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The Rise of the MAWFIA

Men Ageing With Family: Invisible and Alienated



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- My wife and everyone else who has supported me and that I have whinged at, moaned to, bored, & used.
- I acknowledge that terms like ‘childfree’ ‘childless’ ‘voluntary’ ‘involuntary’ ‘infertile’ ‘old’ ‘older’ ‘elderly’ ‘gay’ ‘straight’ and others I may use are contentious.

PhD: Methodology and sample

- Draws on Chambers (2002) '*feminist life course perspective*' based on: Social/critical gerontology, Life course, Auto/Biography, Biographical & Feminist approaches.
- Semi-structured Biographical Narrative Interview Method. (Wengraf, 2001)
- Broad Latent Thematic Analysis. (Braun & Clark, 2006)
- 14 self-defined Involuntarily Childless men were interviewed 2012: 27 interviews in total.
- 13 White-British; 1 Anglo-Celtic Australian.
- Age range: 49 – 82 years.
- 12 heterosexual, 2 non-heterosexual.
- 7 single (5 solo living), 7 in relationships (1 LAT).

Background

- Decline in fertility levels & increase in the age of mortality.
- **Around 20%** of women **in the UK are biologically** childless.
- **Unknown**: the level of childless men in the UK because **men's fertility history is not collected at birth registration.** (ONS, 2014)
- **Potential or actual** infertility **has** major implications **for** physical & mental health, identity, intimate & wider relationships, socio-cultural & economic contexts, & well being (Letherby, 2010).
- Feminist researchers **examining Assisted Reproductive Technology** highlighted **the** invisibility of men's experience. (Throsby & Gill 2004; Letherby 2010).
- **Male Infertility/childlessness NOT studied in Masculinities**

Ageing and childlessness

- 92% of informal care provided by family *(AWOC.ORG, 2016)*
- Older childless adults are not disadvantaged **when their** health is good. **If** health deteriorates **the** informal support declines & formal care does not take up the shortfall. *(Albertini & Mencarini, 2014)*
- Older childless adults have an increased risk of loneliness, social isolation, depression, & ill health. *(Dykstra and Hagestad, 2007)*
- Formerly married childless men **showed** poorer physical & mental health, sleeplessness, excessive drinking & smoking than men with partners. *(Kendig et al, 2007)*
- Childless men & non-contact fathers **had** higher mortality **through** suicide, risky health & social behaviours **than comparable** fathers. *(Weitoft et al, 2004).*

Pathways to childlessness

- **Economics:** *“The bloody interest rates hit 13% - so that made me delay, you know, overtures in those directions.” John (59)*
- **Social clock:** *“Nobody wants a 70 year old father when you’re 20.” Martin (70)*
- **Biological clock:** *“We just don't want to let time go by and let nature take the decision for us.” John*
- **Partner choice:** *“My ex-wife stated that she didn't want children, I just quickly put those inklins’ to one side...” James (65)*
- **Timing:** *“My parents had me in their 40’s. So I thought it would be like falling off a log basically.” Edward (60).*
- **Relationship dynamics:** *“She said, “I never thought you are responsible enough to have children” Which, I guess, is the time I started drinking seriously.” John*

