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Tactics of technology appropriation in the fertility clinic: balancing sacred with profane.

Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) such as obstetric ultrasound and cryopreservation have become vital intermediates shaping new relations between medical professionals, prospective parents, and a future child-to-be. In this paper we discuss video-recorded interactions from a fertility clinic in the Netherlands to see how participants orient to identities, stakes, and norms when appropriating the technological mediations at this site. For this purpose, we combine a postphenomenological take on human-technology relations with Conversation Analysis (CA), and highlight two contrasting patterns of interaction: one by which people relate to the technology with an eye to norms of efficiency and instrumentality, and another by which participants orient themselves to the child-to-be as something endearing, or extremely precious. It appears participants can make use of both repertoires interchangeably. More mundane, instrumental norms are not restricted to either the medical professional or the potential parents. Neither are appeals to the preciousness of new life restricted in this manner. We consequently discuss these patterns with reference to the Durkheimian dichotomy of profane and sacred and argue that, rather than mutually exclusive, the profane and sacred are treated in this technological context as complementary orientations. This is significant, as it is through the contrast of such values that new boundaries of technological intervention are established.