It is not only an issue that has to be dealt with in private but is closely intertwined with dynamics of power and inequalities. I hope this will become evident from my analysis, although this is not the main topic of this thesis as such. The topic of this thesis is the history of menstrual activism in Denmark from 1970 to 1985, which was the Redstockings' active period. I focus on the Redstockings because they were the most prominent voice of women's liberation in Denmark at the time. Although there were other feminist groups, the Redstockings became the image of the new women's movement in Denmark, with a radical and leftist ideology, which I return to in the following section.¹²

In this thesis, I trace the changes in representations and discourses around menstruation, women's bodies, and health in the Danish media and the Redstockings movement, through a wide selection of newspapers and internal and external Redstockings publications. Furthermore, I examine the impact the Redstockings had on making menstruation, women's bodies, and health important topics that could move outside the pages of the newspapers' doctors columns. Moreover, I argue that the Redstockings managed to put women's bodily autonomy on the public agenda by countering the menstrual stigma and medicalization of women, as well as giving women greater knowledge about their bodies and health. The

¹² Drude Dahlerup, "Three Waves of Feminism in Denmark," in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies* ed. Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (London & New York: Zed Books, 2002), 346-47; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 31-32; Lynn Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen: Sex, Kærlighed og Politik i 1968," in *1968 : dengang og nu*, ed. Morten Bendix Andersen and Niklas Olsen (Kbh: Museum Tusculanum, 2004), 259.

Redstockings insisted that ‘the private’ was political and that the medicalization of women and menstrual and health issues were related to societal structures participating in women’s oppression. Despite this, the 1980s saw a greater move towards seeing menstruation, women’s bodies and health as individual issues rather than societal issues.

1.1.1 Research Questions

In this thesis, I explore the following four questions:

1. How was menstruation represented in the Danish Redstockings movement and Danish newspapers in the period from 1970-1985?
2. How were the Redstockings' activism and representation of menstruation, women’s bodies and health influenced by their radical and leftist ideology?
3. In what ways were the representations and discourses of menstruation linked to representations and discourses of women’s bodies and health?
4. In what ways did the Redstockings’ menstrual activism, impact changes in the representations and discourses of menstruation, women’s bodies and health in Denmark?

By answering these questions, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of how menstruation, women’s bodies and health have been represented in Denmark historically, as well as enhance our historical knowledge about the Redstockings movement and menstrual activism in Denmark

1.2 The Development of the Redstockings Movement in Denmark

The spark that started the Redstockings movement, according to scholar Drude Dahlerup in her 1998 book, was women’s experience with men in the new political left-wing movements of the 1960s. Tired of ‘making tea for the revolution’, these women wanted a space where they could talk freely about issues important to them, without being overruled or ignored by the men.

Thus, the Redstockings became a separatist movement that only allowed women to be members, as they insisted that they needed a space of their own to talk, share experiences, and develop their political consciousness.¹³ It all started on the 8th of April 1970 when the first public Redstockings protest took place in Copenhagen. Dressed in hyper-feminine and sexualized clothes they protested the beauty industry's ideals for women, although they also carried signs that addressed many other issues such as abortion, equal pay, and gender roles.¹⁴ In its early years, the Redstockings movement was primarily confined to Denmark's larger cities, such as Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense, and Aalborg. However, by the end of the 1970s, the Redstockings had spread to most parts of Denmark, with at least 60 women's groups in 1978. The geographical diversity continued in the 1980s until the movement started to dissolve around 1985.¹⁵ However, the exact number of how many women were affiliated with or part of the Redstockings movement is not available, as they never formed a centralized organization.¹⁶

In Denmark and the other Nordic countries, there have since the first women's movement in the 1870s and 1880s been a relatively active and visible women's movement. In Denmark, the *Dansk Kvindesamfund* (Danish Women's Society) has existed since its establishment in 1871. During the Interwar Period, women's groups were established in many political parties, which also flourished after the end of the Second World War. In the 1960s many of these groups were closed due to the belief that they were not needed anymore as men and women were believed to be equal.¹⁷ However, it was not a coincidence that a new women's movement formed at this exact time. The huge changes that Danish society saw in the 1960s and 1970s meant that traditional gender roles and social and cultural norms were questioned.¹⁸ In 1960,

¹³ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 162 + 79; Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen," 259-60.

¹⁴ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 170.

¹⁵ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 201-02 + 61-62 + 346-48; "Kvindegrupper i Danmark," Royal Danish Library, updated 03/04/2024, accessed 23/05, 2024, <https://kub.kb.dk/c.php?g=675105&p=4908925>.

¹⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 205-08.

¹⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 124 + 32-38.

¹⁸ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 157-60; "Denmark," in *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*, ed. Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skærlund Risager, and Laurence Cox (Pluto Press, 2018), 157-60.

three out of four women between the ages of 20 and 59 were married housewives.¹⁹ This changed during the 1960s and 1970s as more women entered the labor force, from 26,2% women in the labor force in 1960, to 38,6% in 1970 and 45,6% in 1985.²⁰ With the legalization of hormonal contraception in 1966, birth rates fell and women started having children later in life. Furthermore, in 1971 the divorce rates skyrocketed, which was likely due to the emergence of the new women's movement.²¹

These developments brought changes to the more traditional role of women as housewives and kickstarted a debate about gender roles and women's double burden, as women still had to maintain the home and take care of the children while working outside of the home at the same time. However, these social changes were not the only reasons for the rise of a new women's movement.²² According to Dahlerup and others, another important factor in the emergence of the new women's movement was the rising number of women who entered higher education.²³ Among 25-year-olds, 5% of women had completed higher education in 1960, while the number for men was 16 %. In 1980 women had surpassed men in the statistics, as 30% of women and 25% of men had now completed higher education.²⁴ Dahlerup argued that this gave women new resources to imagine and realize a different life than the previous generation.²⁵

Most of the women who participated in the first protest were students at Copenhagen University, many of them Danish-language and literary studies students, while others were students at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.²⁶ According to a survey made by Dahlerup

¹⁹ *Kvinder og Mænd i 100 År - Fra Ligeret Mod Ligestilling*, Danmarks Statistik (Denmark, 2015), 12.

²⁰ *Ligestillingsrådets Årsberetning 1992*, Ligestillingsrådet (Denmark, 1992), 149-50, <https://www.kvinfol.dk/kilde.php?kilde=336#1>.

²¹ *Kvinder og Mænd i 100 År - Fra Ligeret Mod Ligestilling*, 21.

²² Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 157-58.

²³ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 159; Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen," 259; Emilie Askøe Dahlmann Olsen, "'Nu Er Jeg Blevet Bevidstgjort og det Giver Fandme Perspektiv' - Bevidstgørelse som Kampmiddel i 1970'ernes Danske Kvindebevægelse" (Master Copenhagen University 2024), 8-9.

²⁴ *Kvinder og Mænd i 100 År - Fra Ligeret Mod Ligestilling*, 22.

²⁵ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 159.

²⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 126 + 421; Olsen, "'Nu Er Jeg Blevet Bevidstgjort og Det Giver Fandme Perspektiv'," 9.

among former Redstockings for her 1998 book, which to my knowledge is the only one of its kind, 48% of the 1296 respondents were students, with around half of the students were university students, while 20% were employed in jobs like teachers, pedagogues, social workers, or nurses.²⁷ Only 1% of the respondents were full-time housewives, while 41% of the respondents' mothers had been full-time housewives. 63% of the respondents' fathers were either white-collar workers or self-employed.²⁸ Therefore, it is evident that most Redstockings belonged to the middle class. The average age of the Redstockings based on Dahlerup's survey was 26 years from 1970 to 1974, 28 years from 1975 to 1980, and 33 years from 1981 to 1985.²⁹ Thus, the Redstockings were part of the new educated generation of women.

Dahlerup did not ask about the respondents' ethnicity in her survey. This was probably because Danish society was very homogenous, and so the Redstockings were most likely white ethnic Danish women. This would correspond to the fact that in 1970 only 0,79% of the Danish population were immigrants.³⁰ Among the immigrants that came to Denmark in the 1960s and early 1970s most were male guest workers, which peaked in 1973 (before the oil crisis) with 3000 male immigrants from Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Pakistan.³¹ In 1980 the number of immigrants was still low, as only 3% of the population were immigrants or descendants of immigrants.³²

Another key factor for the Redstockings' emergence was the international travel and sharing of ideas. The Redstockings were inspired by the US Women's Liberation Movement, and especially by the New York-based group 'Redstockings' from which the Danish Redstockings took their name. The name pointed to the term Bluestockings, which in the US

²⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 419-20; Drude Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne: Den Danske Rødstrømpebevægelses Udvikling, Nytænkning og Gennemslag 1970-1985*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Denmark: Gyldendal, 1998), 466.

²⁸ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 420 + 23.

²⁹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 424.

³⁰ "Statistik Banken ", Danmarks Statistik, accessed 3/6, 2024, <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20021>.

³¹ *Befolkningen i 150 år*, Danmarks Statistik (Copenhagen: Danmarks Statistiks trykkeri, 2000), 52 (Figure 6.6), <https://www.dst.dk/Site/Dst/Udgivelser/GetPubFile.aspx?id=4576&sid=bef150>.

³² "Hvor Mange og Hvem Er Indvandrere i Danmark?," (2024). <https://integrationsbarometer.dk/tal-og-analyser/INTEGRATION-STATUS-OG-UDVIKLING>.

referred to politically active and educated women in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the US Redstockings substituted Red for Blue to mark that they belonged to the 1960 New Left.³³ According to Dahlerup, international inspiration was key for the Danish Redstockings, not only from the US but also from the new women's movements in the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and West Germany, among others.³⁴ This will also become evident in this thesis, although the international connections will not be central to my analysis.

The basic organizing principle for the Redstockings movement was also borrowed from the US, namely the 'consciousness-raising groups' which in Denmark were called *basisgrupper*. The inspiration came from different sources, such as journalist Erik Thygesen's writings about the US Women's Liberation Movement in the Danish magazine *Superlove* in 1970 and his book from the same year about different activist movements in the US. In these works, he described the US Redstockings among other groups.³⁵ The work in the *basisgrupper* was the practice behind their slogan '*det private er politisk*' (the private is political),³⁶ which was used across Western women's movements at the time. The Redstockings believed that talking about, sharing, and trying to understand one's own experiences would result in becoming aware of the social and cultural structures that underpin society and individual women's experiences. Only with this awareness could they create collective action and a political consciousness.³⁷ Thus, by putting women's own experiences as the center of attention, the Redstockings aimed to dissolve the dichotomies of the public/political and the private/personal.³⁸

³³ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 173; Pernille Ipsen, *Et Åbent Øjeblik: Da Mine Mødre Gjorde Noget Nyt* (Denmark: Gyldendal, 2020), 33-36.

³⁴ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 162-64 + 72-73; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 101-02.

³⁵ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 164 + 212; Ipsen, *Et Åbent Øjeblik*; Olsen, "'Nu Er Jeg Blevet Bevidstgjort og Det Giver Fandme Perspektiv'", 9-10.

³⁶ Sometimes they also use the phrase 'the personal is political', but there does not seem to be a huge difference in the meaning depending on the wording, according to Dahlerup. See Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 505.

³⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 217-18.

³⁸ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 505-06; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 41.

Dahlerup defined the Redstockings as a radical and leftist movement; thus, she considered the Redstockings feminism to be a ‘women’s liberation feminism’.³⁹ Dahlerup defined women’s liberation feminism as a combination of the demand for women’s autonomy with a classic marxist critique of capitalist societies. What was new in women’s liberation feminism was that instead of seeing women’s oppression as a result of capitalist structures, it also saw women’s oppression as a result of a patriarchal structure, which was men’s oppression of women, a structure much older than capitalism.⁴⁰ By ‘radical’ Dahlerup meant a feminist movement that was based on (1) women’s individual experiences, (2) included all aspects of women’s lives in their activism, (3) used women’s communities as the strategic and organizational principle of the movement, (4) emphasized a practical approach, and (5) that regarded women’s oppression as both material and ideological.⁴¹

Although the Redstockings were part of New Left that critiqued both capitalist society and Soviet Marxism, they differed from most of that movement by combining class struggle with women’s struggle.⁴² The Redstockings saw the class struggle as inextricably linked to women’s struggle, which is evident from one of their main slogans: “*Ingen kvindekamp uden klassekamp, ingen klassekamp uden kvindekamp*” (Woman’s struggle is class struggle, class struggle is woman’s struggle).⁴³ Although the Redstockings shared these ideas with the women’s movement in many other countries, the movement was more unified in Denmark compared to for example the US or England. One reason for this, according to Dahlerup, was the homogeneity of Danish society, as previously discussed.⁴⁴ Despite the Redstockings’ solidarity

³⁹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 38-40.

⁴⁰ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 155-56; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 38-39.

⁴¹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 98.

⁴² Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 156.

⁴³ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 102.

⁴⁴ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 72; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 101.

with the working class and their commitment to marxist-socialist ideas, only about 8% of the Redstockings were working class.⁴⁵

Because the Redstockings believed that all women shared the experience of gender oppression, they were convinced that only through the principle of sisterhood – that is, the shared solidarity among women – could they reach their goals. Instead of focusing on gender equality in a narrow sense, e.g., working towards legal rights, as the earlier Danish women's movement had done, the Redstockings aim was women's liberation. The main aim of the Redstockings was not to create political change but to create cultural and social change by changing the entire way of living and thinking. They believed that only through the creation of a completely new society built on Marxist-socialist ideas, combined with a fight to end patriarchy, would it be possible to eradicate all forms of oppression be it class, gender, race, or age-based.⁴⁶

1.3 Thesis Overview

In Chapter 2, I review the relevant literature for this thesis. I mainly build on three bodies of literature from the field of Critical Menstruation Studies and Women's and Gender History, namely those on: (1) the Danish Women's movement in the 1970s to mid-1980s; (2) women's bodies, health, and menstruation; and (3) menstrual activism. All three bodies of literature are characterized by a lack of historical research both internationally and in and on Denmark. Chapter 3 will focus on the theoretical and methodological underpinning of for this thesis. Theoretically, my thesis is informed by concepts from the cultural approach to social movement theory. My research builds on a feminist approach to archival research, and the analysis is based on a vast array of material collected in the Danish National Archive, the Royal Danish Library, and the online newspaper archive Mediestream, which is hosted by the Royal Danish Library.

⁴⁵ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 420.

⁴⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 153-57; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 38-42 + 98; Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen," 270-74.

Furthermore, this chapter includes my considerations of the terminology of menstruation and menstrual activism, as well as representation and discourse.

The analytical body of this thesis consists of three chapters which cover the periods 1970-1974, 1975-1979, and 1980-1985 respectively. This division is roughly based on Dahlerup's division of the Redstockings movement into three phases: (1) the period of direct actions (1970-1974); (2) feminist counter culture (1974-1980); and (3) specialization (1980-1985).⁴⁷ Although my periodic division is almost the same, I have modified it to fit the surfacing of different themes regarding menstruation, women's bodies, and health.

Chapter 4 focuses on the period from 1970 to 1974. In this chapter, I explore the representation of menstruation in some Danish newspapers, namely *Berlingske Tidende*, *B.T.*, *Weekendavisen*, *Jyllands-Posten*, and *Information*, as well as the lack of knowledge about women's bodies among women and in the medical science more generally. I also examine the Redstockings' critique of this lack of knowledge, and how they tried to solve it through the practice of self-help. Although the Redstockings movement in its early stage did not yet focus on menstruation, it was immediately attentive to women's bodies. More specifically, they helped put women's bodily autonomy on the agenda.

In Chapter 5, covering the period from 1975 to 1979, I focus on the beginning of the destigmatization of menstruation both in the Danish newspapers and in the Redstockings movement, which correlated with United Nations Proclaimed International Women's Year in 1975. I also explore how the practice of self-help led to a greater critique in the Redstockings movement of the field of medicine, especially the medicalization of women's bodies, and of the lack of knowledge. Finally, this chapter also examines how economic issues related to menstruation began to be addressed in this period.

⁴⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 153-55; Dahlerup, "Three Waves of Feminism in Denmark," 347.

The last analytical chapter, Chapter 6, explores the period from 1980 to 1985. In this chapter, I further explore the economic issues related to menstruation, as well as the surfacing of new debates in the Danish media and the Redstockings movement related to pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) and the outbreak of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). The debate about PMS was primarily centered around two cases: namely, the advertising material from the medical company Ferrosan regarding the treatment of PMS; and the first attempt in Denmark to use PMS as a reason for acquittal in a murder case. Finally, I examine the changes in the Redstockings' approach to menstruation, women's bodies, and health in the 1980s. The thesis will end with a conclusion that sums up the findings of my analysis, answers my research questions, and points out areas for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this thesis, I aim to understand the constructions of menstruation, women's bodies, and health by the Danish public and the Danish Redstockings movement from 1970 to 1985. Furthermore, I explore changes in public perceptions of menstruation, women's bodies, and health, as well as in what ways the Redstockings influenced these changes. To do this I build on and contribute to three main bodies of literature: (1) the Danish Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s to mid-1980s; (2) women's bodies, health, and menstruation; and (3) menstrual activism. The literature is drawn from the fields of Critical Menstruation Studies and Women's and Gender History.

What characterizes all three bodies of literature is a lack of historical research both when it comes to the 1970's Danish women's movement, perceptions of menstruation, women's bodies, and health, as well as the history of menstrual activism in other contexts than the US. By analyzing how menstruation, women's bodies, and health were viewed by Redstockings and the Danish public, I aim to further our knowledge in all three areas. The chapter will follow the above division of the literature used in this thesis, and end with a short conclusion.

2.1 *The Danish Women's Liberation Movement*

The first body of literature this thesis builds on and seeks to contribute to is that of Danish social movements in the 1960s to 1970s, as well as the Danish Redstockings Movement. This historical literature sheds light on the Danish context in which the Redstockings emerged, and how this location influenced their thoughts, ideas, and practices. However, it is important to note that the Redstockings were also inspired by other women's movements across the Western world, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Thus, the Redstockings can be considered part of the

International Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.¹ Despite the Redstockings' international connections, there is not much international literature that deals with the history of the Danish Redstockings, or the broader Women's Liberation Movement in Denmark.

Despite the close connections between the Nordic countries, there are few comparative studies of the 1970's Women's Liberation Movement in these countries.² Although several studies focus on Nordic feminism, the topics of gender equality politics and gender research have been favored.³ The reason for this might be that the Women's Liberation Movement across the Nordic countries has gained a mythological status, as historian Elisabeth Elgán has argued is the case in Sweden, for instance. In 2017 Elgán pointed out that one of the main feminist groups of the 1970s in Sweden, *Grupp 8* (Group 8), had either been described by former members themselves or in research that focused on interviews with former members. The scarcity of archival research on the group, has resulted in a very one-sided representation of the 1970's Women's Liberation Movement in Sweden.⁴

A similar point was made by Emilie A. D. Olsen in her 2024 MA-thesis in literary studies about the Danish Redstockings. Olsen argued that "the representation of Redstockings in

¹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 155-56; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 38-39; Dahlerup, "Three Waves of Feminism in Denmark," 346-47.

² See for example *Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in Nordic Countries*, ed. Christina Bergqvist et al. (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1999); Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, "The New Feminist Movement in the Nordic Countries in the 1970s," *Stjórnsmál og Stjórnýsla* 8, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2012.8.1.9>; Hannah Kaarina Yoken, "Nordic Transnational Feminist Activism: The New Women's Movements in Finland, Sweden and Denmark, 1960s-1990s" (PhD University of Glasgow, 2020); Drude von der Fehr, Anna Jonasdóttir, and Bente Rosenbeck, *Is There a Nordic Feminism? Nordic Feminist Thought on Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 1998).

³ See for example: Valgerður Pálmadóttir and Johanna Sjöstedt, "Nordic Feminism Reconsidered: Activism, Scholarly Endeavours and Women's Research Networks at the Nordic Summer University 1971-1990," *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 30, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2021.1973557>; Fehr, Jonasdóttir, and Rosenbeck, *Is There a Nordic Feminism*; Gisela Kaplan, "Progressiveness in Scandinavia" in *Contemporary Western European Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1992); *Unfinished Democracy: Women in Nordic Politics*, ed. Elina Haavio-Mannila et al. (Pergamon Press, 1985); *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia: The Limits of Political Ambition?*, ed. Kari Melby, Anna-Birte Ravn, and Christina Carlsson Wetterberg (Bristol University Press, 2008).

⁴ Elisabeth Elgán, "The Myth and the Archives: Some Reflections on Swedish Feminism in the 1970s," in *The Women's Liberation Movement: Impacts and Outcomes* ed. Kristina Schulz (New York: Berghahn Books 2017).

posterity have been caricatured and stereotypical.”⁵ In a radio interview from 2021, professor of political science Drude Dahlerup stated that the representation of the Redstockings has mythologized them, often in a negative way. These myths resulted in a lack of a collective learning process because they “discourage new generations from building upon the Redstockings’ work.”⁶ Furthermore, looking at the Royal Danish Library online list of research about the Redstockings, which includes master’s theses and university assignments, much of it is also ethnographic or interview-based or written by former Redstockings themselves.⁷ Thus, it seems a similar tendency towards lack of archival research is also found in Denmark. It is striking to me the scarce amount of literature that has been produced about the Redstockings movement and the broader women’s movement in Denmark.⁸ The mythology around the Women’s Liberation Movement and the lack of research might be one reason why there is little comparative research on the Women’s Liberation Movement in the Nordic countries.

Much of the Danish literature reviewed here is relatively old as it was mainly published from the late 1990s to the 2000s. This indicates that there is a need for further research on the Danish Redstockings and women’s liberation movement, based on contemporary questions and feminist theory as it has developed in the meantime. On the Royal Danish Library listed research about the Redstockings, only 5 titles are from the last 10 years.⁹ However, I am not alone with the claim that there seems to be a need for further research. This argument was already made by historians Morten Bendix Andersen and Niklas Olsen in 2004 in their anthology *1968: Dengang og nu* (1968: Then and now). Andersen and Olsen argued that 1968 had gained a mythological status in Denmark. They therefore argued that there was a need for

⁵ Olsen, ""Nu Er Jeg Blevet Bevidstgjort og Det Giver Fandme Perspektiv"," 4.

⁶ Sara Røjjær Knudsen, *Farvel til Rødstrømperne, Goddag til Myten!*, podcast audio, Revolution & Søstersind2021, <https://www.dr.dk/lyd/p1/revolution-og-soestersind/revolution-og-soestersind-1/revolution-og-soestersind-4-4-farvel-til-roedstroemperne-goddag-til-myten-11532140004>. See also: Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 29-30.

⁷ "Rødstrømpebevægelsen: Forskning," Det Kongelige Bibliotek, accessed 3/6, 2024, <https://kub.kb.dk/c.php?g=675105&p=4813109>.

⁸ "Rødstrømpebevægelsen: Forskning."

⁹ "Rødstrømpebevægelsen: Forskning."

more historical research of the 1960s and 1970s in Denmark that could “demystify the common assumptions about 68.”¹⁰

In 2008 historian Anette Warring also argued for the need for more research on the Danish 1960s and 1970s. According to Warring, there were two main points of focus in Danish historiography on this period: the new social movements, especially their political aspects; and leftwing parties. She argued that there was a lack of research about the cultural dimension of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s social movements.¹¹ This seemed counterintuitive, Warring wrote because the historical literature mainly argued that the social movements had a more lasting cultural than political impact. Based on this, she argued that for more research on the cultural and social dimensions of the movements of this time.¹² Although Warring never explicitly defines the terms cultural and political, they hold two meanings. First, they signified two different approaches to history, although this was not defined more precisely; and second they signified the differences in topics research.¹³ Thus, Warring argued that there was more research on political topics such as political protest for nuclear disarmament than on cultural topics such as the development of new lifestyle practices.¹⁴ As will be demonstrated in this section, this is a paucity that this thesis seeks to address.

According to Warring, Danish historiography often tries to separate the cultural and political although they are often not that separate in reality.¹⁵ Andersen and Olsen’s 2004 anthology could be an example of this, as their book is divided into 3 parts: one focuses on political impacts; one focuses on cultural and societal impacts; and one contains personal reflections. However, despite the book separating political and cultural impacts into two

¹⁰ Morten Bendix Andersen and Niklas Olsen, "Arven fra 68," in *1968: Dengang og Nu*, ed. Morten Bendix Andersen and Niklas Olsen (Kbh: Museum Tusculanum, 2004), 21.

¹¹ Anette Warring, "Around 1968 - Danish Historiography," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 33, no. 4 (2008): 357-58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468750802423177>.

¹² Warring, "Around 1968 - Danish Historiography," 356-57 + 60.

¹³ Warring, "Around 1968 - Danish Historiography," 353.

¹⁴ Warring, "Around 1968 - Danish Historiography," 357-58.

¹⁵ Warring, "Around 1968 - Danish Historiography," 361.

sections, several chapters in part two deal with both the political and cultural aspects of the 1960s and 1970s movements.¹⁶ Thus, there is an attempt to string together the political and cultural dimensions. However, it is interesting to note that several of the chapters that do this focus on the Redstockings or the women's liberation movement. This illustrates that in this literature, there is a tendency to look at both the political and cultural aspects of the movement – at least this seems to be the case with the research by Dahlerup¹⁷ and Lynn Walter, professors of Social Change and Development and Women's Studies.¹⁸ This tendency might be a result of the Redstockings' focus on creating cultural and social change rather than concrete political change, as mentioned in the Introduction. However, there are also examples of research that focused more exclusively on the political side of the women's movement, such as Ann-Dorte Christensen's article from 2001 about women's strategies and political in their political action from the 1960s to the 1990s.¹⁹

Dahlerup is the key scholar about Danish Redstockings movement. Her two-volume 1998 book on the Redstockings, is still the most extensive piece of research on the movement. In this book, she examines the emergence, climax, and decline of the movement, as well as its innovative nature and impact. In 2018 Dahlerup also published an article that repeated the same points as her 1998 book, with the addition of her personal involvement in the Aarhus Redstockings, which is not included in her book.²⁰ Instead the latter builds on a vast amount of ethnographic and archival research material.

¹⁶ See for example: Sarah Højgaard Cawood and Anette Dina Sørensen, "Pornoens Legalisering: Seksualitetens Befrielse og Kvinders Seksuelle Frigørelse?," in *1968 : dengang og nu*, ed. Morten Bendix Andersen and Niklas Olsen (Kbh: Museum Tusculanum, 2004); Nina Kirstine Brandt, "Gulerodsflippere og Gummistøvlesocialister: Økologibevægelsens Udvikling og 1968," in *1968: Dengang og Nu*, ed. Morten Bendix Andersen and Niklas Olsen (Kbh: Museum Tusculanum, 2004); Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen."

¹⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2; Drude Dahlerup, "Kvindeoprøret: 1968 og Årene Derefter," *Samfundsøkonomen* 2018, no. 2 (09/13 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7146/samfundsokonomien.v2018i2.140590>.

¹⁸ Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen."

¹⁹ Ann-Dorte Christensen, "Kvindepolitiske strategier og demokratiske udfordringer " *Kvinder, køn & forskning* 1 (2001).

²⁰ Dahlerup, "Kvindeoprøret: 1968 og Årene Derefter."

For this thesis, another key publication is Walter's 2004 article from Andersen and Olsen's anthology, which is a revised and translated version of her 1990 article on the Redstockings published in the journal *Feminist Review*.²¹ These two key works have been supplemented by historian Pernille Ipsen's book from 2020 and Olsen's MA-thesis from 2024. Ipsen was born in one of the first women's collectives established in Copenhagen in 1971 in a squatted building next to the first women's house in Denmark also from 1971. In her 2020 book, Ipsen explored the time of the Danish Women's Liberation Movement through the story of her seven mothers, who were all key figures in the Redstockings movement. Her book builds on extensive interviews with her mothers, as well as archival material.²²

In her book Dahlerup focused equally on the Redstockings political and cultural activism and impact, and how these were woven together. Dahlerup argued that the Redstockings primarily impacted cultural changes, by creating new gender norms and ways of life. By implementing their ideals into everyday life, the Redstockings became a living example of how things could be different.²³ According to Dahlerup, the Redstockings had a significant impact when it came to "*changing the relations between women and men, as well as gendered power structures.*"[italics in the original]²⁴ Furthermore, Dahlerup argued that although the Redstockings did not have much political impact, such as legislative changes, their critique of existing gendered structures and norms paved the way for a more moderate equality-feminism to blossom within the political institutions.²⁵ They did so by influencing and changing the general discourse about women and women's rights, which according to Dahlerup meant that "the *discursive framework* for [equality] politics changed."²⁶ However, in the case of abortion

²¹ Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen."; Lynn Walter, "The embodiment of Ugliness and the Logic of Love: The Danish Redstockings Movement " *Feminist Review*, no. 36 (1990), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/1395117>.

²² Ipsen, *Et Åbent Øjeblik*.

²³ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 391-414.

²⁴ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 408.

²⁵ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 405-06.

²⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 406.

rights and violence against women, the Redstockings did directly influence political changes.²⁷

In this way, Dahlerup's research showed how activism focused on cultural changes, such as changes in norms, cannot be easily separated from political changes, instead these changes are often closely intertwined.

In her 2004 article, Walter agreed with Dahlerup that the Redstockings gained broader cultural influence by creating a broader and more flexible identity for women.²⁸ However, she was more skeptical of the Redstockings' political impact. Walter argued that the 1960s and 1970s social movements' lasting impact was cultural rather than political, as Warring also pointed out. Warring further stated that the Danish women's movement was usually seen as an example of one of the most culturally influential social movements in Denmark from the 1960s and 1970s.²⁹

I agree with these scholars that the Redstockings made a large impact on Danish society. I intend to further our understanding of the movement and its impact by focusing on a specific area of the Redstockings' activism, namely their activism and work related to women's bodies, health, and menstruation. As the central idea in the Redstockings' ideology was that the private is political, I argue there is a cultural and political dimension to their activism, as changing norms and beliefs were seen as a political act. Hence, I aim to help fill the research gap that Warring, as well as Andersen and Olsen, have identified while striving not to make a harsh division between what belongs in the cultural and political dimensions of the movement. With my thesis, I will contribute to this research, hopefully bringing a new perspective to activism centered around menstruation and women's health, and further nuance our understanding of social movements, which I define in Chapter 3, in general, and the women's movement in Denmark specifically.

²⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 406.

²⁸ Walter, "Rødstrømpebevægelsen," 274-78.

²⁹ Warring, "Around 1968 - Danish Historiography," 356-57.

2.2 Menstruation, Women's Bodies and Health

The second body of literature upon which this thesis builds is centered around women's bodies, health, and menstruation in Denmark. In this section, I survey what has been written about menstruation, women's bodies, and health from a historical perspective, with a slight focus on Danish literature.

According to Bente Rosenbeck in her 2006 article, research about the body, its relation to gender, and politics has now become an acceptable topic in the field of History, as opposed to before the 1970s. Thus, historical research on the body is no longer an obscure interest.³⁰ Rosenbeck argued that from being perceived as an "unproblematic natural object", the body "has, on the one hand, become something material and on the other hand an expression of cultural and historical representations."³¹ Thus, according to Rosenbeck, there is a tension between the body as nature and a social construction.³²

Rosenbeck ascribed the changing approach to the body to the 1970s women's movement, as they made the body central to their politics and activism.³³ Since the 1970s the body has become more prominent in academic research according to Rosenbeck, with the work of renowned scholars such as Michel Foucault's books *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* from 1975 and *The History of Sexuality* from 1976 and Judith Butler's books *Gender Trouble* from 1990 or *Bodies That Matter* from 1993.³⁴ Thus, this thesis is in many ways part of this ongoing historical interest in the cultural, political, and gendered meanings of the body. However, it will contribute to this literature by bringing forth a new perspective on the Danish

³⁰ Bente Rosenbeck, "Kroppens Politik," *Forum for Idræt* 22, no. 1 (2006): 105, <https://doi.org/10.7146/ffi.v22i0.31685>.

³¹ Rosenbeck, "Kroppens Politik," 108-09.

³² Rosenbeck, "Kroppens Politik," 109.

³³ Rosenbeck, "Kroppens Politik," 105-07.

³⁴ Rosenbeck, "Kroppens Politik," 108; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York & London: Routledge, 2002); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin 1977); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1980).

