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# **Feminist and Queer Approaches to ICT4D: Imagining and Enacting Liberation**

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**Abstract:** This editorial introduces the core message, conceptual apparatus and contributions of the current Special Issue on Feminist and Queer Approaches to ICT4D. We begin by placing our Call for Papers, and the papers published in this volume, in the historical backdrop of the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and of the uproar fostered by the #MeToo and women's marches movements. We also place this Special Issue in the context of adverse digital incorporation, which characterises present-day ICT4D research and further highlights the importance of a feminist and queer lens within its landscape. We develop a conceptual apparatus to articulate such a lens, integrating feminist and queer theory with views of data justice, algorithmic resistance, decolonial theorisation, and the use of digital technologies in solidarity-making. We then leverage this conceptual apparatus to present the seven papers from this Special Issue, highlighting their synergies, but also their unique contributions to a feminist and queer view of ICT4D. We conclude the editorial with ideas on possible paths that the research engaged in this Special Issue may embark on.

## **1. The Genesis of the Call for Papers: Feminist and Queer Approaches to ICT4D**

This Special Issue presents seven, independent research articles that, through different pathways to knowledge generation, offer novel contributions to the area of Feminist and Queer approaches to Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D). This collection, and the contribution to the literature that this Editorial delineates, stem from two conference tracks on “Feminist and Queer Approaches to Information Systems in Developing Countries” and on “Reimagining digital technology for the ‘new normal’: a feminist approach to freedom and social inclusion”, respectively held at the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) Working Group 9.4 Virtual Conference in May 2021 and the 17th IFIP 9.4 Conference in May 2022 (Vannini et al., 2021a; Dye-Thomas et al., 2022). Set in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, both conferences engaged pressing debates of contemporary ICT4D: these ranged from the challenge to established Western paradigms, to theoretical and methodological innovation and decolonial approaches to the ICT4D field (cf. Perez-Garcia, 2021; Marais & Vannini, 2021; Jimenez et al., 2022). Further liberating movements that unfolded globally, including the 2017 Women's Marches, the #MeToo movement, and the #MyGynaecStory movement, all highlighted the urgent need for ICT4D to address deeply entrenched gender inequalities and power imbalances.

The ongoing global health and financial crisis caused by COVID-19 further exposes the vulnerabilities of marginalised communities and underscores the limitations of the existing ICT4D paradigm. As the Chilean protestors declared during their 2019 demonstrations, “no podemos volver a la normalidad, porque la normalidad era el problema” (we cannot go back to normal, because normal was the problem) (Comité de Redacción Periódico El Pueblo, 2019). This sentiment resonated deeply with scholars, activists, and civil society around the world, who recognised the necessity of moving beyond the status quo. Our experiences around curating conference tracks on ICT4D confronted us with a critical gap in terms of prominence of feminist and queer approaches to the discipline. This realisation, coupled with the powerful movements for social change unfolding globally, compelled us to propose a Call for Papers for this Special Issue. Feminist and queer approaches to ICT4D offer a vital framework for dismantling these inequalities and building a more just and inclusive future.

As we summarise below, the past two decades have seen a wealth of published research that has enabled researchers to think critically about how to proceed further as a field. Drawing on Heeks (2014) and Walsham (2017), several waves of thought and action can be identified in this respect:

**Early ICT4D and the Challenge to Optimism (1960s-1980s).** Heeks (2014) positions the first ICT4D works between the 1960s and the 1980s, at a time when computers had started diffusing across less wealthy countries (cf. Avgerou, 2017). Interest in the positive contributions that computers – and, over time, ICTs – could make to development originated important markers in the field’s history: among those are the birth of the *Information Technology for Development* journal in 1986, and the establishment of IFIP 9.4, back then a Working Group on the *Social Implications for Computers in Developing Countries*, in 1988. The assumptions characterising the early days of ICT4D research have been variously described: Akpan (2003) noted, for instance, that “development” meant “different things to different people”, in a piece where she interrogated whether ICTs were “the missing link” to the economic spillovers of globalisation. Avgerou (2003) problematised the link of ICTs and economic growth in the discourse of development, shedding light on the multi-pronged, rather than linear, relationship between the two. Building on Sen (2001), Kleine (2013) broadened the concept of development beyond economic aspects to encompass the idea of the freedom to lead meaningful lives.

