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# Male infertility and the “*MAWFIA*”: MEN AGEING WITHOUT FAMILY: INVISIBLE AND ALIENATED?



Image: <http://wallpapersonview.com>

Dr Robin A Hadley  
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[@robinhadley1](https://twitter.com/robinhadley1)

# The Package Deal\*: the ideal man?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNOIqfEFew4>

Dove 'Manthem':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNOIqfEFew4>

Google: *NEW DOVE MEN+CARE AD THE MANSONG* – YouTube

\* (*Townsend, 2002*)

# Infertility

Fertility problems affect one in seven couples in the UK -approximately 3.5 million people.

A couple will only be diagnosed as being infertile if they have not managed to have a baby after one year of trying

37% contributed to male factors



[www.hfea.gov.uk](http://www.hfea.gov.uk)



Thanks to Dr Carroll (Manchester Metropolitan University) for data and slides on infertility.

Dr Michael Carroll

Senior Lecturer in Reproductive Science - Course director, MSc Clinical Science / Cellular Science

# Crisis with male fertility

theguardian

Reproduction  
The Observer

The infertility crisis is beyond doubt.  
Now scientists must find the cause

News last week that sperm counts in western men have halved confirmed what experts already knew. The real problem is that no one knows why

BBC

Sign in

NEWS

Health

## Sperm count drop 'could make humans extinct'

By Pallab Ghosh  
Science correspondent, BBC News

25 July 2017 | Health



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Manchester Met Open Day  
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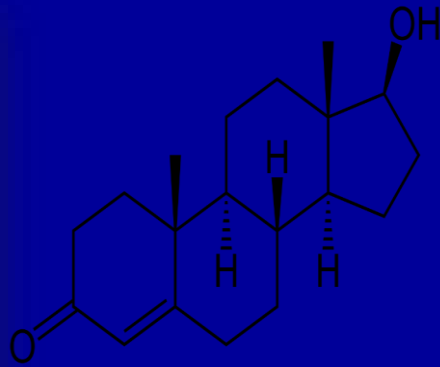


**Huge drop in sperm count could lead to human EXTINCTION: Study reveals 60% drop in fertility since 1970 - driven by the unhealthy Western lifestyle**

# Main Causes of Male Infertility



*Varicocele*



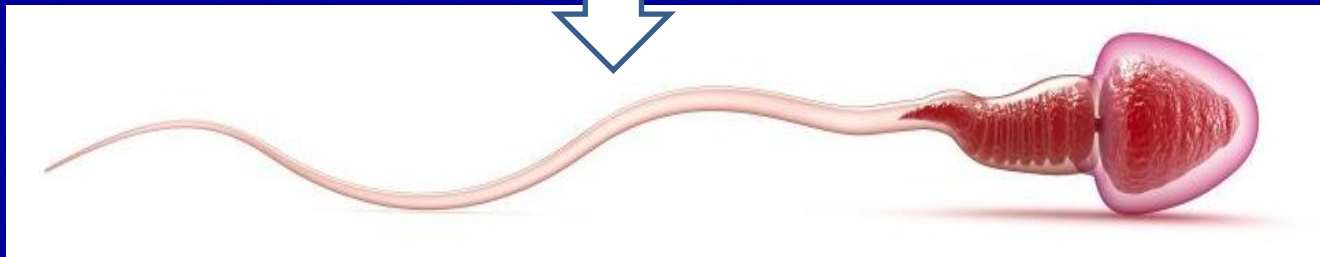
*Hormone abnormalities*



*Genetics*



*Infections and injury*



*Decrease in sperm number & quality*



# Who is advising boys on their fertility?

## Schools

### Teenage boys wear skirts to school to protest against 'no shorts' policy

Dozens of pupils at Isca academy in Exeter stage uniform protest after school insists they wear trousers despite heatwave

**Steven Morris**

🐦 @stevenmorris20

Thu 22 Jun 2017 18.12 BST



378,204

🕒 This article is over 1 year old



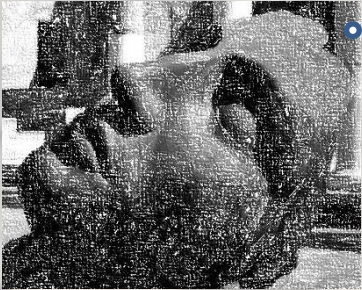
▲ Pupils at Isca academy say boys from every year group have been taking part in the uniform protest. Photograph: BBC/Apex

