

Bridge walk

a series of lectures on bridging the gap between different faculties and disciplines

Date & Time: Wednesday 09.10.2024 | 17:00 – 18:15

Organizers: Mohammad Khair Nahhas & Fares Damien

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Menstrual Technologies, Transdisciplinary Reflections of Self-Care and (Under-)Medicalization

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Abstract

Menstrual products like pads, tampons and cups are designed to help women hide their menstrual flow, facilitating women's equal participation in school, sports, and social life. It has long been recognized by women's health advocates that the inability to use these menstrual technologies constrain women's full participation in society, in particular in low-income contexts – a situation conceptualized as 'period poverty'. The capability to self-manage one's menstruation *using these products* is considered indispensable for women's dignity. At the same time, menstrual hygiene advocates also posit that knowledge about the safety of the various products for women's health is scarce. It is known that menstrual products themselves might have harmful effects to health, and may even be deadly, as in the case of tampon-induced toxic shock syndrome. To date, there is still an evidence and regulatory gap on the safety of menstrual products in different contexts, and on the impact of these technologies on the vaginal microbiome, which is an important gatekeeper to health. Menstrual technologies are thus both potentially harmful and emancipatory; however, the availability of improved menstrual products may increase the social imperative of concealing menstrual fluids and odor. In addition, the focus on self-care may conceal structural constraints to women's health and dignity, such as limited access to water and sanitation. With the IMVAHA study, a project inspired by menstrual health activism and feminist scholarship, we adopt a transdisciplinary approach to researching these sometimes contradictory aspects of menstrual technologies.

Biosketch

Sonja Merten is Titulary professor of Social and Preventive Medicine and Head of the Research Unit 'Society, Gender and Health' at the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute. Her research focuses on sexual and reproductive health.