
FERTILE GROUND: WOMEN'S BODIES AS SITES FOR MOTIVATING DISINFORMATION

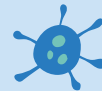
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NSF RAPID #2127545: THE RISE AND PROPAGATION OF ANTI-VAX AND ANTI-ACCESS SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS TARGETED AT DISADVANTAGED AND MINORITY POPULATIONS DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC

The Polyvocality of Online COVID-19 Vaccine Narratives that Invoke Medical Racism

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THE TWITTER DATASET

- The In-House Streaming Collection Service ran from December 18, 2020 and onwards
- Retrospective collection backwards to March 11, 2020.
- We collected on vaccine terms - *vax*, *vaccine*, *vaccines*, *vaxx*, *vaxxed*, *shot*
- During this time, we found the emergence of infertility topics - that incorrectly associated the COVID-19 vaccine with fertility concerns

RESEARCH **STAGE** - I

Objective: To empirically identify in number and phases of COVID-19 vaccine discourse in relation to **fertility concerns**, from pre-vaccine to post-vaccine availability.



QUALITATIVE CODES

01

**CONSPIRATORIAL
TALK**

02

FLAWED REASONING

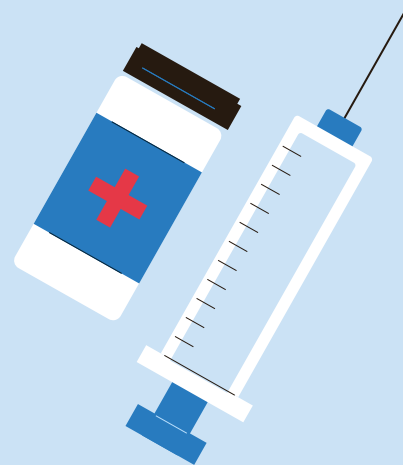
BAD SCIENCE, CHERRY PICKING, BLANKET
STATEMENTS

03

**PRO-VACCINE
ARGUMENTS**

04

**UNCERTAINTY ABOUT
VACCINE SAFETY**

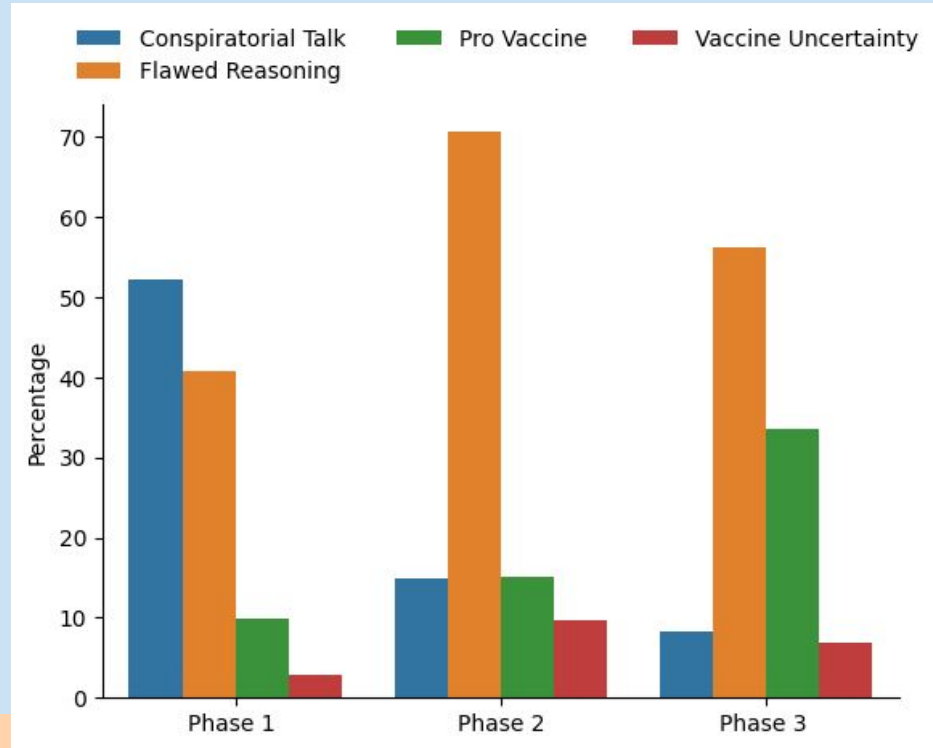


EMPIRICALLY CONSTRUCTED PHASES

Vaccine Discourse Phase 1 209 tweets or 9.6% of the sample analyzed	Mar 11, 2020 - Oct 31, 2020	<i>COVID Vaccines Spoken of Theoretically</i>
Vaccine Discourse Phase 2 384 tweets, or 17.6% of the sample analyzed	Nov 1, 2020 - Dec 11, 2020	<i>Imminence of COVID Vaccines Apparent</i>
Vaccine Discourse Phase 3 1590 tweets, or 72.8% of the sample analyzed	Dec 12, 2020 - Jun 30, 2021	<i>COVID Vaccines Widely Distributed</i>



