

## **Bloody Business? (In)visibility and Practices - Menstruation in the World of Work**

In 2022, around 19.3 million women in Germany (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2023a) had already had the experience of having to deal with their menstruation as a problem to be managed in the workplace. Women have to situate themselves and their physicality in a working environment historically shaped by androcentric structures (Kurz-Scherf 2013) construing the female body as deviation or anomaly (Beck et al. 2023). Therefore, women often experience disadvantages and discrimination, particularly due to their physical and physiological characteristics associated with the ability of childbearing (Kordsmeyer et al. 2022). Nevertheless, menstruation has so far been examined in German-language research primarily from a medical and cultural-historical perspective as well as in the context of critical menstruation research (Bauer 2022); gender and, above all, labour sociological references are rather rare. In my thesis, I therefore use the example of menstruation to explore the question of how gender-specific health requirements are negotiated with in the workplace. On a general level, I ask 1) to what extent women's reproductive capacity is still seen as a risk for their integration into the world of work and to what extent menstruating women and their bodies are discriminated against in today's world of work. On the micro level of the subject and their experience I ask 2) how the tabooing of menstruation affects female employees, how menstruating women deal with their menstruation in the workplace under these conditions, and which practices and coping strategies are used to establish the ability to work and to make menstruation invisible. On an organisational level, I then ask 3) which mechanisms lead to the (in)visibility of the topic and which tabooing processes can be identified (by whom). Following Gugutzer (2022), Douglas (1985), and Buckley (1988), body-sociological reflexions on menstruation and cultural anthropological considerations of menstruation, especially in connection with shame and/or tabooing, are first considered. This is followed by a subsumption of the above-mentioned questions in gender-sociological health and labour research and women's health research. Methodologically, case studies are conducted in 4-5 organisations, consisting of problem-centred biographical interviews with menstruating women (Witzel 2000), in-house expert interviews with (male) supervisors and workforce representation including narrative elements (Lamnek und Krell 2016) as well as group discussions. The interviews will be analysed using qualitative-interpretative methods (Przyborski 2021; Lamnek und Krell 2016; Kleemann 2013) of social research. The results should contribute to breaking down taboos surrounding menstruation, shaping workplaces in a more gender-equitable way and giving people who menstruate more room for manoeuvre in dealing with their menstruation. The project is also expected to provide information on how the world of work and occupational health and safety can be organised in a gender-sensitive way. The above-mentioned research gaps in gender and labour sociology are also to be closed.

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