

## WOMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

### Abstract

This Conversation seeks to examine woman-centered design as a novel form of inquiry in design research practice. Drawing on the ‘woman-centered approach’ put forward in (Almeida 2017), this Conversation contributes to discussions on the intersection of feminism(s), gender and design research. In the Conversation we will explore how design of technologies and interactions can act critically in the ways that they serve, refigure and redefine women’s bodies in light of what woman is. Through analyzing design artefacts, we will discuss what impact the understandings of woman have in the design of technology and interventions. Through making as a catalyst for discussion, we will explore how these understandings can contribute to inform the design of technologies for women. As suggested by Judith Butler, “what’s a woman is a question that should remain open” (Kotz and Bankowsky 1992), and we aim to facilitate an open Conversation about the challenges and opportunities of designing for and with woman, which will support the development of a conceptual framework for a woman-centered design methodology.

**Keywords:** Women; gender; feminisms; technology design

### 1. Convenors Information

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Sarah Homewood	shom@itu.dk	IT University of Copenhagen
Kellie Morrissey	Kellie.Morrissey@ncl.ac.uk	Newcastle University
Madeline Balaam	balaam@kth.se	KTH Royal Institute of Technology

### 2. Context of Conversation Topic

The approach of this Conversation is akin to those suggested in the Design, Research and Feminism(s) track new to DRS2018, inquired in past conversations (Forlano et al. 2016) and latest contributions to the DRS community (Homewood 2018). It is inspired by humanistic

HCI as pioneered by Bardzell & Bardzell (Bardzell and Bardzell 2015) and draws on the ‘woman-centered approach’ put forward in (Almeida 2017).

We understand woman as an individual with specific attributes and requirements, which vary more between individuals than they do between genders (Ehrnberger 2012), and our starting point is that women are not a homogeneous group but have different needs and desires. Gender is not a given on the basis of a given anatomy rather it is culturally situated, and concepts of gender may be unstable but are entangled with notions of identity (Butler 2011). Historically, technology has long been defined in terms of male activities (Wajcman 2010, Prado de O. Martins 2014). Culturally, it has a profound effect on how we understand and relate to women’s bodies, and in turn how women’s relationships to their bodies shape their place in society (Peer et al. 2013).

Our goal is to lead an engaging and fruitful hands-on Conversation that will support and expand on the existing conceptualization of a woman-centered approach to create design-led interventions that can contribute to the design of interactions and practices for and with woman. The conversation will draw on approaches that implicate women, their bodies and experiences, and technology design that may include a wide range of digital systems through materials and biotech experiments. Methods of a woman-centered approach could include critical and speculative design as seen in (Dunne and Raby 2013, Sputniko 2010), biohacking practices and critical storytelling as explored in (Tomasello 2016, Tsang 2017), or technology probes (Almeida et al. 2016, Homewood 2017, Søndergaard & Hansen 2018). Collectively, we will explore i) the potential of novel and creative ways for design research to improve women’s experiences in bodily transactions, choices, and rights, and ii) the wider applicability of a woman-centered design methodological approach in, e.g. health, education, public policy, and, importantly, in practices of everyday life.

### **3. Conversation research question**

In the Conversation, we will discuss how a woman-centered approach can support and enable bodily practices in women; as well as how it impacts other gender(s). To better understand this, we ask: what impact does understandings of woman have in the design of technology and interventions? How can these understandings contribute to inform the design of technologies for women? What are the challenges and opportunities of designing for and with woman? Post-conference, we aim to pursue our research questions as they evolve within this Conversation to develop a conceptual framework for a woman-centered design methodology that embraces interdisciplinary design practice research.

### **4. Set-up of your session**

This Conversation is planned as a 90 minute session in which we will discuss the research questions by i) analyzing the design artefacts brought in by the convenors and those available on the online repository (please see below); ii) use making as a catalyst for discussion. This will involve the participants gathering in small groups to explore possible scenarios in e.g. health, and identify opportunities for intervention and innovation in methods that in turn elaborate on the existing woman-centered approach to design.

The online repository will be available before, during and after the session and participants will be invited to contribute, as way of engaging pre-conference. During the session the convenors will start by introducing the topic and each will bring design artefacts to serve as catalysts for discussion and conversation(s) within smaller groups. Teresa Almeida will facilitate the overall discussion pre- through post-conference, including maintenance of the online repository. She will also be responsible for audio-visual photographic documentation during the session. Sarah Homewood and Marie Louise Søndergaard will prepare design materials and support ideation and discussions during the making activities. Kellie Morrissey and Madeline Balaam will act as discussants on topics of feminism and women contributing perspectives on participatory and socially engaged design research practices.

### 5. Type of space and equipment required

We will need an open room for 20-25 participants including the convenors. All materials for making and prototyping will be provided by the convenors. Movable seating/break-out type of room with tables and chairs, a projector, 1-2 whiteboards.

### 6. Dissemination strategy

Prior to the conference, we aim to start an online design repository on woman-centered design to support the Conversation and to represent and archive design and knowledge that support our ongoing research. Additionally, with inspiration from Garnet Hertz's Critical Making and Disobedient Electronics (Hertz 2012, 2017) handmade book projects, and the Wilful Technologies proposal (Balaam and Hansen 2018), we will curate the Conversation's documentation and prototype based outputs into a visual booklet; a zine based publication. As our tangible outcome of the Conversation, this zine can be featured on the DRS2018 website post-conference. We will forward the zine to different outlets e.g. women centers, for wider public engagement, and use it as material to ignite further conversation(s) in technology and design oriented academic settings. To further contribute within the interdisciplinary areas of research in which we work, we plan to write an ACM *Interactions* magazine article on the topic of this conversation.

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#### **About the Convenors:**

**Teresa Almeida** is a postdoc in Interaction Design at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden. Her work explores design-oriented human-computer interaction (HCI) and design research practices with a focus on women's health.

**Marie Louise Juul Søndergaard** is a PhD candidate in Digital Design at Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research is focused on critical-feminist design practices and issues of gender and sexuality in intimate technologies.

**Sarah Homewood** is a PhD student at the IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She uses design based research to probe the effects of self-tracking on embodied experience, particularly within the field of women's health.

**Kellie Morrissey** is a Research Fellow at Open Lab, Newcastle University where she leads the Digital Social Care theme. Her work focuses on the experience-centred design of technologies for older people and women's health.

**Madeline Balaam** is Associate Professor in Interaction Design at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden. Her current research includes 'Digital Women's Health', which is focused on improving women's access and experiences in health, and rethinking interactions with digital for intimate care.