**Shifting Sands - Rethinking Core Assumptions.** These problematisations have grown with the evolution of the ICT4D field over time. Looking back at ICT4D history, Masiero (2022) notes a crisis of three core assumptions: first, the very notion of “development” – upheld in the early days of ICT4D – became increasingly questioned over time, especially with Escobar’s (1995) unpacking of the power relations implicit in the development discourse and its effects on recipients (Qureshi, 2015). Second, the very notion of “developing countries” emanating from that discourse came under scrutiny: the term, Qureshi (2015) notes again, risks perpetuating the colonial discourse that Escobar (2011) denounces, generating the danger of becoming trapped in an imposing logic rather than a liberating one. Third, the portrait of ICTs in the strive “for development” has become more problematic over time: first with the ambiguities noted by Avgerou (2003), and then with the recognition of utterly harmful effects from being incorporated in digital systems, reflected in the discussion around *adverse digital incorporation* (Heeks, 2022: 128).

**Adverse Digital Incorporation - A Challenge within ICT4D.** The phenomenon of adverse digital incorporation, spreading both within and beyond the field of ICT4D, forms the core contextual element for the research presented in this Special Issue. Heeks (2022, p. 128) defines adverse digital incorporation as “inclusion in a digital system that enables a more-advantaged group to extract disproportionate value from the work or resources of another, less-advantaged group.” This definition provides a powerful conceptual tool to analyse the detrimental, rather than positive, impacts of being incorporated into digital systems. Early ICT4D research focused on bridging the “digital divide” (Warschauer, 2004). However, we now recognise that these divides are not only multiple but also wider than previously thought (Wagg et al. 2024a, 2024b). Furthermore, research on digital surveillance (Sheombar & Skelton, 2023), datafication, and data injustice perpetrated in the name of “development” (Taylor & Broeders, 2015; Roberts et al., 2021) highlights the potential harms associated with ICT4D projects. In light of these concerns, and considering the historical optimism surrounding ICTs and development (Brown & Grant, 2010), ICT4D researchers have a critical need to address these issues.

Drawing on the well-established scholarship of dismantling structural oppression based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation, feminist and queer approaches equip ICT4D research with multifaceted tools to challenge the diverse and often violent manifestations of adverse digital incorporation. These approaches offer a two-pronged strategy. First, they provide a robust conceptual apparatus for illuminating the forms, mechanisms, and lived realities of oppression embedded within

digital systems. Second, by fostering a theoretically grounded understanding of these oppressive contours reflected in the experiences of marginalised communities, they enable the envisioning of solidarity, resistance, and collaborative action. Through this process, as Walsham (2012) suggests, a "better world" can be constructed for those who have been silenced and denied a voice. It is with this commitment to a constructive, liberating, and decolonial approach that the Call for Papers for this Special Issue was developed, and now this diverse collection of research is presented to readers for critical engagement.

This editorial proceeds as follows. We first refer to cognate literatures of ICT4D to delineate a conceptual apparatus for enacting feminist and queer approaches to ICT4D. While not exhaustive in itself, such an apparatus allows us to move through the literature, positioning the seven contributions of this Special Issue in their theoretical landscape. We then summarise the papers in this Special Issue, clarifying how each of them makes unique contributions to ICT4D research and advancing it. We close the editorial with a springboard of ideas for a future research agenda.

## **2. A Conceptual Apparatus: Imaging Liberation through Feminist and Queer Approaches in ICT4D**

To understand the liberating contribution that feminist and queer approaches bring to ICT4D, we note, as a starting point, the binary, cisnormative understanding that much ICT4D research has taken till the present time. We also note how this rarely questioned the existing structures of power that are "ideologically constituted as normal" (Davis, p. 100) and that "involve[s] a consciousness of capitalism [...], and racism, and colonialism, and postcolonialities, and ability" (Davis, p. 104), even if real feminist transformative work should aim at challenging them (hooks, 1984). This set of assumptions is still present in relatively recent works of the discipline: in outlining a research agenda for ICT4D, Walsham (2017) poses the question on gender in terms of the advantages that ICTs can bring for *women*, without contemplating divides beyond the male-female binary; other studies have approached gender matters by integrating them into established systems shaped by patriarchal norms, without actively seeking to alter these power structures (Hentschel et al., 2016; Sultana et al., 2018).

