

# Why do people have children?

12 March 2025, 3pm–6pm followed by a drinks reception

East Room 2, West Hub, Cambridge

## Programme

**15:15 Welcome and introduction**

Kathy Niakan (PDN and Co-Chair of Cambridge Reproduction)

**15:20 Flash talks**

Chaired by Ceren Canse (Obstetrics & Gynaecology)

- Hao Li (Sociology)
- Emma Diduch (Geography)
- Kat Moiseeva (University of Roehampton)

**15:40 Interdisciplinary dialogue: What is the value of children?**

*Introduction*

Romola Davenport (Geography)

*Dialogue*

- Romola Davenport (Geography)
- Mark Dyble (Archaeology)
- Or Perah Midbar Alter (Centre for Child, Adolescent & Family Research; Psychology)

**16:25 Tea break**

**16:55 Flash talks**

Chaired by Nienke Groskamp (History & Philosophy of Science)

- Staci Weiss (Computer Science & Technology)
- Xiwen Fu (Centre for Child, Adolescent & Family Research; Psychology)
- Yiyun Bai (Sociology)

**17:15 Interdisciplinary dialogue: What kind of family do people want?**

*Introduction*

Alice Reid (Geography)

*Dialogue*

- Alice Reid (Geography)
- Robert Pralat (THIS Institute)
- Kai Liu (Economics)

**18:00 Drinks and networking reception**

# Flash talks

## Session 1 (Chair: Ceren Canse (Obstetrics & Gynaecology))

### Exploring the existential nature of childbearing through art

*Hao Li (Sociology)*

**Abstract:** In this talk, I will first briefly introduce the social and political background of my research, especially the latest shift in family planning policy in China. Then, I will introduce my theoretical perspective from existential milestones and how it brings new insights to understanding low fertility intention among Chinese young women. Finally, I will talk about a creative qualitative methodology, which includes art practice to capture the nonverbal, tacit, and emotional aspects of fertility intention. I will also present some initial data collected during my pilot study.

**Hao Li** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology. Her research examines the role of childbearing in China, with a particular focus on how cultural norms and individual agency intersect in fertility intention and decisions. Hao's work is situated within the broader context of recent changes in China's family planning policy and aims to provide a deeper understanding of how Chinese young women navigate their life journey through contemporary cultural and policy dynamics.

### Why DID people have children?

*Emma Diduch (Geography)*

**Emma Diduch** is a PhD candidate in historical demography with a background in economic and social history and a BA from William & Mary and a MSc from Oxford. Her thesis explores the British fertility transition in a life course perspective by using linked census, marriage, and employment records for the county of Derbyshire between 1881 and 1911.

### Exploration of journeys to motherhood: identity, fertility and mental health

*Kat Moiseeva (University of Roehampton)*

**Abstract:** I will give a short overview of our maternity mental health pilot project focused on understanding women's experiences, sense of self and mental health amidst trying to conceive. I will discuss the preliminary results of our qualitative inquiry, which resulted in 3 themes. Those themes highlight the role of 1) opinions, internal and external, 2) relatable support and exposure and 3) the emotional "rollercoaster" of trying to conceive on the perceived experiences of becoming a mother and mental health.

**Kat Moiseeva** is a psychology trainee who recently graduated with her MSc from University of Roehampton. She has a background in civil engineering and hopes to shift to a role which gives voice to people's self-actualisation, self-concept, and mental health through transitions.

## Session 2 (Chair: Nienke Groskamp (History & Philosophy of Science))

### Ambi-natalism: what's behind the reluctance to reproduce?

*Staci Weiss (Computer Science & Technology)*

**Abstract:** A mixed-methods investigation explores ambi-natalism, or ambivalence around the idea of having children. Surveys and interviews have followed how generativity is constructed by people who are trying to conceive and people who do not anticipate becoming parents.

**Staci Weiss** is a sonographer, research fellow at Cambridge and lecturer based at University of Roehampton investigating reproductive journeys from puberty to postnatal. Her research focuses on the motivations why people have children, uses computer vision to identify fetal movements from 4D ultrasound and analysed infant movement and body maps using EEG. She hopes her work will inform inclusive policies for parents, parents-to-be and childfree folks.

### Sibling adaptation without experience: how only-child mothers and firstborns navigate the transition to siblinghood in China

*Xiwen Fu (Psychology)*

**Abstract:** The transition to siblinghood is a major milestone for firstborn children, shaping their social and emotional development. However, in China, many mothers raising two children today grew up as only children themselves due to the one-child policy, leaving them without firsthand sibling experience. This talk explores how these mothers perceive and manage sibling preparation and how their firstborns adapt to the arrival of a younger sibling. Drawing from survey and observational data, I will discuss parental beliefs, family dynamics, and firstborn adjustment, shedding light on the intergenerational impact of China's family policies on sibling relationships.

**Xiwen Fu** is a PhD candidate in Developmental Psychology at the University of Cambridge and Centre for Child, Adolescent and Family Research. Her research focuses on children's social and cognitive development in family environments, with a particular emphasis on mentalization, parent-child interactions, and sibling relationships. She explores how family dynamics, cultural contexts, and early social experiences contribute to shaping children's development.

### Designing the perfect 'Hun-Xue-Er': race and donor selection in ART

*Yiyun Bai (Sociology)*

**Abstract:** I will begin by discussing the global context of transnational reproduction, highlighting the various reasons why people seek assisted conception abroad. Next, I will provide a brief overview of China's legal and policy landscape, which restricts access to ART for single women and lesbian couples, compelling many to pursue reproductive options overseas. I will then explore the racialised desires embedded within the ART industry, examining how concepts of 'racial matching' and 'racial mixing' emerge as controversial choices among different groups. Finally, I will conclude with a reflection on the intersectional inequalities embedded in stratified reproduction, emphasising how access to reproductive technologies is shaped by broader social, economic, and racial hierarchies.

**Yiyun Bai** is a first-year PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge, where she previously completed her MPhil in Sociology of Media and Culture. Her doctoral work adopts an intersectional approach to explore how Chinese single women and lesbian couples navigate transnational reproductive journeys, with a specific focus on the racialised desires embedded in their sperm donor selection. Her research interests include gender and sexuality, race, reproduction, assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), and digital sociology.