1970s women's movement. I focus specifically on the Redstockings and the Danish public's view on women's bodies, health, and menstruation as well as how these were related and changed over time.

Historical research on the perception of and approach to menstruation by the international Women's Liberation Movement is very limited. However, several historical studies deal with how menstruation has been represented at various other times, such as Bettina Bildhauer's articles from 2006 and 2013 about the perception of blood, including menstrual blood, in Medieval Europe,³⁵ Tirzah Meacham's 1999 book about menstruation in Judaism,³⁶ or Saniya Lee Ghanoui research on menstrual health education in Scotland from 2022, 2013 and 2020.³⁷ Another related article is Sharra Vostral's about the Scottish history of menstrual products from 2022.³⁸ However, these studies are not relevant to my research in this thesis.

Within the Danish context, there is little historical research on menstruation, and its relation to the Danish 1970s women's movement has similarly not received much scholarly attention. In the historical literature, one topic stands out: namely, research about the subsequent editions of the book *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, which according to Dahlerup, was inspired by the 1970 American book *Our Bodies Ourselves* (OBOS) written by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective.³⁹ Thus, one can wonder why none of the Danish literature on KKDK compares

³⁵ Bettina Bildhauer, "Blood in Medieval Cultures," *History Compass* 4, no. 6 (2006), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2006.00365.x>; Bettina Bildhauer, "Medieval European Conceptions of Blood: Truth and Human Integrity," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. S1 (2013), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12016>.

³⁶ *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (University Press New England, 1999).

³⁷ Gayle Letherby, "Introduction," in *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003); Saniya Lee Ghanoui, "Mediated Bodies: The Construction of Wife, Mother, and the female Body in Television Sitcoms: Roseanne," *Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association* 2012 (2013); Saniya Lee Ghanoui, "From Home to School: Menstrual Education Films of the 1950s," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Chris Bobel et al. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Saniya Lee Ghanoui, "'Responsible Body': Menstrual Education Films and Sex Education in the United States and Scotland, 1970s-1980s," *Open Library of Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.6349>.

³⁸ Sharra L. Vostral, "Periods and the Menstrualscape: Menstrual Products and Menstrual Manifestations in Scotland, 1870-2020," *Open Library of Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.6347>.

³⁹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 529.

it to its American cousin or editions from other countries. I have only found one study, the MA thesis in literature by Ingrid Mette Gjerde, who compares the five editions of *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop* from 1975 to 2013 with the four Norwegian editions of the book from 1976 to 2004, which were translations of KKDK and not OBOS.⁴⁰ For a study of the translations of OBOS see Kathy Davis 2007 book.⁴¹

Instead, much of the research on KKDK explores the development of the book by comparing the different editions, especially the first four, focusing on changes in the books view on health, the healthcare system, and medicine. Although not all historians, several scholars, such as historian Rikke Andreassen in 2004 and Sine Lehn-Christiansen and Mari Holen in 2012, argue that there seemed to be a change in KKDK's approach from a more collective focus to a more individual focus.⁴² A similar argument was made by Tine Andersen in 1988 in her comparison of the first two editions of KDDK.⁴³

Furthermore, part of Andersen's analysis focused on the changing approach to menstruation in KKDK. She argued that while the first edition was more focused on reproduction and the problems related to menstruation, the second edition had a more positive approach, as well as a greater focus on alternative treatment.⁴⁴ I will come back to these points in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. However, it is important to note that Andersen's analysis is more in the style of popular history, as it lacked a critical analysis and references, focusing more on

⁴⁰ Ingrid Mette Gjerde, "Kjenn Din Kropp, Kjenn Din Tid: En Bokhistorisk Analyse av Kvinne Kjenn Din Kropp (1975-2013) i et Feministisk Perspektiv" (Master University of Oslo, 2019).

⁴¹ Kathy Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴² Rikke Andreassen, "From a Collective Women's Project to Individualized Gender Identities: Feminism, Women's Movements, and Gender Studies in Denmark," *Atlantis (Wolfville)* 29, no. 1 (2004); Sine Lehn-Christiansen and Mari Holen, "Sundheden Er Sgu Din Egen! Udvikling af Forståelser i Køn og Sundhed i Kvinde Kend Din Krop 1975-2001," in *Er der spor? : Feminisme, aktivisme og kønsforskning gennem et halvt århundrede* ed. Sine Lehn-Christiansen et al. (Denmark: Frydenlund Academic, 2012).

⁴³ Tine Andersen, "Kvinder Er Også Kød og Blod: Om 'Kvinde Kend Din Krop' 1975 og 1983," in *Rå Silke: Kroppsnære Kvindehistorier fra 1970 til I Dag*, ed. Tine Andersen and Hanne Møller (Kbh: Gyldendal, 1988).

⁴⁴ Andersen, "Kvinder Er Også Kød og Blod," 106-09.

her personal opinions. Despite this, when combined with the studies mentioned above, as well as Dahlerup's work on the Redstockings, Anderson's study still adds a valuable perspective.

The book *Cyklus – Studier i Rødt* (Cycle – Red studies) from 2000 edited by Marianne Fruergaard⁴⁵ is the only Danish publication on menstruation. It is not an academic study but a collection of texts on menstruation from various authors such as journalists, doctors, writers, private persons, academics, etc. The book was initiated and partly funded by the menstrual product company ALWAYS, a sub-company of Procter & Gamble. There are several interesting chapters for the purposes of this thesis: two on menstrual products and commercials,⁴⁶ two on the development in medicine and science's understanding of menstruation,⁴⁷ one about PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome),⁴⁸ and one by Dahlerup about menstruation and the Redstockings, which is a rewriting of chapter 8 from her 1998 book.⁴⁹ Due to the genre of the collection, most chapters do not contain references, and thus caution needs to be exercised when using them for academic purposes.

A key text for this thesis is Chapter 8 "Det Private er Politisk" (The Private is Political) from Dahlerup's 1998 book on the Danish Redstockings.⁵⁰ In this chapter, Dahlerup analyzed the Redstockings' attempt to create a feminist counterculture, as they perceived "society to be

⁴⁵ Marianne Fruergaard, *Cyklus - Studier i Rødt. Om Alle Tiders Menstruerende Kvinder* (Denmark: Aschehoug, 2000).

⁴⁶ Trine kit Jensen and Anette Villaume Pinz, "Gertrudes Tampon: Lang Vej til Drømmebindet," in *Cyklus - Studier i Rødt. Om Alle Tiders Menstruerende Kvinder*, ed. Marianne Fruergaard (Denmark: Aschehoug, 2000); Anette Dina Sørensen, "En Tørre Fornemmelse: 50 år med Reklamer for Hygiejnebind og Tamponer," in *Cyklus - Studier i Rødt. Om alle tiders menstruerende kvinder*, ed. Marianne Fruergaard (Denmark: Aschehoug, 2000).

⁴⁷ Christian Graugaard, "Den Røde Farer: Om Læger, Kvinder og Blod " in *Cyklus - Studier i Rødt. Om Alle Tiders Menstruerende Kvinder*, ed. Marianne Fruergaard (Denmark: Aschehoug, 2000); Bente Rosenbeck, "Hvad som Hos Fruentimmer Kaldes Menstruation " in *Cyklus - Studier i Rødt. Om Alle Tiders Menstruerende Kvinder*, ed. Marianne Fruergaard (Denmark: Aschehoug, 2000).

⁴⁸ Katrine Sidenius, "PMS: Forbandelse eller Fiktion " in *Cyklus - Studier i Rødt. Om Alle Tiders Menstruerende Kvinder*, ed. Marianne Fruergaard (Denmark: Aschehoug, 2000).

⁴⁹ Drude Dahlerup, "Det Unævnelige: Kulturrevolution, Da Rødstrømperne Trak Menstruation Frem i Lyset " in *Cyklus - Studier i Rødt. Om Alle tiders Menstruerende Kvinder*, ed. Marianne Fruergaard (Denmark: Aschehoug, 2000).

⁵⁰ Drude Dahlerup, "'Det Private Er Politisk'," in *Rødstrømperne: Den Danske Rødstrømpebevægelses Udvikling, Nytænkning og Gennemslag 1970-1985* (Denmark: Gyldendal, 1998).

imbued with a patriarchal culture”⁵¹, and how this was related to the slogan the private is political. A large part of the chapter dealt with different aspects of the Redstockings’ body politics, such as freeing the nipple, abortion, menstruation, birth control, and childbirth.⁵² In the section on menstruation, Dahlerup argued that the Redstockings wanted to change both women’s and the general public’s views on menstruation by debunking myths about menstruation and menstruating women. According to Dahlerup, this “was part of a general tendency towards a greater openness about the body and sexuality.”⁵³

Although the history of menstruation in the 1970s and 1980s has not been covered a lot in scholarly literature, other topics related to menstruation, such as medical perceptions of women’s bodies and health,⁵⁴ contraception,⁵⁵ abortion,⁵⁶ Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS),⁵⁷ and Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS),⁵⁸ have been researched more comprehensively. Within this field, studies that focused on how women’s bodies and their functions were perceived within Western medicine are central to this thesis, shedding light on how women’s bodies and health were represented in Denmark, as well as what the Redstockings wanted to counter in their activism. One of the most important texts in this regard is Emily Martin's book from 1987 about

⁵¹ Dahlerup, "Det Private Er Politisk", 499.

⁵² Dahlerup, "Det Private Er Politisk", 514-33.

⁵³ Dahlerup, "Det Private Er Politisk", 522.

⁵⁴ See for example: Susan E. Bell, "Changing Ideas: The Medicalization of Menopause," *Social Science & Medicine* 24, no. 6 (19987), [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(87\)90343-1](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(87)90343-1); Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Cecilia Tasca et al., "Women And Hysteria In The History Of Mental Health," *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health* 8, no. 1 (10/19 2012), <https://doi.org/10.2174/1745017901208010110>.

⁵⁵ See for example: Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970* (USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Lara V. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill* (Yale University Press, 2001); Suzanne White Junod and Lara Marks, "Women's Trials: The Approval of the First Oral Contraceptive Pill in the United States and Great Britain," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 57, no. 2 (2002), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/57.2.117>, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/57.2.117>.

⁵⁶ Birgit Petersson, Karin Helweg-Larsen, and Lisbeth B. Knudsen, *Abort i 25 År* (Denmark: Lidhardt og Ringhof, 1998); H. Goldstein, "Legal Abortion in Denmark During the Past 25 Years: Aspects of Public Health and Ethics," *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care* 3, no. 3 (1998/01/01 1998), <https://doi.org/10.3109/13625189809051419>, <https://doi.org/10.3109/13625189809051419>.

⁵⁷ P. M. Shaughn O'Brien, Andrea Rapkin, and Peter J. Schmidt, *The Premenstrual syndromes: PMS and PMDD* (CRC Press, 2007); Loes Knaapen and George Weisz, "The Biomedical Standardization of Premenstrual Syndrome," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 39, no. 1 (04/01 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsc.2007.12.009>.

⁵⁸ Sharra L. Vostral, *Toxic Shock: A Social History* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

representations of reproduction and women's bodies in Western medicine; she specifically looked at menstruation in Chapters 3 and 6.⁵⁹ Another important text is Sally King's chapter in the *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies* from 2020 about the history of PMS and its connection to the Myth of the Irrational Female.

While this thesis does not focus on the history of medical representations of women's bodies, reproduction, or menstrual illnesses, these texts are instructive in term of understanding how women's bodies were perceived in Western society. Both Martin and King argued that the representations of these issues in medicine have resulted in a negative image of women, as well as the medicalizing and pathologizing of women.⁶⁰ Although I argue that the same was true in Denmark in the 1970s and 1980s, my thesis is distinct in that I explore how these representations were expressed in the Danish newspapers. Furthermore, I focus on attempts both in the media and by the Redstockings to counter such representations, highlighting the emerging menstrual activism. Thus, I look at women's bodies and health from a different perspective, while also adding to the historical research on menstruation in Denmark.

Despite Rosenbeck's argument that historical research on the body is no longer an obscure interest, historical research on menstruation might still be just that, at least in Denmark. While there is some historical research on perceptions of menstruation at various times, there is only a limited amount of historical research specifically on menstruation and the links between menstruation, women's bodies, and health in Denmark. Thus, in this thesis, I aim to enhance our historical knowledge of menstruation and its connection to representations of women's bodies and health in the Danish context. Although scholars have briefly discussed the Redstockings' approach to menstruation, it has never been explored on its own.

⁵⁹ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Sally King, "Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and the Myth of the Irrational Female " in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Chris Bobel et al. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁶⁰ King, "Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and the Myth of the Irrational Female " 288-89; Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, 27-53.

2.3 Menstrual Activism

As demonstrated in the section above, there is a lack of historical research on perceptions of women's bodies, health, and menstruation in Denmark. This is also true regarding historical studies of menstrual activism in Denmark and Europe. Indeed, this is a paucity that this thesis seeks to address. At the same time, it is important to note that there was much exchange of ideas between Western movements in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶¹ Thus, understanding how menstrual activism came about in other contexts can also help us to better understand its evolution in the Danish context.

The historical literature on menstrual activism is largely focused on the United States, suggesting it originated there.⁶² However, the lack of historical research on menstrual activism in other contexts and of comparative studies of international connections in menstrual activism make the origin of menstrual activism hard to assess. As far as I can ascertain, there are no historical studies of menstrual activism in Asia, Africa, and South America, at least when it comes to English language material.⁶³ Only a few studies focus on menstrual activism in a European or Scandinavian context, although not on its historical development per se.⁶⁴ Even with the possibility of adding literature in Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian, the material is quite limited.⁶⁵ In fact, there is not a single historical study in Denmark that focuses solely on

⁶¹ Kristina Schulz, "A Success Without Impact? Case Studies from the Women's Liberation Movements in Europe" in *The Women's Liberation Movement: Impacts and Outcomes* ed. Kristina Schulz (New York: Berghahn Books 2017), 346; Dahlerup, "Three Waves of Feminism in Denmark."

⁶² Bobel, "From Convenience to Hazard."; Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism."; Nelson, "Historicizing Body Knowledge."; Jieun Roh, "Feminist menstrual activism in South Korea (1999-2012)," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2019.1577031>; Chris Bobel and Breanne Fahs, "From Bloodless Respectability to Radical Menstrual Embodiment: Shifting Menstrual Politics from Private to Public," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/707802>.

⁶³ I have found one study on South Korea, see: Roh, "Feminist menstrual activism in South Korea." However, there is a lot of research on contemporary menstrual activism and advocacy in many of these contexts.

⁶⁴ See for example Persdotter, "Countering the Menstrual Mainstream: A study of the European Menstrual Counter Movement."; Una Mathiesen Gjerde, "Blodig Skam," *K & K* 46, no. 125 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.7146/kok.v46i125.105555>.

⁶⁵ One rare example is Denise Malmberg, *Skammens Röda Blomma? Menstruationen Och den Menstruerande Kvinnan i Svensk Tradition* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, Etnologiska institutionen, 1991).

the history of menstrual activism. Thus, with this thesis, I aim to contribute to the historical literature on menstrual activism in Europe and Denmark.

One of the main contributors to historical literature on menstrual activism in the US context is Chris Bobel. Although she is not a historian, some of her work adopts a historical perspective on the development of menstrual activism in the US, which is the same for some other scholars, such as Breanne Fahs. Bobel and Fahs argued that menstrual activism surfaced within the broader US women's movement in the 1960s among feminist spiritualists who were part of the cultural feminist branch of second-wave feminism. Cultural feminism, in this context meant embracing gendered differences, rather than wanting to obliterate them. Thus, during the 1960s and 1970s feminist spiritualists reframed menstruation as a form of power of womanhood and a source of embodied knowledge.⁶⁶ Opposing the feminist spiritualist radical menstruation activists emerged in the 1990s. According to Bobel, these activists were aligned with third-wave feminism and punk movements which focused on raising awareness and challenging dominant structures.⁶⁷

Menstrual activism's connection to cultural feminism in the US in its early days is important to note when considering the origin of menstrual activism in Denmark. According to Dahlerup, the term cultural feminism did not fit the Danish Redstockings. These differences are important to note when examining how certain ideas and practices were implemented in the Danish context from the US context, even if I do not make a comparative study of Denmark and the US in this thesis.

During the 1970s the feminist health movement developed in the US, which Bobel among others considered the forerunner of the contemporary menstrual movement.⁶⁸ Jennifer Nelson in 2019 and Bobel in 2008 have argued that the feminist health movement aimed to reclaim the

⁶⁶ Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism," 1002-03; Bobel and Fahs, "From Bloodless Respectability to Radical Menstrual Embodiment," 959; Bobel, *New Blood* 8-9.

⁶⁷ Bobel, *New Blood* 8-9.

⁶⁸ Bobel, "From Convenience to Hazard," 740.

body by challenging traditional ideas about women's bodies and sexuality, as well as critiquing the medicalization of women. The movement questioned the authority of doctors and medicine and promoted women's experiences as a valid form of knowledge. Among their different strategies and activities, "self-help" was particularly important.⁶⁹ Self-help also became key to the Redstockings' activities related to the body, health, and menstruation, as will become evident in Chapter 4 and 5. Underlying many of these activities was also an interest in challenging the menstrual stigma.

2.4 Conclusion

What is striking in all the bodies of literature discussed in this chapter is the scarcity of historical research in Denmark and internationally on the topics of menstruation, women's, bodies and health, as well as menstrual activism. Although there is some literature on the history of the Danish women's movement in the 1970s, it is rather limited. Furthermore, there has not been much new research on the Redstockings movement in the last ten years, despite several scholars, such as Anette Warring in 2008, calling for more research. Furthermore, Emilie Olsen and Dahlerup have argued that the representation of the Redstockings has given them a mythological status. When it comes to the literature on women's bodies, health, and menstruation, the historical research is even more limited, at least concerning literature that links these topics to the Redstockings. Movement. The main topic covered by this literature is the development of the books *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop* between 1975 to 2001.

Finally, the historical literature on menstrual activism is also quite limited and has primarily focused on the history of menstrual activism in the US. When it comes to the history of menstrual activism in Europe or Denmark, English-language publications are still largely missing. Thus, with this thesis, I aim to add to all three bodies of literature by enhancing our knowledge about the history of menstrual activism both in Denmark and internationally, as well

⁶⁹ Bobel, "From Convenience to Hazard," 739-45; Nelson, "Historicizing Body Knowledge," 42-49.

as the relations between menstruation, women's bodies, and health. Furthermore, I hope to contribute to enhancing our understanding of the Danish Redstockings movements. This might help pave the way for further historical research in the future between menstrual activism and the women's movement in different contexts.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter, I explore the relevant theoretical and methodological approaches to my research. First, I explore concepts from social movement theory situated within the cultural turn and discourse theory. I focus specifically on the concept of knowledge-practices by Maria Isabel Casa-Cortés, Michal Osterweil, and Dana E. Powell from 2008 and Charles Taylor's idea about the Politics of Recognition from 1994. I also discuss the relevance of the concepts of representation and discourse as defined by Stuart Hall in 2013 building on Michel Foucault.

Following my theoretical reflections, I highlight some important insights from the field of Critical Menstruation Studies in section 3.2 about menstruation as a category of analysis, which helped me define my understanding of menstrual activism. Furthermore, I discuss the terminology of menstruators versus women informed by Critical Menstruation Studies and feminist theory. I end this section with some reflections on how the Redstockings understood the term 'women'.

Finally, I build on a feminist approach to archival research, which I explore in section 3.3, which is informed by feminist theory that highlights the situatedness of research. Following this I reflect on the implications this has in archival research. I conclude this section with some reflections on my source material. Thus, in this chapter, I aim to outline the theoretical and methodological context for my examination of menstrual activism within the Redstockings movement and the construction and representation of menstruation in relation to women's bodies, and health by the Redstockings and in the Danish newspapers.

3.1 *Social Movement Theory*

The interdisciplinary study of social movements is interested in explaining what a social movement is, why they occur, and why people join them. In trying to get closer to answering these questions, other questions surface, such as what the aim of the movement is, how they are

organized, and what tools and actions are used. However, how these questions are answered varies depending on the approach one uses. There are many different approaches to how social movements can be understood and analyzed, such as structuralist approaches, like resource mobilization theory, or cultural approaches, like collective identity theory.¹ In her 1998 study of the Redstockings movement, Dahlerup used a combination of resource mobilization and Social Constructivist theory. Resource mobilization theory, as defined by John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald in 1977, is the study of the mobilization of resources, such as money, organization of the movement, or the commitment of members, which is deemed necessary for the success of a movement.² However, for my study, I have adopted what is termed cultural approaches by James M. Jasper and others.³ I specifically focus on the theory of knowledge-practices by Maria Isabel Casa-Cortés, Michal Osterweil, and Dana E. Powell from 2008 and the theory of the politics of recognition by Charles Taylor from 1994.

According to Jasper, the cultural turn in social movement theory started in the late 1980s as a reaction against the previous structuralist approaches. Instead of looking at the structure of social movements, the action of social movements became central.⁴ Jasper argued that the focus became on “creativity and agency, culture and meaning, emotion and morality.”⁵ According to Dahlerup, this approach sees social movements as a protest against dominant norms and values, but also as a protest against the power structures and dominant actors that define and uphold these norms and values.⁶ However, Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell critiqued the cultural

¹ Mohammad Vaqas Ali and Jawad Tariq, "An Overview of the Framework of Social Movement Theories: An Analytical Review," *Journal of Arts and Linguistics Studies* 1, no. 4 (12/11 2023): 21 + 42 ; James M. Jasper, "Social Movement Theory Today: Toward a Theory of Action?," *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 11 (2010): 966-70, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00329.x>.

² John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *The American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1216-17.

³ Jasper, "Social Movement Theory Today," 966-70; Ali and Tariq, "An Overview of the Framework of Social Movement Theories: An Analytical Review," 768-70; María Isabel Casa-Cortés, Michal Osterweil, and Dana E. Powell, "Blurring Boundaries: Recognizing Knowledge-Practices in the Study of Social Movements," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2008): 22-23.

⁴ Jasper, "Social Movement Theory Today," 970.

⁵ Jasper, "Social Movement Theory Today," 970.

⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 62-68.

turn for its “tendency to mechanize ‘culture’ into an explanatory variable in human behavior.”⁷ Instead, they argued for pushing the cultural turn further and understanding the culture of social movements not “as something ‘out there’” that needs explaining but understanding them “on (and in) their own terms.”⁸

This understanding led Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell to see social movements as sites where “knowledges are generated, modified, and mobilized by diverse actors.”⁹ They define knowledge as “experiences, stories, ideologies, and claims to various forms of expertise that define how social actors come to know and inhabit the world.”¹⁰ Furthermore, they understand knowledge as a concrete and embodied practice, thus highlighting how it is situated in a specific context and location. The activities that produce knowledge are termed knowledge-practices by Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell. This includes traditional research practices, the know-how of micro-political and cultural interventions, as well as cognitive praxis that informs social activity.¹¹

With this approach, they hope to “destabilize the boundary between activist and academic (or other expert) knowledges.”¹² Instead of seeing movements as an object detached from the production of knowledge, they want to understand and highlight that knowledge and knowledge-practices are also developed within social movements. They try to explore social movements through their own understandings, and not only through outside perspectives.¹³ Thus, Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell seek to dismantle the hierarchical structure of knowledge where scientific, academic, and expert knowledge are on top. This approach results in knowledge generated in spaces outside science and academia not being seen as equally valid.

⁷ Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 23.

⁸ Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 21.

⁹ Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 20.

¹⁰ Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 27.

¹¹ Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 21 + 45-47.

¹² Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 23.

¹³ Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 22-25.

Thus, they argue in favor of seeing other knowledge-practices as equally important and valid.¹⁴ This approach is instructive for understanding and conceptualizing the Redstockings' diverse activities as knowledge-practices; as well as how the Redstockings understood menstruation, the female body, and health, and how this was part of their challenge of dominant norms, values, ideas, and gendered and classed power structures.

In this thesis, I combine Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell's understanding of knowledge and knowledge practices with Taylor's concept of recognition. He argued that social movements have become more focused on gaining recognition of the group the movement represents, as a response to the absence or misrecognition by others. As identity is believed to be shaped by the recognition of one's identity, non- or misrecognition of it can inflict "real damage."¹⁵ According to Taylor, recognition has become central in modern democratic societies due to the centrality of human dignity. Taylor argued that human dignity has become understood as universal and egalitarian, in the sense that all humans share this dignity. This leads to the perception that all are worthy of equal recognition, he argues, despite existing inequalities.¹⁶

In Taylor's understanding, there are two conflicting understandings of recognition: (1) the politics of universal dignity; and (2) the politics of difference. The first emphasizes the equal dignity of all, where everyone is worthy of equal rights and recognition, in the way that everyone should be treated the same. The second is based on the idea that everyone (both individuals and groups) have a unique identity, which makes them all worthy of equal recognition of their uniqueness and difference.¹⁷ I use Taylor's two concepts of recognition to frame the differences and similarities between the understandings of menstruation, women's bodies, and health found in the Danish newspapers and the Redstockings movement. This can

¹⁴ Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries," 26 + 32 + 44.

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

¹⁶ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 27 + 36-37.

¹⁷ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 41-44.

also shed light on what type of recognition different actors sought for menstruating women, such as whether or not they should get a tax benefit for menstrual products, which I will come back to in Chapter 5 and 6.

To conclude, understanding social movements as sites that generate knowledge through diverse knowledge-practices helps us zoom in on how menstruation, the female body, and health were understood in the 1970's Danish Redstockings movement. Furthermore, it allows us to see how these understandings were generated, as well as how they might have challenged the medical hierarchies of knowledge. Combining this with Taylor's conceptualization of different types of recognition reveals the underlying reasons for possible differences in the public's and the Redstockings' understandings of menstruation, the female body, and health.

3.1.1 Representation and Discourse

In order to further help me understand how menstruation, women's bodies, and health were represented in the Danish media, I draw on theories of representation and discourses. I mainly focus on Stuart Hall's 2013 account of representation, a revised version of the original publication from 1997. According to Stuart Hall representation "is the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language."¹⁸ He continued by stating that it is the link between concepts and language that makes it possible to refer to the real or imaginary world of objects, people, or events.¹⁹ Hall argued that when we interpret the world in roughly the same way this creates a "shared culture of meanings", which then constructs our social world. However, in order to share a 'culture of meanings' we must also be able to exchange meanings and concepts through a shared language.²⁰

¹⁸ Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* ed. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon (SAGE Publications 2013), 3.

¹⁹ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 3.

²⁰ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 4.

Language is in this regard understood very broadly as written and spoken languages, but also visual images, bodily expressions, etc.²¹ An important aspect of this understanding is that meaning is not found within an object, person, or thing, or in the world. Instead, Hall argued that “it is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable.”²² Thus, meaning is constructed through social conventions, which means that they are not set in stone but can and do change over time.²³

According to Hall, representation has also come to entail the production of knowledge and not only meanings. This is largely based on Foucault’s theory of discourse. Building on Foucault, Hall defined discourse as “the production of knowledge through language.”²⁴ Thus, the study of discourses, according to Hall, is the study of where meaning comes from, and the acknowledgment that discourses are historically and culturally situated. A similar argument, also based on Foucault, was presented by Fran Tonkiss in 1998. Tonkiss argued that as language is also shaping the social world and therefore a ‘social practice’, discourse analysis is interested in understanding how language is used by different actors to create the social world.²⁵ This approach to discourse analysis is what Hall termed the discursive practice.²⁶ Thus, discourses can be understood as the structures that make social practices, norms, institution, etc. appear ‘natural’.

Entailed in the understanding that discourses produce knowledge is that these knowledges are intertwined with relations of power. Not only is knowledge a form of power but there is also power in defining what knowledge is valid at a given time, as in what is constituted as ‘the

²¹ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 4.

²² Hall, "The Work of Representation," 7.

²³ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 8-9.

²⁴ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 29.

²⁵ Fran Tonkiss, "Analyzing Discourse," in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seale (Sage, 1998), 246-49.

²⁶ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 30-32.

truth'.²⁷ According to Hall, Foucault understood power as something that exists at "all levels of social existence," and not only "from top to bottom."²⁸

In this regard the way menstruation, women's bodies, and health were represented in the Danish media from 1970 to 1980 can be seen as an expression of the discourses that existed at the time. Therefore, I will ask questions such as how dominant discourses about women's bodies and health, shaped the representation of menstruation in the newspapers and among the Redstockings, how the Redstockings challenge dominant representations and thus dominant discourses, and how the Redstockings might have influenced the discourse on these topics.

3.2 *Understandings of Menstruation*

The transdisciplinary field of Critical Menstruation Studies is not new. However, it was not named as such until 2020 with the publication of *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*. Although the field was named *Critical Menstruation Studies*, Chris Bobel argued that it could also have been named *Critical Menstrual Studies* to signify that it captures the whole menstrual cycle across a lifespan and not just menstruation itself.²⁹ The *Palgrave Handbook* used the term menstruation to be inclusive of everything that is related to the menstrual cycle during a lifetime, such as menarche or menopause, both related to health issues and political issues. Thus, Bobel argues that just as other fields like Critical Race Studies or Critical Gender Studies used race or gender as a category of analysis, Critical Menstruation Studies use menstruation as a category of analysis. According to Bobel, this approach can help clarify how structures of power and knowledge are created, who benefits from these structures, and in what way.³⁰

²⁷ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 33-34.

²⁸ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 34.

²⁹ Bobel, "Introduction: Menstruation as Lens — Menstruation as Opportunity," 3-4.

³⁰ Bobel, "Introduction: Menstruation as Lens — Menstruation as Opportunity," 3-4.

When I approach the constructions and representations of menstruation and menstrual activism in the Danish media and the Redstockings movement, I understand that these terms include not only menstruation itself but everything related to the menstrual cycle. However, it is not easy to define what menstrual activism is, or what should be considered activism. In the US and Britain, menstrual activism has since 2015 focused a lot on menstrual equity or period poverty, such as eliminating the tampon tax and ensuring access to menstrual products for vulnerable groups like homeless or incarcerated people.³¹ In India and other countries of the Global South, there has been a growing effort since the 2000s toward menstrual hygiene management, which focuses on providing menstrual products, hygiene and water infrastructure, and reproductive health education.³²

Although Bobel argued that menstrual activism usually does involve some resistance towards the shame, secrecy, and silence of menstruation,³³ she and others have also argued that these efforts have been limited.³⁴ Thus, much contemporary menstrual activism focuses on material aspects of menstruation, while there is also a growing understanding of and activism around countering the menstrual stigma.³⁵ This tendency is also the case when exploring how the Danish media and the Danish Redstockings understood and dealt with menstruation from 1970 to 1985, as will become clear in Chapter 4. However, the Redstockings were also attentive to the menstrual stigma and how the representation and construction of menstruation influenced negative stereotypes about women. Therefore, countering these ideas was a central part of their

³¹ Weiss-Wolf, *Periods Gone Public*, 5-6; Chris Bobel, *The Managed Body: Developing Girls and Menstrual Health in the Global South*, 1st ed. 2019. ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

³² Bobel, *The Managed Body*, 6.

³³ Bobel, *The Managed Body*, 5.

³⁴ *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Inga T. Winkler Chris Bobel, Breanne Fahs, Katie Ann Hasson, Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, Tomi-Ann Roberts (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Marni Sommer et al., "Comfortably, Safely, and Without Shame: Defining Menstrual Hygiene Management as a Public Health Issue," *American journal of public health (1971)* 105, no. 7 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2014.302525>; Anna Terese Kofoed-Ottesen, "Blod, Bind og Ligestilling: En Frameanalyse af UNICEFS Narrativer om Menstruation," *Temp - tidsskrift for historie* 12, no. 23 (01/03 2022), <https://tidsskrift.dk/temp/article/view/130087>.

³⁵ Bobel, *The Managed Body*, 5-6; Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism," 1007-09.

activism, when it came to menstruation, women's bodies, and health. I will explore this in Chapter 5.