# How is a man supposed to be an ideal man?




At least 24% of men are childless

Male childlessness/infertility excluded from masculinities literature



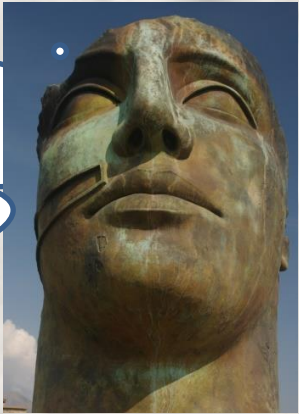
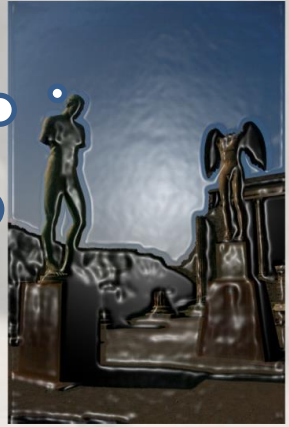
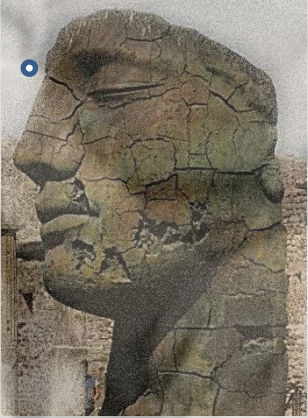
Childless men are less wealthy and less happy than fathers

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





# *“MAWFIA”:*

MEN AGEING WITHOUT FAMILY: INVISIBLE AND ALIENATED?



PhD (2015) MSc (2009), MA (2008), City & Guilds 744 (1982), 3 ‘O’ Levels (1977), 8 CSE’s (1976), Bronze Swimming Badge (1970), St Hilda’s Primary School Football Player of the Year (1970)

# I am...

- 58, White-British, born working class, Lancastrian-Mancunian
- I am Hard-of-Hearing since birth with a 30% loss
- I left secondary education with 3 'O' levels
- 1997- 2008 I worked as a scientific & technical photographer
- 3 academic papers on 'male involuntary childlessness'; various blogs; pieces in the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Mail, and The Times; 4 Podcasts (Australia, Canada, UK, USA); BBC R4 iPM, BBC National Radio, other radio programmes
- My left ear featured heavily in the BBC Breakfast 'AWOC' piece
- I am a involuntarily childless man: I was very 'broody' in my 30's

# *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 incomplete

# Background

- Demographic change: increased longevity, decreased fertility, smaller families, increase in divorce, diversity of family forms.
- Future impact on pensions, health & social care funding and provision (*Wittenberg et al 2008*).
- Family (adult children) provide most informal care for older people (*Phillips, 2007*).
- Lack of data on men's experience of infertility and ageing (*Letherby, 2010, Arber 2004, Arber et al, 2003*).



# Who are the childless?

- **Childless adults** 'occupy all classes and classifications'
- Typically seen as a **binary**: involuntary **or** voluntary
- Often viewed as a life-choice
- **Includes**: never married, expected to be childless, childless-by-choice, childless-by-circumstance (biological, economic, social, relational), estranged from children, pre-deceased children **or** **whose** children have left home (*Dykstra, 2009; Murphy, 2009*).
- **Societies are** pronatalist: **childless labeled as** 'other', 'stigmatised' **and feel and treated as** 'outsiders.' (*Letherby, 2010*)

# Childlessness

- Majority of research focuses on the 'involuntary' and based on those accessing infertility treatment (Letherby, 2002, 2010).
- 'Involuntary childlessness' often used as a clinical term for people following withdrawal from or unsuccessful infertility treatment (Letherby, 2002, 2010).
- Potential or actual infertility has the same affect as a diagnosis of serious or terminal disease on physical & mental health, identity, well being and socio-economically (Letherby, 2002, 2010).
- Childless men who wanted to be a father scored higher for anger, depression, and isolation than similar women (Hadley, 2008).

# Ageing and childlessness

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

# Social networks and men

- Older men especially see their partner as a primary source of care and support. *(Arber, 2004; Arber and Davidson, 2003)*
- Older men are more likely to have very small networks of one person or less compared to equivalent women. *(Phillipson et al 2001)*
- Partner-less older men are more likely to be placed in residential care than equivalent women. *(Arber and Davidson, 2003)*
- Concern over older men's isolation has led to projects such as 'Men in sheds' & 'Hen Power'.
- 'Out in the City' 50+ type groups offer support to older LGBT people.