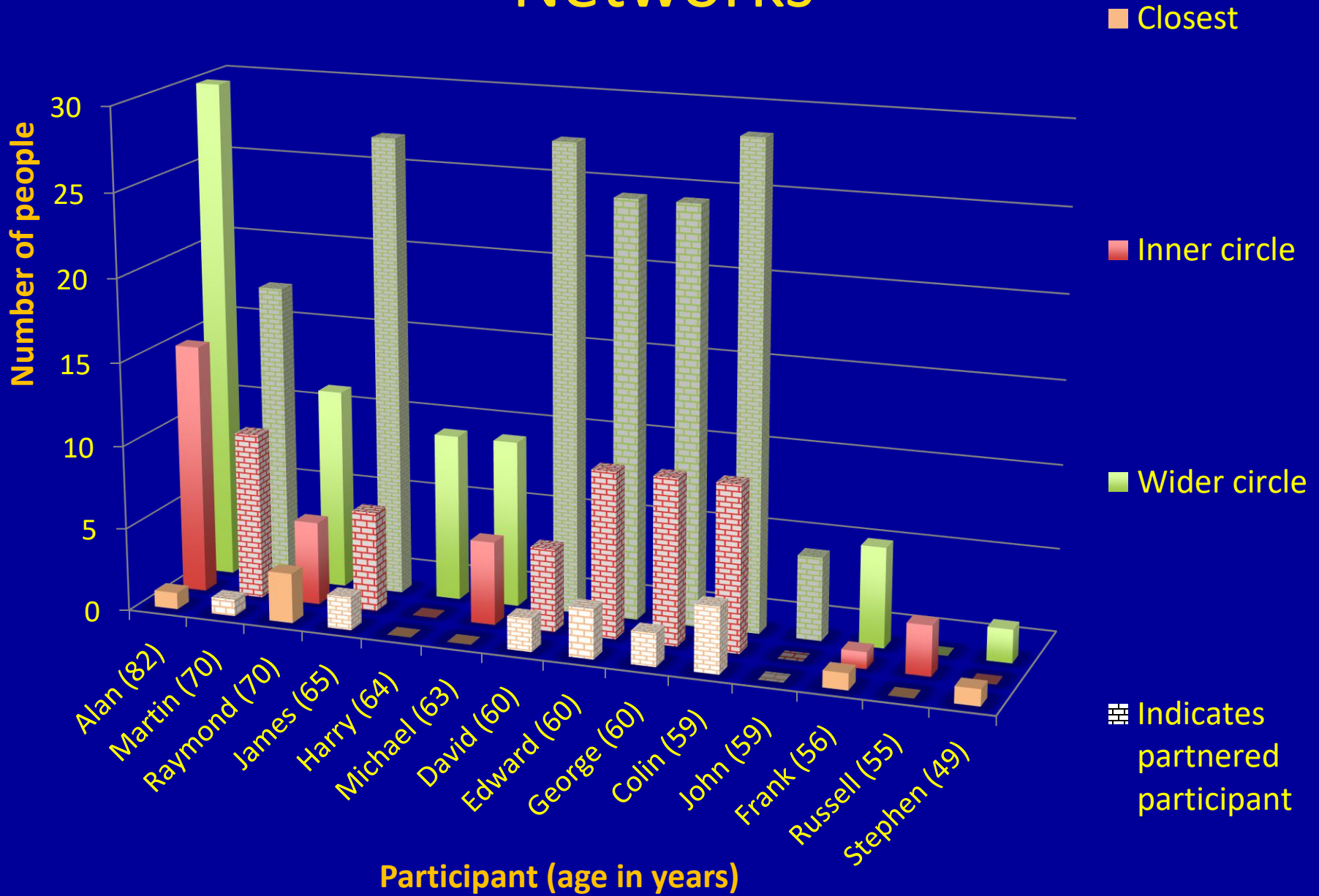
Something missing

*There's something missing,
A conversation ended before it began
Scatterlings of cuda, shuda, wuda, Dada
The latent maelstrom of the none man*

*There's something missing,
holding a life-wide gap,
breathing wallpaper,
I am whole and incomplete*

*There's something missing,
first to be left behind,
first to be sent in,
this line is not complete (Hadley, 2008)*

Networks



Familial Relationship

Colin: *“I have a great relationship with my partner and my brothers, they are most important. My family was, and is, extremely close. Very happy, and fun, childhood.”*

John: *“My childhood [...] I was not abused as such, but it was aversive [...] even now, my mum, it’s still a bloody monster. My middle brother I can't have any respect for him at all...Cousins, I would be hard-pressed to recognise - it's been so long. So now relative strangers.”*

- *“She said, “I never thought you are responsible enough to have children” Which, I guess, is the time I started drinking seriously.”*

Organisations influence on social networks

Alan: *“There is a core of people that is my relatives and some o' the closer people from the group. The ones that 'ave been there probably from the beginnin’.”*

Raymond: *“I've the people at the pub and I've got the group. With the group, if you're not well [...] I ring and then they know I'm not just, sommat's happened, I've not gone. I had a couple of phone calls back, see if I were alright, you know. You think, “Well somebody cares,” you know? [...] It's most of my life - going to the pub or the group. So, I mean, you take that away from me and just sit here forever? Then might as well curl up and die now, you know?”*

No candle

No candle to light, no cake to cut, no nappies smelly, no teeth to keep, no hand to squeeze, no stories read, no surprise to feign, no plays to see, no shoes to clean, no sports-day drama, no parties to piece/police, no presents to buy, no amends to make, no scrapes to clean, no kiss-it-betters, no tears to dry, no hearts to mend, no embarrassment to give, no graduation photos snapped, no ‘Can you help with this?’ No now-empty nest, no grandchild to hold, no legacy to give, no one to call, no one to catch the fall, no wishes heard, no life-lived described, few tears shed, no candle lit.

How to structurally alienate and isolate men: don't collect data

- Lack of data **on** men's ageing experience. (*Arber 2004, Arber et al, 2003*).
- Lack of data **on** men's experience **of** infertility/childlessness. (*Letherby, 2010*)
- Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority '*Fertility Trends Report 2014*' word count:
 - Men = 0
 - Man = 1
 - Male = 7 (4 x 'no male partner')
 - Sperm: 35
 - Women = 105
 - Woman = 52
 - Female = 5
 - Egg = 95

How to structurally alienate and isolate men: blame the men

- **Men are seen as the 'second sex' in academia:** anthropology; social sciences; sociology; demography; health; gender studies. *(Inhorn, 2012)*
- **Men viewed as 'socially reticent' and 'difficult to access' for research on personal matters.** *(Arber et al., 2003)*
- **Men reported as 'not interested' and 'non-participation condemned to be meaningful' by** infertility researchers. *(Lloyd, 1996)*
- **Men are** blamed/dismissed **for** not accessing 'health care'. **Or does 'health care'** not access them?
- Masculine stereotypes **embedded in service delivery** may add to exclusion, isolation, & stigmatisation of older men.