FREQUENCY OF QUALITATIVE CODES BY PHASE



DISCOVERY OF MENSTRUAL REPORTS



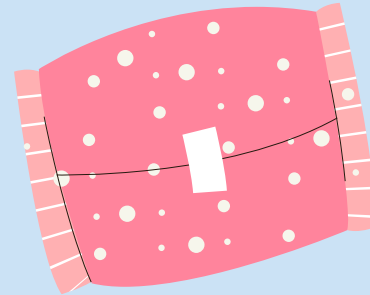
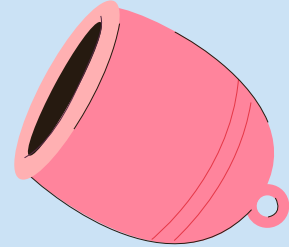
(4/26/2021) “some people saying the vaccine is causing menstrual cycle changes in women/increased rates of infertility/irregularity... yea i’m good”

(5/26/2021) “it looks very likely to affect women’s periods and also fertility ..give it few years ... (when people start forget about it 🤔🤔)!”



RESEARCH STAGE - 2

Objective: To understand the range of positions, values, and arguments surrounding the self-reports and menstrual disruption discussion.





THE FOUR RHETORICAL FRAMES



Vaccine Frame	Used to express: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- opinion of the vaccine and its potential impact on a person's menstrual health- neutral, pro, anti, or concern about the vaccine
Menstruators' Frame	Used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- describe menstrual changes- acknowledge, deny or question others' experiences- ask questions about menstrual health- lament the negligence around menstrual health.
Scientific/Medical/Public Health Frame	Used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- express authors' questions, opinions or feelings about scientific/medical/public health individuals or institutions are offered- show authority by citing tweet authors were themselves from this community.
Lived Experience Frame	Used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- report lived experiences of menstrual disruption- validate/deny lived experiences of menstrual disruption



Data Gathering of Others' Lived Experiences of Menstrual Disruption.




Our survey was approved and made it through production!

VACCINATED MENSTRUATORS ASSEMBLE:

<https://t.co/YY1eolCnWi> (This is a project to explore whether the covid vaxes affect the periods – if you have menstruated before and got the vax, take 15 min to tell us your experiences!)

@KATECLANCY (2021-04-07)

- Medical voices that validated menstruators' experiences and provide expert advice or opinion on the phenomena.

I'm getting a lot of questions about #COVID19 vaccination and the menstrual cycle. Does the #vaccine affect your #period? And does that mean there will be an effect on #fertility?    (Short answer upfront: Maybe, and no.)

@VIKILOVESFACS (2021-04-21)

Medical Professionals Who Cast Doubt on Vaccines' Safety

Clotting disorders are now a recognized side effect. The body depends upon the clotting mechanism for a myriad of processes; internal bleeds, menstruation, the immune system etc ALL dependent upon normal clotting. The long term effects of DNA vaccines are entirely unknown.

@INDEPDUBNRTH (2021-04-20)

- Invokes scientific knowledge and expertise to dismiss lived experiences of menstruators so as to protect compliance to COVID-19 vaccines.

Please STOP sharing that the Covid Vaccine affects your period / cannot be taken during your period. NOT TRUE!! #Verified with a Padmasri Award Winning Gynaecologist Dr Manjula Anagani

@CHINMAYI (2021-04-23)

An anti-vaccine stance that doubts safety of vaccines by demonstrating new concern about women's health

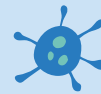
I'm glad people are finally being encouraged to speak about vaccination reactions. I know 3 young women who received the Pfizer vaccine and have not had a regular menstruation cycle since. No official "scientific" explanation from their doctors and they are worried.

@REALCANDACEO (2021-05-07)

RESEARCH STAGE - 3

Objective: To understand if the social media discourse became part of the zeitgeist. In the Stage 2, we saw signs that some anti-vaccine accounts were reusing self-reports of menstrual changes to validate false claims about harming fertility. We seek to verify to what extent that might have been happening. We also seek to understand whether Twitter discourse had bearing on activities of the popular press.



