

# Feminist Technology

Edited by [Kate Boyer](#), [Linda Layne](#), [Sharra Vostral](#)  
[University of Illinois Press](#)

On the cover of this book, a silhouette of what resembles a hand holding a speculum, above the words *feminist technology*, prompts questions. Whose hand holds the speculum? Is it just me, or is it kind of shaped like the letter “F”? The image hints at *Feminist Technology*’s project: to look at technologies in the context of the hands that design and use them, and to consider how they might or might not facilitate feminist social relations.

The scope of both feminism and technology is vast, and where they meet is no small place. So, the editors focus on just a few medical technologies, with articles on the menstrual suppressing birth control pill, the breast pump, the home pregnancy test, and the tampon. In her introduction, Linda Layne writes, “...clearly technological fixes are not enough. Feminists must also work toward undoing patriarchy in all its forms. This means not only introducing new technologies, but changing technosocial systems...”

Aengst and Layne’s article on menstrual-suppressing birth control pills explores effects of the pill on ways of thinking about gender by looking at how the construction of a monthly period as biologically “natural” gets disrupted by the birth control pill’s ability to suppress menstruation and to create new cycles. The article ends by imagining how different strains of feminism would interpret the pill. The two scant paragraphs under the header “African American feminism” are a rare glimpse, in this book, of a feminist of color perspective cognizant of the reproductive injustices historically directed toward women of color. Aengst and Layne implicitly marginalize this politic by naming it so fleetingly. The article ends by proclaiming that the pill Seasonale “might very well be a useful technology for middle and upper class women who seek convenience and can afford to choose among many contraceptive technologies.” One wonders: what about everyone else?

While the language of feminism used in the book is quite universalizing, the focus remains largely on technologies in the US and Canada marketed towards cisgender women, implicitly economically privileged. While Anita Hardon’s piece does mention the disturbing ways in which the Population Council used Norplant coercively in Brazil and Bangladesh, it does so in a way that lacks an analysis of the underlying racism that constructs the bodies of people of color as unworthy of care. In reading, I hoped for more outrage from the author at how technology has been used in decidedly unfeminist ways.

In looking at the book’s final articles on the training of feminist designers in universities, I wondered about how feminist design might be imagined even outside of the increasingly inaccessible world of higher education. Considering means of production, in what conditions would people create these new objects, and how would their labor be valued? What materials would be used?

While [\*Feminist Technology\*](#) provides a trove of historical anecdotes on the development of various technologies, it could do better at revisiting the question of what makes a technology feminist by critiquing the very model of feminism it uses—and the voices it might implicitly exclude. If this topic interests you, consider also the feminist technology blog [Difference Engines](#), whose “concerns are not only with gender, but all manner of differencing, including race, ethnicity, and humanity.”