

ART, Bourdieu & Reproductive Capital:

"So, this is my investment!" (Alan)

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A sociological exploration of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) through the lens of Bourdieu's capital theory, examining how reproduction intersects with workplace dynamics and social structures.

Two-year research project (2020-2022) investigating workplace experiences while accessing Assisted Reproductive Technologies.^{1,2}

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Ethics: MMU ethics committee approved (case 20547). Pseudonyms used.

SRIP, Liverpool 27th August 2025

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2: Background & Context

Demographic Shifts

Global trend of reduced fertility rates, postponed parenthood & increased childlessness. In Europe, approximately 1 in 4 men & 1 in 5 women are childless. ^{1,3,19}

Rise of ART

Assisted Reproductive Technologies: a global industry ^{4,5} projected to reach \$37.4 billion ⁶ by 2030, offering pathways to parenthood for diverse individuals and couples. ^{1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 19}

Workplace as a Field

A site reflecting sociocultural attitudes, policies, practices, & social interactions towards reproduction & non-reproduction. ^{1, 2, 11}

This research applies **Bourdieu's** theoretical concept of **capital** to understand the complex **social dynamics** and **rhizomatic relationships** involved in **reproductive journeys** and workplace experiences. ^{1, 11, 19}

3: Study Aims & Methods

Research Aim

To explore participants' fertility journeys & the effect of work on their preconception & infertility experiences. ²

Methodology

Qualitative study using biographical narrative interviews, primarily conducted online due to Covid-19 restrictions. ²

Data Analysis

Latent thematic analysis hosted on Nvivo12. ^{2, 12}

Sample

91% White-British; all professionals in middle-class occupations.

Relationship status: 69 in heterosexual, 6 in same-sex relationships and 5 women pursuing solo motherhood.

Sample Characteristics (n=80)

67
Women

13
Men

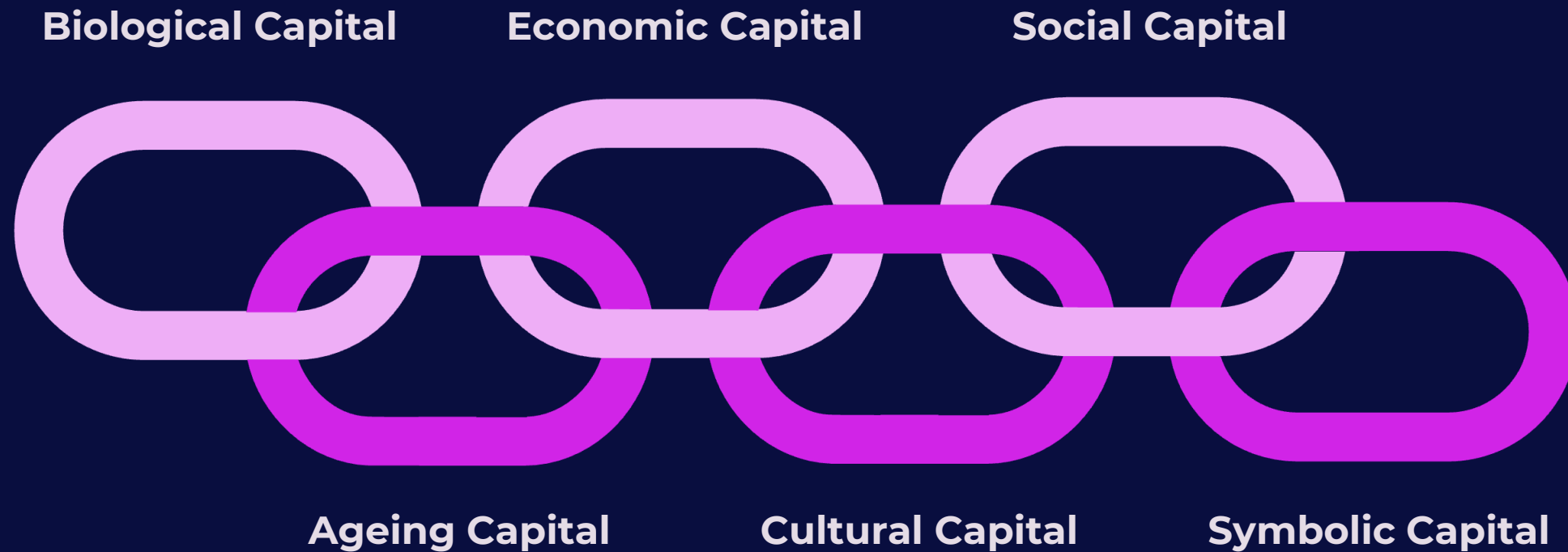
73
UK-based

37
Accessing ART

43
Completed ART

4: Reproductive Capital (RC)

The **agentic** & **structural** conditions that **shape** an individual's **reproductive resources** & **capacities** that facilitate or **constrain reproductive** attitudes, choices & **outcomes**.^{1,19}



The analysis shows the intersection between RC & Bourdieu's original forms of capital as well as contemporary forms including biological capital & ageing.

