

**Centre for Reproduction Research  
School of Applied Social Sciences, Faculty of Health and Life  
Sciences  
De Montfort University, Leicester**

**COMMENCING OCTOBER 2017**

**Selling hope? Investigating the UK IVF industry and the case of fertility treatment “add-ons”**

A PhD research scholarship including stipend and tuition fee costs is offered within the new Centre for Reproduction Research in the School of Applied Social Sciences. It is available to UK or EU students who are suitably qualified and have outstanding potential as a researcher.

In offering this scholarship the University aims to further develop its proven research strengths in social studies of human reproduction. It is an excellent opportunity for a candidate of exceptional promise to contribute to a stimulating, world-class research environment.

For an application pack please visit <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/research/graduate-school/phd-scholarships.aspx>. Please direct academic queries to Nicky Hudson on +44 (0)116 2078766 or email [nhudson@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:nhudson@dmu.ac.uk). For administrative queries contact the Graduate School office email: [researchstudents@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:researchstudents@dmu.ac.uk), tel: 0116 250-6309. Completed applications should be returned together with two supporting references and an academic transcript.

Applications are invited from UK or EU students with a Master's degree or good first degree in a relevant subject (First, 2:1 or equivalent). Doctoral scholarships are available for up to three years full-time study commencing in October 2017 consisting of a bursary of £14,296 per annum in addition to waiver of tuition fees.

**Please quote ref: HLSFB1**

**Closing date: 26<sup>th</sup> June, interviews 10<sup>th</sup> July**

**The study**

In recent months, the UK media has been buzzing with debate about what have come to be referred to as fertility treatment “add-ons” (see Panorama: ‘Inside Britain’s Fertility Business’ 28/11/16). Given that infertility diagnoses are often uncertain (31% of cases are diagnosed as ‘unexplained’) and that success with IVF remains relatively low at around 26.5% [1], clinics are increasingly offering a range of additional treatment options that can be ‘added on’ to an IVF cycle in a bid to improve the chances of a baby. Such optional extras include ‘Embryogluue’, time-lapse embryo imaging, and Intralipid infusions [2]. As with the majority of IVF in the UK, the NHS does not fund these treatments so they increase already expensive treatment costs by hundreds or even thousands of pounds.

Strong concerns have been raised about the efficacy and marketing of these techniques, in some cases by clinicians and scientists themselves, highlighting a pressing need for more public and scientific scrutiny. This includes an urgent need for social science research regarding the ethical, social and economic implications of

these treatments, given that they remain scientifically controversial and in many cases, untested. Public debate about this is now underway in the UK, with the [British Fertility Society](#) and the [Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority](#) releasing statements relating to this issue, with the latter expressing concern for what they refer to as a 'step change' in practice. The Progress Educational Trust hosted a well-attended [public event](#) on the issue in March this year.

In intellectual terms, these developments constitute part of a wider cultural shift in late modernity, which sees the focus of biomedicine as becoming extended beyond questions of illness, disease or disability, to a concern with "life itself" [3]. This shift relates to contemporary theoretical debates within medical sociology and science and technology studies, including the increasing commercialisation of health care, the move towards individualised or 'boutique' medicine, and the 'responsibilisation' of patients; whereby individuals are increasingly instilled with a moral imperative to do everything possible to improve their health. Concerns about big business are also central to debates about fertility treatment, with a common accusation that these commercial, and some argue, exploitative practices form part of the 'fertility-industrial-complex' [4]. This is highly significant in the current context of the UK health and social care funding crisis and the privatisation of the NHS.

There is a significant gap in the social science literature regarding the development of this booming 'baby business', and an investigation of fertility treatment 'add-ons' represents a novel and timely empirical case via which to consider these questions in closer detail. It is intended that the proposed study will use qualitative, ethnographic or genealogical methods to investigate how these techniques develop and their uptake or resistance by clinicians, patients and other key stakeholders in the context of a highly emotive area of biomedicine. A precise design and plan for the research will be developed by the successful candidate in collaboration with the supervisory team and is subject to relevant approvals before the research begins.

It is intended that this research will offer a major scholarly contribution to these debates as well as having the potential for excellent outcomes in terms of public engagement and impact. The proposed project will build on the Centre for Reproduction Research's existing research themes including investigation of novel reproductive biotechnologies in the context of 'hope', cross-border fertility treatment, the experience of (in)fertility and reproductive ageing, and fills a significant gap in current scholarship.

### **What we are looking for**

We are seeking an outstanding candidate to work with us on this under-researched, novel and timely topic. You will have an undergraduate or Master's degree in a social science or closely related discipline and have a good grasp of social research methodology. You will be expected to attend regular meetings with your supervisors at De Montfort University and to participate in a range of Centre-based activities, including seminars, reading groups and other scholarly events, as well as other post-graduate training events and lectures as required. You will join a vibrant post-graduate community in the Centre for Reproduction Research and in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences more generally.

[1] HFEA. 2016. *Fertility Treatment in 2014: Trends and Figures*

[2] see [Balén 2017](#) for definitions

[3] Rose, N. 2007. *The Politics of Life Itself*. Princeton.

[4] Spar, D. L. 2006. *The Baby Business: How money, science, and politics drive the commerce of conception*. Harvard Business Press.