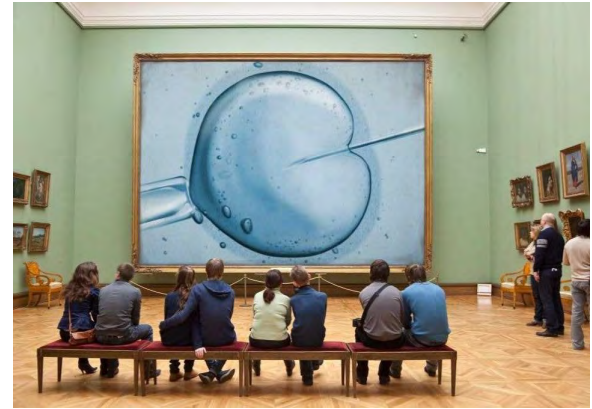


Art, Communication, and Assisted Reproductive Technology

Mira Ogawa
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Prof. Victoria Vesna, PhD
TA: T.C. (Teng Chao) Zhou



Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs)



“ART refers to treatments and procedures that aim to achieve pregnancy.” [1]
-National Institute of Health

Abstract

Following the exhibit at the Fowler Museum, *Communication Systems in a Global Context*, the ability of communication and its different methods to be art stuck with me. It had me considering all the stories that do not get told when discussing reproductive health. One of the largest gaps, despite being globally highly controversial is artificial reproductive technologies.

This project aims to discuss the development of and the destigmatization of assisted reproductive technologies. These technologies sit at the intersection of gender studies, politics, technology, and a discovery of the impossible. However, increasingly assisted reproductive technologies are useful for individuals creating families. Issues of female foeticide in certain nations/cultures, decreasing birth rates in developed countries spur discussions and debates on the merits and accessibility of ARTs. ARTs are under discussed in the media and are often viewed as a last ditch effort of the most desperate. Changing narratives around ARTs and communicating openly about reproductive health can create tangible benefits for individuals.

Concept/Topic: What are ARTs and Whose Stories do They Include?

ARTs include: artificial insemination, cryopreservation, in vitro fertilization, embryo transfer, sex determination, nuclear transfer and cloning (not yet done in humans), and many more.

Since the first IVF procedure more than 9 Million babies have been born from IVF alone. [2]

However, the stories of those who endure IVF treatment and those who utilize other forms of artificial reproductive technologies are often not highlighted or discussed openly. Books like **The Underwear in My Shoe: My Journey Through IVF, Unfiltered** discuss the journey of women going through IVF but these narratives often focus on the ideal populations of those who are going through this treatment. The reality is that ARTs are a future to provide access to families to those who want them. However, they are also riddled with ethical issues and highly politicized. Questions that are often raised about the usage of the technologies include the idea of designer babies (as discussed in the 1997 film, *Gattacca*) to homophobic policies trying to exclude same-sex couples from having children through the means of ARTs. In addition, concerns about equity of access become broadly important due to the cost-prohibitive nature of the technologies, especially in the United States. [3] The ability to have open conversations about ARTs is severely mitigated by social stigma and heavy politicization globally. In addition, the future thinking nature and constantly dance with bioethics while doing what was previously thought to be impossible makes discussions about ARTs even more difficult to facilitate with the public. The possibility of ARTs to do harm is also discussed in the well known New York Review Piece, **More Than 100 Million Girls are Missing**.

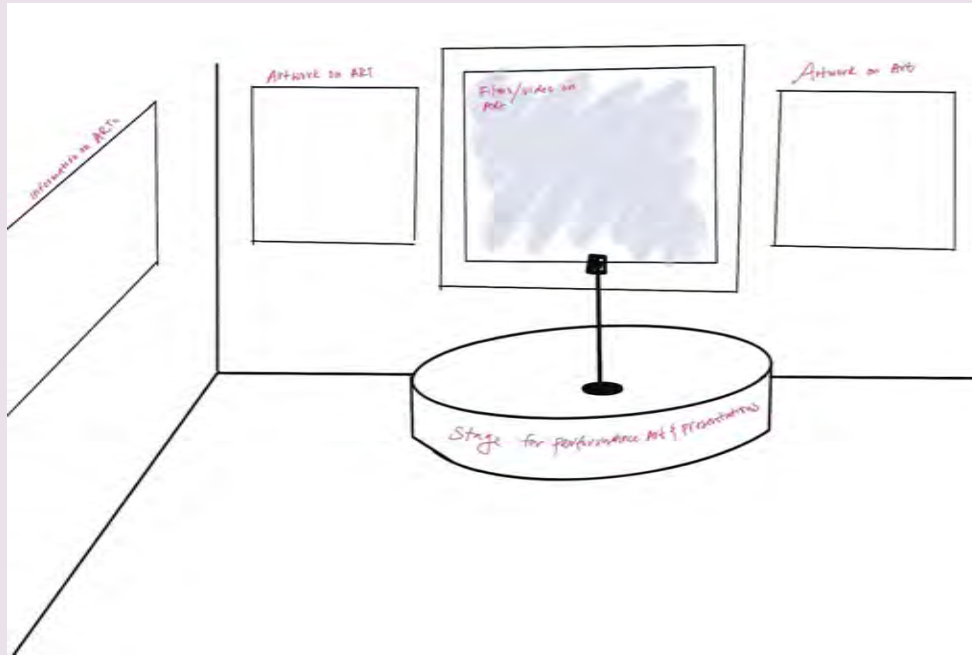
Context and Precedence

Discussions of ARTs have been done on larger political, medical, and religious scales. For example, in South Korea, the usage of sex determination was outlawed and doctors were not allowed to reveal the gender of the fetus to the parents due to the increase of sex-selective abortions skewing the population with a peak of 116.5 boys for every 100 girls born. [4] In the Islamic religion, with the commercialization of ARTs discussions are made and Islamic law outlines acceptable usages and restrictions for the usage of ARTs [5]. While these discussions are available and occur to the interested populations, they are not available or particularly well known to the public or will peak within a single nation's political conscious. As these technologies develop and what was once impossible becomes possible, having open means of communication becomes increasingly important and a key to having public opinion reflected within policy decisions and as an active check and engagement with the scientific community. When playing with life itself, the science and art closely merge.

