

#PERIODPOWER

#PERIODPOSITIVE #PERIODTALK

“The idea is to get the blood out into the open, to show this [...] marvellous liquid, this flesh-clock. [...] it is a symbol of creative power, of life.” (Phelan et al. 2001: 126). These words by the artist Pipilotti Rist regarding her work, and specifically the video *Blutclip* [Blood Clip] (1993), echo in various hashtags that have emerged some twenty years later on social networks: #periodpower, #periodpositive, #periodtalk. Influenced by successful books (Okamoto 2018; Hill 2019), web users and marketers alike are advancing arguments around concepts of a “cycle strategy” and a “menstrual movement”. In the first case, they address questions of personal development: listening to one’s own body, discovering the details of each phase of the menstrual cycle so as to benefit from it in one’s social life. In the second case, the claim is political: to work in favour of better information and to combat problems of access to feminine hygiene products. The two topics, like the online posts, nevertheless converge on a central point, the necessity to speak of and show menstruation in order to deconstruct traditional practices and representations, the taboos and surrounding injustices, and to liberate the body.

— What these discourses demonstrate is the social dimension of menstrual periods. The reality of menstruation seems self-evident, but the words and the adapted customs are the product of a social construction based – according to the theory of the sociologists Berger and Luckmann with regard to everyday life (Berger/Luckmann 1966) – on a two-fold process of objectivation. Actions such as avoiding taking a bath during one’s period, promoting a sanitary pad in an advertising spot by the use of a blue liquid, or seeking to hide a tampon in a little bag are repeated and shared with one’s contemporaries, and they become habitual. Moreover, they are legitimised by a language that, from generation to generation, explains and justifies these actions. Evidence of this can be found in the numerous expressions constructed to circumvent saying “menstruation” directly, such as “aunt flow”, “shark week” or “on the rag”.

— By posting a video presenting a bloody tampon (Okamoto, Instagram 25.12.2020, #onmyperiod, @itsaugust), by discussing running a marathon during her period without protection (Madame Gandhi, Twitter 07.05.2021, @MadameGandhi), by glorifying the menstrual cycle by means of a positive lexical field, or by creating

hashtags containing the term “period”, these voices reverse the process of social construction. They speak and show in order to initiate a change of practices. To do this, certain topoi of the second wave of feminism, like the liberation of the body, sexual liberty and political actions, are evoked. Of course, these are adapted to current tastes, but the essentialisation and binarism (Patu/Schrupp 2017) are still difficult to eliminate. To celebrate periods as a natural and powerful event, comparing them for example to the lunar cycle (Hill: 212), is likely to be seen in some quarters as supporting a biological determinism, a “woman’s nature” (Gildemeister 2008: 167), or even as recalling a patriarchal “eternal feminine” (Bourdieu 2001: 4). In response to the intersectionality of the third wave of feminism, various strategies have been developed such as the coining of the qualifier “menstruator”. This new term aims to include the trans community in discussions. However, such integration engenders the exclusion of other realities (women who don’t have their periods because of a contraceptive treatment or due to menopause, and transgender women who cannot have a menstrual cycle), and often remains incomplete. We touch here upon an inherent contradiction in the movement #periodpower: glorifying a feminine biological specificity using words stemming from a binary vocabulary while proposing an inclusive syntagm external to that language, which sometimes causes critical reactions (Rowling, Twitter 06.06.2020, @jk_rowling).

— By denouncing the social dimension of menstruation, the discourses conducted on social networks view it from the perspective not of a biological sex but of a social one, or in other words, of gender. However, this social sex functions in terms of binarity, not between feminine and masculine, but between a limited group of persons – the individuals designated female at birth – and all others. #periodpower clearly crystallises a point of current tension between feminist and LGBTQIA+ representations: although these are based on several similar practices and arguments, they are characterised by some constructions of gender that are hardly compatible.

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