Speculations on Feminist Reproductive Health Technologies

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Speculations on Feminist Reproductive Health Technologies

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ABSTRACT

This one-day workshop invites participants to discuss possibilities of designing with and for reproductive bodies by taking vantage points in existing discussions within HCI which are rethinking approaches to reproductive health and broadening understandings of reproductive bodies beyond the category of women’s health. The workshop is grounded in these ongoing discussions, calling for intersectional approaches that account for the pluralities of bodies when designing for and with bodies. Through collective and speculative explorations, we are aspiring to find new directions within reproductive health research, to disrupt binary understandings of reproductive bodies, and to explore interpersonal/relational issues when talking about in/fertility that extend beyond the female body. The aim of the workshop is to bring together HCI researchers that are working with or are interested in bodies and bodily experiences including, but not limited to, in/fertility, menopause, menstruation, transitions, interpersonal as well as more-than-human relations, and are motivated to unpack and expand current practices, but also to imagine inclusive directions of design and research in these areas.

CCS CONCEPTS

- Human-centered computing;  
- Human computer interaction (HCI);  
- HCI theory, concepts and models;  
- Interaction Design;  
- Interaction design process and methods;

KEYWORDS

reproductive health, intersectionality, infertility, feminism, bodies

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1 INTRODUCTION

This one-day workshop invites participants to discuss possibilities and challenges of designing with and for reproductive bodies. Reproductive health is a growing field of HCI research, concerned with different aspects of reproductive bodies and health. Here, research and design explorations towards bodies and data entanglements are being conducted, mainly under the broader concept of women’s health. This work covers topics such as menopause [2, 5, 16, 23], menstrual cycle [e.g., 28], menstruation and the menstrual cycle [e.g., 4, 8, 10, 15, 32], as well as in/fertility [e.g., 6, 17, 25, 27]. While we take vantage points in this work, this workshop aims to move beyond essentializing ideas within women’s health that are often equalized with reproductive health and focused on the female body, as recent critique suggests [22]. Instead, we are aiming towards an understanding of reproductive health that encompasses interpersonal and more-than-human relations as well as experiences of male, nonbinary, trans* and infertile reproductive bodies. Through understanding reproductive bodies as hybrids of flesh, bones, blood alongside with sensors and external technologies [9], we will critically reflect on the bodies that are included and excluded in current understandings of reproduction, processes of becoming or unbecoming fertile and designs of self-tracking as well as practices of self-care. We invite participants working on or interested in themes such as in/fertility, menstruation, menstrual cycle, menopause, bodily transitions and feminist perspectives on bodies, more broadly, to explore these understandings with us.

In line with recent work on posthumanism and feminist new materialism [14, 18, 24] we understand different reproductive technologies and practices as socio-technical systems of human and non-human actors [9, 29]. We aim to explore reproductive bodies as entangled with non-human actors such as pregnancy tests, needles, hormones/medication, blood tests, doctor visits, thermometers, blood, ovulation sticks, menstrual products, sensors, tracking apps, Excel spreadsheets, breast pumps and much more. To critically and creatively attend to the ecologies that reproductive bodies are part of, we take inspiration from recent speculative and more-than-human design research in HCI, for example surrounding data...
produced by bodies [31] or explorations of menstrual care practices that expand understandings of fertility beyond reproduction [3].

The workshop will be structured around three themes: 1. Re-thinking approaches/methods we use to understand the different pluralities and temporalities of reproductive bodies; 2. Exploring feminist perspectives on bodily data; 3. Discussing emerging practices for designing with and for reproductive bodies. Taking vantage point in current research that has been trying to address such issues, including for example Soma Design methodologies [21] that challenge a dualist approach to mind and body [20], we ground our workshop discussions and activities on feminist approaches towards reproductive bodies and health technologies. Our aim is to queer understandings [1, 30] of reproductive bodies and point towards the plurality of bodies and lived experiences of in/fertility. We will be working with inclusive and intersectional understandings of reproductive bodies, such as aspects of sexuality, race, class and gender when designing for reproductive health. We also draw on feminist understandings of bodies, such as Grosz’s [1994] work, which attends to the ontologies of the fleshiness, affective, and sensory dimensions of human existence by pointing to the complex inter-relation between societal notions of the body and the physical fleshy body we live through. Along with Haraway’s [2016] notion of the body that points to the entanglements and assemblages of human and non-human actors, where embodiment is distributed beyond the individual body to other humans as well as more-than-human actors. In line with ideas of data feminism, the workshop furthermore asks how we can rethink data when designing, visualizing and materializing for reproductive health, while recognizing the knowledge from people as living, feeling bodies in the world [7]. Research is already pointing to the ways that data collected in regard to reproductive and sexual health could be misused as a tool of surveillance and thereby cause harm [12, 25]. However, considerations about which data to collect, how to represent and store this data seem even more relevant in times where abortion is still illegal in many places [e.g., 26] or is being discussed to illegalize again, as continuously debated in the US.