That menstruation is stigmatized and that the stigma is harmful seems to be agreed upon within the field of Critical Menstruation Studies. According to scholars Ingrid Johnston-Robledo and Joan C. Chrisler, who build on the work of sociologist Ervin Goffman, stigma is a stain or a mark that sets one apart from others.³⁶ In their view, one of the reasons for the stigmatization of menstruation is its perception as disgusting or unclean, which has a long cultural history.³⁷ While Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler do not specify what context they write about, historian Camilla Mørk Røstvik argued in 2018 that in modern Scandinavian history, the uncleanness of menstruation was only introduced at the outset of the 1900s. This change correlated with an "interest in hygiene and sanitation from powerful institutions such as medicine and education" as well as a "stronger public interest in having a modern, efficient, and clean body."³⁸ This connected the expectations of women's cleanliness with their intimate hygiene, thus women and later menstrual product companies put much effort into controlling and managing menstruation.³⁹ That menstruation was also stigmatized in Denmark in the 1970s, will become clear in Chapter 4.

According to Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, if women in the contemporary Western context had their menstrual status revealed, for example by blood stains, this would reflect badly on their person or character.⁴⁰ In this way, menstruation sets the menstruating body apart from "the normative and privileged male body".⁴¹ Furthermore, in 2020 anthropologist Miren Guilló-Arakistain argued that the menstrual stigma was also reproduced in traditional and

³⁶ Ingrid Johnston-Robledo and Joan C. Chrisler, "The Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma," *Sex roles* 68, no. 1-2 (2011): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-0052-z>.

³⁷ Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, "The Menstrual Mark," 10.

³⁸ Camilla Mørk Røstvik, "Crimson Waves: Narratives about Menstruation, Water, and Cleanliness," *Visual Culture & Gender* 13 (2018): 55.

³⁹ Røstvik, "Crimson Waves," 55-56.

⁴⁰ Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, "The Menstrual Mark," 10-11.

⁴¹ Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, "The Menstrual Mark," 10.

contemporary Western medical discourses both in science and education.⁴² Guilló-Arakistain continued that today “both the cycle and the female body are defined exclusively in terms of their reproductive function.”⁴³ According to Emily Martin in her 1987 book, the human body became increasingly defined as a machine during the 19th century, and menstruation came to be defined as a failed production, because no pregnancy was achieved. Martin argued that while menstrual blood was considered unclean before the 19th century, the process of menstruation was not. However, with the shift in medical discourses of the body menstruating itself, as well as menopause and other cycle-related issues, became defined as disorders, and subsequently women’s bodily functions were pathologized.⁴⁴

In 2020 Bobel and Breanne Fahs made an argument for what they believed menstrual activism should entail. One key point was to counter internalized norms and notions about womanhood, such as menstruating bodies being “messy, unruly things that need to be tidied up, medicated, plucked, smoothed, and trimmed,” as well as countering “generations of silence and shame.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, they consider menstrual activism to be part of the feminist understanding that “the personal is political.”⁴⁶ This means that issues surrounding menstruation and the menstrual cycle cannot be handled at the individual level but must be changed collectively. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler also consider menstrual activism as one of the key ways to challenge the menstrual stigma.⁴⁷

In my research on the history of menstrual activism in Denmark from 1970 to 1985, I include any activity that seeks to counter the menstrual stigma and promote curiosity and knowledge about the menstrual cycle. Furthermore, I also see the challenge of power structures

⁴² Miren Guilló-Arakistain, "Challenging Menstrual Normativity: Nonessentialist Body Politics and Feminist Epistemologies of Health," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Chris Bobel et al. (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020), 870-72.

⁴³ Guilló-Arakistain, "Challenging Menstrual Normativity," 871-72.

⁴⁴ Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, 32-35.

⁴⁵ Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism," 1001.

⁴⁶ Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism," 1002.

⁴⁷ Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, "The Menstrual Mark," 16.

and hierarchies as central to menstrual activism, based on the understanding of menstruation as a category of analysis. Menstrual activism includes, according to Bobel and Fahs, humor such as writer and journalist Gloria Steinem's 1978 piece "If Men Could Menstruate",⁴⁸ visual art, and lobbying for legal and political action.⁴⁹ However, I also consider more subtle activities that promoted knowledge about the menstrual cycle and the female body, such as self-help, as central to menstrual activism. Crucial is the commitment to challenging the menstrual stigma, as well as the norms and notions about women's bodies and health the stigma promotes.

3.2.1 Women or Menstruator?

The term or category of women is not a stable one. Like other social categories, the category of women is also constructed through powerful discourses. This means that there is no neutral or given meaning of what the term women means. Following Deirdre Keenan, I argue that we must reject a strictly essentialist biological understanding of women, as they are "themselves constructed concepts within discourses of power and authority, such as science and medicine."⁵⁰ Therefore, I understand "women" as a socially constructed category, which means that there is no universal experience of being a woman. Instead, what it means to be a woman is shaped by the intersection with other social categories, as well as ones social, cultural, historical, geographical, and political context.⁵¹

In the field of Critical Menstruation Studies, the term menstruator is often used to include all people who menstruate, not only those who are considered by others or themselves to be women. The term emerged in the 1990s with the rise of third-wave feminism in the US, in what Bobel terms the radical menstrual wing of the menstrual movement, I defined these terms in Chapter 2. The radical menstrual wing attempted to build a more inclusive movement and undo

⁴⁸ Gloria Steinem, "If Men Could Menstruate," *Ms. Magazine*, 1978.

⁴⁹ Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism," 1004-07.

⁵⁰ Deirdre Keenan, "Race, Gender, and Other Differences in Feminist Theory " in *A Companion to Gender History*, ed. Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 111.

⁵¹ Keenan, "Race, Gender, and Other Differences in Feminist Theory " 111; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3-44.

the gender binary, inspired by prominent scholars like Judith Butler. Thus, they sought to detach menstruation from gender by introducing the term menstruator to be inclusive of trans and non-binary people, as well as highlighting the fact that some women do not menstruate for various reasons, such as menopause or illnesses. The term menstruator was therefore used to verbalize that not all women menstruate, and not all who menstruate are women.⁵² Although, I recognize that this is the case, this term was not yet used in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, I use the terminology that was used at the time, which based on my sources was the term 'women'.

3.2.2 Differences in the Redstockings Movement

While the Redstockings did not yet question the contemporary biological understanding of the term woman, they were aware that there were many differences between women. They mostly focused on class differences and how these related to women's experiences, which were linked to their leftist ideology. Being part of the new left meant that they were also part of a new generation of activists.⁵³ The Danish Women's Liberation Movement, which the Redstockings were part of, represented a new generation as well.

Due to their leftist ideology, the Redstockings were very conscious of the fact that most of their members were part of the new middle class that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Sometimes this led to debates about how they should show their solidarity with working-class women, how to attract working-class women, as well as how much weight the class struggle should have in their activities and activism.⁵⁴ Although the Redstockings were aware of the extra expenses that menstruation caused women and the fact that menstruation, as well as pregnancy and childbirth, sometimes was used to discriminate against women at the workplace,

⁵² Bobel and Fahs, "The Messy Politics of Menstrual Activism," 1003-04; Bobel and Fahs, "From Bloodless Respectability to Radical Menstrual Embodiment," 960-61.

⁵³ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 38-39; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 155-56.

⁵⁴ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1.

this was never fully developed into how experiences of menstruation were also class-based. I will return to this issue in Chapter 5 and 6.

Apart from class differences, the Redstockings also paid some attention to sexual differences between women, but not to trans women or broader gender identities. However, according to Pernille Ipsen in her 2020 book, the Redstockings had much more trouble articulating the implication of sexual difference, specifically lesbianism, than they had to articulate class difference. Furthermore, where attention to class was part of the Redstockings' DNA, the role of lesbianism in the movement and women's struggle was uncertain.⁵⁵ Especially at the beginning of the movement, lesbianism generated heated debate and backlash from some members of the Redstockings Movement.

In her book, Ipsen described a meeting in the spring of 1971 where the membership of lesbians was discussed at a Redstockings meeting because a few lesbians from *Forbundet af 1948* (Association of 1948, the Danish Gay and Lesbian Association) had attended and asked if they could become part of the Redstockings.⁵⁶ Although Ipsen did not name the opponents, she quoted one of her mothers who remembered that "there were several people who loudly declared that was a bad idea to allow lesbians from the Association [*Forbundet af 1948*] to participate in the [Redstockings] movement."⁵⁷ This was why some of the lesbian Redstockings eventually created their own organization called *Lesbisk Bevægelse* (Lesbian movement) in 1974. According to Dahlerup in her 1998 book, the Lesbian movement never completely disconnected from the Redstockings movement, as many of its members continued to be affiliated with the Redstockings movement and participated in their activities.⁵⁸ Despite the

⁵⁵ Ipsen, *Et Åbent Øjeblik*, 105-10.

⁵⁶ Ipsen, *Et Åbent Øjeblik*, 104-06.

⁵⁷ Ipsen, *Et Åbent Øjeblik*, 105.

⁵⁸ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 285-91.

creation of the Lesbian movement, Dahlerup described that there were continued conflicts and debates in 1976 and 1977 about lesbian's⁵⁹ role in the Redstockings movement.

Finally, the Redstockings did not talk much about the impact of race or ethnicity, probably due to the homogeneity of Danish society.⁶⁰ Therefore the race perspective did not take up much space in the Redstockings movement as it did in the US women's movement, for example. However, there was an acknowledgment that one's race and geographical context did affect the experience of being a woman. Although the Redstockings rarely linked racial differences to menstruation, women's bodies, and health, in one case the Redstockings magazine *Kvinder* (Women) critiqued Danish medical companies for selling medication that was not allowed in Denmark to the Global South.⁶¹ However, the Redstockings believed that unity among women was possible despite their differences because of the shared experience of gender oppression in a patriarchal society.⁶² When it came to issues related to menstruation, women's bodies, and health the Redstockings tended to articulate it in a universal way that indirectly favored a middle-class perspective, because they did not pay much attention to women's differences, or how this affected their experiences of issues related to these topics.

3.3 Doing Feminist Archival Research

This thesis project draws upon classic historical archival research. The main sites for my research were the Danish National Archive and the Royal Danish Library. The latter hosts the online newspaper archive Mediestream and a large collection of material published by the Redstockings Movement. In this section, I explore what it means to do feminist research, specifically feminist archival research, and the implications for my research topic. I also reflect on the sources collected and their use in my research.

⁵⁹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 205.

⁶⁰ See Introduction, this thesis.

⁶¹ Barbara Ehrenreich, "Farlig Prævention – En Fed Forretning," *Kvinder* 32, June/July 1980, 5-7.

⁶² Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 44.

Following sociologist Gayle Letherby in her 2003 book, I understand feminist research as a commitment to challenge the silences in mainstream research, including both the topics or issues researched, as well as the way they have been studied.⁶³ What characterizes feminist research, according to Letherby, is its grounding in both political and academic concerns, an aim to be non-exploitative, and an acknowledgment of the “messiness” of doing research.⁶⁴ Crucial is the awareness that there is no such thing as objective truth. Feminist research builds on the understanding that all research is ideological because “no one can separate themselves from the world – from their values, and opinions, from books they read, from people they have spoken to and so on,”⁶⁵ as Letherby states. Edward Said stated the same in his 1978 book *Orientalism*. Said continued that “the circumstances of life [...] continue to bear on what he does professionally, even although naturally enough his research and its fruits do attempt to reach a level of freedom from the inhibitions [...] Yet this knowledge is not therefore automatically nonpolitical.”⁶⁶

Therefore, feminist research emphasizes that the research and the researcher cannot be separated. Instead, it aims to make this relationship visible and be open about it so that readers can understand where one’s claims, statements, and arguments come from.⁶⁷ My research interest in gender history is shaped and influenced by growing up in Denmark after the Redstockings movement, an early interest in the Danish Women’s Liberation Movement, and a continued interest in feminist issues, particularly menstrual issues. Identifying as a feminist means that I share values and ideas with the Redstockings. Although I admire the work of earlier feminist movements, the continued development of feminism since the 1970s has shaped my critical view on earlier feminists such as the Redstockings. My academic training in both

⁶³ Letherby, "Introduction " 4.

⁶⁴ Letherby, "Introduction " 5-6.

⁶⁵ Letherby, "Introduction " 5-6.

⁶⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 1978; repr., 1995), 10.

⁶⁷ Letherby, "Introduction " 6.

History and Gender Studies has also informed my analysis and evaluation of the Redstockings movement.

The feminist acknowledgment that knowledge and research can never be objective but are always situated within the researcher's positionality, is central to my approach to doing archival research. When doing history, this means rejecting the Rankean vision of objective history, where the goal is to know history as "it really was".⁶⁸ Instead, I acknowledge that there are multiple ways to interpret the past and that this is always influenced by the sources available, and the researchers background and positionality.

Doing feminist archival research also entails an understanding that archives are not just neutral sites for storing sources. Following Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Marry Elizabeth Perry, I understand that archives are always formed based on decisions about "what to keep, what to discard, how to organize what is kept, and for what purpose."⁶⁹ Therefore, it is important to approach archives critically, by understanding their history and their internal logic and the implications of both for the historical research.

Furthermore, the collection of documents and their storage are a form of power, according to historian John H. Arnold in his 2000 book. As documents were written in "particular circumstances, [and] for particular audiences",⁷⁰ no source or document is unbiased. However, this does not pose a problem for Arnold. Instead, he argues that the biases are rather telling about the documents own time. Biases should therefore be embraced, as what is included and excluded in documents is equally important.⁷¹ This approach entails acknowledging that sources do not speak for themselves, and not taking the sources claims as truth. Instead, Arnold

⁶⁸ Katherina Kinzel, "Method and Meaning: Ranke and Droysen on the Historian's Disciplinary Ethos," *History and theory* 59, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12144>.

⁶⁹ Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Marry Elizabeth Perry, "Introduction," in *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Marry Elizabeth Perry (Chicago Ill: University of Illinois, 2010), xiv. OTHERS?

⁷⁰ John H. Arnold, "Voices and silences," in *History: A Very Short Introduction*, ed. John. H. Arnold (UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

⁷¹ Arnold, "Voices and silences," 67.

proposes that the historian needs to interpret them, be critical of their statements, be attentive to silences, and be aware of the specific context within which a source is produced.⁷²

3.3.1 Source Reflections

The source material for this thesis consisted of two sets of data: the first consisted of materials from the Redstockings and people related to the group; the second consisted of mainstream national newspapers from 1970 to 1985. The majority of my material was located at the Royal Danish Library, while some of the Redstockings material was located at the Danish National Archive, which holds the *Kvindehistorisk Samling* (Women's History Collection). As the material is in Danish, all citations are my translations.

The Royal Danish Library is an institution within the Danish Ministry of Culture, and their aims and tasks are specified in the agreement with the Ministry of Culture. Apart from being a public and university library, the Royal Danish Library also functions as a collector of Danish cultural heritage, in terms of photos, texts, and sound material, for future generations. The collection of this material is based on the legal deposit law, meaning that all publishers of printed or physical material, as well as radio, television, and online material must be handed in to the library. Denmark has had a legal deposit law since 1697, the library itself was established in 1648 by king Frederick III. Due to the legal deposit, the Redstockings also had to hand in their publications to the Royal Danish Library.⁷³

The Danish National Archive was formally created in 1889, but since the 1300s there have existed a state archive in Denmark. Today the archive is also an institution under the Ministry of Culture. The Women's History Collection was established at the Royal Danish

⁷² Arnold, "Voices and silences," 65 + 68 + 76 + 78.

⁷³ "What Is Legal Deposit?," accessed 15/11, 2023, <https://pro.kb.dk/en/legal-deposit/what-legal-deposit>; "Task and Goals," accessed 15/11, 2023, <https://www.kb.dk/en/about-us/tasks-and-goals>; "Timeline for Royal Danish Library," accessed 26/05, 2024, <https://www.kb.dk/en/about-us/timeline>.

Library in 1964 but transferred to the National Archive in 2016.⁷⁴ It was initiated by Emma Christensen with the help of *Dansk Kvindesamfund*, together their two archives formed the basis of the collection, which now entails a large selection of material from a diverse range of Danish people and organizations.⁷⁵ As Dahlerup wrote in 1998, the Redstockings material “is everything else than organized, but quite extensive,”⁷⁶ because the Redstockings did not have any formally organized archive, and thus it was up to the individual groups or people to preserve whatever material they wanted to preserve. Most of the material in the Women’s History Collection about the Redstockings was collected because of Dahlerup’s research on the movement. In the survey she made for her research, there was an encouragement to the participants to send their material related to the movement to the Women’s History Collection. According to Dahlerup, about 10% of the respondents did it, which is why there is any material from the Redstockings in the collection. However, there is still a large amount of material that is not publicly available.⁷⁷

Apart from focusing on archival research, I could also have conducted interviews with former Redstockings. However, because I was hesitant to do oral history, as I had never done this before or had any training in it, it became too late at one point. Furthermore, it would also have required more time, which I did not have. The research was conducted on two research trips, each lasting for two weeks.

Redstockings Sources

The Royal Danish Library hosted most of the published material from the Redstockings Movement, such as pamphlets, magazines, books, and songs. The key material for this thesis

⁷⁴ Jørgen Thomsen, "Rigsarkivet " in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2024).
<https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Rigsarkivet>; "Data Om Kvinders Forhold ", accessed 15/11, 2023,
<https://www.rigsarkivet.dk/udforsk/data-om-kvinders-forhold/>.

⁷⁵ Jytte Nielsen, "Kvindehistorisk Guld Ligger Udforsket i Arkivet " (2011).
https://moreinfo.addi.dk/2.11/more_info_get.php?lokalid=35076506&attachment_type=f56_a&bibliotek=870971&source_id=870970&key=4103ed05559234140e82.

⁷⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 74.

⁷⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 77-78; Nielsen, "Kvindehistorisk Guld Ligger Udforsket i Arkivet ".

was the magazine *Kvinder* (Women), published by the Copenhagen Redstockings from 1975 to 1984 and in 1985 by *Foreningen Kvindershæfte* (Association for Women's Booklet), and the first two editions of the book *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop* (Women Know Your Body, KKDK) from 1975 and 1983 published by the fund K. Vinder. *Kvinder* was the Redstockings movement's only outgoing magazine. As the Redstockings endeavor of an alternative to the regular women's magazines, *Kvinder* problematized women's situation and presented an alternative aesthetic and representation of women.⁷⁸ *Kvinder* was run voluntarily on a bimonthly basis with circulation numbers between 3000 to 7000, at its peak 9.500 copies were printed.⁷⁹ For comparison, one of the largest women's magazines in Denmark, *Alt for Damerne* (Everything for Women), in 1950 had a print run of 200.000 copies.⁸⁰ In 1984 the *Kvinder* was struggling financially, and the Copenhagen Redstockings stopped producing it. In 1985 *Kvinder* was published again, but now by *Foreningen Kvindershæfte* and with commercial advertisements, but with many of the editors as before. In December 1985, *Kvinder* was closed for good because of continued financial issues. The last edition reported that the magazine only had 2500 subscribers.⁸¹

Due to rules in Denmark at the time about library royalties, where books with more than one author did not generate any money, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop* (KKDK) was published under the pseudonym K. Vinder,⁸² which was a writing collective mainly consisting of women who were affiliated or part of the Redstockings movement.⁸³ The book became very popular in Denmark, and the 1975 KKDK reached the bookshop's top 10 list and sold 100.000 copies. According to the website *Our Bodies Our Selves Today*, this was more than the following four

⁷⁸ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 569-71.

⁷⁹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 571; *Bladet Kvinder 1975-1984*, ed. Signe Arnfred, Litten Hansen, and Anne Houe (Copenhagen: Tiderne Skifter, 2015), 398.

⁸⁰ Jette Drachmann Søllinge and Maiken Christensen, "Alt For Damerne " in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2014). https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Alt_for_damerne.

⁸¹ Editors, "Leder", *Kvinder* 56, June 1984, 3; Editors, "Afskedsbrevet," *Kvinder* 8, December 1985, 3; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 383.

⁸² The pseudonym was a play on the Danish word for women, *kvinder*.

⁸³ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 529.

editions combined.⁸⁴ The second edition from 1983 was still popular but sold only 50.000 copies. Nevertheless, KKDK was the widest-circulated publication to come out of the Redstockings movement. I will come back to the book KKDK in Chapters 5 and 6.

Other important sources for my research from the Royal Danish Library were the magazine *Kvinder I Vestjylland* (Women in Western Jutland) published from 1975 to 1985 (36 issues) by different women's groups in the Danish region of Western Jutland, *Rødstrømpebladet* (Redstockings Magazine)⁸⁵ published by the Copenhagen Redstockings from 1971 to 1974 (18 issues), and the book *Kvinder Synger* (Women Singing), from 1977, published by the Copenhagen Redstockings. From the Danish National Archive, the most important sources were *Det Interne Blad for København* (The Internal Magazine for Copenhagen) by the Copenhagen Redstockings, published from 1974 to 1977,⁸⁶ and *Rødstrømpen* (The Redstocking) the internal magazine for the Aarhus Redstockings from 1971 to 1983. Other relevant sources from the Danish National Archive were the *Det Interne Blad* (The Internal Magazine), flyers, and pamphlets from the Odense Redstockings from 1973 to 1978 and flyers and meetings minutes from the Skive Women's group from 1974 to 1984, as well as programs and pamphlets from *Kvindehøjskolen* (the Danish Feminist School)⁸⁷ from 1979 to 1985.

The internal magazines usually held minutes from meetings, presentations, activities, and *basisgrupper*, as well as an activities calendar, invitations to meetings, activities, or protests, other messages, and contact information for the different groups within the city. Sometimes the internal magazines also included small updates from groups in other cities or small articles. The magazines *Kvinder i Vestjylland* and *Rødstrømpebladet* were both semi-internal magazines in

⁸⁴ Pi Michael and Elisabeth Therkelsen, "Kvinde Kend Din Krop," review of *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, by K. Vinder, *Kvinder* 6, February/March 1976, 3; "Denmark: K. Vinders Fond," Our Bodies Our Selves Today, accessed 23/05, 2024, <https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/global-projects/denmark-k-vinders-fond/>.

⁸⁵ The first number was called *Mokke*, however hereafter they were called *Rødstrømpebladet*.

⁸⁶ The title was not always consistent, but usually it was called *The Internal Magazine for Copenhagen*.

⁸⁷ This was the Redstockings' own translation of the schools' name. see *Kvindehøjskolen* (Danish Feminist School), "Women & Health." *Små Pjecer*. 1979-1994 Diverse, Box 38-39. 10541-21800 *Kvindehøjskolen*

the sense that they were made for other women within the movement itself, and not easily available for women outside the movement. Neither the internal magazines nor *Kvinder I Vestjylland* and *Rødstrømpebladet* were consistent in their annotation; sometimes they referenced month, issues, and year, other times only year and issue. Thus, I refer to them with issue and year. Lastly, the frequency with which they were published also sometimes varied.

Taken together various sources will allow me to answer the question of how the Redstockings constructed issues related to menstruation, women's bodies, and health, how these differed from the representation of these topics in the newspapers, as well as how their own representations were informed by their radical feminist and leftist ideology.

Danish Newspapers

The second set of data consisted of a selection of articles, doctors columns, letters from readers, debate pieces, and advertisements from a wide range of Danish newspapers. As Mediestream holds more than a hundred different newspapers and more than 35 million digitized pages, I focused on the big nationally distributed newspapers from different sides of the political spectrum to explore the representation and discourses around these topics. I supplemented the big national newspapers with local and regional newspapers, as well as minor national newspapers whenever relevant.

The primary newspapers were *Weekendavisen* (Weekend Newspaper), *Berlingske Tidende* (Berlingske Times), *B.T.*, *Jyllands-Posten* (Jutland Post), and *Information* (Information). All five newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s were independent of any political party. In Denmark, there is a majority of right-wing newspapers, which includes newspapers with a conservative, liberal, or combined liberal-conservative political orientation. Left-wing-oriented newspapers usually include both a socialist and social democratic political orientation.

My selected newspapers include the four major right-wing newspapers, namely *Weekendavisen*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *B.T.*, and *Jyllands-Posten*,⁸⁸ and only one of the three major left-wing newspapers, namely *Information*.⁸⁹ The other two major left-wing papers, *Politiken* (sounds like the word politics in Danish, but is spelled a bit differently) and its tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* (Extra Magazine),⁹⁰ were not available via Mediestream. Because of this unevenness, I supplemented the material with smaller national, regional, and local newspapers, whose political orientation I will mention whenever used. As some of these were left-wing papers, this provided a more balanced picture of the newspapers discourses and representations of menstruation, women's bodies, and health.

Berlingske Tidende, was established in 1749, thus being the oldest Danish newspaper still in circulation. It was published by *Det Berlingske Officin* (today Berlingske Media), which also published both *B.T.*, established in 1916, and *Weekendavisen*. Where *B.T.* was a tabloid, *Weekendavisen* started as the evening and weekend edition of *Berlingske Tidende* under the name *Berlingske Aftenavis* (Berlingske Evening Paper). When *Berlingske Aftenavis* closed in 1971, the weekend edition continued and took the name *Weekendavisen*.⁹¹ For the sake of convenience and not to confuse it with *Berlingske Tidende*, I refer to it as *Weekendavisen* in the thesis, even for the period before it changed its name. *Jyllands-Posten* was established in 1871 and is the only of the five major newspapers not located in Copenhagen, but in Aarhus.⁹² The

⁸⁸ Jette Drachmann Søllinge, "BT (avis)," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2023). https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/BT_-_avis; Jette Drachmann Søllinge, "Berlingske " in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2023). https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Berlingske#-Berlingske_Politiske_og_Avertissementstidende_%E2%80%93_1800-tallet; Jette Drachmann Søllinge, "Jyllands-Posten," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2024). <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Jyllands-Posten>; Jette Drachmann Søllinge, "Weekendavisen," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2024). <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Weekendavisen>.

⁸⁹ Jette Drachmann Søllinge and Erik Lund, "Information (avis)," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2023). https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Information_-_avis.

⁹⁰ Jette Drachmann Søllinge, "Ekstra Bladet," in *Den Store Danske* (Online, 2014). https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Ekstra_Bladet; Jette Drachmann Søllinge, "Politiken," in *Den Store Danske* (Online, 2020). <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Politiken>.

⁹¹ Jette Drachmann Søllinge, "Berlingske Media," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2020). https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Berlingske_Media; Søllinge, "BT (avis)."; Søllinge, "Berlingske "; Søllinge, "Weekendavisen."

⁹² Søllinge, "Jyllands-Posten."

last newspaper, *Information*, was established in 1943 as an illegal Nazi-resistance newspaper. Since 1945 it has been part of the legal Danish press.⁹³

I will use this source collection to answer the questions of how menstruation was represented and understood, and how these were linked to representations of women's bodies and health, by examining articles, doctors columns, book reviews, and letters from readers about menstruation or other cycle-related issues, as well as menstrual product advertisements. Furthermore, I will also use these sources to track some of the Redstockings activism on these topics and to answer the question of their impact on mainstream representations and discourses.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the relevant theory and methodology for my thesis, as well as defined key concepts. I understand social movements as sites that generate knowledge through diverse knowledge-practices, as defined by Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell's in 2008. This will help me understand how menstruation, the female body, and health were understood in the 1970's Danish Redstockings movement, and how the Redstockings might have challenged the medical hierarchies of knowledge. Furthermore, this approach allows me to conceptualize the Redstockings' activism, and how this was part of their challenge of dominant norms, values, ideas, and gendered and classed power structures.

Combining this with Taylor's conceptualization of different types of recognition can reveal the underlying reasons for possible differences in the newspapers and the Redstockings' approach to menstruation, the female body, and health. The use of the concepts of representation and discourse, as defined by Hall in 2013, combined with the concept of the understanding of knowledge from Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, allows me to see how the Redstockings and the selected national newspapers constructed and represented menstruation, women's

⁹³ Søllinge and Lund, "Information (avis)."

bodies and health, as well as in what ways the Redstockings influenced the newspapers' representations and the general discourse on these topics.

Furthermore, my research has been informed by a feminist approach, which entails the acknowledgement that no research is unbiased and that there is no such thing as absolute objective truth as argued by Letherby and Said, amongst others. Because the research and the researcher cannot be separated, feminist research aims for this relationship to be visible. Furthermore, I acknowledge that there are multiple ways to interpret the past and that this is always influenced by the sources available, and the researcher's background and positionality. In archival research, this also presupposes acknowledging that archives are not neutral sites and that no source is unbiased. Instead, both are produced in a specific context, as for example the historians Arnold and Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry have argued.

In this chapter, I also sought to define the terms 'menstrual activism' and 'women.' Central to my understanding of menstrual activism are the attempts to counter the menstrual stigma and promote curiosity and knowledge about the menstrual cycle, as well as the challenge of power structures and hierarchies such as those in medicine, which result in women's bodies being medicalized and pathologized. My understanding is based on seeing menstruation as a category of analysis. Furthermore, I argued for the use of the term women because this was the term used by the Redstockings, although I do recognize that menstruation also impacts people who do not identify as women and that not all women share the experience of menstruating. Although the Redstockings aimed to be attentive to women's differences, particularly class differences, in their activism regarding menstruation, women's bodies and health they tended to favor the idea of unity among women, because of women's assumed shared oppression by patriarchy.

4 MEN'S BODY OF KNOWLEDGE, WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE OF BODIES (1970-1974)

This chapter explores how menstruation and the menstrual cycle were represented in the Danish newspapers from 1970 to 1974, and how these representations were linked to medical discourses about women's bodies and health. Furthermore, I will also examine how the topics of reproductive issues and women's bodies were part of the Redstockings activism. Therefore, I focus on the public debate around other reproductive issues, like abortion and contraception. I also explore how questions regarding women's bodies and health were addressed in the national newspapers and the Redstockings how this were related to the Redstockings continued activism around women's bodies.

In section 4.1 I explore how menstruation was represented in Danish newspapers, and how this was linked to medical discourses on women's bodies and health, by drawing on Stuart Hall's concepts of representation and discourse, as well as the literature about menstrual stigma and medical discourses. In section 4.2 I examine how the body and bodily autonomy got on the public agenda with the influence of the Redstockings. Through Hall's concepts, I focus on the Redstockings' activism regarding women's bodies, the abortion debate, as well as the representations of hormonal medication and contraceptives in the newspapers. Finally, in section 4.3 I explore how the newspapers exhibited a lack of knowledge about women's bodies both among women and in medicine, and how this lack became central to the Redstockings' activism, especially with the introduction of self-help inspired by the Women's Health movement in the US. Furthermore, I explore how the practice of self-help related to the Redstockings focus on bodily autonomy, and how this challenged medical knowledge, by drawing on Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell's understanding of movements as sites of knowledge production and their concept of knowledge-practice.

4.1 The Menstrual Stigma

In this section, I explore how menstruation and the menstrual cycle were represented in Danish newspapers from 1970 to 1974, as well as how these representations were linked to medical discourses about women's bodies and health. As shown in Chapter 3 menstruation became linked to hygiene and pathology in the 19th century, which left the act of menstruating and the menstrual blood to be seen as dirty. This has resulted in women having to hide their menstruation. According to two almost identical articles published in 1972 in the conservative newspaper *Aarhus Stiftstidende* and right-wing newspaper *Randers Dagblad*, the menstrual stigma was believed to originate from men's fear of menstrual blood in primitive societies, and thus it stemmed from hygiene issues.¹ According to Bobel, the belief that menstrual stigma is as old as menstruation itself is still common today.² Although the two articles from 1972 did not try to counter the stigma, they described its origin as well as the development of menstrual products. Furthermore, the articles argued that the development of more "hygienic" and "effective" menstrual products correlated with the fight for gender equality.³ Even if it was not explicitly stated, the argument implied that women's ability to make their menstruation invisible made it possible for them to appear equal to men, thus framing menstruation as a negative that made women inferior.

The norm of framing menstruation as something that should be hidden was also frequently reproduced in menstrual product advertisements. Advertisements for menstrual products in Danish newspapers contributed to this discourse, by emphasizing their products' ability to prevent leaks and smell, their invisibility, as well as the use of words such as safety

¹ Inga Jeppesen, "Månedlig Årsag til Mandssamfund," *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, February 22, 1972, 4; "Menstruation og Overtro," *Randers Dagblad og Folketidende*, March 23, 1972, 11.

² Bobel, *New Blood* 32.

