

Awakening lay expertise and the changing doctor-patient relationship in Hungary

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SESSION 3: Emerging Configurations of Biomedical Technologies

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Present paper (funded by OTKA-K108981) investigates everyday life experiences of infertile women who have decided to seek medical treatments which employ assisted reproductive technologies (grounded in a volatile relationship with the health care facilities), based on a systematic and in-depth qualitative analysis of topic related on-line discussion group messages.

The research focuses on the special knowledge and expertise patients obtain throughout the course of their often long and emotionally taxing treatments, becoming the archetype of lay experts. The study examines how this contextual knowledge is used in cooperation with medical professionals, or at times leveraged against them through the course of infertility treatment. Growing patient knowledge has potential to affect the fundamentals of medical practice.

Hungary provides unique techno-political context for exploration, since it is traditionally a field where trust towards medical professionals and institutionalized medicine is typically low and social discourse on moral and societal impacts of biomedical and intimate technologies is very limited.

The chosen research design permitted studying the discourse of the participants in a natural, non-controlled environment, where the presence of the researcher had no influence on the results.

Main findings suggest that while lay expertise and condition based knowledge is rising, the supremacy of trust towards medical professionals and institutionalized medicine is fading in Hungary and a new dynamics in attitudes towards treatments is emerging as we speak.