# Why study childless men?

- Off the cuff suggestion for the topic for my MA dissertation in Counselling (2008): Interviewed 10 men aged 30 – 65:
- Underlying question, *'Was it only me who was broody'?*
- Found there was very little on men's desire for fatherhood.
- MSc in Research Methods (2009): Online survey of 232 men and women. Age range: 19 – 75:
- Question: *'Is it true women are 'broody' and men are not'?*
- PhD in Social Gerontology (2015): 14 men; 2 non-heterosexual, 12 heterosexual; aged 49 – 82
- Question: *'What is the impact of involuntary childlessness on older men?' My PhD was funded by Keele University.*

# How are men viewed?

- Men are the 'second sex' in academia: anthropology; social sciences; sociology; demography; health. *(Inhorn, 2012)*
- Men are blamed/dismissed for not accessing 'health care'. Or does 'health care' not access them?
- Men viewed as 'socially reticent' and 'difficult to access' by gerontology researchers. *(Arber et al., 2003)*
- Men reported as 'not interested' and 'non-participation condemned to be meaningful' by infertility researchers. *(Lloyd, 1996)*
- Older men are viewed as genderless, impotent, and as a sexual threat. *(Walz, 2002).*

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

- Men's fertility history is not collected: it is not possible to assess the level of childless men in the UK. (ONS, 2014; Cohort Fertility background notes).
- Lack of data on men's ageing experience. (Arber 2004, Arber et al, 2003).
- Lack of data on male experience of infertility/childlessness. (Letherby, 2010)
- Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 'Fertility Trends Report 2014' word count:

• Men = 0	Women = 105
• Man = 1	Woman = 52
• Male = 7 (4 x 'no male partner')	Female = 5
• Sperm: 35	Egg = 95

# How to institutionally alienate and isolate men: blame the men

- Men are blamed/dismissed for not accessing 'health care'. Or does 'health care' not access them?
- 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 76% of suicides in the UK *(ONS, 2017)*



## Social context: 'The package deal'

*"I just naturally, in growing up, rather assumed I would leave school, do university, get a job, get married, and have a family."* David (60)

*"I always imagined I would have children."* Harry (70)

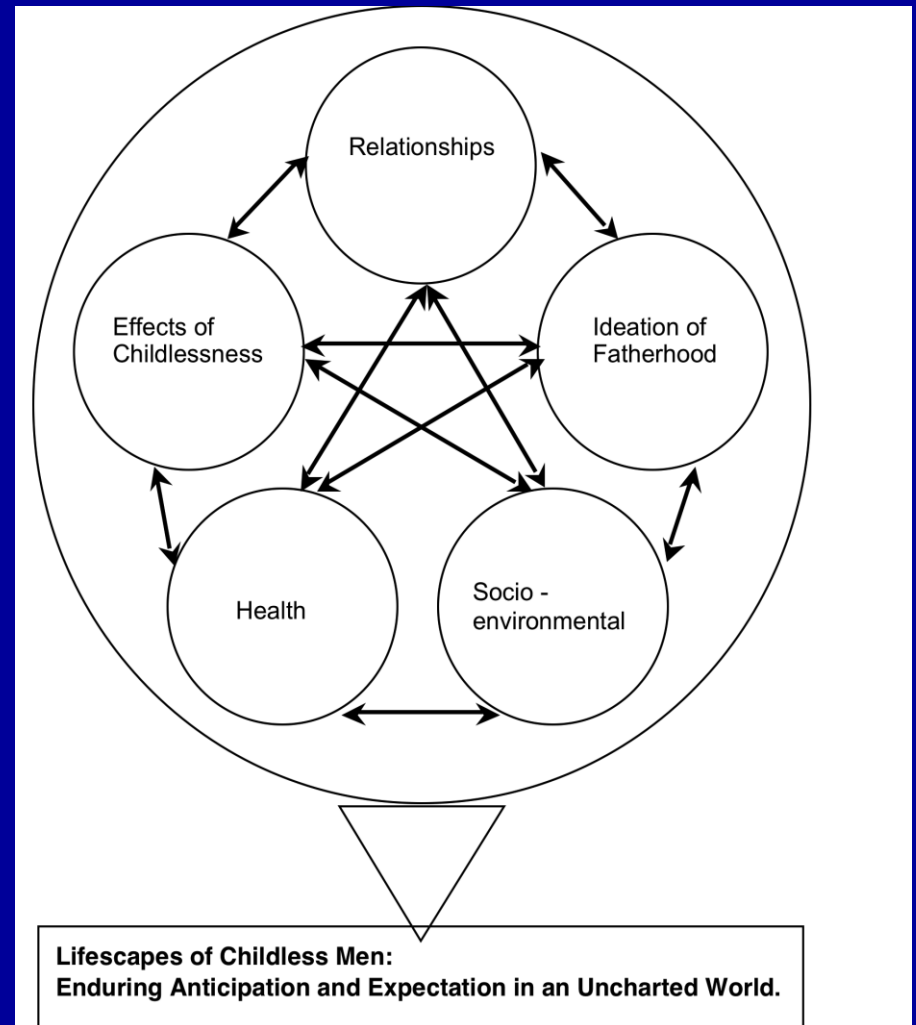
*"I think from about like 15 years old I knew I was gay, so in my mind even then I knew I would never get married. So I suppose I didn't even think too much about children because you don't get married them days you didn't have children."* Raymond (70)