³ Jeppesen, "Månedlig", 4; "Menstruation og Overtro", 11

and protection.⁴ For example, an advertisement for Tassaway, the first menstrual cup, from 1971 stated that “[o]ne does not get the unpleasant surprise of bloody leaks.”⁵

Because menstruation was linked to hygiene and the control of one's body, as Røstvik argued, leaking would reflect negatively on women because of the menstrual stigma.⁶ Thus, by emphasizing that menstrual products would prevent this from happening, and therefore keep women's menstrual status hidden, advertisements reinforced the norm of hiding. Furthermore, the advertisements also emphasized that women would not feel their product, indicating that women could forget about their menstruation – and by extension it would be easy to hide it. For example, an advertisement for the pads *Anonym Små* (Anonymous Small) from 1974 stated that the pad was “a much, much smaller self-adhesive pad, completely invisible and practically imperceptibly.”⁷

I also explored what kind of language newspaper articles used to refer to menstruation. According to Alma Gottlieb, the use of euphemisms is another way the menstrual stigma is reproduced.⁸ Based on my material the terms menstruation or menses were commonly used in Danish newspapers during the 1970s and 1980s, although the euphemism ‘minus days’ was also frequently used.⁹ This not only contributes to the menstrual stigma as Gottlieb argued but explicitly framed menstruation within a negative discourse that devalues women due to their menstrual cycle. My material showed one example of a male doctor who argued against using

⁴ Tassaway, A/S Dumex, “En Helt Ny Menstruations-beskyttelse, Ikke en Tampon, Ikke et Bind...,” advertisement, *B.T.*, September 18, 1971, 9; Tassaway, A/S Dumex, “3-5 Dage 13 Dage om Året, i 38 År.,” advertisement, *B.T.*, February 18, 1974, 9; Anonym Små, Cederroth, “Anonym Små: Nyhed et Meget, Meget Mindre Bind,” advertisement, *B.T.*, March 28, 1974, 9. See also: “Små Bind til Minusdage Skal Slå Vat og Tamponer Ud” *Berlingske Tidende*, March 16, 1974.

⁵ Tassaway, “En Helt Ny”

⁶ Røstvik, “Crimson Waves,” 55; Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, “The Menstrual Mark,” 10.

⁷ Anonym Små, “Anonym Små.”

⁸ See Alma Gottlieb, “Menstrual Taboos: Moving Beyond the Curse,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Chris Bobel et al. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 145. OTHERS

⁹ See for example: N.V. “Når Arbejdet Driller, Er det Mændene der Har Minus Dage i Trafikken,” *Fyens Amts Avis*, June 5, 1972, 10; “Familiefar Har Lavet Kalender Over M-Dage,” *Jyllands-Posten*, June 5, 1979, 7; “Få et Ekstra Plus ud af Minus-Dagene,” *Jyllands-Posten*, February 22, 1984, 15.

euphemisms for menstruation, namely in the social liberal newspaper *Skive Folkeblad* from 1972.¹⁰ However, he did not address the reasons behind his statement.

Furthermore, there was also one example of a male doctor Niels Nilausen, in *Berlingske Tidende* from 1974, who stated that “[t]he term ‘minus days’ is primarily used by or about women – or against women.”¹¹ Nilausen acknowledged that menstruation or the discomfort some women experienced were sometimes used to discriminate women, and that because of this many women felt “guilty both towards their workplace and towards their husband or fiancé.”¹² Thus, he argued that these discomforts should be relieved by doctors, even if it were not an actual disease.¹³

Despite the above examples, it was still rare for doctors to advocate against the use of euphemisms or the derogatory use of ‘menstruation’. According to my sample of national newspapers, how did the male doctors address menstrual discomforts? One doctor, Fangel Poulsen declared in his newspaper column from 1972 that “all women experience discomfort during menstruation.”¹⁴ Fangel continued: “To the extent where it is possible, menstrual pain should be ignored and one should try to continue one's job as normal, as well as exercise and play sports during the bleeding period.”¹⁵ Fangel further stated that it “only rarely helps to go to bed and huddle up.”¹⁶ Despite the expectation that menstruation was uncomfortable or painful, women just had to accept it and get on with their lives.

A similar position can be found in an information pamphlet for girls about puberty, reviewed in *Weekendavisen* in 1970, which stated that “how you feel [during menstruation] depends a lot on how you take it.”¹⁷ The belief that women should try to get on normally, not

¹⁰ Bertan de Nully, “Menstruationsforstyrrelser,” *Skive Folkeblad*, August 12, 1972, 12.

¹¹ Nils Nilausen, “Minusdage Kan Mildnes,” *Berlingske Tidende*, November 11, 1974, 5 (sec. 2).

¹² Nilausen, “Minusdage,” 5.

¹³ Nilausen, “Minusdage,” 5.

¹⁴ Fangel Poulsen, “Smerter ved menses,” *B.T.*, December 12, 1972, 30.

¹⁵ Poulsen, “Smerter,” 30.

¹⁶ Poulsen, “Smerter,” 30.

¹⁷ “Hvordan,” review of *Privat*, by Mölnlycke A/S, *Berlingske Aftenavis* (later *Weekendavisen*), January 29, 1970, 6.

showing their discomfort, reinforced the belief that menstruation, and all things related to it, should be kept hidden. These examples confirm Bobel's statement that "[w]hen menstrual pain is not pathologized (...) it is trivialized and interpreted as 'just in their head', psychosomatic proof of women's frailty and instability."¹⁸

Based on Bobel's quote, the trivialization of menstrual discomfort is also linked to negative stereotypes. According to Bobel, these ideas have been used against women to argue against them "pursuing a college education comparable to a man's [...] to being elected presidents of the United States or Nominated to the Supreme Court."¹⁹ So how were ideas about women as unstable, unreliable, and unbalanced due to the menstrual cycle linked to negative stereotypes of women in this period? An example from my source material was a case reported in the social democratic newspaper *Aktuelt* in 1974, in which two female bus drivers had been fired for taking too much sick leave because of menstrual discomfort. One of the fired women, who usually took one or two days of sick leave a month, explained: "I have been told that I am not sturdy enough. (...) KS [the bus company] thinks that it [her absence] is skiving."²⁰ The bus company's director denied that they fired women for having one sick day a month. However, he emphasized that "it is important that the staff shows up. Women can have some issues. So, the question is whether one is fit for [working in] public transport." Although he did not explicitly mention menstruation, it is clear from the broader context that the term 'some issues' referred to menstruation. This case shows how women, because of their menstruation, were believed to be more unreliable and less fit to do certain jobs.²¹

¹⁸ Bobel, *New Blood* 36.

¹⁹ Bobel, *New Blood* 36.

²⁰ Jens Holmsgård, "Tør Ikke Være Syg – Frygter at Blive Fyret," *Aktuelt*, May 4, 1974, 23.

²¹ See the following for other examples: Lange, "Svedne Grin på Sidelinjen," *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, September 16, 1974, 34; "Fordom Mod Kvinder," *Berlingske Aftenavis* (later *Weekendavisen*), July 28, 1970; Inge-Lise Melhede, "Medicin i Trafikken Bør Straffes som Spritkørsel," *B.T.* July 23, 1974, 3; Karl Larsen, "Minus Med Minusdamer Bag Rattet," *B.T.* July 30, 1974, 2; Tania Ørum, "Kvindetur," *Information*, May 14, 1972, 5; N.V., "Når Arbejdet Driller," 10.

The idea that women were unreliable and unstable due to their menstruation also resulted in men not taking women's writings and opinions seriously, especially if they were criticizing something.²² Journalist Malin Lindgren from *Berlingske Tidende* stated in an interview with the right-wing newspaper *Dagbladet* in 1974 that "if a girl makes a fuss, it is always because she has her menstruation or something to do with the hormones."²³ Lindgren continued "[t]hat a girl can reasonably get upset about something, never occurs to men."²⁴

The menstrual stigma itself did not receive much media attention in the first half of the 1970s. Instead, the examples above clearly show how menstruation was stigmatized and embedded in a discourse that views women as unreliable workers and menstruation as something that negatively impacts their abilities. However, even though the menstrual stigma was still alive and well in Denmark in the 1970s, the approach to women's bodies was changing, as the following section will show.

4.2 *Bodily Autonomy on the Agenda*

This section will examine how the body and bodily autonomy got on the public agenda, and what role the Redstockings played in this. In 1971 the Copenhagen Redstockings established their first women's house in a squatted building, with the help of the Danish squatting movement *Slumstormerne* (slum raiders).²⁵ Some of the activities the Redstockings offered in the women's house, such as the *emneuger* (topic weeks), focused on women's bodies. The main purpose of the *emneuger* was to "create a more lively house"²⁶ and facilitate an easier access to the women's house as "most [women] do not feel comfortable to just enter [the house] and say: here am I – instead there needs to be an occasion."²⁷

²² See for example: Hanne Reintoft, "Du Danske Mand," *Information*, June 8, 1970, 3; Maria Marcus, "Hvor Er Du Sød, Når Du Er Ophidset," *Information*, January 13-14, 1973, 4.

²³ Egon Møller, "Den Skrappe fra Berlingeren Ønsker at Ende som en Usikker Gammel Dame," *Dagbladet*, (Ringsted, Sorø, Haslev), April 6, 1974, 2 (Lørdag på Sjælland).

²⁴ Møller, "Den Skrappe", 2 (Lørdag på Sjælland).

²⁵ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 203.

²⁶ "Kvindehuset," *Rødstrømpebladet (Mokke)* 1, 1971, 8-10.

²⁷ "Emneuger i Kvindehuset," *Rødstrømpebladet* 3, March, 1972.

In *Rødstrømpebladet* no. 1 from 1971, the Copenhagen Redstockings sought women who would help to plan the *emneuger*. The initiators imagined that topics such as women's bodies, abortion, contraception, and orgasms could be taken up.²⁸ In 1972, *Rødstrømpebladet* no. 3 reported that "[w]e have agreed on the most obvious topic: Women's bodies," which was then divided into the subtopics of contraception, abortion, childbirth, menopause, and menstruation.²⁹ However, the report also showed that they had only established an abortion and contraception group.³⁰ These examples indicate that the Redstockings from their beginning saw issues regarding women's bodies and health as central to their activism regarding making the private political. According to Dahlerup, this meant that political action should be based on women's own experiences, as this was necessary to highlight power dynamics and women's oppression because this took place in all spheres of life.³¹

4.2.1 Legalizing Abortion

In this section, I give an overview of the Danish path to legalizing abortion and the debate at the time. The fight for legalizing abortion started in the late 1960s, before the emergence of the Redstockings movement. During the 1950s and 1960s, there were several liberalizing changes in Danish abortion laws. However, according to Dahlerup and others a shift occurred in the late 1960s, as new and young actors entered the abortion debate, demanding the complete legalization of abortion, instead of just further liberalization of the current law. A central actor was *Dansk Kvindesamfunds Ungdomskreds* (Danish Women's Societies Youth Division). However, the question of abortion divided the mother organization *Dansk Kvindesamfund* which as Denmark's oldest women's organization represented middle-class women and favored an approach that focused on gender equality and not women's liberation. *Dansk Kvindesamfund*

²⁸ Kvindehuset," 8-10.

²⁹ "Emneuger i Kvindehuset."

³⁰ "Emneuger i Kvindehuset."

³¹ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 505-10.

did not endorse the demand for legal abortion until 1969, which in 1968 made the youth division break away and establish the organization *Individ & Samfund* (Individual and Society), whose focus was the legalization of abortion.³²

Another key advocate of legalizing abortion was the party *Socialistisk Folkeparti* (Socialist People's Party, SF).³³ In 1967 they had presented a bill to legalize abortion, although it was not adopted.³⁴ The party SF was joined by prominent female politicians from both sides of the political spectrum, such as Helle Degn and Inge Fisher Møller from *Socialdemokratiet* (the Social Democrats) and Grethe Fenger Møller from *Det Konservative Folkeparti* (the Conservative People's Party).³⁵ In March 1970 the Danish abortion law was further liberalized. Although there was never a large anti-abortion movement in Denmark, according to Dahlerup, like in the US or Norway, the liberalization did create some backlash. In April 1970 a new political party was established, *Kristeligt Folkeparti* (the Christian Peoples Party, KF), whose main political interest was resisting the legalization of abortion and pornography.³⁶

The Redstockings entered the abortion debate in 1970 on the pro-legalization side. According to Dahlerup, they focused on the arguments of women's rights to choose if they wanted to become mothers and their right to bodily autonomy. Before this, the pro-legalization discourse had focused on the problems with illegal abortions. According to Danish historian Anne Sørensen, other arguments for legalization were the patronization of women in the law,

³² Jytte Willadsen, "Birtig Petersson " in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (lex.dk, 2013). https://kvindebiografiskeleksikon.lex.dk/Birgit_Petersson; Hanne Rikken Nielsen and Eva Lous, "Dansk Kvindesamfund," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2023). https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Dansk_Kvindesamfund; Charlotte Wilken-Jensen, Bente Rosenbeck, and Inger Dübeck, "Abortens Historie," in *lex.dk* (lex.dk, 2024). https://lex.dk/abortens_historie; Drude Dahlerup, "Kvindebevægelsen," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2024). <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/kvindebev%C3%A6gelsen#-Kvinderetsbev%C3%A6gelsen>; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 160-61.

³³ Today they go under the name of Green Left in English.

³⁴ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 222; "Tidslinje: Vejen til Fri Abort ca. 1920-1973," Danish National Archive, accessed 21/05, 2024, <https://www.rigsarkivet.dk/udforsk/kildepakke-uoensket-gravid-foer-og-efter-den-fri-abort/tidslinje-vejen-til-fri-abort-ca-1920-1973/>; Anne Sørensen, "Fri Abort ,1973-," (2017). <https://danmarkshistorien.dk/vis/materiale/fri-abort>.

³⁵ Wilken-Jensen, Rosenbeck, and Dübeck, "Abortens Historie."

³⁶ "Tidslinje."; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 224.

gender equality, and an ideal of *ønskebørn* (wished-for children). However, the most important argument in the 1970s became women's bodily autonomy.³⁷

According to Dahlerup and Sørensen, the opposing side, with KF and the Danish church in the lead, argued for the right of the fetus. Part of KF's arguments also stemmed from a wish to restrict the premarital sexual life of Danish youth due to the relaxation of the sales regulation of contraceptives and lowering of the age limit for diaphragms from 18 to 15 years in 1965, and the legalization of the contraceptive pill in 1966. Other arguments against legalization were that women would be pressured to choose abortion due to its acceptability.³⁸ In May 1973 legalized abortion became a reality, with the passing of a bill almost identical to SF's bill from 1967.³⁹

According to Dahlerup, one of the Redstockings' achievements in the abortion debate was to change the discourse such that women's right to bodily autonomy became central. The Redstockings saw the patronizing control of women's bodies by the state, doctors, and men as part of women's oppression. Dahlerup further argued that the fight for legalizing abortion also became an incitement for the Redstockings to demand free and safer contraception, especially in the case of hormone contraception.⁴⁰ They critiqued the lack of scientific knowledge about women's bodies and the effects of hormonal contraception on their bodies, the authority of male doctors over women, and the lack of knowledge among women about their own bodies. Indeed, the topic of hormonal contraception was also taken up in Danish newspapers, as well as radio and television programs which the next section will demonstrate.

4.2.2 Hormones and Contraceptives

This section explores the representation and discourse regarding hormonal medication, including contraception, and how this was linked to representations of women's bodies and

³⁷ Sørensen, "Fri Abort."; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 223-25.

³⁸ Sørensen, "Fri Abort."; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 224.

³⁹ Wilken-Jensen, Rosenbeck, and Dübeck, "Abortens Historie."

⁴⁰ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 223-25.

health both in the major national newspapers and in the Redstockings movement. In the early 1970s, there was not yet much debate in the Danish newspapers about hormonal contraception or other hormonal medication. In 1970, *Weekendavisen* reported that West Germany had established a new research center for hormonal drugs, in order to settle the debate among medical researchers about the risks related to hormonal contraception.⁴¹ In 1971 the social-democratic newspaper *Bornholmeren* reported that in Sweden a committee within *Socialstyrelsen* (the National Board of Health and Welfare) advised against doctors prescribing women oral contraception if they could use other contraceptives. However, according to *Bornholmeren*, the Danish Health Authority had no plans to follow in Sweden's footsteps.⁴²

In the Redstockings movement, hormonal medication and contraception were also not widely debated yet. However, as mentioned at the beginning of section 4.3, a contraception group was formed in Copenhagen in 1972 to plan an *emneuge* about contraception at the women's house. Part of their goal for the *emneuge* was to provide general information, as well as to question "why it is always the women who have to take care of contraception."⁴³ This inequality was raised several times by the Copenhagen Redstockings.⁴⁴

In the Danish media, the question of the safety of hormonal contraceptives was raised in 1973 by television hostesses Nele Rue and Charlotte Strandgaard in a broadcast about hormonal contraceptives targeting the younger generations.⁴⁵ In an interview in *Berlingske Tidende* Rue and Strandgaard, asked the question "[h]ow long do we girls still have to be guinea pigs for men?"⁴⁶ They further critiqued the lack of research about the short- and long-term effects of hormonal contraceptives, as well as the lack of information (male) doctors provided women

⁴¹ "Skal Forske P-pillens Bivirkninger," *Berlingske Aftenavis* (later *Weekendavisen*), July 25, 1970, 19.

⁴² "P-piller Okay i Danmark" *Bornholmeren*, July 21, 1971, 9.

⁴³ "Præventionsgruppen," *Rødstrømpebladet* 3, March, 1972.

⁴⁴ *Kvindehuset Forår 73, Mandag + Fredag*. Kvindehuset i København. 10541-22054, Box 3. Danish National Archive; Tusindfryd, "Hvor Langt Er Vi Kommet?," *Politisk Revy*, August 20 1971, reprinted in *Rødstrømpebladet* 17-18, 1974, 22-24.

⁴⁵ Unfortunately I did not have access to the television program.

⁴⁶ Malin Lindgren, "To TV-Piger til Teenagerne: Forlang Klar Besked om P-pillen," *Berlingske Tidende*, November 25, 1973, 3.

(and girls) with. Rue and Strandgaard's television program aimed to give girls "the courage to take care of their health. Show them that they have certain rights."⁴⁷ Continuing, they hoped that also boys and parents would watch the program to become better informed about the issue.⁴⁸ Apart from the above example, hormonal contraceptives were usually represented as safe and harmless by male doctors in Danish newspapers. I return to this in the following section, where I demonstrate that many doctors endorsed the use of hormonal medication despite the lack of knowledge about the side and long-term effects.

4.3 Women's and Medical Lack of Knowledge

In this section, I explore what questions were raised in newspaper doctors columns, and how they addressed issues regarding women's bodies and health. Furthermore, I explore how the Redstockings continued their activism regarding women's bodies and health. As the section above demonstrated, as was there was a lack of medical research about the possible side and long-term effects of hormonal medication. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge among women and girls about their bodies was obvious in the newspapers' doctors columns, edited by male doctors.⁴⁹ Therefore, I wanted to understand what questions women had about their menstrual cycle (and consequently what knowledge they had of it) and how these questions were addressed in the doctors columns. The questions that male doctors took up in the newspapers showed that many women and girls were quite ignorant about their cycle. The doctors columns in my source material showed that the questions asked covered a variety of topics, such as physical and mental discomfort before and during menstruation, irregular menstruation, pregnancy, contraception, and menstrual products.⁵⁰ Sometimes male doctors also used their

⁴⁷ Lindgren, "To TV-Piger," 3.

⁴⁸ Lindgren, "To TV-Piger," 3.

⁴⁹ There were no examples in my newspaper material of a doctors column edited by a female doctor. Thus, when talking about doctors in the newspapers, they were always male, unless otherwise specified.

⁵⁰ See for example, Erik Münster "De Slemme Dage," *Silkeborg Avis*, February 5, 1972, 16; Fangel Poulsen, "En Ung Piges Problemer," *B.T.*, September 1, 1970, 16; Fangel Poulsen, "Ung Piges Blødninger," *B.T.* July 4, 1973, 21

columns to write about specific topics without previous questions from readers.⁵¹ Some local newspapers, such as *Dagbladet* or *Skive Folkeblad*, did not have a doctors column, but instead featured a section where a doctor wrote about different topics about health and illnesses.⁵² Thus, my material both indicated what knowledge girls and women were seeking to find (of course filtered through the editorial processes of the newspapers) and what information the newspapers assumed was missing or decided should and could be addressed publicly.

Generally, the doctors gave very long and elaborate answers to questions asked in their columns, often going much beyond the original question. This tendency indicated that they assumed their readers were ill-informed. However, this was not always the case, and some doctors, like Fangel Poulsen from *B.T.*, expected their female readers to have some basic knowledge. In 1972 Poulsen wrote, “I assume that all young girls today – at least in school – have been explained the meaning of menstruation, as well as what happens when one menstruates.”⁵³ He continued with an elaborate answer on what could be done to relieve menstrual discomfort, which suggests that even if girls had some basic knowledge, there were still huge gaps in it. However, other articles confirmed that most women and girls were not that well-informed about their biology, such as “Menstruation disorders” in the social liberal newspaper *Skive Folkeblad*⁵⁴ from 1972 or “The female genitals” in right-wing newspaper *Dagbladet*⁵⁵ from 1974 – both of which explained the basic biology of the menstrual cycle.

One explanation for the number of questions from women and girls could be that sex education was not mandatory in Danish schools before the summer of 1971.⁵⁶ Although sexual

⁵¹ See for example: Erik Bostrup, “Lægerne Uenige om Kvindernes Overgangsalder,” *Jyllands-Posten*, April 4, 1971 16.

⁵² See for example: de Nully, “Menstruationsforstyrrelser,” 12; “Kvindelige Kønsganer,” *Dagbladet* (Roskilde), June 22, 1974, 4 (Lørdag på Sjælland).

⁵³ Fangel Poulsen, “Smerter ved menses,” *B.T.*, December 12, 1972, 30.

⁵⁴ de Nully, “Menstruationsforstyrrelser,” 12.

⁵⁵ “Kvindelige Kønsganer,” 4.

⁵⁶ Anne Katrine Gjerløff, “Seksualundervisning i Skolen Gennem 200 år.”

https://skolehistorie.au.dk/fileadmin/skolehistorie/Undervisningsmaterialer/Baggrundsartikler_21/UV_Baggrund_13_Seksualundervisning.pdf; Christian Garugaard, “Seksualundervisning ” in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2014). <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/seksualundervisning>.

education had been recommended by the Danish Ministry of Education since 1960, it was not mandatory for schools to teach it, and parents could exempt their children if they did not wish for them to participate. Moreover, there were no regulations for what should be taught; thus, the quality and content could vary a great deal from school to school.⁵⁷ This meant that many adult women had never received any formal sexual education, while some younger women might have received some level of sexual education, but only since 1971 and one must assume that it took a few years for the sex education to be fully implemented.

The doctors' columns also showed that there was a general lack of knowledge in the medical field about menstrual-related issues, such as excessive pain⁵⁸, endometriosis⁵⁹, Premenstrual Tension (PMT),⁶⁰ and menopausal discomfort.⁶¹ This can be connected to a lack of scientifically proven treatments to help women with these issues. Most doctors suggested some form of hormonal treatment, like the contraceptive pill, for all types of menstrual-related physical and psychological discomfort, despite its effectiveness not being scientifically proven yet.⁶² An example was a response from *B.T.* doctor Poulsen to a 36-year-old woman in 1970, who wrote "[e]very time before I get my menstruation, I feel very bad. I am tired, irritated, and depressed. I have trouble sleeping and I am not very nice towards my husband and children."⁶³ Poulsen responded that she probably suffered from PMT. While the origin of the disorder was still unknown, Poulsen stated that "the disorder is probably caused by hormones."⁶⁴ Although he confirmed that there was no proven treatment or cause of PMT, he continued to state that

⁵⁷ Gjerløff, "Seksualundervisning i Skolen Gennem 200 år."; Garugaard, "Seksualundervisning ". See also: Lisbeth Skov Larsen, "Sex-Teknik for 13-Årige," *Weekendavisen*, December 17, 1971, 5.

⁵⁸ Poulsen, "Smerter", 30.

⁵⁹ Erik Münster, "Sygdom Behandles Med P-piller," *Viborg Stifts Folkeblad*, February 9, 1970, 12.

⁶⁰ Fangel Poulsen, "Jeg Har det Dårligt før Menses, Hvad Med P-piller?," *B.T.*, April 9, 1970, 14.

Premenstrual Tension was an earlier term for Premenstrual Syndrome. See chapter 6, or King, "Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and the Myth of the Irrational Female".

⁶¹ Knud Lundberg, "Susanne Bliver Surer og Surer," *Aktuelt*, February 1970, 13.

⁶² Fangel Poulsen, "Menstruation Under Eksamen," *B.T.*, May 2, 1972, 21; Poulsen, "Smerter", 30; Poulsen, "Jeg Har det Dårligt," 14; Nilausen, "Minusdage," 5 (sec. 2).

⁶³ Poulsen, "Jeg Har det Dårligt," 14.

⁶⁴ Poulsen, "Jeg Har det Dårligt," 14.

“many women feel better after they start taking the pill.”⁶⁵ In 1972 his recommendation for the same issue was still hormonal contraceptives.⁶⁶ Another example was *Viborg Stifts Folkeblad* from 1970, where doctor Erik Münster recommended hormonal medication as the treatment for endometriosis.⁶⁷ Possible side effects were never mentioned by these doctors. Thus, this section has demonstrated how the Danish newspaper’s representation in the early 1970s of menstruation, women’s bodies, and other reproductive issues was mostly characterized by a lack of knowledge both among women and in medicine.

4.3.1 Self-help as a Counter Action

This section examines how the Redstockings continued activism regarding women’s bodies and health as a response to the lack of knowledge among women and doctors, that I exhibited above. Here I draw Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell’s understanding of social movements as a site for knowledge production. While the efforts to provide women inside and outside the movement with knowledge about their bodies, such as the *emneuger*, had been quite sporadic, this changed in 1973. In an article written by an unnamed woman in *Rødstrømpebladet* no. 12 from 1973, she reported about her visit to the San Francisco Women’s Health Collective and commented on the existence of health groups and self-help clinics in the US.⁶⁸

According to historian Jennifer Nelson and others, self-help originated from the US Women’s Health movement.⁶⁹ In her 2019 article, Nelson stated that self-help was based on the idea that women could challenge male doctors’ authority “by starting from their experiences with and observations of their own bodies in collective forums.” Nelson continued that “self-

⁶⁵ Poulsen, “Jeg Har det Dårligt,” 14.

⁶⁶ Poulsen, “Menstruaion Under Eksamen,” 21.

⁶⁷ Münster, “Sygdom Behandles,” 12.

⁶⁸ “USA Sundheds-Grupper og Selvhjælps-Klinikker,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 12, 1973, 11-12.

⁶⁹ Nelson, “Historicizing Body Knowledge.”; Ruth Rosen, “Hidden Injuries of Sex,” in *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (Penguin Books, 2006), 175-81.

help philosophy was grounded in the idea of ‘body knowledge’,” which meant that personal experiences and observations were an alternative to clinical medical knowledge.⁷⁰ Self-help was a way for the women’s liberation movement, not only in the US but also in Denmark, to generate knowledge through women’s own experiences and observations, which aimed at dismantling the power of medical knowledge and reinforcing women’s bodily autonomy. Although the Redstockings had paid attention to women’s experiences before the introduction of self-help, this practice cemented its importance in their activism.⁷¹ Thus, self-help is then a perfect example of a knowledge-practice in Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell’s definition, which pluralizes understanding of how knowledge is produced.⁷²

According to the 1973 article in *Rødstrømpebladet*, self-help usually involved self-examination of the vagina with the use of a speculum, a mirror, and a flashlight, enabling one to see inside the vagina to keep track of changes within it and detect potential diseases or pregnancy. It also included breast examinations and learning from a variety of sources, both medical and feminist, about contraception, common genital diseases, infections, and possible treatments, as well as the different stages the female body goes through during the menstrual cycle and in one’s lifetime.⁷³ According to the article in *Rødstrømpebladet* the US health and self-help group aimed to demystify doctors’ authority over women’s bodies and to inform women about their bodies, giving them more autonomy over their bodies and health: “[w]e are not expected to have any knowledge about our bodies or how it functions but are just expected to leave all observations and decisions to him [the doctor].”⁷⁴

It was this exact power relation, between doctor and patient, that the US Women’s Health movement wanted to challenge.⁷⁵ The *Rødstrømpebladet* article continued: “many women, in

⁷⁰ Nelson, "Historicizing Body Knowledge," 43.

⁷¹ See for example: “Præventionsgruppen,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 3.

⁷² Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Blurring Boundaries."

⁷³ “USA Sundheds-Grupper,” 11-12.

⁷⁴ “USA Sundheds-Grupper,” 11.

⁷⁵ Rosen, "Hidden Injuries of Sex," 177-78.

Denmark and the US, know the experiences of humiliating visits to the doctor... especially when it is about contraception, vaginal diseases or sexually transmitted diseases.”⁷⁶ Through self-help, women would become more confident to ask male doctors questions and to demand answers about their health. In Denmark, the Redstockings emphasized that “the purpose of self-help is not to undermine the doctor's work,” but “to help the doctor figure out exactly what the problem is.”⁷⁷ Thus, self-help was a way for women to gain knowledge about their bodies, which would enhance their bodily autonomy, as well as constitute a way for them to challenge the male authority over women’s bodies.⁷⁸

Generally, the writer of the article was very positive about her experience with the Women’s Health Movement in the US and its ideas, and she encouraged interested women to take up its ideas.⁷⁹ However, she also expressed some skepticism as did some Redstockings in Copenhagen and Aarhus before the visit of two American women Carol Downer and Debbie Law. An article about self-help in *Rødstrømpebladet* no. 14 from December 1973 asked: “Many of us were very skeptical: ‘What is self-help’? ‘The term is only justified in the US, as we have our social laws’.”⁸⁰ And an article from *Rødstrømpen* no. 19 from 1973, stated: “Although we had not accepted the American self-help groups offer of visiting Aarhus while they were in the county, they still visited when we later changed our minds.”⁸¹ Due to the Danish welfare system access to medical facilities and doctors was usually free. In the US, as the article in *Rødstrømpebladet* no. 12 explained, many women could not afford basic healthcare, due to “the enormous expenses.” Private clinics had “sky-high prices”, while public clinics had “overflowing waiting rooms,” resulting in a lack of time for each patient.⁸² Although the Danish

⁷⁶ “USA Sundheds-Grupper,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 12, 11.

⁷⁷ “Selvhjælp,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 14, December, 1973, 27. See also: K. Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 1 ed., ed. Brita Wielopolska and Anette Petersen (Denmark: Tiderne Skifter 1975), 286.

⁷⁸ Rosen, “Hidden Injuries of Sex,” 178.

⁷⁹ “USA Sundheds-Grupper,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 12, 12.

⁸⁰ “Selvhjælp,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 14, 26.

⁸¹ “Selvhjælp!,” *Rødstrømpen* 19, December, 1973. *Rødstrømpen* 1973. 1971-1983 Foreningsbladet Rødstrømpen, Box 26. 10541-294246 Rødstrømperne i Århus. Danish National Archive.

⁸² “USA Sundheds-Grupper,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 12, 11.

Redstockings shared the experience of “overflowing waiting rooms,” access to healthcare was not an issue in Denmark.⁸³

Carol Downer was probably one of the most famous activists in the US Women’s Health movement with her public displays of self-help and popularization of menstrual extraction.⁸⁴ On 29th October Downer and Law visited the Copenhagen Redstockings, and on 17th November, Downer visited the Aarhus branch.⁸⁵ Subsequently, both the Copenhagen and the Aarhus Redstockings were much more interested in self-help. In Copenhagen, 200 women showed up to the meeting with Downer and Law. At a meeting a few days after Downer and Law’s presentation, five self-help groups were established, on the same principle as the *basisgrupper*, differing only by focusing specifically on women’s bodies and health.⁸⁶ Although no self-help groups were established following the meeting in Aarhus,⁸⁷ a health group appeared in *Rødstrømpen* no. 20 from 1974 on a list of registered *basisgrupper*.⁸⁸ This suggested that at least some women in Aarhus also took an interest, if not in self-help, then in women’s health.