Notable exceptions are to be acknowledged, as they set the tone for the discussions we aim to foster through this Special Issue. As one of the precursors to feminist research in ICT4D, Buskens (2011) adopts a critical constructive perspective, noting that, as the nature of social reality is inherently gendered and subject to gendered power dynamics, implementing ICT programs without gender awareness only perpetuates gender-based inequality. Later on, she proposed a distinction between conformist, reformist, and transformist research (Buskens, 2014), highlighting how ICT4D research has often assumed a conformist or reformist approach to address women's practical needs and cope with existing gender inequalities. However, only transformative ICT4D initiatives have the potential to change the structural power relationships and to tackle the root causes of gender inequality (Buskens, 2014). Roberts (2016) employs critical feminist theories in his research to convert women's practical experiences of discrimination into an awareness of their strategic gender interests, which focus on dismantling patriarchal power structures.

Gurumurthy (2017) historicises the struggles for gender justice and feminist engagement with ICT policies, emphasising the contributions of women, and Indigenous women in particular, from the global South while tracing ICT4D connections to neoliberal and opportunistic discourses that have hindered feminist struggles for gender equality. She claims that the rise of the internet alongside neoliberal policies adversely impacted women's rights and empowerment, failing to acknowledge "the injustice of the global economic system" and remaining "uncritical of how trade liberalisation and open markets pose the biggest threat to indigenous women's rights to their territories, resources and

intellectual and cultural heritage” (Gurumurthy, 2017, p. 4) Gurumurthy, Vasudevan and Chami (2017) offer a critical perspective on how ICT-mediated media affect women's human rights, highlighting that the neoliberal agenda of online platforms perpetuates regressive gender ideologies, violate personal autonomy and endangers vulnerable groups, makes it difficult for progressive gender perspectives to gain traction, curtails gender minorities’ participation and stifles their free speech, and ultimately fails to account for the unique challenges women face in accessing technology, tending to reinforce economic disparities among genders (Gurumurthy et al., 2017). Their words echo the work of Federici (1975, 2018), who relates the historical oppression of women to older and newer forms of capital accumulation.

Unfortunately, this more critical and transformation-oriented research has not always been openly contemplated from the ICT4D community, with a few notable exceptions. *Queerness* (Brewis et al., 1997; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013) is represented in research performances, problematisation of universalism and essentialism of ICT4D projects (Vannini et al., 2021b; Sultana et al., 2018). The allied disciplines in the recent past had started to witness multiple instantiations of such contributions including the movement for a Queer HCI (Spiel et al., 2019; DeVito et al., 2020). At the IFIP 9.4 Virtual Conference, van Zyl & McLean (2021) noted how contact tracing technologies were generating disproportionate adverse effects on LGBTQIA+ users. A similar perspective was adopted by Wyers (2022), who proposes a research agenda for queer issues in ICT4D.

The feminist and queer approaches that we propose in this Special Issue aim to retake this more critical ICT4D scholarship, mostly relegated to a niche of the mainstream ICT4D scholarship, and result into its recentering. In this way, we do not only want to enable researchers to acknowledge and interrogate the dominant binaries (such as male-female) and norms (such as masculinity, heterosexuality), but also provide them tools to debate and examine varied forms of *adverse digital incorporation* (Heeks, 2022: 128) and support to question the very same - patriarchal, neoliberal, colonial - logics that have prevented the discipline, so far, to aim for a real societal transformation. Further, critical interrogation of information and communication technology underscores a common challenge faced by ICT4D researchers: how to engage with diverse feminist and queer theoretical perspectives while still aiming to improve development outcomes.