# My research

- MA in Counselling (2008) : Interviewed 10 men aged 30 - 65
- MSc in Research Methods (2009): Online survey of 232 men and women. Age range: 19 – 75
- PhD in Social Gerontology (2015): 14 men: 2 non-heterosexual, 12 heterosexual aged 49 – 82
- My PhD was funded by Keele University.

# MA emerging themes:

- Consequences of childlessness
- Ideation of Fatherhood
- Relationships (childhood and adult)
- Socio-economic
- Health



# Consequences of Childlessness:

## Social loss

- *“I felt out of phase with...normality or the expectations of how, to how life is...” (Jeremy, 61)*
- *“There was a slight awkwardness...like people were implying there was something wrong with you” (Ben, 60).*
- *“Envy, envious - plum envious...I’ve got friends with children, all my sisters have got children.” (Phil, 51)*
- *“If I didn’t want one so much, I wouldn’t be in the crap I’m in” (Shane, 33).*



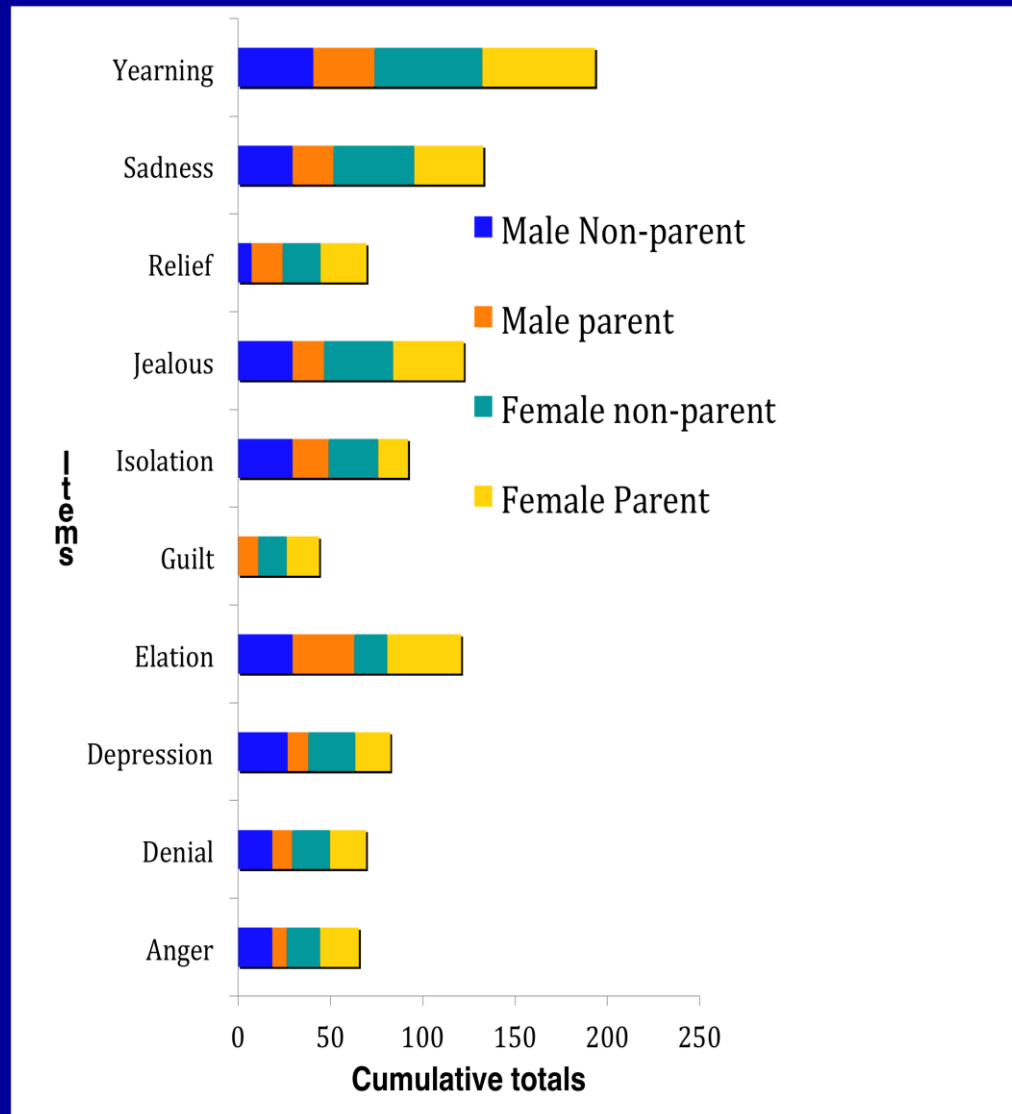
# Relationships.