In the first half of the 1970s, self-help and an interest in women’s bodies and health became a stable part of the Copenhagen Redstockings activities available in the women’s house, as their internal magazines *Internt blad* and *Rødstrømpebladet* showed.⁸⁹ However, it is important to note that from 1970 to 1974, the Redstockings and thus the practice of self-help were still confined to the big Danish cities. With the introduction of self-help, the knowledge provided by women’s own experiences and observations became central to the Redstockings’

⁸³ “Selvhjælp,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 14, 27.

⁸⁴ Rosen, “Hidden Injuries of Sex,” 176-77.

⁸⁵ “Selvhjælp,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 14, 26-27; “Selvhjælp!,” *Rødstrømpen* 19, December, 1973.

⁸⁶ “Selvhjælp,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 14, 26-27

⁸⁷ “Selvhjælp!,” *Rødstrømpen* 19, December, 1973.

⁸⁸ “Grupper,” *Rødstrømpen* 20, February 1974, 2. *Rødstrømpen* 1974. 1971-1983 Foreningsbladet *Rødstrømpen* 1971-1983, Box 26. 10541-294246 *Rødstrømperne* i Århus. Danish National Archive.

⁸⁹ “Selvhjælp,” *Rødstrømpebladet* 15, 1974, 31; “Indkaldelse til Koordinationsmøde.” + ”Meddelelser.” + ”Det Interne Blad for København” + ”Det Interne Blad for København no. 7” + ”Interne Blad for København no. 8” + ”Interne Blad for København no. 9” + ”Det Interne Blad for København 10.” 1974-1977 Det Interne Blad for København, Box 1. 10541 *Rødstrømperne* i København. Danish National Archive.

activism on menstruation, women's bodies, and health. Self-help was then a way to challenge the hierarchy of knowledge as Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell termed it, as it produced an experience- and bodily-based knowledge as an alternative to what the Redstockings saw as male medical knowledge. In this way self-help, understood as a knowledge-practice, challenged the authority of traditional medical knowledge and gave women autonomy over their bodies. This section has then demonstrated how the Redstockings continued their activism regarding women's bodies and health by critiquing the lack of knowledge among women and doctors about women's bodies and the practice of self-help.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the representation and discourse of menstruation and the menstrual cycle, as well as the debates on and discourses of other reproductive issues, such as abortion and hormonal medication. It has become clear from section 4.1 that menstruation was still stigmatized in the early 1970s, and that women were encouraged to hide their menstruation and try to forget about it. Furthermore, the menstrual stigma manifested itself in discriminative attitudes towards women, as they were believed to be unreliable and unstable, making them unfit for certain activities and jobs.

The stigmatization and negative stereotypes of women did not take up much space in the Danish newspapers or among the Redstockings. Instead, section 4.2 showed how other reproductive issues helped put bodily autonomy on the agenda. According to Dahlerup, this was the key contribution of the Redstockings to the debate about legalizing abortion and changed the discourse of the pro-legalization advocates.⁹⁰ I would also argue that the debate itself contributed to placing women's bodies out of the private sphere and into the public sphere. Furthermore, the emerging critique in the media about hormonal contraceptives and medication contributed to creating more attention towards issues regarding women's bodies and health.

⁹⁰ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 225.

These debates lay the foundation for the Redstockings' further activism around women's bodies and health.

As section 4.3 demonstrated the emerging debates on hormonal medication and menopause, together with the newspapers' doctors columns, showed that there was a huge lack of medical knowledge about women's bodies and the treatment of menstrual cycle-related issues. Furthermore, this section showed that women also lacked knowledge about their own bodies. This came to be a central part of the Redstockings' activism, especially with the introduction of self-help in 1973. The Redstockings used the practice of self-help to heighten women's bodily autonomy, as it advanced women's knowledge about their bodies. Although self-help was not meant to eliminate doctors, the Redstockings wanted to dismantle the hierarchy between doctor and patient, and thus male authority over women's bodies.

The Redstockings' use of self-help represented an alternative knowledge-practice, where knowledge was gained through personal experience. Where the newspapers' doctors columns provided women with theoretical knowledge about their bodies, practical knowledge was still reserved for (male) doctors, thus still keeping women detached from their bodies. With the introduction of self-help, the Redstockings provided women with a way to gain both practical and theoretical knowledge about their bodies. Thus, the practice of self-help and writing the newspapers' doctors columns represent two radically different approaches for women to gain knowledge about their bodies and take care of their health. Although the Redstockings did not yet address menstruation women's bodies and reproductive issues were already emerging as important topics for the movement. This was the background for the Redstockings' future engagement with menstruation, which I will detail in the coming chapter.

5 MAKING MENSTRUATION VISIBLE (1975-1979)

This chapter will explore the emergence of menstrual activism primarily within the Redstockings movement, but also more broadly, and will ask within which discourses this activism was framed. I also examine the context that made it possible to articulate menstrual issues in the Redstockings movement and the major national newspapers. Furthermore, I explore which issues regarding menstruation the Redstockings took up, and how these issues were discussed in the Danish newspapers I selected. Finally, I will examine how the emerging menstrual activism challenged dominant discourses about menstruation, women's bodies, and health.

In section 5.1 I explore how the United Nations (UN) International Women's Year (IWY) and the spread of self-help shaped the possibilities for articulating issues related to women's bodies and health, including menstruation, in the Danish media and within the Redstockings movement. In section 5.2. I examine how new representations of menstruation emerged within the national newspapers from 1975 to 1979 and the Redstockings movement. This section focuses on how the Redstockings and other menstrual advocates challenged the dominant discourse and norms regarding menstruation (the latter discussed in Chapter 4), through the use of Stuart Hall's definition of discourse and representation. Furthermore, I explore how the Redstockings' menstrual activism was linked to their understanding of women's health, as well as how their activism can be understood through the term of knowledge-practices. Finally, in section 5.3 I explore how issues related to menstrual products were framed in Danish newspapers and the Redstockings movement, focusing on economic issues and alternative menstrual products. I examine how the Redstockings' activism was linked to their radical and leftist ideology. In this section I also draw on the concepts of discourse and knowledge practices, as well as Charles Taylor's concept of 'politics of recognition'.

5.1 Spreading Attention to Women's Bodies and Health

In this section, I examine what role the UN IWY and the spread of self-help played in continuing the possibility of articulating issues related to women's bodies and health, like menstruation, in the Danish media and Redstockings movement. While abortion and contraception had been the center of attention in the first half of the 1970s, both in the Danish newspapers and in the Redstockings movement, new issues regarding women's bodies and health started to be raised in the mid-1970s.

One event that helped further the possibility of articulating issues related to women's bodies and health, like menstruation, in the public was the UN's declaration of 1975 as IWY. IWY was the result of lobbying by the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). At the 1972 session of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women, WIDF convinced delegates from Romania to propose their idea of having an international year for women, as WIDF did not have the power to do this themselves. The proposal was backed by the Finnish delegates, and in December 1972 the UN General Assembly established that 1975 would officially be UN IWY. The highlight of IWY was the UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City. The aim of IWY and the Mexico Conference was to enhance women's position by promoting gender equality, national and international development, and world peace.¹ Thus, in the context of IWY, it became legitimate to raise all sorts of issues regarding women.

How did the IWY impact Denmark? According to historian Kristine Kæjrsgaard, IWY and the conference in Mexico City greatly influenced Danish gender equality politics. She argued that the events were used by left- and right-wing politicians to advance the establishment of political institutions, such as the Equal Status Council, and political networks that focused

¹ Jocelyn Olcott, "Introduction," in *International Women's Year: The Grassroots Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 5-6; Olcott, "WINGO Politics " 19-23; Kristine Kæjrsgaard, "International Arenas and Domestic Institution Formation: The Impact of the UN Women's Conferences in Denmark, 1975–1985," *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 36, no. 3 (2018/07/03 2018): 271-72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18918131.2018.1522776>.

on gender equality.² At the beginning of 1975, the Danish Prime Minister's Office established a committee for coordinating activities regarding IWY, which included that the ministries, like the Ministry of Culture, could provide funding for various activities.³ Therefore, a large variety of activities, exhibitions, seminars, etc. took place in Denmark during IWY with the help of state funding.

As the Redstockings were a radical and leftist movement, as well as anti-establishment and anti-authority, how did they view the IWY? According to Dahlerup, the Redstockings were skeptical of IWY, as they worried it would be a pacifier that would not lead to any real change. Despite this reluctance, the Redstockings used the offer to get state funding for several activities, such as the women's caravan, which aimed to strengthen and spread the Women's Liberation Movement across Denmark. Furthermore, the Redstockings also gained their first official committee membership in the IWY committee for developing countries headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one of the only official committees the Redstockings ever participated in.⁴ However, at the end of 1975 and the beginning of 1976 many Redstockings felt that IWY had not created the change they had hoped for. As *Kvinder* no. 5 from 1975/1976 stated it "has been more characterized by male society's condescending jokes and convulsed attempts to tell the world how everything actually is."⁵

Despite the Redstockings' pessimist evaluation of IWY, it did "participate in a large mobilization of women" Dahlerup wrote in her 1998 book.⁶ However, how did IWY affect interests in women's bodies, health, and menstruation? While the Redstockings movement had been a big city phenomenon, it spread to most parts of Denmark during the second half of the

² Kjærsgaard, "International Arenas and Domestic Institution Formation," 272-73 + 76-79. See also Anne Trine Larsen, "From Feminist to Family Politics: Re-Doing Gender in Denmark after 1970," *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 13, no. 2 (2005/11/01 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740500348248>.

³ "Skematis Oversigt Over Aktiviter," *Roser og Sten* (1976). <https://www.kvinfol.dk/kilde.php?kilde=582>.

⁴ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 273 + 319; "Skematis Oversigt Over Aktiviter."

⁵ Redaktionen, "Kvindeåret Er Ved at Være Slut," *Kvinder* 5, December/January 1976/1976, 2.

⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 319.

1970s.⁷ This also meant the spread of the ideas and practice of self-help. In this way, the interest in women's bodies and health started to reach a much larger audience. One way this happened was through the women's caravan funded by the Danish Ministry of Culture as part of IWY.

According to a notice in the magazine *Kvinder i Vestjylland* no. 2 from 1975, introduction to self-help was one of the caravan's activities, combined with introductions to the Redstockings Movement, film-showings, music, etc.⁸ Another way in which the movement and the focus on women's bodies through self-help spread to other parts of Denmark was through invitations from local women's groups to established self-help or health groups, usually from the bigger cities, to talk about self-help or other issues regarding women's bodies and health, such as vaginal diseases or contraceptives.⁹

Another example of IWY's importance was the collaboration between the Redstockings and other women's organizations regarding their activities during IWY. In the fall of 1974, the Redstockings invited a range of other women's organizations to coordinate their activities during IWY.¹⁰ A press release from January 1975 showed that the Redstockings had teamed up with ten other women's organizations. Together they had divided the year into four themes they wanted to focus on and center their activities around: Women in the labor market, women in the family, women's bodies and gender roles, and finally women, consciousness, and politics. Under the theme of "Women's bodies and gender roles", the eleven organizations suggested taking up topics such as menstruation, women's illnesses, puberty, contraception, menopause, and self-help. At the start of each quarter, a large meeting was held in Copenhagen on each

⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 201-02 + 61-62 + 346-48. "Kvindegrupper i Danmark."

⁸ "Kvindekaravanen," *Kvinder i Vestjylland* 2, 1975, 7.

⁹ "Emneaften – Marts!". Skive Kvindegruppe 1976-1977. 1974-1982 Diverse, Box 1. 10541-21404 Skive Kvindegruppe. Danish National Archive; "Emneaften 28/4 kl. 19.30 på Biblioteket." Skive Kvindegruppe 1976-1977.

¹⁰ "Skematis Oversigt Over Aktiviter."

theme.¹¹ Thus, IWY was used by the Redstockings as a platform to ally with other women's organizations to raise issues related to menstruation, women's bodies, and health.

Another key factor for the continued attention to women's bodies and health, as well as the spread of self-help, was the book *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop* from 1975. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the 1975 KKDK was the most widely circulated publication to come out of the Redstockings movement. While self-help was also spread through other Redstockings publications such as *Kvinder* and *Kvinder i Vestjylland*, as well as via introduction meetings in the larger cities, KKDK probably played the biggest in making self-help more publicly known, thus constituting an important milestone in the knowledge-production of the movement.¹²

The above examples showed that the IWY in 1975 was an important factor in increasing general attention toward the topics of menstruation, women's bodies, and health. Although KKDK was not directly linked to IWY it was published in the same year. Together KKDK and IWY helped spread an interest in women's bodies and health and the practice and ideas of self-help. Furthermore, IWY enabled the Redstockings movement to spread to other regions in Denmark outside the bigger cities. Together these developments helped facilitate greater attention towards issues regarding menstruation, women's bodies, and health both in the Redstockings Movement and Danish newspapers in the coming years.

5.2 Challenging the Menstrual Stigma

With the previous debates on abortion, and the emerging debates on hormonal medication and contraception, issues regarding women's bodies and health became accepted topics in the

¹¹ Lyhne, "11 Organisationer Arbejder Sammen om Kvindeåret," *Fyns Amts Avis*, January 7, 1975, 9; "Pressemeddelelse," *Rødstrømpen* 27, January, 1975. *Rødstrømpen* 1975. 1971-1983 Foreningsbladet *Rødstrømpen*, Box 27. 10541-294246 *Rødstrømperne* i Århus. Danish National Archive; "FN-Kvindeår 1975 – Kvartalsmøder og Hovedemner," *Det Interne Blad* 1, 1975. Intern Blad og Meddelelser 1973-78. 1975-1978 Billeder, Box 2. 10541-294320 *Rødstrømperne* i Odense. Danish National Archive.

¹² Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 278-95; Else Christensen, "Selvhjælp," *Kvinder* 5, December/January 1975/1976, 14-15; Jytte, "Kend Din Krop," *Kvinder i Vestjylland* 3, 1975, 8; "Tid og Sted," *Kvinder* 4, October/November 1975, 31; Elisabeth Rygaard, "Kortfilm om Kvinder," *Kvinder* 21, August/September 1978, 20.

Danish newspapers, also outside the doctors columns. This section explores how menstruation was represented in the Danish newspapers from 1975 to 1979, and how IWY allowed new representations. As evident from Chapter 4, menstruation was still stigmatized in Denmark in the 1970s, which resulted in demeaning attitudes towards women. One of the harshest examples was male doctor Fangel Poulsen in the newspaper *B.T.*, who wrote several times that women were found to be more criminal just before their menstruation, referencing a French study.¹³ This belief reinforced the idea that women were unstable before and during their menstruation.¹⁴ However, in 1975 these demeaning attitudes began to be challenged, as arguments for destigmatizing menstruation appeared in the tabloid *B.T.*, which published several articles on the topic in 1975 written by writer Bente Clod and *B.T.* journalist and writer Inge-Lise Melhede. Clod and Melhede were some of the most notable advocates in the newspapers.

Clod had become known in the Danish public, after her entry to a feature-writing competition on the occasion of International Women's Year in 1975 in *Politiken*, for which she won second place.¹⁵ Although her piece, titled "*Det Autoriserede Danske Samleje*" (The Licensed Danish Intercourse), focused on gender roles in sexual relations, Clod also became known for writing about menstruation.¹⁶ While I have not been able to establish whether Melhede was affiliated with the Redstockings movement, Clod had a connection with the movement. During 1975 and 1976 Clod started coming to meetings for lesbians in the Women's House in Copenhagen.¹⁷ Hence, even if Clod was not directly involved in the Redstockings movement, she was affiliated with the movement through her involvement with other lesbians in the Women's House. This connection with the Redstockings would explain the overlap in

¹³ Fangel Poulsen, "Ubehag 14 Dage Før Menses," *B.T.*, November 30, 1978, 16; Fangel Poulsen, "Når Sexlysten Forsvinder," *B.T.*, April 26, 1975, 19.

¹⁴ See also: P. Arendt, "Hysteriet om ligeberettigelse," *Berlingske Tidende*, November 14, 1975, 7 (sec. 2); P.H. Møller, "Afskaf de Kvindelige Dommere," *B.T.*, August 31, 1976, 12.

¹⁵ K. S., "En Velmenende Eftersnakke," *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, May 1, 1976, 11. Unfortunately I did not have access to Clod's original article from *Politiken*.

¹⁶ See for example: Bente Clod, *Det Autoriserede Danske Samleje – Og Andre Nærkampe* (Denmark: Gyldendal, 1976).

¹⁷ "Bente Clod," *litteratusiden.dk*, accessed 22/05, 2024, <https://litteratusiden.dk/forfattere/bente-clod>.

opinions between Clod and the Redstockings, which will become evident below. However, Melhede must also have been sympathetic towards the Redstockings, at least there is also several overlap in opinions between her and the Redstockings.

During 1975 both Melhede and Clod critiqued the norm that women hide their menstruation.¹⁸ In a *B.T.* feature piece from January 1975, Melhede pointed out that women kept their menstruation secret because it “ha[d]s always been something embarrassing, primitive.”¹⁹ Melhede did not explain why women felt ashamed. However, she argued that such feelings of shame were reproduced by the menstrual product industry through their advertisements, which I also showed in Chapter 4. Aiming the critique at advertisements seems unsurprising, as advertisements and the media’s representation of women were under attack in these years according to Dahlerup, especially by the Redstockings who criticized them for objectifying and sexualizing women.²⁰ One way the menstrual product industry had reproduced the shame according to Melhede, was through the use of euphemisms to denote menstruation, such as minus-days.²¹ The same was pointed out by Clod and others.²²

Furthermore, Clod and Melhede both linked the norm of having to hide one's menstruation to the menstrual stigma and negative stereotypes about women. In a *B.T.* article from November 1975, Clod wrote: “Menstrual blood (say the word!) is neither smelly, ugly, or repulsive,” but “menstruation has been coated in one of their [patriarchal society] harshest taboos.”²³ In the vignette for four interviews with four women next to Clod's article, Melhede wrote “[m]enstruation is still a steeped in taboo, and myths still circulate.” She continued that the worst myths, such as the belief that women are unclean, had been eliminated in Denmark.²⁴

¹⁸ Inge-Lise Melhede, “Lad Os Bære en Rød Ring, Når Vi Har Menstruation,” *B.T.*, January 13, 1975, 12; Bente Clod “Jeg Ville Afdække Verdens Bedst Bevarede Hemmelighed,” *B.T.*, November 1, 1975, 22-23.

¹⁹ Melhede, “Lad Os Bære,” 12.

²⁰ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 45-52.

²¹ Melhede, “Lad Os Bære,” 12.

²² Clod, “Jeg Ville Afdække,” 22-23; Vibeke Brix, “Kan Kvindeåret Bruges? Skal det Bruges? Og til Hvad?,” *Frederiksborg Amts Avis*, March 10, 1975, 8.

²³ Clod, “Jeg Ville Afdække,” 22-23.

²⁴ Inge-Lise Melhede, “Her Fortæller Fire Kvinder om Deres Menstruation,” *B.T.*, November 1, 1975, 22-23.

However, Melhede pointed out that myths such as, “Women are disabled, they are not suited for responsible and trusted positions,” “They are too unreliable to participate in politics,” and “Women are hysterical” were still circulating in Denmark.²⁵

A female reader’s response to Melhede’s January 1975 article showed that not all women saw the menstrual stigma as a hindrance for women to talk about their menstruation.²⁶ Nonetheless, the vignette to Melhede’s interviews demonstrated that the menstrual stigma in general was a hindrance for women to talk about their menstruation publicly. Despite Melhede asking thirty women to participate, only four had wanted to do so when they learned that the interview was about menstruation.²⁷ Melhede continued that “the secrecy is participating in oppressing and depriving women of their autonomy.”²⁸ The reason she argued, were the stereotypes listed above.

Nonetheless, Melhede herself reproduced the stereotypical image of menstruating women, commencing her January 1975 piece: “I am tired, irritated, touchy, and could stab anyone who comes too close with a breadknife.”²⁹ Playing with the stereotypes about women, she based her argument on one of the harshest ones, namely that women would become murderous because of their menstruation. Hence, Melhede here reproduced the dominant discourse on menstruation discussed in Chapter 4. However, Melhede argued that hiding these feelings would make them worse. In this way, Melhede countered the belief that attention to menstrual discomfort would make it worse, as well as the norm that dictated women dealt with their menstruation in private.

Although both Melhede and Clod linked women’s menstrual shame to the menstrual stigma, Clod went a bit further by highlighting what she believed to be the origin of the

²⁵ Melhede, “Her fortæller”, 22-23.

²⁶ N. I. Jørgense, “Fortæl, Hvis Din Surhed Skyldes Menstruation,” *B.T.*, January 21, 1975, 2.

²⁷ Melhede, “Her Fortæller,” 22-23.

²⁸ Inge-Lise Melhede, “Her Fortæller Fire Kvinder om Deres Menstruation,” *B.T.*, November 1, 1975, 22-23.

²⁹ Melhede, “Lad Os Bære,” 12.

menstrual stigma. In her 1975 article, she traced the stigma to “ancient purifying rituals during the time of women’s ‘unclean days’ among primitive people.” Clod argued that the two factors – advertisements and ancient myths – had resulted in menstruation being censured to such a degree that it has become “the world’s best-kept secret.”³⁰ Although Clod did not expand on this statement, she was probably referring to the belief that menstrual stigma originated in men’s fear of menstrual blood, related to the connection between blood and death, in “primitive hunter-gatherer cultures” as PhD student Peter Thielst told *B.T.* in 1978.³¹

Apart from highlighting the menstrual stigma, and critiquing the menstrual product industry for reproducing the shame and secrecy related to menstruation, what did Melhede and Clod suggest that women should do about these issues? Both of them suggested women to be more open about their menstruation. In her January 1975 article, Melhede encouraged women to “openly tell [others] that we are menstruating when we do it.”³² This was important she stated, “women’s year or not.”³³ Melhede further proposed that women “could do this by carrying a small red ring when we have it [menstruation].”³⁴

Whether the suggestion of wearing a red ring was genuine or an exaggeration used to provoke the reader to think about these issues is unclear. But despite the negative reactions Melhede imagined her proposal would receive, she hoped the end result would be “tolerance and more understanding” towards women during menstruation.³⁵ This (theoretical) act of protest would have been a clear disruption of the general discourse on menstruation that framed it as a problem to be hidden as discussed in Chapter 4. Although Melhede in her November 1975 article still argued that women should be talking openly about menstruation, she focused

³⁰ Clod, “Jeg Ville Afdække,” 22-23.

³¹ Torben Bagge, “Menstruationen Har Altid Holdt Kvinderne Nede,” *B.T.*, September 29, 1978, 8; See Chapter 4, this thesis for other examples.

³² Melhede, “Lad Os Bære,” 12.

³³ Melhede, “Lad Os Bære,” 12.

³⁴ Melhede, “Lad Os Bære,” 12.

³⁵ Melhede, “Lad Os Bære,” 12.

less on creating more tolerance. Instead, Melhede warned women against using their menstruation or menstrual discomfort as an excuse, as they then “help keep the myth that women are unreliable alive.”³⁶

In her November 1975 article, Clod also argued that it was important to talk openly about menstruation. Clod reframed the discourse as she pointed out that “it is extremely important that we start thinking about menstruation in a new way, especially among men, as it is still the male-dominated society and its experts [like doctors] that control our bodies.”³⁷ By “thinking about menstruation in a new way” Clod meant to see menstruation in a more positive light and as a strength, by bringing back the “laughter and imagination” regarding menstruation.³⁸

While educating men about menstruation was not a huge theme in my source material, there were a few examples of it. For example, in a 1979 review in *Berlingske Tidende* of a new book about puberty and menstruation for educational purposes. Here the journalist suggested including boys in classes about the book, even though the book focused mainly on girls puberty. The journalist found it reasonable to include boys when teaching from the book, because there was a small section on boys puberty and because it “might give them a better understanding of girls' situation and why they often react differently than usual.”³⁹ Furthermore, three of the four women in Melhede’s 1975 interviews in *B.T.* also emphasized how freeing it was to be able to talk openly with their male partner about menstruation.⁴⁰ These examples indicate that some people believed enhancing both women's and men’s knowledge about menstruation, would help bring it out in the open and create more tolerance for menstruating women.

The above examples show that in *B.T.* some people started to challenge the menstrual stigma. Thus, Clod and Melhede challenged the dominant discourse about menstruation at the

³⁶ Melhede, “Her Fortæller,” 22-23.

³⁷ Clod, “Jeg Ville Afdække,” 22-23.

³⁸ Clod, “Jeg Ville Afdække,” 22-23.

³⁹ Finn H. Jensen, “Diskret Reklame – God til Undervisning,” review of *Pige/KVINDE*, by Mölnlycke A/S, *Berlingske Tidende*, May 1, 1979, 7 (sec. 2).

⁴⁰ Melhede, “Her Fortæller,” 22-23.

time. In Stuart Hall's terminology, Clod and Melhede tried to impact our shared culture of meaning by exposing how the discourse of menstruation as something unclean resulted in negative representations and approaches to women, such as women being unreliable workers, unbalanced, and hysterical. Clod and Melhede further tried to challenge the dominant discourse by encouraging women to go against the norm of hiding their menstruation. The possibility for articulating these issues had been created by IWY, as well as by the previous debates that had put women's bodily autonomy on the public agenda.

Interestingly, there were only a few examples outside *B.T.* of newspapers that published articles that so directly and explicitly talked about menstruation. Instead, there were many examples of articles that reinforced the menstrual stigma.⁴¹ That menstruation was still a contested topic is evident from the newspapers reviews of Clod's debut book in 1976. While *B.T.*'s review of her book called Clod's descriptions of menstruation "pioneering work" for "the gender that spends one-fifth of most of their adult life bleeding,"⁴² others were less positive about Clod's writings about menstruation. *Jyllands-Posten* review stated that "the title alone will for many be a big mouthful and there will probably also be several [readers] who will find it hard to swallow at least part of the content of this book."⁴³ Although not stating what these parts were, the rest of the review suggested that menstruation and bodily functions were among these "hard to swallow" sections.⁴⁴ These examples show that menstruation was still a niche topic, although other Danish writers had also started taking it up, such as poet Charlotte Strandgaard.⁴⁵

⁴¹ See for example: Claus Borre, "Tigeren fra Torin Kaldes Kvinden, der Jagter 14 Mænd," *Berlingske Tidende*, March 10, 1975, 8; Søren Krarup "Disse Prægtige Mænd med Deres Kostelige Kønsroller," *Information*, January 13, 1976, 6; Hanne Kaufmann, "Mors Dag?," *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, May 7, 1978.

⁴² Rigmor Jessen, "En af Disse Tapre Unge Kvinder Får Sin Debut," review of *Det Autoriserede Danske Samleje – Og Andre Nærkampe*, by Bente Clod, *B.T.*, April 9, 1976, 19.

⁴³ A.V., "Af en Kvindes Udvikling," review of *Det Autoriserede Danske Samleje – Og Andre Nærkampe*, by Bente Clod, *Jyllands-Posten*, May 12, 1976, 11.

⁴⁴ V., "Af en Kvindes," 11.

⁴⁵ See for example: Charlotte Strandgaard, *Udvalgte Digte 1965-2021*. (Denmark: Herman & Frudit, 2021)

What can be the reason then that *B.T.* stood out in their publications on menstruation, compared to the other major newspapers? According to Dahlerup the press had a huge influence in spreading the Redstockings ideas, especially the tabloids *B.T.* and *Ekstra Bladet*.⁴⁶ A possible explanation could then be that *B.T.* large coverage of the Redstockings also made room for others to write about women's issues. Whether *Ekstra Bladet* also published similar types of articles I do not know, as I did not have access to this newspaper. However, since the 1960s *B.T.* had differentiated itself from *Ekstra Bladet* by focusing more on women's and consumer issues, as well as by creating a more family-oriented image.⁴⁷ These reasons could explain why *B.T.* published more articles about menstruation than most other newspapers. Whatever the reason this made it possible for other representations, in Hall's definition, of menstruation and menstruating women to enter the Danish public domain and thus challenge the dominant discourse of menstruation.

5.2.1 New Perspectives on Women's Health and Menstruation

While some women started to challenge the representation of menstruation and menstruating women in mainstream Danish newspapers, the Redstockings also began to challenge representations of women's bodies and menstruation. This section asks how the Redstockings represented menstruation, women's bodies, and health and how these representations were related to their radical and leftist ideology. As mentioned in section 5.1 self-help started to spread during the second half of the 1970s. The ideas behind self-help were the fuel that made the Redstockings start to pay attention to the lack of knowledge among women about their bodies, and the medicalization and pathologization of women in medical science.

⁴⁶ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 185-88.

⁴⁷ Søllinge, "BT (avis)."

In the preface of KKDK 1975, the editors Brita Wielopolska and Anette Petersen, both connected to the Redstockings movement, wrote that the book originated from the wish to write a self-help pamphlet. However, when they found out “how little we and most women know about our body and how it works,” they decided to include other topics than self-help, and thus it ended up as a book about women’s bodies and health more broadly.⁴⁸ Although Dahlerup stated that the book was inspired by the American book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (OBOS) from 1971, OBOS was not mentioned in the preface of the 1975 KKDK.⁴⁹ According to scholar Kathy Davis in her 2007 book about OBOS, there were three types of adaptations of OBOS: direct translations; translations and adaptations; and inspired editions. Davis categorized KKDK as an inspired edition and not a translation of OBOS, which is confirmed by the lack of mentions of OBOS in the 1975 KKDK.⁵⁰

What was the aim of the 1975 KKDK then? Originating from the ideas about self-help, the 1975 KKDK sought to challenge the authority of male doctors and to give women knowledge of and autonomy over their own bodies. “Medical science is male science,” the editors Wielopolska and Petersen wrote in the preface.⁵¹ It was this circumstance that the book sought to challenge. According to Wielopolska and Petersen, KKDK’s aim was to make knowledge about women’s bodies accessible to women and show how the body and health were political.⁵² Thus, following Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell’s understanding of knowledge hierarchies, KKDK, like self-help, was presented as an alternative to male-dominated medical knowledge. In this way, KKDK can be seen as a knowledge-practice.

As so, what were the main critiques in the 1975 KKDK of male-dominated medicine, and how was this linked to the Redstockings radical and leftist ideology? One of the central points

⁴⁸ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 9.

⁴⁹ Vinder, *Kinde, Kend Din Krop*, 9-10; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 529.

⁵⁰ Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 63-72. See also Gjerde, “Kjenn Din Kropp, Kjenn Din Tid,” 11-12.

⁵¹ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 9.

⁵² Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 10.

of critique in KKDK was the medicalization of women. In the section “Women and Illness,” the book’s authors argued that women were not “biologically weaker than men.”⁵³ But because processes such as pregnancy and menopause were pathologized, women were thought to be weaker and more ill than men.⁵⁴ The result, according to the authors, was that women’s capacity for reproduction was used both to define women’s role in life as “giving birth” and to discriminate and oppress women because they allegedly were “unstable both as labor force and as humans.”⁵⁵ Therefore KKDK’s authors saw women’s illness as a result of the current society.

The 1975 edition of KKDK showed that the Redstockings believed that women’s health was directly linked to women’s oppression both by patriarchy and capitalism.⁵⁶ For example, the authors wrote: “Our (greater) illness is not due to our gender, our biology, but our societal position, and thus we must fight to change it. But we must not only fight for equality with men. We must fight for a society where neither women, men, children, or elderly people get exploited. We must fight for a classless society.”⁵⁷ Thus, KKDK shared the Redstockings view that women’s freedom was related to all people’s freedom, which could only be realized in a socialist society. As scholars Sine Lehn-Christiansen and Marie Holen concludes, this approach resulted in a very broad understanding of health in KKDK.⁵⁸

According to the Redstockings women were under more pressure from society than men due to gendered norms and roles. The authors of KKDK further stated that “we must not forget that women have different opportunities according to which class we belong to.”⁵⁹ However, the authors did not develop this point nor did they elaborate on how class affected women’s opportunities to take care of their health. Instead, they argued that “[t]he conservative gender

⁵³ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 11.

⁵⁴ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 11 + 223.

⁵⁵ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 11.

