



School: Creative Industries

Researcher: Claire Levy and Ruth Farrar

Project Title: (In)Fertility, the Media & Me

UOA: 34 – Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

300-Word Statement

‘(In)Fertility, the Media & Me’ is a documentary co-produced by Levy and Farrar, growing out of Feasey’s monograph, ‘Infertility and Non-Traditional Family Building’ (2019). A single-component output, the documentary adopts reflexive practice-based research methods (Sullivan, 2009; McNamara, 2011). It deals with three interrelated research trajectories: one, how documentary filmmaking can develop new ways of engaging with academic themes; two, the role of participatory ethnographic methods in this process; and three, what these aforementioned approaches reveal about the chosen subject matter of representations of (in)fertility in the media. Contextual information in this collection comprises video diaries with participants and other audience responses, as well as documentation of the output’s public screenings.

Methodologically, the participatory ethnographic methods employed in the making of the documentary offer new ways of opening up the research process, aiming to counter the inevitable compression necessitated in academic writing. The collection evidences participants’ changed perceptions of how (in)fertility is represented in the media, incorporating participant video diaries and filmed audience feedback as part of the creative research process. Filmmaking emerged as a way of diffusing the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016). The significance of this participatory ethnographic method to arts and humanities research more broadly lies in its ability to subvert the traditional question and answer format of research interviews or focus groups, which have been shown to privilege the researcher over the participants (Jackson, 2015), and instead create a research environment based on reciprocal learning between researcher and participant.

The documentary was disseminated through screenings at the Fertility Fest (2018), an (in)fertility arts festival. Audience feedback highlighted the documentary’s potential to support public and cross-sector education about the subject of (in)fertility and the media, specifically highlighting the disconnect between media statistics regarding IVF treatment outcomes and wider social perceptions.