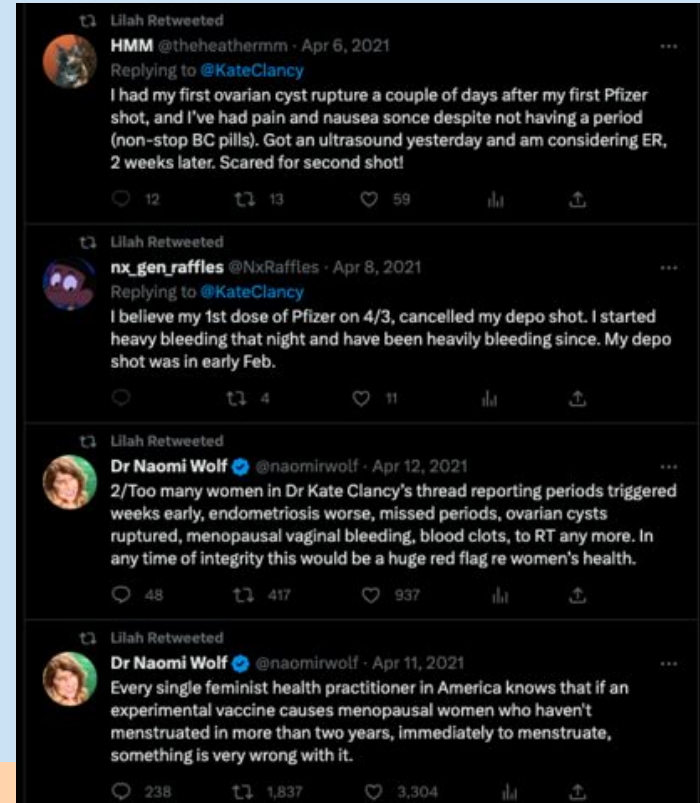


RETWEET ANALYSIS OF MENSTRUAL REPORTS

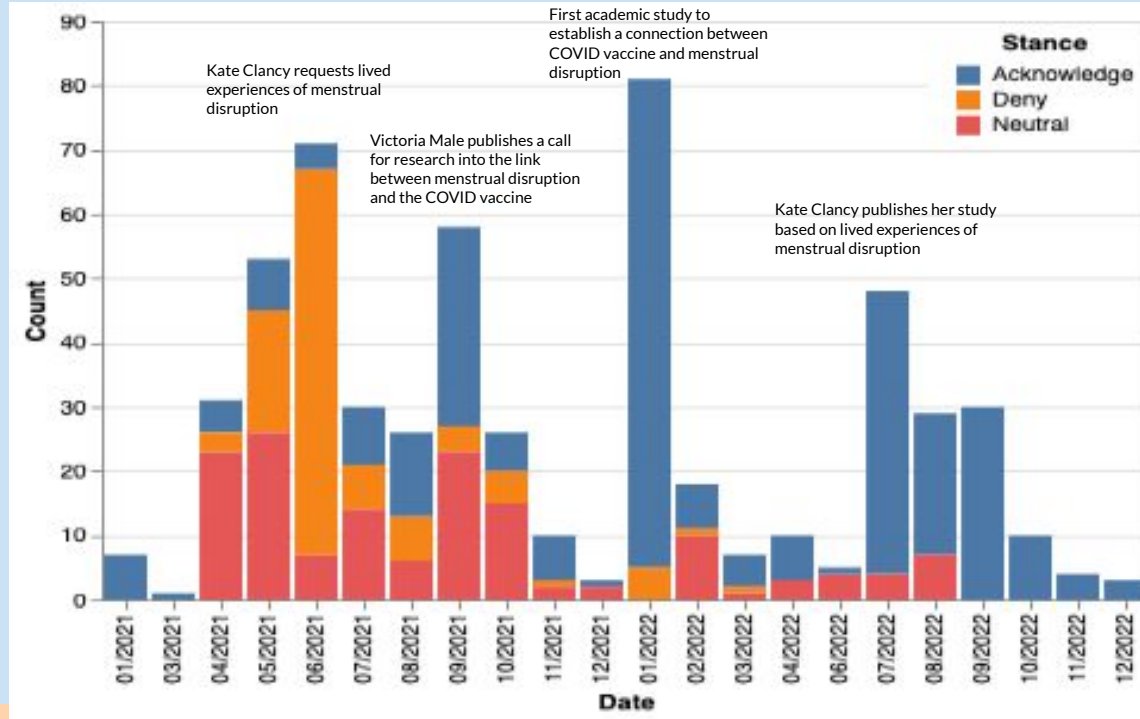
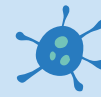
- Used replies to two tweets that requested self-reports to analyze retweets
- Empirically identified cut off for number of tweets to analyze based on retweet count
- Attempted to understand if the account retweeting the reports was previously tweeting/retweeting other anti-vaccine content.

Out of 192 self reports, we found that 176 were retweeted by at least one anti vaxxer with several being retweeted with more than one.

Popular anti-vax activist Naomi Wolf retweeted 69 of the 192 replies.



POPULAR PRESS ANALYSIS



SO WHAT?

- **Collective action online drew attention** to an important medical issue that women and other menstruators were facing
- **Medical and scientific communities were silent on the issue**, therefore, **confusion and denial** about the connection ensued.
- An **already mobilized anti-vaccine campaign** was able to **incorporate the online reporting of menstrual disruption**—into their argument that vaccines negatively impact fertility.
- The best defense against disinformation is not allowing silence on matters that affect marginalized populations ensue.
- Good information can do far less when it has to correct than when it is already in place as a defense.



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THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?