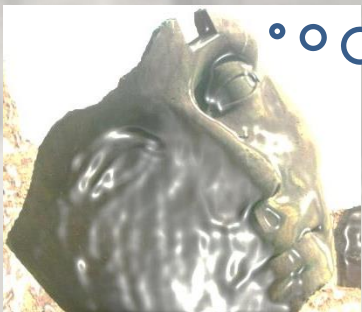
Academia & invisible men

1. Childlessness or Ageing seldom feature in masculinities' research, including Connell's (1995) and Kimmel, Connell and Hearn's (2005) influential books.
2. Maria Lohan (2015, p. 215) argued that men are absent from literature 'on family planning, fertility, reproductive health and midwifery.'
3. Marcia Inhorn (2012, 2009) & William Marsiglio et al. (2013) argued that feminist scholarship has retained the theoretical and experiential spotlight on women's reproductive issues.
4. Inhorn (2009) argued that men are now the 'second sex', in all areas of reproduction scholarship because of the 'widely held but largely untested assumption' that men are not interested & disengaged from, reproductive intentions & outcomes.

Summary

1. If you are not counted - then you don't count.

How is a man supposed to be a man?



At least 24% of men are childless

Childlessness/infertility excluded from masculinities literature



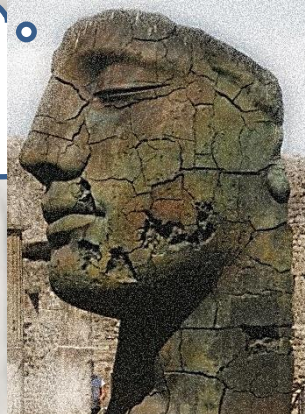
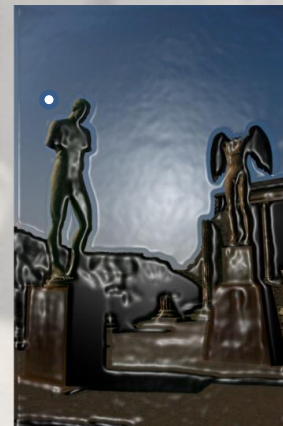
Childless men are less wealthy and less happy than fathers

Childless men have higher death rate through suicide than fathers



Older men are more likely to be placed in formal care than equivalent women

Older men fear being seen a paedosexual



Questions for gerontologists...

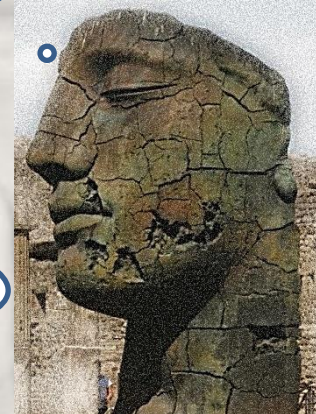


1: 1 million people over 65 never been parents: how did you miss that?

2: Adult children provide 92% of care for older people. Yet total silence around the impact for people Ageing without Children?

3: Why is so there much personal anger & institutional defensiveness, denial, & resistance about points 1 and 2?

4: 2030: at least 2 million people aged 65 & over Ageing Without Children



Thank you!



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My (unpaid) stuff

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Ageing masculinity

“How is a man supposed to be a man?” Frank (56)

Masculinity: provider, active, virility, strength, heterosexual, non-feminine, emotionally distant, subordination of others = ‘Ideal’ type.

Ageing associated with loss of: control, independence, strength, and physical and mental health.

Consequently, older men are viewed as ‘other’ and seen as both genderless and a sexual threat (Walz, 2002).

Emergent Masculinity: Men now behaving in ways that counter/reject the hegemonic masculinity ideal/the old ways. (Inhorn, 2012)

Mosaic masculinity: Older men adapt parts of masculine scripts to form their masculine identity. (Coles, 2008)

Men's experience of Isolation and Alienation

“People have no conception of just how isolated someone who hasn't got kids in middle age is. That's point number one to get through in your bloody PhD.” Russell (55)

“When couples get older, they have a whole raft of experiences, you know, if you haven't had those experiences you're shut out along with everything else. You're on the fringe - you haven't experienced: that is alien to you.” Russell

“Loads of activities around here from people we knew. I've dropped out of that because I hate going on my own. A problem – I'll solve it. I'm the only one. I don't know anyone.” Harry (64)

“It is noticeable that friends who have children drift away.” Edward

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Future

Health: *“Who's gonna take us to the hospital? Who's gonna push us? When we fall on the floor, who's gonna pick us up?” Michael (63)*

“You're suddenly aware you're no longer invincible.” John (59)

Threat: *“I don't want people saying, “Oh, he's a bit of a paedophile, this one, looking at the kids”.” Raymond (70)*

Legacy: *“There is a richness of family history, which it's nice to pass on, again no one to pass it on to.” David (60)*

“To be brutal death is the future... I'd like to see my surrogate granddaughter grow up... 15 years will take her to 18. You can see them to be an adult then, can't you?” Martin (70)

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Academic reading

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