⁵⁶ Lehn-Christiansen and Holen, “Sundheden er sgu din egen!,” 42-45; Andersen, “Kvinder Er Også Kød og Blod,” 94-95 + 104-05.

⁵⁷ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 13.

⁵⁸ Lehn-Christiansen and Holen, “Sundheden er sgu din egen!,” 41-44.

⁵⁹ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 12.

roles, [and] poor education or lack of it, are often to blame for the fact that many women work at home,” as housewives whose “working conditions [...] are unreasonable.”⁶⁰ Although they acknowledged that it was just as hard to be a “working housewife”, because of working women’s double burden of work both outside and inside the house KKDK focused more on the housewife’s struggles. In this way, the authors ended up favoring a middle-class perspective, even though their understanding of women’s health was based on a radical and leftist ideology. The difficulty to fully implement a class perspective in their approach to health might stem from the fact that the majority of Redstockings belonged to the Danish middle-class themselves.

Were the Redstockings, or KKDK specifically, more successful in applying a class analysis to the topic of menstruation? While Tine Andersen emphasized that KKDK 1975 largely focused on women’s suffering, Dahlerup argued that such a focus was a general trait of the 1970s Women’s Liberation Movement.⁶¹ Dahlerup continued that “the ‘suffering descriptions’ nevertheless seemed liberating in the 1970s,” because they “reversed the individual frustration about women’s lives to a communal collective effort.”⁶² This anger could then fuel action, Dahlerup argued. This was exactly how menstruation was approached in KKDK.

In KKDK’s chapter about menstruation, there was a section titled “[t]he lies about menstruation.”⁶³ Here the authors pointed out that “[t]hough half of the population at some point menstruates, we are still taught to keep it secret.”⁶⁴ They continued, to argue that women’s shame of menstruation stemmed from “keeping menstruation secret and [from] the myth of the unclean woman.”⁶⁵ The shame made women use euphemisms about their menstruation. Like Clod and others, KKDK linked the origin of the myth of the unclean woman to pre-historic

⁶⁰ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 12.

⁶¹ Andersen, “Kvinder Er Også Kød og Blod,” 95; Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 532.

⁶² Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 533.

⁶³ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 79.

⁶⁴ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 79.

⁶⁵ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 79. ’

times. However, according to scholar Camilla Røstvik Scandinavian constructions of menstruating women as unclean stemmed from 19th-century ideas about hygiene in medical science.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the connections to medical ideas about hygiene were not made by the Redstockings or other menstrual advocates such as Clod.

While both Melhede and Clod pointed out that the the menstrual-product industry reproduced the norm of hiding menstruation, the authors of KKDK went one step further by arguing that the menstrual-product industry also replicated the myth of the unclean woman. They did this by selling women intimate hygiene products, that promised women they would get “your natural freshness and security back.”⁶⁷ The authors continued that if women bought intimate hygiene products, “then you participate in reproducing the lie that women are unclean during menstruation.”⁶⁸ Instead, it was important to counter this and other negative beliefs about women the authors pointed out, as “they [the negative beliefs] oppress us all.”⁶⁹

Following Ingrid Johnston-Robledo and Joan C. Chrisler definition of the term stigma, KKDK opposed the menstrual stigma, which resulted in women hiding their menstruation in order not to get exposed and negative stereotypes about women. How did the Redstockings or those Redstockings writing in KKDK imagine that women should counter the negative representation of menstruation? Like Melhede and Clod, KKDK encouraged women to talk more openly about menstruation. And, similar to Melhede in her November 1975 article, KKDK also advised their readers to be beware of men’s ‘tolerance’, because it could be used against them: “it can easily happen that every time you are ‘out of balance’, every time you are dissatisfied, – then you are probably menstruating.”⁷⁰ The authors warned their readers that such an approach meant that men did not have to take their opinions or complaints seriously.

⁶⁶ Røstvik, "Crimson Waves," 55-56.

⁶⁷ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 79

⁶⁸ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 79.

⁶⁹ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 80.

⁷⁰ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 80.

Nevertheless, KKDK still advised its readers to “talk openly to others about the problems” they experienced during their menstrual cycle, such as physical or psychological discomfort, while also explaining to others that promoting tolerance could end up overriding women’s actual issues.⁷¹ Furthermore, the authors also encourage women to seek help from a doctor to alleviate their physical discomfort. Thus, KKDK acknowledged that some women actually did suffer during menstruation, although the authors still focused more on countering the representation of women as hysterical, unbalanced, and unreliable workers.⁷² There may have been a reluctance among some women to put too much emphasis on menstrual discomfort, out of fear of reproducing negative stereotypes about women. Apart from countering the stigma, KKDK also proposed that women must fight for proper toilet facilities in public places and at work. However, this proposal was not taken up by the Redstockings elsewhere. Instead, access to safe and free menstrual products became the main arena for the Redstockings menstrual activism, as the following section will demonstrate.

Outside of KKDK, how was menstruation represented in other Redstockings publications? The Copenhagen Redstockings magazine *Kvinder* no. 25 from April/May 1979 had menstruation as its theme. While three of the articles focused exclusively on menstrual products, the other five discussed other aspects of menstruation. All eight articles were written by journalist student Solveig Schmidt as her final exam project at the Danish Journalist School (*Danmarks Journalisthøjskole*).⁷³ Many of the issues this edition of *Kvinder* took up were the same as in the 1975 KKDK, such as the negative stereotypes of menstruating women, the myth

⁷¹ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 80.

⁷² Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 79-80.

⁷³ Solveig Schmidt, “Menstruation: Det Er Rødt, Det Er Godt, Det Giver Ny Energi,” *Kvinder* 25, April/May 1979, 5.

of the unclean woman, and the reproduction of shame and secrecy by menstrual product advertisements.⁷⁴

However, this edition of *Kvinder* also focused on a more positive approach to menstruation. An example was the magazine's first theme article.⁷⁵ Schmidt still critiqued the menstrual stigma, the secrecy of menstruation, and the negative stereotypes of menstruating women which she argued reproduce women's oppression.⁷⁶ And like KKDK and, Clod and Melhede, Schmidt also encouraged women to talk openly about menstruation. However, Schmidt critiqued women who denied that the menstrual cycle included emotional changes, pain, and other issues, as this "replaces an old prison with a new one," which would further reproduce the menstrual stigma.⁷⁷ Thus, Schmidt's words exemplify the argument recently put forth by Bobel that "[b]laming biology for the behavior of women (or men) is a classically antifeminist position, but so is the failure to take women at their word and validate their experiences."⁷⁸ As some of the examples above showed, there was a tendency among some Redstockings and menstrual activists to diminish women's experiences of pain. However, this was not done from an antifeminist position, but from the fear of confirming the negative stereotypes about women. In this way these examples exhibit the dilemma and difficult balance in menstrual activism of highlighting women's menstrual issues and difficulties, without reproducing the menstrual stigma.

Furthermore, and importantly Schmidt also proposed a new way for women to view their menstruation, namely as strength and positive asset, as seen in the article's title and final statement which was "Menstruation: It Is Red, It Is Good, It Gives New Energy." This new

⁷⁴ Solveig Schmidt, "Hun Bløder – Hun Er Farlig," *Kvinder* 25, April/May 1979, 6-8; Schmidt, "Det Urene Køn," *Kvinder* 25, April/May 1979, 8-9; Redaktionen, "Retten Til at Menstruere," *Kvinder* 25, April/May 1979, 2; Schmidt, "Menstruation," 5-6.

⁷⁵ Schmidt, "Menstruation," 5-6.

⁷⁶ Schmidt, "Menstruation," 5.

⁷⁷ Schmidt, "Menstruation," 6.

⁷⁸ Bobel, *New Blood* 37.

representation of menstruation challenged the dominant discourse that menstruation was something that subtracted from women's value by contrarily framing it as something positive. The editorial in *Kvinder* no. 25, also stated: "If we learned to consider menstruation as a privilege, as an opportunity for gaining an intimate connection with our body function, learned to listen to the body demands, we would probably manage to avoid a lot of physical pain and psychological unbalance as our negative expectations would decrease."⁷⁹ The illustrations of the magazine also presented a more positive and imaginative approach to menstruation, like Clod proposed in her 1975 *B.T.* article, as the example below shows.⁸⁰

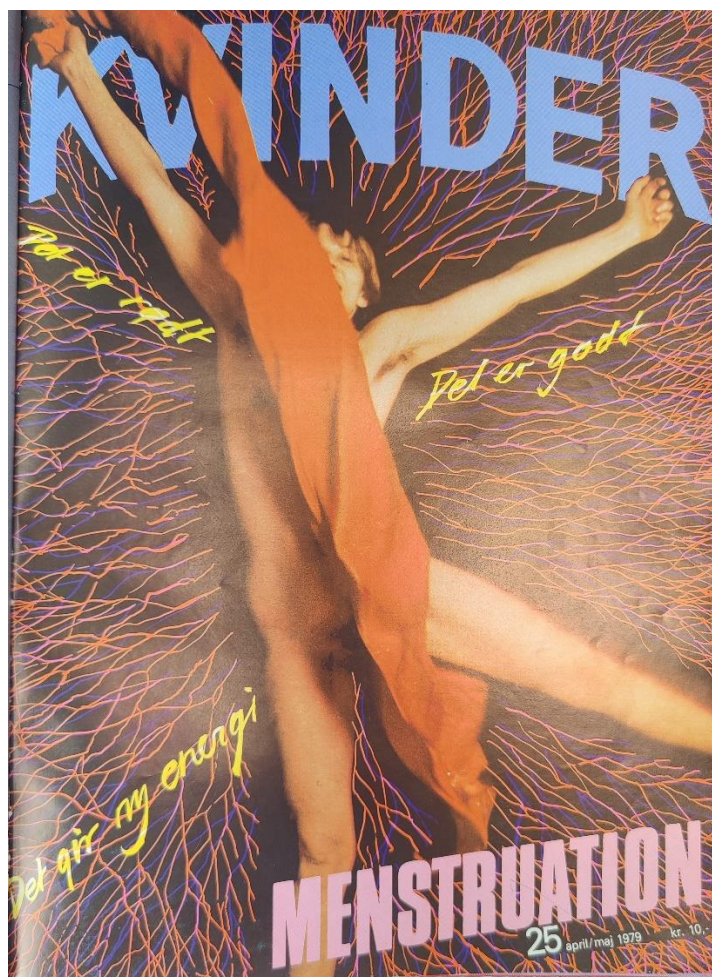


Figure 1 Frontpage of *Kvinder* no. 25, "It is red. It is good. It gives new energy."

⁷⁹ Redaktionene, "Retten Til," 2.

⁸⁰ *Kvinder* 25, 25, April/May 1979.

These examples hint at a new approach to menstruation among the Redstockings, which focuses on how changing one's mindset about menstruation could turn what for many women was a negative experience into a positive one. Although this view was not very common among the Redstockings yet, it became more widespread during the 1980s. This new view also foreshadows the 1980s more individualized approach to menstruation, rather than challenging the structural issues regarding menstruation, something to which I will return in Chapter 6. However, this section has shown that in the latter half of the 1970s both the Redstockings and some other women started to challenge the menstrual stigma and its related stereotypes of women. In this regard, women were encouraged to talk openly about menstruation, while at the same time warned not to use their menstruation as an excuse in order not to reproduce negative representations of women. In this way, the Redstockings, as well as other menstrual advocates such as Melhede and Clod, tried to challenge the dominant discourse and norms around menstruation. This was made possible with the spread of self-help and the context of IWY, which allowed other representations of menstruation and menstruating women to enter some Danish newspapers.

5.3 *Menstrual Products: Economy and Alternatives*

While the menstrual stigma was challenge in Danish newspapers and in Redstockings publications during the last half of the 1970s, this happened on a relatively small scale. However, issues relating to menstrual *products* were much more prominently discussed. This section will explore how issues regarding menstrual products were represented by the Redstockings, and in Danish newspapers.

The Redstockings primarily had two focus points in their criticism of menstrual products: the safety of menstrual products; and the economic issues related to menstruation. The critique of the safety of menstrual products was related to similar critiques of other products used internally, such as spermicidal products. In 1976 a health group in the Odense Redstockings

working on contraceptives stated that “[i]t is astonishing that it is even legal to sell [contraceptive] products which contain perfume, especially knowing that they will be in direct contact with the mucous membrane of the vagina.”⁸¹ They added that the same could be said about intimate hygiene products. In another example from *Kvinder* no. 17 from 1977/1978, four women criticized tampons for “drying the vagina,” “containing bleach which has been identified as causing cancer,” and “not being made of the natural material cotton but of a synthetic fabric.”⁸² The authors of the 1975 KKDK had also critiqued menstrual product companies, specifically those producing tampons, for “omitting to tell that tampons can be a health hazard,”⁸³ due to the same reason highlighted by the four women in *Kvinder* no. 17. Apart from pointing out that tampons for being a health risk, the authors of KKDK also criticized tampon manufacturers for reproducing the idea that menstruation was unclean as demonstrated in the section above.⁸⁴

The above examples showed that the Redstockings critiqued the lack of safe menstrual products, echoing their critique of the lack of safe contraceptives, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. Although it was not stated explicitly in these examples, the general context of the Redstockings’ anti-capitalist critiques of menstrual products indicates that the Redstockings believed that menstrual product companies did not care about women’s safety as long as they made money. Apart from the Redstockings’ critique of menstrual product companies for reproducing the menstrual stigma and the lack of safe menstrual products, they also critiqued the menstrual product companies, as well as the Danish state, for profiting from women’s biological functions, as I will show below.

⁸¹ Sundhedsgruppen, “Til kvinder (som forbrugere) og alle ansatte inden for sundhedssektoren!”, Rødstrømpen 42, May 1976. Rødstrømpen 1976. 1971-1983 Foreningsbladet Rødstrømpen, Box 27. 10541-294246 Rødstrømperne i Århus. Danish National Archive.

⁸² Bente, Pia, Grith, and Geske, “Åh – Min Tampon... Jeg Mener, Min Svamp!.” *Kvinder* 17, December/January 1977/1978, 11.

⁸³ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 81.

⁸⁴ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 81

In KKDK 1975 the authors stated that “it is not only the pads- and tampon manufacturers who earn big money from your bodily functions, the state does the same,” because of the taxation of menstrual products.⁸⁵ The same issue was raised in the song “*Vampyren*” (the Vampire) on the Redstockings record *Kvindeballade* (Women’s Trouble) from 1977. The song was originally Swedish but was translated to Danish on the record.⁸⁶ In addition to critiquing the profit made from women’s menstruation, part of the chorus said, “I do not change every other hour, because I cannot afford to do it so often.”⁸⁷ In this way, the song also highlighted that the prices of menstrual products prevented some women from changing menstrual products as often as recommended. The high prices were also mentioned in the magazine *Kvinder*, especially by its readers,⁸⁸ as well as by the Aarhus Redstockings both on International Women’s Day in March 1977, and in an exhibition in the Aarhus Women’s House in January 1978.⁸⁹ These examples show that the critique of menstrual product companies was articulated by the Redstockings in many different ways all over Denmark.

According to a calculation in KKDK women spent 156 DKK (21 Euro) on menstrual products a year.⁹⁰ On-top of this came the costs for other intimate hygiene products, they added. However, other products related to menstruating were not included, such as extra underwear, or medical products like painkillers, that some women require to deal with their menstruation. KKDK’s calculations were based on women having approx. thirteen cycles a year, bleeding for five days, and using four pads or tampons a day.⁹¹ However, according to several newspaper

⁸⁵ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 83.

⁸⁶ “Vampyren”, track 3 on Kvindeballadegruppen, *Kvindeballade*, Demos, 1977. See also: S. Østre, “Vampyren”, *Kvinder Synger* (Copenhagen: Rødstrømpebevægelsen Bogcafe), 100-101.

⁸⁷ Østre, “Vampyren”, 100-101.

⁸⁸ See for example: Ulla-Stina Nilsson, “Svampeklub,” *Kvinder* 24, February/March 1979, 14.

⁸⁹ Lise “Referat fra Koo-Møde d. 1/3/77”, *Rødstrømpen* no. 52, April 1977. *Rødstrømpen* 1977. 1971-1983 Foreningsbladet *Rødstrømpen*, Box 27. 10541-294246 *Rødstrømperne i Århus*. Danish National Archive; “Referat fra Koo-Møde 15/11/1977, *Rødstrømpen* no. 59. *Rødstrømpen* 1977. 1971-1983 Foreningsbladet *Rødstrømpen*, Box 27.

⁹⁰ The prices are in today’s DKK to Euro exchange rates. However, 100 DKK in 1975 would amount to 553 DKK in 2023, which equals 74 Euros today. “Prisberegner,” accessed 3/6, 2024, <https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/laer-om-statistik/prisberegner>.

⁹¹ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 81-83.

articles in 1979, the prices of menstrual products could vary up to 50%.⁹² So the annual expense for menstrual products alone could easily be much higher, depending on where women bought their products and if they used pads or tampons. Furthermore, these examples show that the Redstockings' critique of the prices of menstrual products was framed within an anti-capitalist discourse, as they argued that women were being utilized for profit by menstrual product manufacturers. However, apart from the song *Vampyren* I have not seen any examples of Redstockings that highlighted how the high prices of menstrual products could hinder some women from having sufficient access to menstrual products. Instead, their critique was more framed in terms of the unfairness of women being profited off, which the Redstockings solutions to the high prices also showed, as I will discuss below.

In the 1970s the Redstockings proposed two solutions to the economic consequence of menstruation: either compensating women for the expenses by making menstrual products free or giving women a tax benefit; or using alternative products. While both these options were raised frequently in the late 1970s, in the 1980s the Redstockings' focus shifted away from the collective and structural approach of making menstrual products free of charge, to mainly focusing on alternative products, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 6.

That menstrual products should be costless was raised by the Redstockings in several of my selected sources. In the 1975 KKDK, the authors argued that "we [women] should demand that menstrual protection becomes free. It cannot be right that someone should profit from our biological functions."⁹³ The song "*Vampyren*", likewise stated: "research something that is not poisonous and dangerous, and it has to be free and good [...] an alternative must be found."⁹⁴ Besides highlighting that menstrual products should be free, the song also emphasized that women should have access to safe and healthy alternatives. However, some Redstockings took

⁹² Joli, "Priskrig på Tamponer – 12,85 eller 22,85 For 40 Stk.," *Jyllands-Posten*, March 13, 1979, 7; "Prisforskel på 9.45 For den Same Vare," *Horsens Folkeblad*, July 2, 1979, 6.

⁹³ Vinder, *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, 83.

⁹⁴ Østre, "Vampyren", 100-101.

matters into their own hands, by implementing a tax-benefit on their tax declaration for menstrual products.

In January 1977, the right-wing newspaper *Sjællands Tidende* (Zealand Times) reported that the Redstocking Brita Wielopolska, one of the 1975 KKDK editors, had visited a women's meeting in the town Holbæk. *Sjællands Tidende* continued that the Copenhagen Redstockings “encouraged all the nation's women to regularly deduct 500 DKK (67 Euro) on their tax declaration for the expenses of contraception and menstrual protection,”⁹⁵ as a form of protest. The proposal was received with “loud cheers” from the assembled women.⁹⁶

Although *Sjællands Tidende* mentioned that the Redstockings, planned to announce the protest in all Danish newspapers, I did not find such announcement. However, the message must have spread, as the right-wing newspaper *Dagbladet* in May 1977 reported that twenty-five women from the town of Nyborg had added their expenses for menstrual products to their tax declaration.⁹⁷ The journalist found the idea both funny and clever, as no men “have ever thought to deduct the costs of shaving on their tax declaration.” The journalist continued that the “Redstockings are not kidding [...] the tax benefit was a matter of principle. When society is organized in a way that profits from women's functions, the least male society can do to repair the damage is to make the expenses deductible.”⁹⁸

Despite referencing the Redstockings' view on menstruation, the journalist at *Dagbladet* found the proposal more humorous rather than taking their proposal seriously. The lightness with which the Redstockings' critique of capitalizing on women's biology was treated in these examples might stem from the newspapers being right-wing. It is possible that more left-wing papers would have taken their anti-capitalist critiques more seriously. However, this would

⁹⁵ Nils Duve, “Rødstrømper Kræver Fast Fradrag til Prævention,” *Sjællands Tidende*, January 21, 1977, 1.

⁹⁶ Duve, “Rødstrømper Kræver,” 1.

⁹⁷ “Skal der Fradragsret På den Lille Forskel?,” *Dagbladet*, May 21, 1977, 5.

⁹⁸ “Skal der,” 5.

require more extensive research of Danish newspapers than was possible for this thesis.⁹⁹ The above examples show that the Redstockings' proposal to make menstrual products free or compensate women's expenses via a tax-benefit was an example of Taylor's 'politics of difference', as the Redstockings demanded that women's biological differences should be accommodated by the state.

However, how did the Danish media present the economic issues of menstruation? Interestingly the newspapers that reported the Redstockings tax-benefit protest were both local newspapers. However, the Redstockings' protest action of deducting the costs of menstrual products, was also reported in a television program about menstruation from 1977 hosted by Nele Rue which would have reached a larger audience than the local newspaper reports.¹⁰⁰ If the big national newspapers did not write a lot about the economic issues related to menstruation, what was their focus when they did write about it?

There were only a few articles among my selected material that mentioned the Redstockings tax-benefit protest, one in *B.T.* and one in *Jyllands-Posten*, both spurred by the mention in Rue's television program of the protest. Flemming Chr. Nielsen who reviewed the program in *Jyllands-Posten* asked: "what about the barber soap?" hinting that it was unfair if women received special treatment.¹⁰¹ A similar response was found in *B.T.* where a reader stated that "then men should also be able to deduct condoms in their tax declaration."¹⁰² These examples thus represented Taylors "politics of universal dignity", as they believed women and men should be treated equally.

The Redstockings' other solution to the economic issues of menstruation was also linked to their critique of safe menstrual products, namely the proposal to use alternative products. As

⁹⁹ For one example see article in the social democratic trade-union paper: Else Steen Nansen, "Menstruation Gøres til en Slags Vanvid," *Aktuelt*, March 29, 1979, 12-13.

¹⁰⁰ Flemming Chr. Nielsen, "Hvad Med Barbersæben?," *Jyllands-Posten*, September 9, 1977, 2.

¹⁰¹ Nielsen, "Hvad med," 2.

¹⁰² Vibeke Petersen, "Så Må Mænd da også Trække Udgifter til Kondomer fra i Skat," *B.T.*, September 13, 1977, 13.

the doctors group in charge of *Kvinders* doctors column, consisting of the four female doctors Katrine Sidenius, Anse Stoltz Andersen, Birgit Petersson, and Lone Meyer, replied in *Kvinder* no. 18 to some questions about alternative menstrual products: women would have to find alternative menstrual products on their own because “we shall not expect the [medical product] industry to do it, as there are great economic forces behind it.”¹⁰³

Consequently, many Redstockings took matters into their own hands, primarily by using natural sponges as an alternative menstrual product, although there were also a few examples of women who suggested others to use diaphragms to collect the menstrual blood. Both methods were endorsed by female doctors, such as the doctors group in *Kvinder*, although there was little knowledge about the use and safety of natural sponges.¹⁰⁴

The use of alternative products was both linked to safety and economics, and various readers wrote to *Kvinder* about both issues.¹⁰⁵ Generally, many Redstockings were fascinated by the use of natural sponges, as evident from the Aarhus Redstockings who asked the doctors groups in *Kvinder* no. 18 about how to best clean it, as they were collecting information about the sponges.¹⁰⁶

Kvinder no. 25 about menstruation (“It is red. It is good. It gives new energy”) also had an article about using natural sponges and diaphragms as menstrual products, where Schmit interviewed three women about their experience with alternative products, primarily natural sponges. Apart from highlighting the health and economic benefits of using a natural product such as natural sponges, the three interviewed women also mentioned how it “like self-help [...] demystified our genitals,” as they got to know themselves inside.¹⁰⁷ The three interviewees

¹⁰³ Lægegruppen, “Natursvampen til Menstruationsbeskyttelse,” *Kvinder* 18, February/March 1978, 12; Pi Michael and Elisabeth Therkelsen, “Kvinde Kend Din Krop,” review of *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop*, by K. Vinder, *Kvinder* 6, February/March 1976, 6.

¹⁰⁴ See for example: Susanne, “Pessar som Menstruationsbeskyttelse?,” *Kvinder* 9, August/September 1976, 30; Lægegruppen, “Natursvampen,” 12.

¹⁰⁵ Susanne, “Pessar,” 30; Bente, Pia, Grith, and Geske, “Åh – Min Tampon,” 11,

¹⁰⁶ Lægegruppen, “Natursvampen,” 12; see also Lise “Referat fra Koo-Møde d. 1/3/77”, *Rødstrømpen* no. 52, April 1977.

¹⁰⁷ Solveig Schmidt, “Alternativet Findes: Natursvampen,” *Kvinder* 25, April/May 1979, 13

further mentioned that using a natural sponge had helped them challenge the menstrual stigma and perception of menstrual blood as disgusting, although one of them still found it difficult to clean it in public toilets because she was “afraid of other people’s reaction.”¹⁰⁸ This example showed that while alternative menstrual products were usually framed within an anti-capitalist discourse linked to the Redstockings' leftist ideology and their critique of the safety of products targeting women, alternative products could also be considered a way for women to get to know themselves better and challenge the menstrual stigma. In this regard using natural sponges, can also be considered a knowledge-practice as in Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell’s definition of knowledge as a concrete and embodied practice.

How were alternative products represented in the Danish media? Apart from critiques of the Redstockings proposal to make a tax benefit for menstrual products, there was only one example in my material of a young girl, who wrote to *B.T.* in 1978 on the occasion of UN International Children's Year who also found the high prices on menstrual products unfair, and argued that they should be free of charge.¹⁰⁹ Instead, there were several reports in the big national newspapers about how women could save money by using an alternative menstrual product. In 1979 there were reports in several newspapers of an article in the consumer-rights magazine *Tænk* (Think), advocating the use of natural sponges to soak up menstruation, instead of regular single-use products.¹¹⁰ As most of the reports on the *Tænk* article were based on a statement from the news agency *Ritzaus Bureau* (RB), the content of the articles was almost identical.

¹⁰⁸ Schmidt, “Alternativet Findes,” 12.

¹⁰⁹ Inge-Lise Melhede, “Uretfærdigt at Vi Skal Betale for Hygiejne-Bind,” *B.T.*, December 30, 1978, 15.

¹¹⁰ Ritzaus Bureau, “Natursvamp Kan Spare Danske Kvinder for Million Udgifter,” *Jyllands-Posten*, August 4, 1979, 2; Ritzaus Bureau, “Kvinder Kan Sparer Millioner – Brug Natursvamp Under Menstruation,” *Fyens Stiftstidende*, August 4, 1979, 3; Inge-Lise Melhede, “Brug en Natur-Svamp i stedet for Tamponerne,” *B.T.*, August 6, 1979, 9; ; Ritzaus Bureau, “Tænk: Brug Natursvampe i Menstruationsperioden,” *Information*, August 6, 1979, 5.

The statement from RB said, “when looking at the advertisements that cinemas and magazines show no one can doubt that this [menstruation] part of women’s biology is profitable.”¹¹¹ The article in *Tænk* also stated that there was much to be saved depending on where one bought menstrual products. Furthermore, it suggested that women could use a natural sponge, instead of single-use products, as sponges could last up to one year, and thus women could save “millions.”¹¹² While the articles based on RB’s statement primarily discussed how natural sponges were economically beneficial for women, one of the authors of the *Tænk* article, Maria Hegeler, told Melhede in an interview in *B.T.* from 1978, that natural sponges were also better for women’s health. Hegeler had written the article together with her father Sten Hegeler, a well-known Danish psychologist, sexologist, and writer.

According to Maria Hegeler, American research indicated that “tampons can outright destroy the vagina’s natural defense against different bacteria.”¹¹³ However, in her experience, this was not the case with natural sponges. Furthermore, Hegeler was aware that many women would probably find using natural sponges difficult because menstruation was still stigmatized and because they still did not know their bodies very well. Hegeler also stated that “it [menstruation] is a juicy deal for the manufacturers,” thus problematizing the manufacturers’ exploitation of women’s biology.¹¹⁴ Therefore, Hegeler was one of the first voices in the mainstream media to criticize the menstrual product industry as well as questioning the safety of tampons.¹¹⁵ This position was not yet commonly exhibited in the mainstream media. Thus, the critical position towards the menstrual-product industry formulated by Hegeler, was much more common among the Redstockings, as their advocacy for compensating women for the extra expense of menstrual products showed.

¹¹¹ RB, “Natursvamp Kan Spare,” 2.

¹¹² RB, “Natursvamp Kan Spare,” 2; RB, “Kvinder Kan Spare,” 3; RB, “Tænk,” 5.

¹¹³ Melhede, “Brug en Natur-Svamp,” 9.

¹¹⁴ Melhede, “Brug en Natur-Svamp,” 9.

¹¹⁵ Melhede, “Brug en Natur-Svamp,” 9.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the emergence of menstrual activism inside and outside of the Redstockings movement, the circumstances that made this possible, as well as how menstrual issues were represented in the national newspapers and the Redstockings movement. It became clear from section 5.1 that International Women's Year (IWY) and the Redstockings publication of 1975 *Kvinde, Kend Din Krop* (KKDK) were a key factor in creating more attention toward issues regarding women's bodies, and health. Together these events fostered a greater interest in women's bodies and health and the spread of the practice and ideas of self-help. The broader circulation of self-help was also a result of the Redstockings movement spreading nationwide, which facilitated an increased interest in the topics of menstruation, women's bodies and health both in the Redstockings Movement and in Danish newspapers.

Within the context of IWY the Redstockings and a few other people, like writer Bente Clod and *B.T.* journalist and writer Inge-Lise Melhede began to challenge the menstrual stigma and stereotypes about menstruating women, by advocating for more openness regarding menstruation, as demonstrated in section 5.2. The analysis showed that there were many overlaps between Clod, Melhede, and the Redstockings in their menstrual activism, such as a critique of menstrual product companies for reproducing the menstrual stigma, advocacy for more openness, and rejecting the norm of hiding menstruation. In this way, they challenge the negative discourse about menstruation, which also meant that they sometimes diminished menstrual discomforts out of fear of confirming negative stereotypes about women. Furthermore, at the end of the 1970s some Redstockings started to develop a new discourse of menstruation that presented menstruation as a positive addition for women, and not as something that subtracted from women's value. I return to this aspect in Chapter 6.

Apart from challenging the menstrual stigma, the Redstockings challenged the safety and the economic costs for women of menstrual products, both approached through their radical

and leftist ideology. (section 5.2 and 5.3) The Redstockings especially critiqued menstrual product companies and the state for capitalizing on women's bodily functions, which was why they proposed that women should be compensated for their extra expenses either with a tax benefit for menstrual products or by making the latter free of charge. While the Redstockings advocated for a politics of difference by recognizing the differences between men and women, the few reactions to their proposals deemed them unfair and instead advocated for equal treatment through a politics of universal dignity. Although a Redstocking was the first to make such a proposal, it did not receive many reactions in the mainstream media.

Lastly, the Redstockings also proposed the use of alternative menstrual products, such as natural sponges, as a solution to the economic issues of menstruation and the lack of safe products. This proposal for alternative menstrual products is also taken up by consumer rights advocates in the Danish media. This foreshadowed the upcoming more individualized approach to menstruation: rather than challenging structural or cultural issues, such as the menstrual stigma or companies profiting from women's bodies, the issue became an individual choice between industrial or alternative menstrual products.

6 FROM ACTIVIST TO CONSCIOUS CONSUMER (1980-1985)

This chapter explores the further development of menstrual activism and representations and discourses of menstruation in the Redstockings movement and the national newspapers from 1980 to 1985. In particular, I examine the impact of the debate about Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and the outbreak of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) on the representations of women's bodies, health, and menstruation. Thus, I also explore the increasing focus on menstrual products, as well as the Redstockings movement's development towards a more individualized and consumer-oriented approach to menstruation, women's bodies, and health.

In section 6.1 I examine the changing approach to the economic issues of menstruation in Danish newspapers and the Redstockings movement, drawing on Charles Taylor's conceptualization of the politics of recognition. In section 6.2, I explore the impact of debates regarding PMS on the representation and discourse of menstruation, women's bodies, and health. This section focuses on two cases: the critique of an advertising campaign for a PMS treatment and the use of PMS in a legal case. Drawing on Stuart Hall's definition of discourses, I explore how PMS was constructed within the Redstockings movement and in the newspapers.

