THE FUTURES IN AND OF GENOMICS

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Abstract:
The dramatic fall in the price and cost of genomics testing has made possible a practice that seemed to be confined to the laboratory until a few years ago. Testing one's DNA, or that of beings close to us is an increasingly widespread and almost trivialised possibility. Particularly in the reproductive sphere, where non-invasive prenatal testing, pre-conception or gamete donor screening are emerging, but also more simply with the use of direct-to-consumer genetic tests that can investigate susceptibility to diseases, food intolerances, allergies, and so on. A common element of these tests is that they use genomics to anticipate the future in different ways: to predict the possibility of a genetic mutation in a couple before conception, to identify the presence of a chromosomal/genetic disorders in a foetus before it to be born, or the predisposition to a common, multi-factorial disease before its onset. The relationship with the future is certainly one of the aspects that makes genomics as much promising as controversial, if not even disturbing. That is why this panel aims to ignite a conversation around the question: what are the futures embedded in genomics?
The possibility of a disease-free future comes along with the threat of discriminating on the basis of DNA and, more generally, with the imperative of knowledge-based management to optimise risk. While healthcare systems are extremely cautious about these tests, whose clinical usefulness they often dispute, their main driving forces are clinics, laboratories, or private companies whose commercial strategies rely on the symbolic power of the genome. In this space, situated on the fringes or outside the national healthcare services or the medical establishment, the access rules to human constitutional DNA are reconfigured and rooted in the very materiality of the technology used. These types of highly routinised testing practices make use of a wide range of devices that, for instance, analyse genomes through panels of pre-set DNA variants or segments in a quasi-automatized way. As these panels incorporate the medical decision of what regions of DNA are worth being analysed, they are the object of debate of international, national, or local ethics committees, and medical associations. Also, like many other classification systems, they tend to crystallize into standards that compete in crafting the future of genomics. For this session, we welcome contributions to explore how these futures embedded in genomics reconfigure practices of consumption and subjectification, discourses and imaginaries of health and well-being, systems of regulation of access to DNA, and the production of testing devices. We are also open to submissions delving into the more-than-human confines, where genetic testing or screening are used on embryos, foetuses, or non-human animals such as companion animals or farm animals.

Key words:
genetic testing; susceptibility; futures