1.1 Anticipated Outcomes

The aim of the workshop is to bring together HCI researchers and practitioners that are working with bodies and bodily experiences including, but not limited to, in/fertility, menopause, menstruation, transitions, feminist perspectives on bodies, and are interested in unpacking current practices surrounding these topics, as well as imagining inclusive future directions in HCI research on reproductive health. Through intersectional understandings of reproductive bodies, unearthing inequality and introducing alternative sets of values and possible futures, we aim to expand contemporary practices. The workshop builds on groundwork and through speculative explorations [11] we are aspiring to find new directions within reproductive health research, to disrupt binary understandings of reproductive bodies, and to explore interpersonal/relational issues when talking about in/fertility that extend beyond the female body. As this field is still growing, this is one of the first attempts to invite participants to explore these themes collectively and create a (Nordic) network of reproductive health researchers.

Finally, we will organize an online catalog that will detail the outcomes of the workshop in the form of speculative sketches, collages and stories which can be used as a point of departure for future work in this domain, both as an inspiration for further projects and as points for reflection. The online catalog will also allow us to share the results and conversations with the NordiCHI community and beyond.

2 OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

This one-day workshop will be split into three phases. In the first one we will collectively share our experiences of working with feminist methods and values, to ensure that we can conduct the workshop with a shared understanding. We will then invite participants to give a brief presentation of their motivation for participation, which can include a project they have been working on related to the workshop topic, a design they have made, or reflections on the topic. This will be followed by presenting some examples of current technologies for fertility tracking and sensing bodies, inviting participants to add to those examples. Together, we will critically analyze these artefacts through a feminist lens. Before moving on to the second phase, we will invite participants to join for a sensitizing exercise inspired by Soma Design [19], to consciously be in and with our bodies for the rest of the workshop. In the second phase, we will move towards the speculative part of the workshop. In plenum we will bring forth scenarios and challenges, on which basis participants can begin discussions and speculative ideations in smaller groups. The artefacts and projects analyzed and discussed earlier will support the speculations at this stage, functioning as a point of departure. The aim of this phase is to both reflect on current reproductive health technologies and to imagine future directions of research and design in this area grounded in feminist values. Questions that will be driving the work conducted in this stage include: Which bodies are included and excluded from predominant narratives of reproductive health technologies? What temporalities of reproductive bodies are communicated? How can we imagine reproductive health technologies otherwise? What human and non-human practices, imaginaries, assumptions, and entanglements can we identify and highlight? Rather than reproducing clear binaries between infertile/fertile bodies, human/non-human, digital/material or male/female, these speculations are aiming to embrace entanglements, everyday rituals with more-than-human actors and to transgress these binaries and categories.

In the final phase, participants will present and discuss their speculations in plenum. Collectively, we will reflect on our speculative explorations and start developing a catalog that entails the speculative sketches, collages, and stories, in addition to further reflecting on ways forward in intersectional HCI research on reproductive bodies.

3 DRAFT CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Different aspects and phases of reproductive bodies have become of interest in HCI research and design, such as menstruation, in/fertility, menopause and menarche. However, reproductive health is often equalized with women’s health, resulting in essentializing understandings of reproduction, bodies and gender. It is
This one-day workshop will invite participants to reflect on and discuss feminist approaches to data, reproduction and bodies before inviting them to speculatively explore inclusive reproductive futures. We welcome submissions from interested participants in the form of a short description (2-3 pages) of their work around reproductive health or research that focuses on bodies and bodily experiences with a focus on feminist approaches. We also welcome autobiographical/ethnographical explorations of one’s own lived experiences of inhabiting reproductive bodies. Furthermore, we gladly receive contributions that are interested in exploring feminist theories in relations to bodies without having done prior research in this area. The workshop outcomes, in the form of speculative sketches, collages and stories, will be collected and published in an online catalog, which will be circulated to a broader audience after the conference.