In section 6.3, I examine how TSS was represented in Danish newspapers and in the Redstockings movement, what reactions TSS raised among the Redstockings, and how this might have impacted their increasing focus on menstrual products and consumer rights. The last section, 6.4 explore the further development of the Redstockings approach to menstruation, women's bodies, and health. This section emphasizes the Redstockings' development towards a focus on individualism and consumer rights, and a decline of their leftist ideology.

6.1 *Who Should Pay for Menstruation?*

When the Redstockings in the second half of the 1970s highlighted the economic aspects of menstruation there were only got a few reactions in the Danish newspapers, as Chapter 5

demonstrated. This changed at the beginning of the 1980s when the economic issues regarding menstruation were brought up again. This section explores the reactions to the economic aspects of menstruation in the Danish newspapers in the 1980s, and how the Redstockings' approach to this issue had developed in the 1980s.

In February 1980, the proposal that women should get a tax benefit to cover the expenses of menstrual products, including underwear, was raised again in *B.T.*¹ This time it was brought up by Doctor Eva Graungaard, who was not only a well-known doctor but also a fierce fighter for the weakest of society, especially children, and known for being part of the Danish anti-Nazi resistance groups during the Second World War.²

In her debate piece, Graungaard suggested that all women between the ages of 15 and 60 should get a tax benefit of 2400 DKK (322 Euro) a year, or 200 DKK (27 Euro) a month.³ She argued that “[i]t is completely unfair that the (...) necessary additional expenses that women have – but that men – as the tax administration presumably knows – do not have, cannot be deducted from one’s tax declaration.”⁴ Thus, Graungaard agreed with the Redstockings' earlier argument, that it was unfair that women had to pay so much to care for a bodily function they did not control. Graungaard ended her piece by underlining that her proposal was not a joke.⁵ That she thought it was necessary to add this comment, reiterated that menstruation was something people (men) did not have to take seriously. However, this time Graungaard’s proposal was taken seriously.

In the three days following Graungaard’s proposal, *B.T.* published six readers responses. While none of them fully agreed with her, some respondents were more sympathetic towards

¹ Eva Graungaard, “Kvinder Må Have Ekstra Fradrag for Menses-Udgifter,” *B.T.*, February 1, 1980, 13.

² “Mindeord: Eva Graungaard”, Ugeskrift for Læger, 2008, accessed 22/05, 2024, <https://ugeskriftet.dk/navne/mindeord/eva-graungaard>.

³ The prices are in today’s DKK to Euro exchange rates. However, 100 DKK in 1975 would amount to 337 DKK in 2023, which equals 45 Euro’s today. Statistik, “Prisberegner.”

⁴ Graungaard, “Kvinder Må Have,” 13.

⁵ Graungaard, “Kvinder Må Have,” 13.

her proposal than others. However, all six respondents, including those who found the proposal absurd, agreed that if women were to receive a tax benefit for menstrual products then men should receive one for shaving equipment.⁶ The logic was that men had to shave every day and that the expenses for shaving equipment and menstrual products were the same.⁷ One respondent also suggested that instead of giving women a tax benefit, the government should remove the value-added tax (VAT) on “hygiene products.”⁸

The reactions to Graungaard’s proposal reflect the two understandings of recognition identified by Charles Taylor, as explained in Chapter 3. Graungaard sought to get women’s biological differences recognized and accommodated with her proposal. Thus, her proposal can be seen as an example of Taylor’s ‘politics of difference’. This approach entails that although everyone is worthy of equal recognition, we also have unique identities that result in differences for which one should not be punished. In this case, because women menstruate, this difference in biology should be accommodated through a tax benefit, because it was unfair that women had to pay for this difference just because men did not menstruate. The respondents on the other side represented the ‘politics of universal dignity’, meaning that everyone is worthy of equal rights and thus should be treated the same.⁹ Therefore, if women received a tax benefit, so should men.

In the 1980s the economic aspect of menstruation was also raised by two girls, in June 1980 and in October 1982 respectively.¹⁰ Both proposals were printed in *B.T.*’s section *B.T. båndet* (B.T. tape) started in 1980, where young people could state their opinions or concerns

⁶ Birgit Haagenzen, “Bedre at Fritage Hygiejne for Moms,” *B.T.*, February, 2, 1980, 13; Birthe Hansen, “Kæmper For at Få Fradragene Fjernet,” *B.T.*, February, 2, 1980, 13; L. Sweitzlev, “Barberblade,” *B.T.*, February, 2, 1980, 13; Ruth Stender, “Det Går Lige Op Med Barbering,” *B.T.*, February, 2, 1980, 13; Frode Thomsen, “Man Kan Blive Vred,” *B.T.*, February, 2, 1980, 13; Per Thellefsen Dahl, “Du Har Ret, Graungaard,” *B.T.*, February, 4, 1980, 13.

⁷ Stender, “Det Går Lige Op,” 13; Hansen, “Kæmper For,” 13.

⁸ Haagenzen, “Bedre at Fritage,” 13.

⁹ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 41-44.

¹⁰ “Bind og Tamponer Burde Være Gratis” *B.T.*, June 14, 1980, 17; Lene Rem, “Hvem Tjener på Menstruation,” *B.T.*, October 28, 1982, 33.

and ask questions to the editor, social worker Lene Rem. By calling a telephone number the readers reached an answering machine where they could leave a message, although it was probably also possible to send letters.¹¹ But how did their proposals differ from Graungaard's proposal? Instead of proposing a tax benefit with which women still had to pay for menstrual products up-front, both girls proposed that menstrual products should be free of charge, like some Redstockings also proposed in the 1970s.¹² In their letters, the girls suggested that a certain number of free menstrual products should be made available at all pharmacies.¹³ Thus, like Graungaard and the Redstockings, the younger generation of women also ascribed to the 'politics of difference'.

The girl in 1982 further asked Rem: "who profits from us women between approximately 14 and 45 years when we are menstruating?"¹⁴ Rem answered that when they started *B.T. båndet* "we talked a lot about the unfair expense for women and profit for others – manufacturers, the merchants."¹⁵ However, their 'talk' did not change anything: instead of a subsidy for menstrual products there was only a sharp price competition between retailers, Rem wrote. Although it is unclear where this 'talk' took place, there were several articles among my source material, from 1979 and the early 1980s, that reported on price wars on menstrual products and up to 50% price differences in some cases.¹⁶ Rem continued encouraging her readers to share their opinions and proposals regarding menstrual expenses, asking if "pads and tampons would be

¹¹ Sarah Skarum, "Det Vilde Mærkeræs," *B.T.* (2005). <https://www.bt.dk/nyheder/det-vilde-maerkeraes>; Sisse Sejr-Nørgaard, "De Trofaste Ører Takker Af," *B.T.* (2010). <https://www.bt.dk/danmark/de-trofaste-oerer-takker-af>.

¹² See Chapter 5, .

¹³ "Bind og Tamponer Burde Være Gratis" *B.T.*, June 14, 1980, 17; Lene Rem, "Hvem Tjener på Menstruation," *B.T.*, October 28, 1982, 33.

¹⁴ Rem, "Hvem Tjener," 33.

¹⁵ Rem, "Hvem Tjener," 33.

¹⁶ "Prisforskel på 9.45," 6; Joli, "Priskrig," 7; Ritzaus Bureau, "Prisforskelle," *Information*, November 18, 1981, 12; Dith, "50 pct. sparet på 'månedens tilbud'," *Jyllands-Posten*, November 27, 1981, 13.

free of charge if it was men who used them?”¹⁷ Thus, Rem implicitly linked the economics of menstrual products to structural gender inequality.¹⁸

In the weeks following the entry from October 1982, several responses were printed in *B.T.*, although only a selection was printed due to the large number of responses.¹⁹ Most of the printed responses were from other girls who fully agreed that menstrual products should be free or that women should get a subsidy for menstrual products.²⁰ One girl also stated that if women ruled Denmark there would be a subsidy for menstrual products, “but it is men [that rule Denmark] and it is men who produce and sell menstrual products.”²¹ Thus, she pointed towards the impact of gendered power dynamics and capitalism on menstruation.

Similar to the responses to Graungaard’s proposal in 1980, the printed counter-reactions to making menstrual products free pointed out the unfairness of women and girls getting a benefit that men and boys did not.²² One example, a 55-year-old woman, also criticized girls for being “insane” and “spoiled,” stating that when she was young, “[m]y mother and I knitted hygiene pads of white cotton yarn, where you could insert cotton wool for the first days where the bleeding was heavier (...) and we paid it ourselves.”²³

The reactions to the proposals in the 1980s to compensate women for the involuntary expense of menstrual products showed that there seemed to be both a gendered and generational difference in the reactions, and thus between those who ascribed to the ‘politics of difference’ or to the ‘politics of universal dignity’.²⁴ The source material showed, that where men and boys,

¹⁷ Rem, “Hvem Tjener,” 33.

¹⁸ Rem’s final question was very similar to the content of Gloria Steinem’s famous essay “If Men Could Menstruate” from 1978. It was originally printed in the US *Ms. Magazine*, but was translated to Danish and reprinted in *Kvinder* no. 45 from 1982, making it possible that Rem had read the essay. (Steinem, “If Men Could Menstruate.”; Steinem, “Hvis Mænd Kunne Menstruere,” *Kvinder* 45, August/September 1982, 12.)

¹⁹ Lene Rem, “Pigerne: Vi Vil Ha Fri Bind og Gratis Tamponer,” *B.T.*, November 2, 1982, 18.

²⁰ Rem, “Pigerne,” 18; Pia, “Drenge Fri For Menses-Besvær,” *B.T.*, November 22, 1982, 27.

²¹ Rem, “Pigerne,” 18.

²² “Hvem Betaler Barbergrejer?,” *B.T.*, November 4, 1982, 3; Karin Christensen, “55-Årig: I Er Skøre og Forkælede,” *B.T.*, November 2, 1982, 18.

²³ Christensen, “55-Årig,” 18.

²⁴ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 41-44.

as well as the older generation of women, seemed to ascribe to the latter standpoint, girls and young women tended to ascribe to the former. Although Graungaard was an exception to this pattern, I consider the Redstockings to belong to the younger generation of women, which is why the difference between what politics of recognition one ascribed to can still be considered generational.

The difference between Graungaard and the girls' solutions to the economic issue regarding menstruation could stem from differences in income. As girls usually do not have a large amount of money, menstrual products were likely a much larger expense for them than for adult women. Although none of the entries from the 1980s explicitly highlighted this as an issue, one girl responded in 1982 that "instead you skimp on the pads" even if that was unhygienic, indicating that she did not have enough money to change regularly. Furthermore, the lack of money was the reason behind an identical proposal in December 1978 from a 13-year-old girl.²⁵

While the Redstockings raised the economic issue of menstruation in the late 1970s, how did they approach it in the 1980s? What was interesting in the source material from 1980 to 1985 was the Redstockings' lack of mobilization around the economic side of menstruation. Even though the Redstockings were the first in Denmark to suggest that women should receive a tax benefit for menstrual products (Chapter 5), I only found one entry in *Kvinder* from the 1980s about a tax benefit for menstrual products.²⁶ Despite the fact that the Redstockings had frequently critiqued the menstrual product companies for profiting from women's biology, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, they did not continue to mobilize around countering this issue in the 1980s. Whether the reason for their change of interest can be found in the Redstockings'

²⁵ Melhede, "Uretfærdigt," 15.

²⁶ Anne B., "Om Fradrag af Menstruationsudgifter," *Kvinder* 40, October/November 1981, 24.

change in life circumstances and age or in the movement's slow decline during the 1980s or both is hard to say without further research.²⁷

While the Redstockings in the 1970s had proposed both economic compensation and alternative products as a solution for women's menstrual expenses, in the 1980s they focused more on alternative menstrual products. Instead of fighting for structural changes, the Redstockings began to concentrate more on individual solutions. In the 1983 edition of *Kvinde Kend Din Krop* (KKDK), the authors wrote: "Many women and especially the women's movement have reacted [to the expenses of menstrual products] by trying to find reusable products that are cheaper and easier to fit in one's bag."²⁸

The Redstockings growing attention to alternative products was also present in KKDK, which in the 1983 edition included a separate section on different menstrual products, which the 1975 edition did not. While the 1983 KKDK did acknowledge that women can not "freely choose what method we will use," they related this to products' various side effects and not to women's economic differences. However, economic issues could also be a reason why women could not freely choose what menstrual product to use, as the Redstockings had highlighted in the 1970s (Chapter 5). Thus, there seemed to be a decline in the Redstockings leftist perspective on economic issues related to menstruation, as well as in their collective approach in favor of a more individualized approach. I return to this point in section 6.4. Instead, this section has shown how the approach to economic issues of menstruation was both generational and gendered, as well as how this topic had moved from the Redstockings to the media.

6.2 An Unreliable, Unbalanced, and Dangerous Woman

During the 1980s topics related to the Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) appeared in the Danish newspapers. This section focuses on two instances that raised issues related to PMS,

²⁷ Dahlerup argued that the interest and commitment to the Redstockings movement changed because of its members' change in life circumstances. Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 2, 381-82.

²⁸ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 2 ed., ed. Hanne Fokdal et al. (Denmark: Tiderne Skifter 1983), 114.

women's health, and menstruation: namely the advertisement campaign for a medication against PMS, and the use of PMS in a legal case, asking how the Redstockings and the Danish newspapers approached these issues.

6.2.1 Ferrosan's Advertising Campaign

In 1979, the medical company Ferrosan launched an advertisement campaign for the hormone medication Terolut for treating Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS). The medication had been on the market for 10 years but was now relaunched as a treatment for PMS.²⁹ According to medical sociologist Sally King, menstrual-related symptoms have been treated for at least the past 3800 years, although the first formal medical description of premenstrual symptoms was from 1931, by US gynecologist Robert T. Frank.³⁰ Frank used the term Premenstrual Tension (PMT), which was still the most common in the Danish newspapers in the late 1970s, although British doctors Katharina Dalton and Raymond Greene coined the term PMS in 1953.³¹

The advertising material that relaunched Terolut, which was sent to all Danish General Practitioners, spurred a sharp critical reaction from eight female doctors and gynecologists in December 1979.³² Some of the doctors, in particular Jytte Willadsen and Birgit Petersson, were part of the Redstockings movement.³³ Their original complaint was published in the Danish medical journal *Ugeskrift for Læger* (Weekly Journal for Doctors) but was taken up by most Danish newspapers, from left to right. Their complaint resulted in a large media coverage about PMS and the medicalization of women.

²⁹ Inge-Lise Melhede, "Lægeprotest: Medicinfirma Slår Plat På Menstruation," *B.T.*, February 13, 1980, 25.

³⁰ King, "Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and the Myth of the Irrational Female " 287-89.

³¹ King, "Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and the Myth of the Irrational Female " 289-90.

³² From now on I just refer to them with the 'eight doctors'.

³³ Karin Garde, "Jytte Willadsen," in *Danks Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (lex.dk, 2023). https://kvindebiografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Jytte_Willadsen; Willadsen, "Birgit Petersson ".

The main point of critique from the eight doctors was that the Terolut advertisement was sexist and unscientific. Especially two statements, which were cited in both *B.T.* and *Information*'s articles, were critiqued for being unscientific: (1) that "approx. 40% of all women will require treatment for shorter or longer periods" and (2) that "[r]esearch shows that more than 50% of criminal actions by women were committed in the week before menstruation."³⁴ The doctors argued that the Terolut advertisement reproduced negative stereotypes about women, where "[w]omen cannot be trusted, as you never know where they stand," due to their biology.³⁵ Furthermore, they also argued against women being medicalized by men because of menstruation, pregnancy, or menopause.³⁶ In this way, the female doctors challenged what Emily Martin has termed pathologizing medical ideas about women's bodies.³⁷ Furthermore, Inge Lunde Nielsen, one of the eight doctors, argued in *B.T.* that there was no evidence for PMS being caused by hormonal imbalances. But with the new advertisement material, Nielsen stated that "we [the eight doctors] are afraid that the country's doctors are tempted to prescribe women this hormone when they are being bombarded with such advertising material."³⁸

The critique from the female doctors was backed up by other medical professionals in 1980, such as Doctor and Professor John Philip in *Berlingske Tidende*, who opposed the claim that women suffering from PMS supposedly were more criminal.³⁹ The Danish Medical Industry's Information Committee also supported the critique. In *Information* its member Jørgen Ulrich rejected the claim that 40% of women needed treatment and hormone medication as a first choice to treat menstrual discomfort.⁴⁰ In March 1980 the case was also taken up by

³⁴ Søren Fisher, "Kvindelige Læger Raser over Firma: Bevis, Vi Er Kriminelle før Menses," *B.T.*, December 4, 1979, 11; "Protester Mod Medicinalfirmas Reklamer for Nyt Kønshormon," *Information*, December 10, 1979, 8.

³⁵ Fisher, "Kvindelige Læger," 11; "Protester Mod," 8.

³⁶ Fisher, "Kvindelige Læger," 11; "Protester Mod," 8.

³⁷ Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, 27-53.

³⁸ Melhede, "Lægeprotest," 25.

³⁹ Helle Bygum Knudsen, "Minusdage Kan Ikke Altid Gøres til Plusdage," *Berlingske Tidende*, March 2, 1980, 3 (sec. 2)

⁴⁰ Hanne Dam, "Ikke Rimeligt at Anbefale Terolut som Rutinemulighed," *Information*, February 20, 1980, 5; See also the article from the same day.

the Danish Health Authority, who wanted to investigate whether Ferrosan's advertisement had followed the regulation for medical advertising.⁴¹ The case received so much attention that it was also taken up in a new series of television programs about health and illnesses on the public broadcasting channel *Danmarks Radio* (Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR) in February 1980, which Ferrosan in vain had tried to stop.⁴² Most of the selected newspapers that covered the case focused on the critique of Ferrosan. The journalists Inge-Lise Melhede from *B.T.* and Hanne Dam from *Information* explicitly critiqued Ferrosan, agreeing that it was problematic to pathologize women because of their menstrual cycle.⁴³

Ferrosan completely rejected the criticism. In December 1979, *B.T.* reported that to the charges of sexism, Ferrosan had responded in *Ugeskrift for Læger* that "the informational material about PMS and the possible treatment with the new medication is exclusively developed by female employees."⁴⁴ In another article in *B.T.* from February 1980, the CEO of Ferrosan Jørgen Eismark repeated that their advertisements were not sexist. When asked if 40% of women needed treatment, he stated: "We have never said this. We have only said that 40% have symptoms. But this does not mean that they all have to be treated."⁴⁵

In light of the overlap between the female doctors who initially raised the critique and the Redstockings movement, how was the case represented within the movement? Despite the large media coverage of the critique of Ferrosan, the Redstockings paid remarkably little attention to the case in their publications, making it hard to assess the movement's view. There was only one article about the case in *Kvinder* no. 30 from February/March 1980, written by *Kvinder*'s doctors group, consisting of four female doctors, one of them being Birgit Petersson, who were

⁴¹ Berlingske Tidende, 06/03/1980, p. 5 (1. sektion, 6 pdf)

⁴² Harald Holder, "Medicinfirma Protesterer mod Indslag om Sygdom," *Berlingske Tidende*, February, 20, 1980, 16 (sec. 2); Michael Blædel, "Ligevægt Her og Der," *Berlingske Tidende*, February 21, 1980, 16 (sec. 2); Hanne Dam, "Ferrosons Forsøg På at Bremse Tv-Udsendelse om Terolut Mislykkedes," *Information*, February 20, 1980, 5.

⁴³ Melhede, "Lægeprotest," 25; Hanne Dam, "Ferrosans Reklamemetoder Bør Få Konsekvenser," *Information*, February 18, 1980, 3; Hanne Dam, "Kvindehormoner," *Information*, February 21, 1980, 1.

⁴⁴ Fisher, "Kvindelige Læger," 11.

⁴⁵ Melhede, "Lægeprotest," 25

responsible for the magazine's doctors column.⁴⁶ This Redstockings' minimal covering might stem from the large coverage in the mainstream media.

The article in *Kvinder* echoed the critique by the eight doctors but also related the case to the Danish publishing of two English books about PMS. The doctors group critiqued the books and Ferrosan for forcing women to submit to a society that valued productivity and profit and thus did not fit women's hormonal cycle, which reflected the Redstockings leftist ideology.⁴⁷ Although the case with Ferrosan was only covered once in the Redstockings publication, it spurred a debate within the Redstockings movement about how to view PMS.

In the article in *Kvinder* no. 30 about Ferrosan, the doctors group criticized that PMS was used to regulate women's hormones so that women were better adapted to "industrial machines and the other demands our stressed society proposes."⁴⁸ In a response to a critique from a reader, the doctors group highlighted that the problem was not women's sensitive periods or hormonal changes, but that these were used to medicalize and pathologize women. Therefore, they argued that it was yet another way to "oppress us once again."⁴⁹ Furthermore, the doctor's group did not believe that hormonal changes caused PMS. Instead, the demands of modern society caused it, as women "suppress some emotions within ourselves in order to cope with the pressure [of society]". Emotions were "harmful in the eye of society"⁵⁰ they argued, which was why women felt ashamed of them. Thus, *Kvinder's* doctors group argued that more room for emotions might be exactly what society needed if it were to change. To be emotional or sensitive was not an illness, they argued, therefore women should challenge this view.⁵¹

In this way, the doctors groups resembled the representation of women's health in the 1975 KKDK as linked to societal norms and capitalism (Chapter 5). Although the doctors group

⁴⁶ Willadsen, "Birtig Petersson ".

⁴⁷ Lægegruppen, "Ny Måde at Undertrykke Kvinder På," *Kvinder* 30, February/March 1980, 16-17.

⁴⁸ Lægegruppen, "Ny Måde," 17.

⁴⁹ Lægegruppen, "Lægegruppen Svarer," *Kvinder* 30, February/March 1980. 14.

⁵⁰ Lægegruppen, "Lægegruppen," 14.

⁵¹ Lægegruppen, "Lægegruppen," 14.

in *Kvinder* did recognize that women had “sensitive periods”, they downplayed the impact of how this affected some women, as well as the discomfort some women experiences. A similar approach to menstruation was demonstrated earlier by some Redstockings (Chapter 5), when women were warned against using their menstrual discomforts as an excuse. The reason behind this warning was the same reason why the doctors group and those who agreed with them downplayed menstrual discomfort, namely the fear of reproducing negative stereotypes about menstruating women, such as being a less capable workers. In this way the doctors group represented Dahlerup’s description of how some Redstockings responded to PMS, namely “that women do not have any notable discomfort and do not feel different before, during, and between menstruations. To claim otherwise was to pathologize women.”⁵²

However, not all women in the Redstockings movement agreed with the doctors group’s view of PMS as mainly a result of the current society and medical science’s pathologization of women. Instead, several readers in *Kvinder* highlighted that PMS was also related to women’s hormonal balance. In *Kvinder* no. 30, reader Kirsten argued that PMS was hormonally conditioned based on her own experience.⁵³ In *Kvinder* no. 33 from 1980, reader Mette Hilden wrote that the monthly sensitivity some women experienced was caused by hormones, but that the negative expression of this sensitivity was caused by societal problems. In her words, “there is a mutual connection between PMS, hormones, and society.”⁵⁴ Therefore, she criticized the doctor’s group for not taking women’s menstrual issues seriously, reflecting a similar critique raised by some Redstockings in the 1970s regarding menstruation, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. Hilden also argued that it was a woman's own duty to “assess whether she wants to be treated because it [PMS] is too heavy a burden for her – or if she wants to live with it.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, Hilden also proposed to see women’s sensitive periods as a positive asset, which could “have a

⁵² Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 523.

⁵³ Kirsten, “Kirsten Svarer,” *Kvinder* 30, February/March 1980, 15 + 18.

⁵⁴ Mette Hilden, “PMS, Hormoner og Samfund,” *Kvinder* 33, August/September 1980, 12.

⁵⁵ Hilden, “PMS,” 12.

cleansing effect; you get a breath of fresh air, see some injustices clearer, and perhaps (hopefully) make one's surroundings aware of them.”⁵⁶

According to Dahlerup there were two standpoints regarding PMS in the Redstockings movement. The first claimed that PMS was highly exaggerated and pathologizing to women, as demonstrated above, while the second argued that the medical industry's profit from PMS and the viewpoint one “both served the purpose of adapting women to the labor markets requirement – to make women more like the normal labor force = men.”⁵⁷ However, based on my analysis I argue that the main difference between the Redstockings' two standpoints lay in the assumed origin of PMS, namely if PMS was an actual biological condition or not. The Redstockings who ascribed to the second view emphasized the importance of acknowledging women's experiences, while at the same time agreeing with the first standpoint's critiques of how society pathologized women

6.2.2 PMS and Criminal Actions

The case with Ferrosan was not the first nor the last time menstruation and PMS were linked to crime. In Chapter 4, I described how *B.T.* doctor Fangel Poulsen stated that women were more likely to commit crime in their premenstrual phase, referencing a French study. Therefore, in this section, I explore the reactions in Danish newspapers to the representations of women as murderous due to their menstrual cycle, and how the Redstockings might have impacted these representations

During the 1980s there were several reports on PMS being used in legal cases. The earliest case in Denmark in my newspaper material was from *B.T.* in June 1979, where a woman confessed to having made 12 pyromaniac fires. The article stated that her “desire to commit arson always manifested itself around the menstruation period.”⁵⁸ In 1981, *Berlingske Tidende*

⁵⁶ Hilden, “PMS,” 12.

⁵⁷ Dahlerup, *Rødstrømperne*, 1, 523.

⁵⁸ Susan Galslev, “Vores Urinstinkter Er Forrådt i Mandssamfundet,” *B.T.*, July 20, 1979, 8.

reported two cases from England, where “two women [...] have received a suspended sentence for murder and attempted murder committed while in a mentally unstable condition caused by premenstrual tension.”⁵⁹

The first case in Denmark where a defense attorney used PMS as an argument for clearing his client against charges of murder was reported in *B.T.* in the fall of 1984. The accused, a woman in her mid-30s, had killed her partner in December 1983.⁶⁰ According to the defense attorney, Morten Wagner, the woman did not have any motive for the murder and had never committed a crime before. This made him wonder if she might suffer from “the mental illness that only appears among a few women in the days before their menstruation.”⁶¹ Although *B.T.* did not use the term PMS, there is no doubt this was what Wagner meant, and the term was used in other newspaper reports of the case.⁶² Wagner had the woman tested by psychiatrist W. Gottlieb Petersen, who concluded that she definitely suffered from PMS, and allegedly the woman got her menstruation the day after the murder.⁶³ The trial ended on February 21, 1985, with the woman being sentenced to four years in prison. Although she was not acquitted, her penalty was reduced as the court found that she was temporarily insane at the time of the crime. Even though the presiding judge Johannes Jørgensen did not disclose to the newspapers whether PMS was part of the reasons for the verdict, the newspapers did not report any other circumstances that could support the claim of temporary insanity.⁶⁴ Thus, PMS was likely part of the reason for her reduced penalty.

⁵⁹ Nils Eric Boesgaard, “Hver 4. Uge Er Denne Kvide Farlig,” *Berlingske Tidende*, November 13, 1981, 1 (sec. 2); Henning Ziebe, “Tilfælde fra Minus-Dagenes Overdrev,” *Berlingske Tidende*, November 13, 1981, 1 (sec. 2).

⁶⁰ “Kræves Frikendt for Drab På Grund af Menstruation,” *Berlingske Tidende*, February 21, 1985, 9; Erik Sandager, “Giftmorderske Kræves Frikendt: Havde Menses,” *B.T.*, September 14, 1984, 4.

⁶¹ Sandager, “Giftmorderske,” 4.

⁶² See for example: Ole Kjær, “Forsvar: Kvinde Led af Præmenstruelt Syndrom Under Drab,” *Jyllands-Posten*, February 21, 1985, 3.

⁶³ “Kræves Frikendt,” 9; Kjær, “Forsvar,” 3; Erik Sandager, “Vil Frifindes for Gift-Mord: Jeg Skulle Have Menses,” *B.T.*, February 21, 1985, 26.

⁶⁴ “Dømt for Drab – Retten Afviste Menses-Syndrom,” *Berlingske Tidende*, February 22, 1985, 5; Erik Sandager, “Præmenstruel Gift-Morder Fik Kun 4 Års Fængsel,” *B.T.*, February 22, 1985, 6; Ole Kjær, “Kvinde Dømt for Drab Trods Forestående Menstruation,” *Jyllands-Posten*, February 22, 1985, 12; Egon Balsby, “Danmark Rundt – Bulletin fra Landsdelene,” *Weekendavisen*, March 1, 1985, 15.

This case was covered extensively by both the big national newspapers and local and smaller national newspapers.⁶⁵ However, different from the case of Ferrosan where menstruation and PMS were also linked to crime, this trial triggered a large amount of responses from readers. Especially in *B.T.* a debate among readers erupted after one reader, Margit Bertelsen, in September 1984 proposed that doctors “better figure out why men kill their wives.”⁶⁶ Bertelsen argued that it was “grotesque that women’s menses should be an excuse for murder”, continuing that “men love to medicalize women. A natural thing like menses has to be considered an illness now.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, she provocatively wondered if “something is wrong with men’s sex hormones since they are so violent.”⁶⁸

Some readers agreed with Bertelsen’s critique of the medicalization and devaluation of women due to their biology. One reader, Annelise Hansen, worried that “it can result in a huge backlash against the women’s movement” if the defense attorney succeeded in getting the accused woman acquitted, especially “when there is then proof that women in some periods are unreliable.”⁶⁹ The response from one male reader in *B.T.*⁷⁰ and a letter from a male reader, Helmut Toftdahl, in *Jyllands-Posten*⁷¹ expressed the same concerns. Thus, Bertelsen and her supporters reflected the same view on PMS as the eight female doctors who critique Ferrosan and some Redstockings, like *Kvinder*’s doctors group. Therefore, the resistance towards seeing women’s biological functions as pathological seemed to have become more common in Danish newspapers.

Bertelsen’s letter also received some negative reactions. In one example, a woman called Sonia Gudsø critiqued Bertelsen for downplaying menstrual discomforts, as Gudsø herself

⁶⁵ For local and small newspapers see for example: “Afviste Krav Om Frifindelse,” *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, February 22, 1985, 2; “Menses Betød Lavere Straf til Morder,” *Bornholms Tidende*, February 22, 1985, 1; Erik Münster, “Mod i Minus-Dagene,” *Fyens Stiftstidende*, March 10, 1985, 63.

⁶⁶ Margit Bertelsen, “Find Hellere Ud af Hvorfor Mænd Slår Deres Koner Ihjel,” *B.T.*, September 17, 1984, 12.

⁶⁷ Bertelsen, “Find Hellere,” 12.

⁶⁸ Bertelsen, “Find Hellere,” 12.

⁶⁹ Annelise Hansen, “Uvidenskabeligt Vrøvl at Kalde Menses Sygdom,” *B.T.*, September 20, 1984, 21.

⁷⁰ Andr. Nissum, “Menses Ikke Tabu,” *B.T.*, September 28, 1984, 22.

⁷¹ Helmut Toftdahl, “Kvinder Er også Mennesker,” *Jyllands-Posten*, September 30, 1984, 7 (sec. 2)

suffered from severe mood swings, depression, and even suicide attempts before her menstruation.⁷² Gudsø's letter triggered a response from another female reader, Bente Sørensen, who accused Gudsø of using PMS as an excuse for her "tantrums."⁷³ Sørensen continued stating that if "you [Gudsø] believe the claim that any outburst of anger is caused by hormonal imbalances, then you participate in reproducing the opinion that women are unreliable."⁷⁴ A male reader called Andr. Nisum, also critiqued the women who denied that some women experience severe menstrual discomfort, as this "harmed the minority of women who really suffer."⁷⁵ Furthermore, Nisum wondered: "would it not be more reasonable to advocate for women's right to be women – and be entitled to bad days."⁷⁶

While the murder trial was not mentioned in any of the Redstockings material, the examples above resemble the two views of PMS existing in the Redstockings movement discussed in section 6.2.1. However, the different views on PMS presented in the Danish newspapers did not include the societal and capitalist critique that was also part of the Redstockings view. Thus, while it seems that part of the Redstockings viewpoints have been adopted more broadly, resulting in two discourses on PMS, their radical and leftist ideology had not been adopted.