5: RC and Other Forms of Capital

Biological

Strong **connections** between reproduction, **social & economic inequalities**, life-course **development**, **health** outcomes, **epigenetics**, & parental **environments**. ^{1, 10, 14}

Economic

Financial challenges of **ART costs**: draws on personal savings, loans, or family support, creating "**Economic Eugenics**." ¹ Fertility sector critiqued as "**bio-capitalism**" prioritizing **profit** over patients. ^{1, 10, 15}

Social

In the **work** environment **functions** as "**the bond which ties all other forms of capital together**." ^{1, 17}

Cultural

Pronatalism: **parenthood** as **high status**, with parents having **higher status & trust** from colleagues in **workplace** environments. ^{1, 16, 19}

Age

The "**biosocial clock**": age-related **biological changes** (men & women) **intersections** with **sociocultural norms** about **reproduction** across the **lifecourse**. ^{1, 13, 19}

Symbolic

Sociocultural status, rights & privileges related to **parenthood**, contrasted with '**othering**' of the **chosen & circumstantially childless**. ^{1, 19}

6: RC – Trading Status: Participants' Voices

Economic

"We'd taken out a mortgage to pay for treatment." *(Alan)*

"We spent £60 - 70,000; my parents helped & my brother paid for a round of treatment." *(Violet)*

"Insemination is about £1500 a go." *(Hannah)*

Biological

"My sperm count was very low" *(Tom)*

"We were having IVF for PGD because my husband is registered blind." *(Brittany)*

"Fertility was an issue: I knew it was my fault. I had ICSI." *(Tony)*

Social & Symbolic

"It's a lonely place [work] when a lot of people are having babies." *(Felicity)*

"I said, 'I don't have any' & he said, 'Well, some people weren't meant to have children.' I lost it." *(Dan)*

"I argued with my manager that the 3-4 days I had after a miscarriage was pregnancy related." *(Iris)*

Ageng & Cultural

"My 40th birthday - I went into a major depression because of not going to be a Mum." *(Gail)*

"Friends are one day going to be grandparents - it's never really going to stop." *(Chris)*

Cultural

Key to cultural capital: 'family' & 'centrality of motherhood'¹⁸ via social & biological reproduction. *(Bourdieu, 1996, p.23)*



7: Conclusions & Implications

RC's Contribution

Offers insights into how reproduction intersects with class, gender, and other factors in workplace and social settings across the lifecourse.

Reveals the intersection between agency & structure.

Call to Action

Governments, employers, and HR professionals must recognize RC and its impact on workers and working environments.

Inclusive Policies

Adopt equitable legislation and policies that acknowledge the complex intersection between reproduction, work, and wider social environments.



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Thank You! Any questions?

Reproductive Capital: theoretical foundations and empirical evidence from the workplace.

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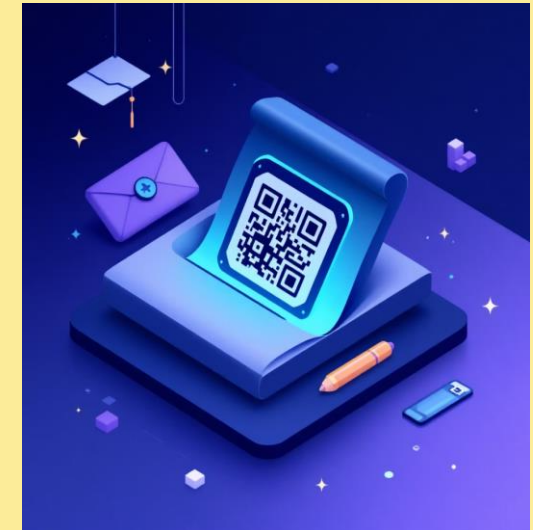
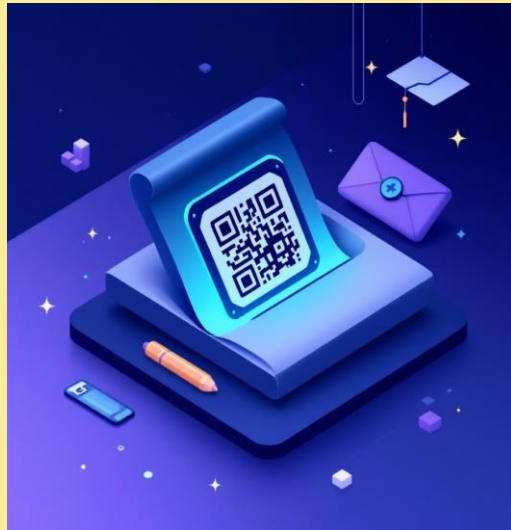
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