We offer two broad approaches to align these schools of thought with ICT4D research, termed a *performance-based* and an *affect-based* approach. We acknowledge the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of feminist and queer theories, and this Special Issue does not aim to prescribe specific frameworks. Instead, we assert the value stemming from the inherent *alterity* of feminist and queer theories, offering a critical lens that challenges dominant power structures and resists assimilation by mainstream approaches. Papers in this Special Issue showcase how feminist and queer approaches can be used to reconfigure the object of enquiry itself as they problematise heteronormativity in research data during literature reviews, investigate the agential capabilities of digital communities as socio-technical systems, and envision alternative futures through a process of speculative engagement with the historical past (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; Hovorka & Peter, 2021). This Special Issue demonstrates how researchers can leverage the strengths of feminist and queer theories to reimagine their research questions and methodologies. The two suggested, complementary approaches are detailed below.

**Performance-Based Approach.** Butler’s (1993) concept of *performativity* implies that actions and practices shape norms and identities. We learn by repeating existing practices, but through these repetitions, we can also introduce subtle changes (“repetition with a difference”). Thus, feminist and queer investigation of ICT4D projects may involve actively questioning and contesting how development and usage happens. This could enable researchers to propose alternative designs and uses of technology that challenge normative assumptions and test the limits of existing practices.

Theories aligning with performative view also suggest to problematise usage of technology only as a site for transformation but also the cause of transformations (Butler, 1993). Thus, acknowledging that not just technologies but also researchers operate within established systems and power structures. In the context of ICT4D, this means that the way people interact with the technology, both in its organising (development) and enactment (usage) can influence how it ultimately shapes development outcomes. Overall, a performativity-based approach suggests that ICT4D research should not just focus on the technology itself, but also on the ways people use it in order to challenge existing developmental practices and create new possibilities.

**Affect-Based Approach.** So far, an affect-based approach remains less frequently adopted by Information Systems (IS) and ICT4D scholars (Burrell & Toyama, 2009). This is primarily due to the historical tendency within these fields to view social and technology as distinct entities. This view often relies on binary oppositions such as action and agency, material and non-material, or human and non-human (Faulkner & Runde, 2019). We encourage a critical re-evaluation of this perspective and advocate for the merits of relational feminist and queer approaches within empirical research contexts. Motivation for this shift can be found in studies published in leading IS journals (Leonardi, 2013; Byagi et al., 2021). The affect-based approach offers theoretical frameworks and tools for studying ICTs as digital objects that emerge from the interconnected actions of human and non-human agents. This allows researchers to examine the affective dimensions of ICTs, such as abjection, subjection, and omission. By doing so, it provides opportunities to problematise issues of adverse digital incorporation as conceptualised in Heeks (2022).

Within the space of an affect-based approach, the work of Karen Barad (2011) equips researchers not only to consider technology as an agent of change through its ongoing re-performance but also to explore the origins and relationality of affects. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how ICTs shape and are shaped by human experiences. Researchers can further explore how emotions and lived experiences shape project outcomes. For instance, scholars such as Law and Mol (1995) and Ahmed (2004) emphasise emotions (affect) as not simply reactions, but integral to agency and action. For example, someone feeling excluded from a technology project might be less likely to participate in it. This approach provides tools to imagine an ICT4D project as a temporary gathering of different elements – the technology, the people involved, the surrounding environment that are themselves shaped by people's feelings and lived experiences (Doolin & McLeod, 2012).

To sum up, queer and feminist perspectives allow the researcher to delve into the spectrum of power dynamics, from empowering to oppressive, intertwined with the challenges of adverse digital incorporation. The explorations undertaken by papers in this Special Issue reveal instances of coercion and complicity with normatively informed ICT4D. Consequently, researchers can build on these studies to challenge the prevailing narrative regarding ICT4D as unproblematic, and shed light on the violence of perpetuating "normality" through these technologies (Varela et al., 2011).

It needs to be noted that a full conceptual mapping of feminist and queer approaches – and of the multiple notions through which these illuminate questions of ICT4D – is beyond the scope of this editorial. However, the papers in this Special Issue detail various empirical realms, collectively illuminating the key concepts that we discuss below. Taken together, these concepts form a composite conceptual apparatus, which is reflected in the papers published in the present issue.