Project Proposal

Knowledge and understanding of ARTs by the public is limited and often lacks nuance. To combat this, the creation of a physical space to create a rotating exhibit regarding different policies, views, artwork, and stories about ARTs and a website that looks at ARTs in different countries would benefit the spread of knowledge and greater nuance within conversations of ARTs. In addition, greater information and understandings of conception can expand social and economic rights for individuals who face difficulty having children. This can include decreasing the stigma against women and individuals who struggle to get pregnant, couples that cannot conceive, or individuals who want a child without being attached to a partner. In addition with 46% of the world's population living in nations that have fertility rates below replacement, there becomes an increase in concern and thus a window for non-nuclear families to be formed and be integrated into the new normal. [6] This may potentially open greater avenues for social and political rights as well as positioning articulations for better social support networks as nation's attempt to boost fertility rates to save social security systems and prevent economic crises similar to that currently faced by China. [7]

Physical Space for Exhibit

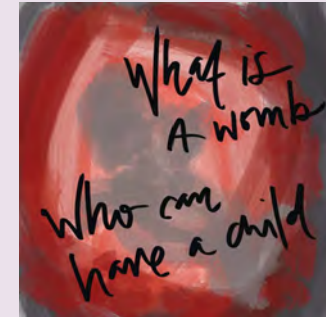


The exhibit would always show different pieces of artwork, film, and host talks about ARTs and reproductive rights globally. Similar to how different museums focused on specific topics garner greater attention to subjects of contention (like the Red Light Secrets Museum), the hope is that such a space can broaden views and educate the public on ARTs and the nuanced issues that derive from them. The space to have discussions would allow both experts and those with connections to ARTs to share knowledge and discuss experiences, similar to how in class speakers come to share knowledge regarding topics and connections to art and science. Fostering these connections creates chains of communication, not only written but also visual and interpersonal for the visitors.

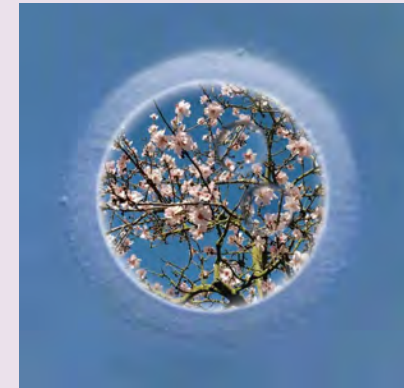
Art to Communicate Topics within Reproductive Health

The usage of art to communicate the heavily emotional experience of utilizing ARTs, the expression of political opinions and raising potential concerns creates another experience within the physical and online space. Learning about the experiences of others through art allows the audience to create more emotional ties and connections with the issues at hand. In the case of ARTs, where the stories of many are often unheard and fall to the wayside in favor of sensationalized headlines, the ability of art to showcase the political and personal is increasingly important. This is evident in the artwork done by Gina Clover that tackles a critical understanding of the clinical alongside the hope that blooms with the usage of ARTs. Tabitha Moses embroidered onto the gown symbols of hope, fertility, and the tools used in ART processes to show the labor and dreams that goes into the utilization of ARTs but also the amount of luck that must occur in the process (with only around half of IVFs being successful). [8]

Tabitha Moses



Me



Gina Clover

Learning through Art

Art allows students and individuals to learn by putting aside modern distractions. This allows for deeper learning and more analytical understanding through the peeling back of metaphors and the ability to read the room. By presenting different art forms in the physical exhibition, the aim is to trigger deeper understanding of ARTs and the struggles and stories that individuals go to access and use them. In addition, there art connects the viewer, even one without background to the issue at hand. This access and understanding makes personalization occur in the learning process and can help facilitate more empathetic discussions and understanding around largely controversial topics. [8] These conversations also create and allow complex ideas to be unpacked as the layers of the image are slowly revealed with and without external context as material is provided throughout the exhibition [9]



Interactive Website

The creation of a website to make the exhibit more accessible globally and to include larger breadth of pieces (as the physical locations cycles through different works). In addition, games and interactive activities can be incorporated into the site to create more engagement and information retention. The fact that ARTs are not exclusively used in the United States and the rest of the world means that the inclusion of culturally sensitive content is necessary. In addition, there is a need for greater access to the material at hand. In part, this aspect of the project is inspired by [ALIEN] Star Dust's hybrid approach to interacting with and giving information and perspectives to listeners and viewers globally as everyone could benefit from the perspectives given by the project.



Conclusion

The knowledge that can be produced through interaction with artwork, presentation, and story-telling is unique and is an excellent way to obtain multifaceted perspectives on complex issues. In the case of the usage of ARTs, the ability of interactive learning through art and online resources can be incredibly beneficial to both learning more about the possibilities of the technology but also to create greater discourse to analyze the nuance of the issues at hand. In a world where ARTs are constantly at conflict with potential ethical concerns but are trying to solve for the struggles that many individuals face of wanting to create a family, a forum and place to learn about the issues and have open discussions is unique and powerful.

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