

What does “De-Gendering of Technologies” mean? Searching for a common theoretical ground

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De-Gendering software and information technologies is clearly a project located within computer science. However, this discipline does not provide a foundation for such an approach and it is still a question on which theoretical basis a critical-feminist technological design practice could be grounded. While de-gendering approaches in gender studies focus on gender identity (e.g. Judith Butler) or aim at overcoming binary gender divisions altogether (e.g. Judith Lorber), STS with the concept of gender scripts (Rommes, van Oost, following Akrich) provides only a frame for the analysis of gendering processes, which does not necessarily transfer into a theoretical background for a de-gendering of technologies.

In my presentation I want to propose a combined approach which starts with a thorough analysis of the intended goals, e.g. the envisioned outcome of a de-gendered design process. Gendering practices of software and information technologies known so far are classified according to one of the three major strands of feminist theory and politics: gender equality, gender difference and (de-)construction approaches. Furthermore, I suggest to apply existing design methodologies in computer science (e.g. participatory design, critical technical practice, reflective design), in order to promote a de-gendering in the development of software and information technologies. I will relate these practices to the classification scheme of gendering practices or of goals for a “feminist” technology design, respectively.