- **Data justice.** Feminist and queer approaches, with their focus on people's representation in data, invoke the notion of data justice, as recently reflected in research (Dencik et al., 2022). We adopt Taylor's (2017) definition of data justice as "fairness in the way people are made visible, represented and treated as a result of their production of digital data." Taylor emphasises that, just as a notion of justice informs the rule of law, a notion of data justice is key to navigating ethical considerations in a

data-driven world. Along similar lines, Bentley et al. (2023) analyse how intersectional data feminist practice is operationalised and propose ways to advance the intersectional data science agenda by adopting an articulation mindset (Collins, 2019). Feminist and queer approaches go beyond data articulation and visualisation; they encompass the subsequent representation and treatment of people based on that data. Relatedly, the concept of "data feminism" (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020) involves recognising how traditional data science practices perpetuate existing inequalities. Defined as "a way of thinking about data, both their uses and their limits, that is informed by direct experience, by a commitment to action, and by intersectional feminist thought" (ibid., p. 8), data feminism aims to leverage these very practices to disrupt and redistribute power in order to transform society. Another poignant example is Costanza-Chock's (2020) description of the violent treatment inflicted by airport security officers in response to the flagging of a non-gender-conforming body. Similarly, Wong-Villacres et al. (2018) advocate for designing for intersectional, minority groups by acknowledging social dynamics, considering both disadvantages and privileges, and incorporating context-specific comparisons. Gallistl et al. (2024) recommend investigating ageism in AI models and its implications for aging in a datafied world.

- **(Algorithmic) solidarity.** Notably, a focus on the detrimental aspects of ICT adoption has emerged due to adverse digital incorporation (Akbari & Masiero, 2023). However, it is equally important to recognise that pervasive negative outcomes are only one side of the story told in present-day ICT4D research. Over time, an equally significant phenomenon has emerged: the rise of studies on technologies that, instead of perpetuating negative digital incorporation, offer opportunities to build solidarity and resist technologically induced oppression. Recent work by Bonini and Trerè (2024) exemplifies this trend. Their study of algorithmic resistance sheds light on how algorithms, along with other technological elements, can be used to promote solidarity and escape oppressive dynamics. The papers within this Special Issue embrace this logic of resistance, illuminating the diverse ways it plays out in contexts of oppression related to sex, gender, and gender orientation.

- **Reflexivity.** The papers in this Special Issue actively engage with a plurality of feminist texts, encompassing not only feminist perspectives but also those emerging from queer, decolonial, and other critical schools of thought. This rich foundation serves feminist and queer researchers well. In line with this, we recommend researchers acknowledge the inherent limitations of their own positionality and abilities. For example, researchers can refer to works in allied disciplines, such as Neha et al. (2019). In their work, the authors exemplify reflexive practices by explicitly acknowledging their identities as researchers from global north universities conducting research in the global south. Similarly, Tandon et al. (2019) disclose their cis-gendered identities and the lead author's lack of personal experience with marriage or motherhood, which they posit as a potential influence on their data collection. With this special issue, we encourage researchers to adopt transparency and *self-problematization* (Dixit, 2023) practices vital for presenting robust and liberating ICT4D research. Without reflexivity and problematisation, mere inclusion of positionality statements risks becoming an *epistemological performance* (Caruth, 2010), rather than a genuine reflection of engagement with feminist theories with a commitment towards ethical research practices (Deaden & Kleine, 2021).

- **Queer(ing) the research process.** Queering the research process challenges the traditional notion of rigid protocols for data collection and disembodied researchers (Sandelowski, 2002; Silverman, 1998; Parker, 2016). When applied to research methodology, queer theory prioritises both researcher well-being and documenting the tensions that can arise between researchers and participants (Jensen & Mahmud, 2024; Rajendra & Sarin, 2023). Beyond sharing personal experiences (Langer, 2016; Erfanian et al., 2020), researchers can leverage feminist and queer methodologies to create safe spaces for participants to discuss taboo topics (Tuli et al., 2023). This aligns with the emphasis on the Special Issue towards challenging traditional norms. Additionally, queer theory encourages experimentation

with data presentation formats. For instance, Tandon (2019) argues that presenting field interactions as vignettes can generate empathy among readers towards participants, ultimately promoting a more liberating development in ICT4D. This highlights the value of methodological flexibility within queer theory and the new possibilities it opens for researchers.