6.3 *The Dangerous Tampon*

As mentioned in section 6.1. the 1980s saw a larger attention towards menstrual products, at least among the Redstockings. This might partly have been due to the outbreak of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). This section will examine how TSS was represented in Danish newspapers and in the Redstockings movement, and what type of reactions it spurred among the Redstockings. During the early 1980s the first reports on the outbreak of TSS in the US,

⁷² Hansen, "Uvidenskabeligt," 21.

⁷³ Bente Sørensen, "Dårlig Forklaring," *B.T.*, September 25, 1984, 18.

⁷⁴ Sørensen, "Dårlig," 18.

⁷⁵ Nisum, "Menses," 22.

⁷⁶ Nisum, "Menses," 22.

which received the nickname ‘the tampon disease’, reached Denmark. The disease was first described in 1978 in the US. In 1980 *Berlingske Tidende* reported that an American study showed that there might be a connection between tampons and TSS and that it mainly affected women under 30 years.⁷⁷ According to US historian Sharra L. Vostral TSS was the third biggest news story in the US in 1980, because “the illness seemed salacious; journalist could not easily write accurate articles without discussing women’s bodies and reproductive processes, with vaginas implicated all around.”⁷⁸ Although the Danish context might be different from the US, TSS was also covered extensively in Denmark.

While not all cases of TSS were linked to tampons, the majority of people who were diagnosed were menstruating women who used tampons. It turned out that super-absorbent tampons were the primary cause of the outbreak of TSS in the 1980s, due to the manufacturers of super-absorbent tampons claim that women did not need to change them as often. This type of tampon created the perfect environment for some types of the bacteria staphylococcus or streptococcus, which occur naturally in the body, to develop a toxin that then caused the disease. However, TSS can also develop in post-surgery wounds, for example.⁷⁹ In the US, the breakout of TSS in the early 1980s resulted in some super-absorbent tampons brands being withdrawn from the market (such as Rely by the company Procter & Gamble) warnings on the packages, as well as recommendations to change frequently and not use tampons during the night.⁸⁰

In February 1982, the first case of TSS was reported in Denmark. However, this case was not due to the use of tampons but occurred in a post-breast-surgery wound where the bandage had been too tight, thus creating the environment for TSS to develop.⁸¹ In 1983 several

⁷⁷ Jens J. Kjærgaard, "Giftige Tamponer," *Berlingske Tidende*, August 17, 1980, 8 (sec. 2)

⁷⁸ Vostral, *Toxic Shock*, 78.

⁷⁹ Adam Ross and Hugh W. Shoff, "Toxic Shock Syndrome " *StatPearls* (2023).

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK459345/>; Sharra L. Vostral, "Toxic Shock Syndrome, Tampons and Laboratory Standart-Stetting " *CMAJ* 189, no. 20 (2017), <https://doi.org/0.1503/cmaj.161479>.

⁸⁰ Vostral, *Toxic Shock*, 78; Vostral, "Toxic Shock Syndrome."

⁸¹ Inge-Lise Melhede, "Dansk Pige Døden Nær, da Hun Ville Have Nye Bryster," *B.T.*, February 6. 1981, 11; "Første Tilfælde af Tampon-Syge Er Nu Konstateret i Danmark," *Jyllands-Posten*, February 6, 1981, 11; Jens J.

newspapers reported that there had only been 12 cases of TSS in Denmark until then, none of them deadly. They also reported that in the US more than 2000 cases had been reported, and at least 5% with a deadly outcome.⁸² Despite the limited number of cases of TSS in Denmark, it got a lot of media coverage from 1980 to 1983, mainly following the development in Denmark and the US, with occasional reports on cases in Sweden as well.⁸³

Radio and television programs also reported about TSS.⁸⁴ One of the earliest articles in my newspaper material was a complaint from a man, Ole Salting, about a consumer radio program in 1980 on the breakout of TSS in the US. He found it disturbing, even ‘disgusting’, to talk about this especially in the morning during his breakfast, indicating that the program made him throw up.⁸⁵ While the article demonstrated that it had become more acceptable to discuss menstruation in the media, it also showed that the menstrual stigma was still alive as some found menstruation too disturbing to talk about publicly.

Despite the connections between TSS and tampons, there was not much debate in my newspaper material about the safety of menstrual products. However, in 1981 the Danish Environmental Protection Agency started an investigation of the material used in tampons with the possible outcome of prohibiting synthetic fibers and perfume, while the Danish labeling

Kjærgaard, "Den Farlige 'Tampon-Syge' Er i Danmark," *Berlingske Tidende*, February 9, 1981, 3; Birgit Petersson, "Tampon-Sygen – Nu også i Danmark," *Information*, February 17, 1981, 4.

⁸² Ritzaus Bureau, "Yderligere Tre Ramt af Tamponsyge," *Information*, October 20, 1983, 3; Ritzaus Bureau, "Tampon-Sygen Rammer Stadig Danske Kvinder," *Jyllands-Posten*, October 20, 1983, 4; "Værd at Vide: 12 Tamponsyge," *B.T.*, October 20, 1983, 22.

⁸³ See for example: "Ringe Risiko ved Tamponer," *Jyllands-Posten*, December 19, 1980, 3; "Kvinder Advares Mod Ny Sygdom," *Jyllands-Posten*, February 3, 1981, 2; "Tamponer Mistænkes for at Medføre," *Berlingske Tidende*, February 3, 1981, 3; Birgit Petersson, "Tampon-Sygen – Nu også i Danmark," *Information* February 17, 1981, 4.

⁸⁴ "Radioprogram," *Berlingske Tidende*, February 18, 1981, 13 (sec. 2); "Dansk TV i Dag," *Jyllands-Posten*, June 4, 1981, 39; Bodil Steensen-Leth, "TV-Mening," *Jyllands-Posten*, June 5, 1981, 39; Kirsten Sørrig, "Fald i Salget af Tamponer After TV-Program," *Berlingske Tidende*, August 4, 1981, 3; Ole Salting, "Jeg Vil Gerne Have Min Morgenmad i Fred og Ro for 'Vi Bruger Osse'," *B.T.*, December 9, 1980, 8.

⁸⁵ Salting, "Jeg Vil Gerne," 8.

agency started working on a new label for tampon packages.⁸⁶ The critique and media reports on TSS resulted in declining sales of tampons, *Berlingske Tidende* reported in August 1981.⁸⁷

Although the Danish headlines sometimes sounded quite alarming, using words such as ‘poisonous’, ‘dangerous’, and ‘disease’ most newspapers did not aim to instill fear of the disease in their readers.⁸⁸ The news discourse on TSS in my material usually reassured readers that although the disease was dangerous, it was very rare. As long as one changed tampons often, and considered using pads during the night, there was no reason to avoid tampons.⁸⁹ Only women who had already had TSS or had just given birth were advised against using tampons.⁹⁰

While there were few mentions of TSS in the Redstockings material, the following explores how the Redstockings movement reacted its outbreak. In 1981 *Kvinder* reported about TSS a few times. The first time was in *Kvinder* no. 36 from February/March, which published three articles about diseases caused by menstrual or contraceptive products that only women used written by doctors Birgit Petersson and Ellen Ryg Jensen.

Although *Kvinder*’s coverage included much of the same information as the articles about TSS in the mainstream media, additionally it critiqued the lack of consumer safety and encouraged their readers to “demand that all products get labeled – including tampons.”⁹¹ At that time there was no labeling on tampons or other menstrual products that informed the users about the materials used in these products. Petersson stated that TSS seemed to be caused by the use of synthetic fibers instead of cotton due to “price-based reasons.”⁹² Therefore, Petersson

⁸⁶ Sørrig, “Fald i Salget,” 3; “Bedre Vejledning om Tamponer,” *Jyllands-Posten*, June 22, 1981, 9; Ritzaus Bureau, “Nye Krav til Hygiejnebind,” *Information*, June 18, 1982, 3; “Tamponer Skal Kontrolleres,” *Berlingske Tidende*, June 18, 1982, 2; “Vil Drøfte Advarsel Mod Tamponer,” *Berlingske Tidende*, December 31, 1982, 3.

⁸⁷ Sørrig, “Fald i Salget,” 3.

⁸⁸ Kjærgaard, “Giftige Tamponer,” 8 (sec. 2); Reuter, “Tamponbrugere i USA Advares Mod Giftchok,” *Jyllandsposten*, June 23, 1982, 8; Kjærgaard, “Den Farlige,” 3; Fangel Poulsen, “Ny Sygdom Som Følge af Menstruations-Tampon,” *B.T.* December 30, 1980, 18.

⁸⁹ “Ringe Risiko Ved Tamponer,” *Jyllands-Posten*, December 19, 1980, 3; Poulsen, “Ny Sygdom,” 8; “Kvinder Advares,” 2; “Tamponer Mistænkes,” 3.

⁹⁰ Ritzaus Bureau/Reuters, “Teenage-Piger Bør Ikke Bruge Tamponer,” *Information*, June 5, 1982, 14.

⁹¹ Birgit Petersson, “Farlige Tamponer,” *Kvinder* 36, February/March 1981, 22.

⁹² Petersson, “Farlige Tamponer,” 22.

ended her article with the advice: “[A]void using those [tampons] with synthetic materials in them,”⁹³ as well as an encouragement to contact producers and ask what materials their tampons were made of. However, although this might seem good advice, it must have been hard to follow when tampon packages lacked proper labelling.

The article about tampons and TSS was followed by another two articles that critiqued the materials used in panty liners and in spermicidal cream for a diaphragm. In these articles, doctors Jensen and Petersson also discussed the lack of proper product information on these products. Here the major critique was focused on the use of perfume and other allergenic substances.⁹⁴ They argued that especially because these products were used in such close contact with the body, they should be properly labeled.⁹⁵ The same critique was raised by Pettersson in *Kvinder* no. 39 from 1981 as a response to the launch of perfumed tampons in Denmark.⁹⁶

A critical view of menstrual products was also found in the 1983 KKDK. Contrary to the 1975 KKDK, the 1983 edition had a separate section about menstrual products. It described four types of menstrual products: natural sponges, diaphragms, pads and panty liners, and tampons. While the first three types of menstrual products took up two pages combined, tampons took up a little over one and a half pages. The focus of the section on tampons was TSS, the high-absorbent tampons and their connection to TSS, other negative side effects of tampons, and how to choose the right tampon. Furthermore, KKDK recommended to “use tampons as little as possible.”⁹⁷ This approach was quite different from the mainstream media’s discourse around tampons, which did not advise against tampons but just advised users to

⁹³ Petersson, “Farlige Tamponer,” 22.

⁹⁴ Ellen Ryg Jensen, “Eksem og Trusseindlæg,” *Kvinder* 36, February/March 1981, 23-24; Birgit Petersson, “Pessarcreme Var Pludselig Parfumeret,” *Kvinder* 36, February/March 1981, 24.

⁹⁵ Jensen, “Eksem,” 24; Petersson, “Pessarcreme,” 24.

⁹⁶ Birgit Petersson, “Nu Har De også Sendt Parfumerede Tamponer på Markedet,” *Kvinder* 39, August/September 1981, 17.

⁹⁷ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 116-118.

change them often and not use them during the night.⁹⁸ The above examples showed how the Redstockings in the case of TSS continued their critique of the lack of safe menstrual products which they had already raised in the 1970s (Chapter 5).

Furthermore, Jensen argued that women must “be critical towards the exploitation of the anxiety towards our body and odors”⁹⁹ which she found to be the reason for using perfume, and asked whether pantyliners were even necessary suggesting they stemmed from an imagined need created by product manufacturers. Petersson also pointed out in *Kvinder* no. 39 that the reason for selling perfumed tampons was that “many women do not like the smell of menstruation.”¹⁰⁰ Jensen and Peterssons articles showed that women were still believed to be unclean. Their critique of perfumed products was then a continuation of the Redstockings critique of the menstrual stigma and negative representation of women’s bodies.

6.4 Towards Individualism and Consumer Rights

This section will explore how the Redstockings approach to menstruation, women’s bodies, and health changed during the 1980s. In the 1983 edition of *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, the six editors, Hanne Fokdal, Pernille Kløvedal Helweg, Karin Lützen, Helena Nielsen, Katrine Sidenius, and April Lorraine Young wrote that much had changed since 1975, such as “the understanding that the pathologization of women is the foundation of the public healthcare system.”¹⁰¹ The critique of the medicalization and pathologization of women was especially strong in the 1980s, in this thesis demonstrated through the discourse of PMS and connected representation of women. This was not only true in the Redstockings movement, Danish

⁹⁸ Poulsen, “Ny Sygdom,” 8; “Kvinder Advares,” 2; “Tamponer Mistænkes,” 3.

⁹⁹ Jensen, “Eksem,” 24.

¹⁰⁰ Petersson, “Nu Har De,” 17.

¹⁰¹ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 8.

newspapers also continued to write about the medicalization of women in the 1980s, even after the case of Ferrosan in 1980s was closed.¹⁰²

In the 1983 KKDK the authors criticized medical science for viewing the human body as a machine, where problems were seen as isolated from feelings and emotions, as well as one's life circumstances.¹⁰³ Instead, the authors argued: "Our health depends on everything within us and around us. Everything has an impact – your mood, your family situation, your social life, your working conditions, your economy, your housing situation, the society's economic, political, and cultural situation, as well as nature and the weather."¹⁰⁴ The same view of health was also found in *Kvinder* during the 1980s.¹⁰⁵ Although the 1975 KKDK also operated with a broad understanding of health, the 1983 seems even broader.

In other words the authors of the 1983 KKDK has a more holistic approach to women's bodies and health, focusing on what women themselves could do to take care of their health through diet, exercise, and rest. The authors further stated: "We must do something for our health together and separately – collective political action against assaults of our health: perceptions of women, women's oppression, and other forms of pollution – of air, water, food, workplaces, and homes. And we can act individually in our choices with our bodies, minds, and souls. We must do both."¹⁰⁶

The quote shows that there were still links to the Redstockings radical and leftist ideology, however, an individualized and consumer-oriented approach was developing. As Sine Lehn-Christiansen and Mari Holen have stated about the 1983 KKDK: "[t]he contours of health as a time-consuming activity reserved for middle-class women emerged" in the 1983 edition of

¹⁰² Hanne Dam, "Lægevidenskaben Er Ofte Fuld af Fordomme og Myter om Kvinder," *Information*, October 24, 1980, 11; "Kvindelige Læger Imod Hormonforsøg," *Berlingske Tidende*, February 9, 1981, 2; Elsebeth Halckendorff, "Menstruationsgruppen af 16. March 1985..." *Thisted Dagblad*, March 20, 1985, 9

¹⁰³ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 14. See also Martin, *The Woman in the Body*.

¹⁰⁵ See for example: Jabube Margall, "Hvorfor Bliver Vi Syge," *Kvinder* 44, June/July 1982, 28-29.

¹⁰⁶ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 22.

KKDK.¹⁰⁷ Lehn-Christiansen and Holen also critiqued it for not reflecting on “women’s double burden or the ideals about the real woman, the book is contributing to produce.”¹⁰⁸ A similar point was made by Tine Andersen, who argued that “[h]ealth and healing seems to be something women take care of separately and in their free time.”¹⁰⁹ This indicated the Redstockings move towards a more individualistic approach, even though there were some capitalist critiques left, as I have demonstrated above. While the 1983 KKDK still emphasized the importance of women’s own experiences, as a valuable and important type of knowledge, this edition was also characterized by a more individualistic focus. Andersen has argued that in the 1983 KKDK women “appear themselves as experts and authorities, they trust their own and other women’s knowledge.”

Instead of using this knowledge to create societal and structural changes, it was increasingly used as a way for the individual to improve their own situation. An example of this was the increased focus on *kropsbevidsthed* (body awareness) rather than self-help. In 1983 body awareness instructor Stine Johansen defined body awareness in an article in *Kvinder* as being able to “feel its [the body’s] current state, its tensions and movement possibilities, its temperatures and strengths” as well as having “knowledge about its functions and the way it works.”¹¹⁰ The belief was that bodily tension was “unresolved energy that manifests in the body as tensions”,¹¹¹ which stemmed from unresolved or suppressed feelings, emotions, or needs. By developing this awareness, it was possible to be more accepting of oneself as an individual, Johansen argued. The core of body awareness was to understand how the body and mind were connected and mutually influenced each other.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Lehn-Christiansen and Holen, "Sundheden er sgu din egen!," 44.

¹⁰⁸ Lehn-Christiansen and Holen, "Sundheden er sgu din egen!," 43.

¹⁰⁹ Andersen, "Kvinder Er Også Kød og Blod," 106.

¹¹⁰ Stine Johansen, "Kropslighed På Kursus," *Kvinder* 51, August/September 1983, 14.

¹¹¹ Johansen, "Kropslighed," 14.

¹¹² Johansen, "Kropslighed," 14. See also: Kirsten, "Kropsbevidsthedskursus," *Rødstrømpen*, March 1983 + "Mandagsmøde," *Rødstrømpen*, May 1983, 6-8. *Rødstrømpen* 1983. 1971-1983 Foreningsbladet Rødstrømpen, Box 28. 10541-294246 Rødstrømperne i Århus. Danish National Archive.;

Johansen further argued that due to the development of a highly competitive society, most of the body's signals were suppressed. Thus, body awareness aimed at regaining the capacity to recognize the body's signals. Although the reason for tensions was found in societal structures, Johansen argued that body awareness could not change society and did not "immediately lead to a political consciousness."¹¹³ However, body awareness could contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which and reasons why women were oppressed, by understanding how these structures manifested themselves in the body.¹¹⁴ While this showed that body awareness still operated with a feminist approach, it had left self-help's aim to create a political consciousness through experience-based knowledge. Thus, in the practice of body awareness, the Redstockings' leftist ideology was abandoned.

Several institutions, such as *Kvindehøjskole* (the Danish Feminist School), offered courses in body awareness.¹¹⁵ A *højskole* (folk high school) provided non-formal adult education and has existed in Denmark since 1844 until today. Although such schools also exist in other countries around the world, they are particularly widespread in the Nordic countries.¹¹⁶ *Kvindehøjskolen* also provided courses about alternative healing practices and the use of healing herbs from the very beginning in 1979.¹¹⁷ While self-help was never aimed at taking the place of doctors or completely renouncing mainstream medical knowledge or treatments, it aimed at improving the conditions of all women regarding their health, by reforming the healthcare system, the medical field, and the doctor-patient relationship.¹¹⁸ The move towards alternative medicine represented a more individualistic approach to women's health because it

¹¹³ Johansen, "Kropslighed," 15.

¹¹⁴ Johansen, "Kropslighed," 15.

¹¹⁵ Programs for *Kvindehøjskolen* 1979-1985. 1979-1994 Diverse, Box 38-39. 10541-21800 Kvindehøjskolen. Danish National Archive

¹¹⁶ Poul Dam, "Folkehøjskole," in *Den Store Danske* (lex.dk, 2023).

https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/folkeh%C3%B8jskole#-H%C3%B8jskoler_uden_for_Danmark.

¹¹⁷ Programs for *Kvindehøjskolen* 1979-1985.

¹¹⁸ Chapter 4, this thesis

was not something all women necessarily had access to, as it was outside the regular healthcare system.

According to Tine Andersen, what was described in terms of suffering in the 1975 KKDK, the 1983 edition described as something natural and positive.¹¹⁹ An example of this was menstruation. As mentioned in Chapter 4 some Redstockings began to view menstruation in a more positive light. While the 1983 KKDK still described some of the negative aspects of menstruation, like the menstrual stigma, they also included a more positive description of it. For example, the authors highlighted “the strength we can experience during those days [of menstruation] in our dreams as well as in our creativity and in our sexual desires.”¹²⁰ They continued stating that women had begun to celebrate that “every day is not identical, but that we have a cycle.”¹²¹ The same positive approach to menstruation was also found in the description of a course at *Kvindehøjskolen* about menstruation, titled “From curse to blessing.”¹²² Thus, this section has shown a decline in the Redstockings radical and leftist approach to issues related to menstruation, women’s bodies, and health, as well as an increase in a more individual and consumer-oriented approach, rather than a structural approach. In this way at least some parts of the Redstockings movement were becoming more in line with what Bobel termed feminist spiritualists.¹²³

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how menstrual activism and representations and discourses of menstruation developed during the 1980s in the Redstockings movement and Danish newspapers, and the Redstockings’ impact on these representations and discourses. Generally,

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¹²⁰ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 101.

¹²¹ *Kvinde Kend Din Krop*, 102.

¹²² “Sommer 1984: Program.” A67 Kvindehøjskolen, 39. 1979-1994 Diverse, Box 38-39. 10541-21800 Kvindehøjskolen. Danish National Archive

¹²³ Bobel, *New Blood* 8-9 + 12 + 66.

the period saw a move towards an increasing focus on menstrual products, as well as individualized and consumer-oriented solutions to issues regarding menstruation, women's bodies, and health.

Section 6.1 demonstrated how economic issues regarding menstruation were now brought up by women and girls in the Danish newspapers and not by the Redstockings movement. Thus, the Redstockings' ideas had reached a larger audience. While the responses in the 1980s to compensating women for their menstrual expenses were almost identical to the responses in the 1970s, this section has shown that the different viewpoints found among those who supported the proposals and those who did not were both gendered and generational. It was especially girls and young women who supported the idea of compensating women's menstrual expenses. This section also showed that the Redstockings were moving their focus towards alternative menstrual products, focusing less on structural changes and more on individual solutions.

The debates about PMS, demonstrated in section 6.2, show how this was a contested issue both in the media and among the Redstockings. The section demonstrated two different discourses regarding PMS. In the case of the Ferrosan's advertisement material, the media's representation of PMS was largely in line with the critique presented by the eight female doctors, some of whom were part of the Redstockings movement. The eight doctors framed their critique as oppressive of women because it reproduced negative stereotypes of women and a pathologizing medical discourse of women's bodies.

A similar view was found among the Redstockings, especially *Kvinder's* doctors group, who argued that PMS was not hormonally caused but a result of women's oppression in a patriarchal and capitalist society, thus inspired by the Redstockings ideology. This discourse saw PMS as a tool for oppressing women and therefore downplayed the impact of menstrual discomforts. However, among the Redstockings another representation of PMS existed as well, one that regarded PMS as impacted both by hormones and capitalist and patriarchal society.

While advocates of the second representation agreed that it was problematic to reproduce the negative stereotypes of menstruation, they also argued that it was problematic to downplay women's experiences of menstrual discomfort. Although the Redstockings did not comment on the use of PMS in the Danish murder trial, the two discourses exhibited in the Redstockings movement were present in the reactions to the murder case in the newspapers. However, they did not include the societal and capitalist critique that was part of the Redstockings framing of PMS.

The increasing orientation towards alternative products and individual solutions was also found in the Redstockings response to TSS, as demonstrated in section 6.3. Even though Danish newspapers' representation of TSS did highlight the danger of the disease, they did not advise against tampons or present them as dangerous. This differed from the critique of tampons within the Redstockings movement. While the Redstockings had already been critical of tampons in the late 1970s, in the aftermath of TSS they were strongly against tampons. However, the Redstockings critique also included other menstrual or intimate products, highlighting the lack of consumer safety.

As section, 6.4, showed there was a general move within the Redstockings movement towards a more consumer-oriented and individualistic approach to menstruation, women's bodies, and health during the 1980s. While the discourse of menstruation as a positive asset was gaining more followers in the Redstockings movement, the approach to health became increasingly defined within a middle-class and individualistic discourse. Thus, their radical and leftist ideology was declining in the 1980s. This chapter has shown that the Redstockings in some cases did impact public discourses on menstruation, women's bodies, and health, however, their more leftist critiques were usually not implemented.

7 CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored the Danish history of menstrual activism, through the representation of menstruation, women's bodies, and health in Danish newspapers and the Redstockings movement from 1970 to 1985. My analysis was framed within the following four research questions: (1) How was menstruation represented in the Danish Redstockings movement and Danish newspapers in the period from 1970-1985? (2) How was the Redstockings' activism and representation of menstruation, women's bodies, and health influenced by their radical and leftist ideology? (3) In what ways were the representations and discourses of menstruation linked to representations and discourses of women's bodies and health? (4) In what ways did the Redstockings' menstrual activism, impact changes in the representations and discourses of menstruation, women's bodies, and health in Denmark?

Menstruation was clearly stigmatized in Denmark in this period, which resulted in women being encouraged to hide their menstruation and try to forget about it. The menstrual stigma manifested itself in discriminative attitudes towards women, as they were believed to be unstable workers, unreliable, and even hysterical. (Section 4.1) While menstruation was not yet on the agenda in the early 1970s, other issues regarding women's bodies and reproductive rights were taken up. Through these debates, the Redstockings, established in 1970, put bodily autonomy on the public agenda. (Section 4.2) With the emergence of self-help within the movement, the Redstockings challenged the authority of medical doctors and their scientific knowledge and argued that personal experience and bodily knowledge were equally valid. With the introduction of self-help, the Redstockings provided women with a new strategy to cope with their health, instead of only seeking expert advice from doctors. (Section 4.3)

In 1975 representations of menstruation started to change, as the Redstockings and some women started to challenge the menstrual stigma. An important context for this was the United

Nations-proclaimed International Women's Year which fostered a greater interest in women's bodies and health and contributed to spreading the practice and ideas of self-help, as well as the Redstockings movement outside the major Danish cities. A noticeable change in the newspapers was, that issues regarding menstruation, women's bodies and health could move outside the newspapers' doctors columns. (Section 5.1) My analysis has shown that there was a large overlap between the way the menstrual stigma was challenged in Danish newspapers and within the Redstockings movement, indicating the Redstockings impact on the media discourses. Therefore, the latter half of the 1970s saw a challenge of the discourse that framed menstruation as negatively impacting women, although this meant that feminist activists sometimes downplayed menstrual discomforts out of fear of confirming negative stereotypes about women. However, the end of the 1970s period also saw the slow emergence of a more positive discourse about menstruation as a strength and not as something negative, shameful, and incapacitating. (Section 5.2.) This development continued in the Redstockings movement in the 1980s, where representations of menstruation focused less on the suffering and more on how it was a natural and positive asset. (Section 6.4)

This shift was related to a change in the movements from a more structural to an individualized approach to menstruation, women's bodies and health as well as a decline in the Redstockings leftist approach in favor of a more consumer-oriented one. In the 1970s, the Redstockings' understanding of women's health was shaped by their radical and leftist ideology, as they believed capitalist and patriarchal society impacted people's health (Section 5.2); in the 1980s these ideas were still found but health as an individual middle-class project was emerging. (Section 6.4)

A similar shift occurred in the Redstockings' activism regarding menstrual products. In the 1970s they protested against the state and menstrual products companies profiting from women's bodies, which women should be compensated for. Furthermore, they also critiqued

the lack of safe products, which might be why they proposed alternative menstrual products, like natural sponges, as a solution for the economic aspects of menstruation, because these were both reusable and natural. (Section 5.3) While this proposal was framed within a critique of capitalist society, it hints towards a more individualized approach. This new orientation became clearer in the case of TSS when the Redstockings' activism started to focus more on consumer rights. (Section 6.3) However, during the 1970s, when the Redstockings held radical and leftist views, they often lacked a more class-based analysis of menstruation and health issues. While they were critical of capitalist society, they did not say much about how social class affected women differently also in terms of health or menstruation. (Section 5.2, 5.3, and 6.4)

Nevertheless, my research has demonstrated that the Redstockings managed to impact the media representations and discourses of menstruation, women's bodies, and health in several cases. The Redstockings' protests against the profits made from women's bodies in the 1970s, were brought up again by other women and girls in Danish newspapers in the 1980s. A similar development took place in the case of PMS, where the two discourses of PMS existing in the Redstockings movement following the critique of Ferrosan's advertising campaign emerged in national newspapers in the reactions to the use of PMS in a murder trial. However, the Redstockings' anti-capitalist discourse was usually not adopted outside the movement. (Section 5.3, 6.1, and 6.2)

Today menstrual activism is still led by feminists, such as activist Emma Liber,¹ and has reached a much larger audience. This became especially clear when Danish left-wing and feminist politicians Sikandar Siddique, Uffe Elbæk, and Susanne Zimmer in 2021 proposed to make menstrual products free, following the example of Scotland from 2020.² Although there was little support in the parliament for the proposal, it kickstarted a public debate. This case was the first time, the issue of accessibility of menstrual products reached the Danish

¹ "Mit Navn Er Emma," accessed 3/6, 2024, <https://emmalibner.dk/om-mig>.

² B 173 Forslag til Folketingsbeslutning Om Gratis Adgang til Menstruationsprodukter, (2021).

parliament. Since then, there has been more talk in the Danish media and parliament about menstrual and cycle-related issues, most recently in April 2024 when the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen addressed issues related to endometriosis, fertility, and the lack of medical research in women's health.³ Whether this is happening out of fear of a declining white population would require more research. However, in the last five years, there has been a huge activist-led debate around reproductive and fertility issues in Denmark, framed within discourses of women's bodily autonomy and gender equality.⁴

Furthermore, today there is an awareness among most menstrual activists and advocates that menstrual issues are not only relevant for women but for all people with a uterus, regardless of gender identity. This is something that the Redstockings never considered. There is also an emerging attentiveness to how race or ethnicity affects one's experience of menstruation and health. This aspect was also not something the Redstockings considered, probably due to the ethnic homogeneity of Danish society at the time. Still, this perspective is just emerging in Denmark but has been researched in other contexts.⁵

With this thesis, I hope to contribute to bridging the gap of knowledge in historical research about menstruation and menstrual activism in Denmark and internationally, as well as enhancing our understanding of the 1970s Danish women's movement. Thus, this thesis aim to contribute to both the field of Critical Menstruation Studies and Women's and Gender History.

³ Mette Frederiksen, "Statsminister Mette Frederiksens Tale til Regionernes Politiske Topmøde," 2024, <https://www.stm.dk/statsministeren/taler/statsminister-mette-frederiksens-tale-til-regionernes-politiske-topmoede/>.

⁴ See for example: Cille Lewinsky, "Nyt Borgerforslag: 'Staten Skal Ikke Bestemme, Hvornår Jeg Skal Have Børn'," *Vores Børn* (2020). <https://www.alt.dk/boern/rockpaperdresses-fertilitetsbehandling-borgerforslag>; Nanna Schelde, "Befrugtede Æg Hober Sig Op i Verdens Fryser. Kan Man Bare Smide Dem Ud?," *Zetland* (2021). <https://www.zetland.dk/historie/soGPvg9G-ae6Ewl5D-ca4c2>.

⁵ See for example: Minerva Orellana et al., "'In Our Community, We Normalize Pain': Discussions Around Menstruation and Uterine Fibroids with Black Women and Latinas," *BMC Women's Health* 24, no. 1 (2024/04/12 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-024-03008-z>, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-024-03008-z>; Lisandra Rodriguez White, "The Function of Ethnicity, Income Level, and Menstrual Taboos in Postmenarcheal Adolescents' Understanding of Menarche and Menstruation," *Sex Roles* 68, no. 1 (2013/01/01 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0166-y>, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0166-y>; Michelle Fine, "Leaking Women: A Genealogy of Gendered and Racialized Flow," *Genealogy* 3, no. 1 (2019), <https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/3/1/9>.

Although there are indications of the importance of international connections between the 1960s and 1970s Western women's movement in this thesis, there is little research on this topic. Limitations of space and time prevented me from exploring this further, but there is great potential for more research on this topic. However, this would also require more research on menstrual activism and the women's movement in other contexts. Thus, this thesis can hopefully be a contribution in this direction. Another topic that might be fruitful for future research is the impact of Danish consumer-rights movements and eco-feminists on menstrual activism, as this thesis indicated a change towards a consumer-oriented approach in the Redstockings activism during the 1980s. However, a further exploration of this connection was outside the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, while this thesis is based entirely on archival and published material, oral history would provide an opportunity for further research of the Redstockings movement, and of their menstrual and health-related activism.

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