Therefore important to reflect on how we understand reproductive bodies and how we account for their multiplicity, including male, non-binary, queer, trans* and infertile bodies as well as the ways they are entangled in interpersonal and more-than-human relations. To open this conversation, this one-day workshop invites researchers and designers working with or being interested in reproductive bodies and bodily experiences including, but not limited to, in/fertility, menopause, menstruation, or transitions, and on feminist perspectives on bodies as well as bodily experiences, more broadly. The workshop will invite participants to unpack and expand current practices around these themes and imagine inclusive future directions. It will be structured around three themes exploring different aspects of design practices related to reproductive bodies:

• Rethinking approaches/methods we use to understand the different pluralities and temporalities of reproductive bodies
• Exploring feminist perspectives on bodily data of reproductive health
• Discussing emerging practices for designing with and for reproductive bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:20</td>
<td>Welcome to the workshop, introduction to activities from the organizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:20-10:00</td>
<td>Collectively discussing our feminist approaches &amp; values, short participant presentations and presenting examples of reproductive health technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:45</td>
<td>Analyze examples through a feminist lens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-11:00</td>
<td>COFFEE BREAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-11:10</td>
<td>Bodily Sensitizing exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:10-12:00</td>
<td>First session of speculations (in smaller groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-13:00</td>
<td>LUNCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00-14:30</td>
<td>Second session of speculations (in smaller groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30-15:00</td>
<td>COFFEE BREAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00-16:00</td>
<td>Formalizing speculations and start developing the catalog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00-17:00</td>
<td>Presentations, discussions, and reflections in plenum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY, RECRUITING AND SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

We will set up a website to promote the workshop and offer additional information before and after the workshop. Applications in the form of position papers, anecdotes or expression of interest can be submitted through this website. We invite HCI and design researchers, as well as practitioners that are working with or are interested in different aspects of reproductive bodies. Therefore, the workshop will be shared via various relevant email lists and through the organizers’ Social Media accounts. We welcome work that is concerned with different aspects of reproductive health, this can also include autobiographical explorations. Participants are selected based on the relevance of their experience and/or interest for the workshop.

5 ORGANIZER BIOS

Lara Reime (she/her) is a PhD Fellow in the Technologies in Practice research group at the IT University of Copenhagen. Her interdisciplinary research project combines design and ethnographic methods to explore socio-technical entanglements of infertile bodies, with focus on bodily and embodied practices of fertility tracking.

Nadia Campo Woytuk (she/her/they) is a PhD student in Interaction Design at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. Her work focuses on critical and intersectional feminist design of technologies for menstrual health and intimate care. She has led and contributed to projects involving new media art, textiles, software art, and postcolonial computing. She is currently interested in ecofeminist framings of the body and the social and environmental ecologies it entangles. www.nadiacw.com

Joo Young Park (she/they) is a PhD student in Interaction Design at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. She uses critical feminist theories and some design methods to develop intimate wearable technologies for women’s health and well-being.

Marie Louise Juul Søndergaard (she/her) is a postdoctoral researcher at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Norway. Her research explores critical and speculative approaches to imagine and design digital technologies for menstrual and sexual health. Marie Louise has co-organized workshops at CHI and DIS on topics
of women’s health, sexuality, feminisms, futures, and more-than-human design. She has a PhD in Interaction Design from Aarhus University. www.mljuul.com

Deepika Yadav (she/her) is a Digital Futures postdoctoral fellow at the Stockholm University. Her research examines interpersonal care relationships associated with intimate health in domestic and workplace settings. She engages with feminist, care, and entanglement theories to unpack the tacit perspectives and bhaviors affecting the structures needed for attending to body and care. She did her Ph.D from IIT-Delhi, India where she worked on the training challenges of frontline health workers in rural India and led multiple field studies including a large-scale study involving 500 frontline health workers.

Vasiliki Tsaknaki (she/her) is an Assistant Professor at the Digital Design department at IT University of Copenhagen. Her research combines materials experiences, computational crafts and Somaesthetic Design methods. Through practice-based studies she investigates and reflects on intersections of these areas with a feminist theoretical commitment, aiming to trouble and dissolve binaries between body/mind, body/material and human/non-human. She has a PhD in Interaction Design from KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm.

Sarah Homewood (she/her) is an Assistant Professor in Human Centred Computing at the University of Copenhagen. Her research uses feminist theories of the body and research-through-design methods to examine how self-tracking technologies are shaped by societal understandings of bodies, and how, in turn, these technologies go on to shape the way bodies are understood.

6 PARTICIPATION

We are planning the workshop as an in-person one, as the group-work setting benefits from personal encounters. Furthermore, it makes it easier for us to provide materials for the speculative explorations during the second phase of the workshop In-person participation also offers more possibilities for network building, which is one of our aims with this workshop. However, if the Covid situation permits us from having the workshop in person, we are prepared to conduct it online and will consider possibilities to follow up with an in-person meeting after the conference.

REFERENCES