In addition, queering the research process and reviewing queer research requires careful consideration of two key issues. The first issue concerns the importance of centring the voices of marginalised populations. However, as Wyers (2023) points out, this approach carries a potential risk. Once identified and categorised, marginalised identities may face increased visibility, which can lead to further discrimination. Therefore, the challenge lies in finding effective ways to voice these perspectives without simply replacing them with the perspectives of researchers who occupy dominant positions. One solution may involve leveraging visual art, blog posts, poems, and other forms of self-expression (Biehl-Missal, 2015; Jensen and Mahmud, 2024; Tandon, 2021). The second issue emphasises the importance of demonstrating a commitment to working both with and for those marginalised by dominant ICT4D structures. A powerful example of this approach can be found in this Special Issue: Cecilia Strand uses data from popular social network platforms employed by organisations working within and alongside the Ugandan LGBTQIA+ community. The analysis of this data allowed for an exploration of the "differential agentic affordances" (meaning the varying empowering possibilities) of social media platforms for different organizations within the community. Overall, papers within this issue go beyond traditional methods of "research on subjects" by advocating for methodologies that enable – "research for and with people." This shift, we believe, would foster a more holistic approach to ICT4D projects.

**- Embodiment (centring bodily experiences).** A fundamental challenge in ICT4D research lies in the tendency to marginalise the "unknown" and categorise those differing from the dominant norm as "other" (Myers et al., 2020). This "othering" process can encompass individuals based on factors like geographic location, gender, sexuality, class, caste, race, religion, region, or ability who fall outside the archetypal user. Feminist and post-humanist scholarship critiques this approach, emphasising the importance of centring lived body experiences within research (Haraway, 1988, 1991; Mol, 2008; Lupton, 2014; Spiel et al., 2020). These experiences encompass the social and material realities of living with diverse bodies, such as those identified as fat, asexual, breastfeeding, transgender, diabetic, or disabled (ibid.). Traditional ICT4D research often attempts to remove the complexities of these realities by excluding participants' bodily experiences from the research narrative. This Special Issue calls for a shift in this practice. We advocate for researchers to engage with the lived bodily experiences of participants (when appropriate and with consent) (Chughtai, 2021). By incorporating these experiences into the research, they can explore the design implications of ICT4D projects alongside their ethical, political, and social consequences. This approach further aligns with the concept of feminist reflexivity discussed before, as highlighted by Merleau-Ponty (1994). Reflexivity acknowledges the researcher-participant relationship as both subjective and intersubjective, shaped by the embodied experiences of both parties. Recognising this reciprocal relationship between researchers and researched bodies can foster a deeper understanding of the ICT4D context.

**- Decolonial and Indigenous theorisation.** In line with our commitment to decolonial, Indigenous, and feminist principles, this Special Issue encourages a move away from standardised language in research, from conceptualisation and research questions to data analysis and dissemination. We advocate for the use of local words and concepts to capture the nuanced experiences of participants. This emphasis on local language extends to the development of mid-range theories as exemplified by Diaz Andrade et al. (2021) in their theorisation based on the concept of "itikanga" (customary traditions) in a Māori community. The Special Issue showcases studies, such as Illari Diez and Juan Bossio's analysis of "sororidad" (sisterhood) within a Peruvian Facebook group. Ultimately, we advocate for researchers to harness the combined lens of feminist, queer, and Indigenous and



decolonial theories to critically examine ICT4D projects. By centring local knowledges and experiences, we can not only generate more nuanced and contextually relevant theories for ICT4D research, but contribute to dismantle the structures of oppression currently contributing to reproducing societal inequalities.

### 3. Summary of Contributions

This Special Issue contains seven contributions that, spanning across geographical, social and political contexts, immerse the reader in multiple facets of feminist and queer approaches to ICT4D. This section leverages the conceptual apparatus developed above to introduce the Special Issue papers, noting their synergies but also the unique ways in which each of them develops new, important knowledge for the field. Different parts of the conceptual apparatus are relevant to each paper, but all contribute to advancing the debate that our Call for Papers had initially invited.

