

RGS-IBG 2024 session abstract: geographies of (non)reproduction

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Session sponsored by the Geographies of Children, Youth and Families Research Group and the Gender and Feminist Geographies Research Group.

Session location: hybrid

Contribution formats: we are happy to accept presentations in a variety of formats.

Please send your abstracts or other proposals to m.fitzmaurice@lancaster.ac.uk and sneha.krishnan@ouce.ox.ac.uk before midnight on Friday 16th February.

Abstract

The year 2024 marks 20 years since the publication of Lee Edelman's (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. This text was decisive in introducing geographers and social and cultural theorists to the figure of the Child as the future, of which queerness is the negation. But what happens when this future becomes increasingly unrecognisable and unpredictable?

Meanwhile, the increasingly inhospitable environment for 'family life' – whether this is the anxiety about marriage rates and a 'baby bust', increasingly unaffordable costs of living and housing, or fears about having children due to the climate crisis - and the availability of a discursive framework within which to think of family beyond the reproductive nuclear unit is a topic of live discussion. Non-reproductivity, Eleanor Wilkinson (2020) argues, invites reflection on intimacy rather than family – here including forms of kin-making between friends and co-parents, among childfree and childless adults in paradigms that unsettle how it looks to grow up and live together. All these phenomena have undersides that are riven with inequalities and domination. The ongoing panic about a 'baby bust' and declines in marriage rates in the global North co-exists with racist fears of being 'swamped' by migrants from certain countries with high fertility rates (especially in Africa); schools in some highly gentrified areas of London have closed due to declining numbers of children, while others in outer London areas are heavily oversubscribed. This points to the inequities at the heart of social reproduction: as Cindi Katz (2018) argues, the figures of the 'child as accumulation strategy' and the 'child as waste' are two sides of the same coin. Meanwhile, judgements about what counts as a 'family', and about whose families 'count', are deeply imbricated with legacies of heteropatriarchal (settler) colonialism, imperialism, and racialised domination. As Martin (2014: 458) has put it, "we become legible as subjects – as humans – in and through the ways in which we perform our families". Conversations about futures of (re)production, furthermore, are haunted by the ugly spectre and histories of eugenics and population control, which continue today, albeit cloaked in more benign guises (see for e.g. Bhatia et al 2020; Wilson 2017; Wilson & Shaw 2019; Patchin 2021).

One example that highlights some of the flaws in dominant conceptions of (non)reproduction is that of 'reproductive anxiety' related to the climate crisis. The discourse of 'reproductive anxiety' contains a series of assumptions. First, it assumes a single shared understanding of what

'having a child' means. Second, it is underpinned by an assumption of a shared baseline of reproductive capacity, which is belied by what we know about how Black women in the US are more likely to experience fertility problems – or infertility – than are white women, and the obstacles faced by queer, trans and disabled people in accessing reproductive assistance or state recognition of their status as parent. Second, it presupposes that individual, often biological, parents are uniquely responsible for the future environmental impacts of their children, as well as privatised notions of futurity, i.e., the idea that a child's safety and well-being is the responsibility of the parents alone (Lewis 2019). How can we reconcile this with the fact that if the climate crisis shows us anything, it shows that entanglements of responsibility are fundamental to our humanity (see Clark and Whittle 2023a, 2023b).

We invite contributions that consider (non)reproduction as a mode of building communal futurity, queering futurity beyond same-gender attraction, and experiments in anti-capitalist and anti-heteronormative living. How might we think about (non)reproduction in ways that exceed the privatised liberal frameworks of choice and responsibility? How do mid-twentieth century understandings of 'childless' people as deviant and stigmatised subjects hold up in the era of the so-called 'Anthropocene' and amid ongoing and overlapping crises? What does it mean to live together, make kin together, and envision futurity outside of the heteronormative ideal? How do we cultivate alternative 'family' relationships that are not beholden to logics of possession ('having' children) or linear, legally sanctioned temporal relationships to the next generation (biological parenthood and inheritance)?

Potential topics for papers:

We invite contributions on – but in no way limited to – the following topics:

- Coupledness, marriage, (in)fertility, miscarriage, gestation/pregnancy, surrogacy, abortion, child-rearing, adoption, fostering, inheritance...
- Reproductive justice struggles in an era of 'baby bust'
- Historical research on experiments in anti/extra-heteronormative living
- Experiments in anti/extra-heteronormative living (e.g. friendship, extended or chosen families, non-monogamy, communalised cohabitation and/or parenting etc.)
- Queer and trans futures of (non)reproduction beyond same-gender attraction
- Meanings of childlessness in/beyond the 'Anthropocene'

We are happy to be flexible about contribution format, and welcome ways of presenting research that go beyond the conventional academic paper.

References

Bhatia R, Sasser JS, Ojeda D, Hendrixson A, Nadimpally S & Foley EE (2020) A feminist exploration of 'populationism': engaging contemporary forms of population control. *Gender, Place & Culture* 27(3), 333-350.

Edelman L (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Clark N & Whittle R (2023a) Planetary Rifting and the Paleogeography of Care. *Environmental Humanities*. Special issue on 'Earth as Praxis'.

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Lewis, S (2021) *Full surrogacy now: Feminism against family*. London: Verso.

Martin L (2014) Accounting for the Familial: Discourse, Practice and Political Possibility. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 13(3), 457-462.

Patchin PM (2021) For the sake of the child: The economisation of reproduction in the Zika public health emergency. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 46(2), 2-14.

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Wilson K (2017) Re-centering 'Race' in development: Population policies and global capital accumulation in the era of the SDGs. *Globalizations* 14, 434-449.

Wilson K & Shaw A (2019) The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the necro-populationism of 'climate-smart' agriculture. *Gender Place and Culture* 27(3), p. 378.