

Report for St John's College Research Centre Management Committee

Contemporary childbearing and evolutionary theory

A two-day workshop at St John's College, Oxford 31 March 2011 – 1 April 2011 organised by Anna Rotkirch, Stuart Basten and David Coleman.

The workshop brought together 35 researchers to discuss contemporary childbearing and reproductive behaviour from cross-disciplinary perspectives, notably demographic and Darwinian. It focused on the use of life history theory to explain fertility preferences and reproductive outcomes, including kin support and sexual selection and their effects on the course of natural selection; the effects of social norms, learning, personal preferences and personality on contraception and childbearing; and why fertility levels appear to be recuperating in most developed societies while remaining at the lowest levels in a few areas, for example in urban Asia.

14 papers from across the social and biological sciences were presented (titles listed below). Between them, these papers covered a wide array of settings, data sources (and interpretations), theories and methodologies. In particular, it was felt that presenting findings from one disciplinary viewpoint to proponents of another was a highly useful exercise and one which should be developed in the future.

As well as the presentation of papers, time was devoted to debate and discussion concerning both the general relationship between demography and evolutionary studies, as well as possible future research avenues and collaborations. A general consensus was that there was a real need for greater collaborative effort between the disciplines and that workshops of this kind should be encouraged and replicated in the future.

The abstracts of presentations are available on the OXPOP website www.spi.ox.ac.uk/oxpop

Evolutionary approaches to fertility. Rebecca Sear, Evolutionary Anthropology Research Group, Dept of Anthropology, Durham University.

The opportunity for sexual and natural selection in Finland 1700-1900. Jenni Pettay, University of Turku.

The risk of breeding failure and shifts in life-history traits in recent human demographic transitions Jianghua Liu, University of Sheffield.

Twinning: Direct or indirect selection? Ian J Rickard, University of Sheffield.

Intergenerational continuities in childbearing: an update and replication. Mike Murphy, London School of Economics.

Are elder siblings helpers or competitors? Long-term fitness effects of sibling interactions in a Finnish population. Aida Nitsch, University of Sheffield.

Family and fertility: Kin influence on first and second birth in the British Household Panel Study. Paul Mathews, London School of Economics.

The association between father absence and the timing of male reproductive decisions: Evidence from a cohort of British men. Paula Sheppard, London School of Economics

Personality, fertility and offspring success: what do we already know? Markus Jokela Institute of Behavioural Science, University of Helsinki

Genetic associations between personality traits and childbearing: Evidence from a Finnish twin study. Venla Berg and Markus Jokela, Institute of Behavioural Science, University of Helsinki

The global development of one child norms, with a focus on China and India. Stuart Basten, Oxford Centre for Population Studies, University of Oxford

Social transmission and the adoption of modern contraception in rural Ethiopia Alexandra Alvergne. University College London

What room for choice in mutual mate choice? Alex Courtiol University of Sheffield

Pathways to above-average fertility in Finland. Anna Rotkirch and Anneli Miettinen
Population Research Institute, Väestöliitto, Finland and Oxford Centre for Population Studies.