In “Centring queer knowledge paradigms in designing and implementing health information and communication technologies”, Travis Wagner and Vanessa Kitzie (2024) report on findings from two studies of the health information practices of queer persons in the South of the United States of America. The two studies share a common core: the first one presents semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 65 queer community leaders and members, enquiring on their views of ICT-related barriers to health information. The second one conducts participatory research on Community Health Worker (CHW) certification attained by queer individuals, who collaborated with health science librarians for the development of a queer-focused informational resource. Drawing on participants’ voices, the paper’s findings concur to illuminating the cisnormative and heteronormative biases entrenched in health ICTs, and propose ways forward in queering ICTs for health promotion. While presenting multiple forms of data injustice as defined in Taylor (2017), the paper also explores ways to overcome these forms of injustice, ways that the voices of study participants directly corroborate.

In “Women’s solidarity as feminism in action: the concept of sisterhood (*sororidad*) in #LasRespondonas, a Facebook group in Peru”, Illari Diez and Juan Bossio (2024) analyse the meaning of the notion of *sororidad* (sisterhood, or female solidarity) in the context of a feminist Facebook group in Peru. The group, called #LasRespondonas, works to share information on gender violence and enact protection for victims and survivors. Drawing on intensive netnography of the Facebook group, the study reveals how group communications reflect feminist and sisterhood concepts, positioning *sororidad* as a bridge between theory and politics in understanding liberation from gender oppression. The paper illuminates how the very same tools - in this case, social media - leveraged by multiple groups for gender oppression can be applied to liberation, repositioning social media from a site of dubious informational practice to one of solidarity and emancipation.

In “‘I pretend to be an ideal woman just to keep their mouths shut’: Bangladeshi women’s contestation of abuse through social media platforms”, Hannah Klose and Lubna Jebin (2024) study social media as a site where Bangladeshi women contest, rather than absorb, the patriarchal norms that characterise the society they live in. The background of the study illuminates the patriarchal norms that influence social media use in the context of Bangladesh, narrated through the voices of respondents whose lived experience is told in the study’s data. Narrative data are used to illuminate how each interviewed woman adopts different practices to exert agency on social media, resorting to different turnarounds with respect to patriarchal norms. The paper illustrates a resistance that is different from the collective solidarity that much social movements literature (cf. Milan & Beraldo, 2024) is about: while private and individual, these workarounds are central in challenging patriarchal norms, building space for the creative agency of the affected individuals.

In “Health ICTs and transgender health equity: a research agenda”, Katherine Wyers (2024) offers a critical literature review of health ICTs in use by transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people. Noting the risk that blind spots in the literature may result in perpetuation of hurdles to healthcare access for TGD people, she adopts a health equity perspective, combined with the lenses of structural violence and intersectionality, to conduct her review of the literature. Her analysis results in a research agenda that identifies unaddressed topics in TGD-relevant health ICTs, illuminating how these ICTs shape the inclusion and exclusion of marginalised communities. A combined theoretical lens, where the literature is read intersectionally with considerations of health equity and structural violence, offers a unique conceptual perspective to the health ICTs domain.

In “Comprehending ICT for gender empowerment in an aging context: digitalization of marginalized female elderly in the Global South during COVID-19”, Xin Pei, Zhen Troy Chen and Lina Zhang (2024) position the discussion of ICTs and gender in the context of aging women in China. Through an intersectional lens, they delineate the multiple challenges suffered by aging women in coming to terms with digital tools. At the same time, the study draws on participants’ voices to illuminate the ways aging women appropriate, understand and ultimately, exert agency on digital technologies, which became part of the contextual landscapes in which their access to essential services is inscribed. While starting on a note of intersectional oppression, the paper bears a strong meaning of liberation: the liberation that can be achieved through the repurposing of digital tools for the individual’s freedoms, in the light of their needs and of the sociotechnical factors that produce them.

In “Decolonizing gender through ICT: a semiotic analysis of web images from Two-Spirit people websites”, Jose Ortiz (2024) offers a netnography of Two-Spirit websites, where Two-Spirit indicates Indigenous Peoples of North America whose gender identity comprehends feminine and masculine qualities. The paper conducts a semiotic analysis of Two-Spirit websites, addressing the question on how such images reflect the values of Two-Spirit people. Values of *empowerment*, *supportiveness* and *restoration* are found to be reflected in the websites’ images, articulating a logic of cultural emancipation that the internet is able to convey. Starting off on the awareness of the constraining potential of social media, the paper ends up illuminating their liberating affordances, detailing them in the light of Two-Spirit people’s experiences.

In “Challenging the Local logics of Oppression in times of post-colonial Amnesia – A Study of Ugandan LGBT+ Activism in digital media spaces”, Cecilia Strand explores how five established LGBT+ organisations in Uganda make use of their self-controlled social media spaces. Through her analysis of the same organisations over one month in 2022, she illuminates how the organisations’ social media use practices did not directly configure in terms of resistance against an oppressive system: they did, instead, reappropriate resistance as the transmission of relevant information, also providing digital services to the offline LGBT+ community. Placed in the context of the increasingly repressive Ugandan laws, the study illuminates central workarounds in LGBT+ digital work, showing more ways to liberate from harmful heteronormative gender-orientation and oppressions.

#### **4. Conclusion: Enacting Liberation through Feminist and Queer Approaches in ICT4D**

The vibrant collection of papers published in this Special Issue, diverse in their geographic, empirical, and theoretical approaches, share a powerful common thread: the liberating essence of feminist and queer ICT4D research. These papers illuminate previously unseen forms of oppression, revealing the intricate web of power dynamics at play in development contexts. However, the apparatus utilised in these papers is not solely a lens of critique; it is also a lens of possibility. These papers showcase the remarkable capacity for solidarity, collective action, and creative appropriation of technology that emerges through a feminist and queer perspective. By centring marginalised voices and lived

experiences, these approaches empower communities to challenge the status quo and forge new pathways towards a more just and equitable future.

We invite readers to engage with this collection as a springboard for further inquiry. The following research questions, inspired by the rich tapestry of perspectives presented here, offer a glimpse into the exciting possibilities that lie ahead:

**Community Resistance and Appropriation:** How do communities re-purpose and adapt ICT4D tools to challenge existing power structures and inequalities? What can feminist theories help us understand regarding the way communities seek social transformation through ICTs?

**Emotions and User Engagement:** How do emotions including frustration, perception of exclusion or care, affect user engagement with ICT4D projects? How do cultural contexts and lived experiences shape user perceptions and experiences of these technologies?

**Values in and for our research:** What values and whose agendas are we promoting when conducting ICT4D research (e.g., competition, solidarity, collaboration)? How can we more deeply integrate feminist, queer, and care ethics into the values that underpin our research?

**Inclusive Research Practices:** How can researchers from different backgrounds collaborate effectively on ICT4D projects to ensure inclusivity? How can ICT4D research be conducted in a way that is both rigorous and respectful of the communities being studied?

**Embodiment:** How do ICT4D projects have to be adapted to accommodate the needs and experiences of users with diverse bodies? How do different embodied experiences affect the way ICT4D projects are experienced?

**Decoloniality:** How can ICT4D research projects be designed to centre local knowledges and histories? What does the interplay between coloniality and feminist practices teach us regarding the implementation, use, or push back of technologies?

**Algorithmic Justice:** What are the ethical considerations in using algorithms to promote social justice and challenge discriminatory practices? How can ICT4D projects be designed to empower communities to resist algorithmic bias and manipulation?

**Data Justice:** How do current data collection and analysis practices in ICT4D projects perpetuate inequalities and biases (e.g., against non-conforming bodies)? What are the ethical considerations of using data analysis tools which may exhibit ageism, ableism, or other biases in development contexts? How can ICT4D research contribute to "data feminism" by leveraging data practices to challenge power structures and promote social justice?

These questions are just a starting point – the potential for feminist and queer approaches to revolutionise ICT4D research is boundless. As we move forward, let us embrace the transformative power of this critical lens, fostering a future where technology becomes a catalyst for liberation and empowerment for all.

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