- *“I thought that means I’ve missed my chance of having a family...I felt really sad - it caught me by surprise to feel a sense of loss about that ” (Marcus, 33)*
- *“I can literally blame my two divorces on the fact that I’ve not had a kid ” (Shane, 33)*
- *“She said... ‘I wish I’d had children with you. ” So not being a father impinges partly on my relationship with X. You know, it’s missing between us .” (Phil, 51)*

# MSc 'Broodiness' online survey

- 51.9% of the **childless men** in the survey indicated a desire for parenthood compared to 25.9% who did not.
- **Female and male non-parents** showed **a similar level of desire for parenthood**: ( $Mdn = 1.00$  [Yes]),  $U = 995.000$ ,  $z = -.688$ ,  $p = .492$  and  $r = -0.06$ .
- The decision to **parent** for **non-parents** indicated **economic** and **social** factors as the main influences, with greater differences between **females** and **males**. **Females** noted **personal desire** as a major influence. **Males** indicated **cultural/societal** and **family expectations**, with an underlying trend of **personal desire** and **biological urge**.

# Reactions to broodiness question



# Yearning item:

- 'Yearning' was the item most associated with 'broodiness'. *Non-parents* were more affected by Yearning, Sadness, and Depression.
- *Non-parent females* indicated higher responses in Isolation and Sadness than mothers.
- *Non-parent males* demonstrated higher responses than both female non-parents and male parents for Depression and Isolation.
- *Male non-parents* recorded higher levels in all items compared to *male parents*, except for **Elation, Guilt, and Relief**.
- *Male non-parents* broadly had similar scores to *female parents* in *sadness, jealousy, depression and anger*.

# PhD: methodology and sample

- Draws on Chambers (2002) '*feminist life course perspective*' based on: social/critical gerontology, life course, Auto/Biography & feminist approaches.
- Semi-structured Biographical Narrative Interview Method. (Wengraf, 2001)
- Broad Thematic Analysis. (Braun & Clark, 2006)
- 14 self-defined IvC 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).

# 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
- **Timing:** *"I thought it would be like falling of a log because my parents had me in their 40's."* 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

# Continuity of disruption

*“It would suddenly hit me - I would see the relationship between a father and son, or a daughter, and I was thinking “Ah” I’m never really going to get that, you know ... I miss that.”* George (60)

*“It’s something I will never stop regretting. You know, it won’t go away.”* Martin (70)

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

*“I’m never going to be able to say, “This is my grandson” am I?”* Harry (64)



# Men's experience of Isolation and Alienation

**Isolation:** *"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)

*"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)

**Alienation:** *"When couples get older, they have a whole raft of experiences, you know, first day at school - 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

*"It is noticeable that friends who have children drift away."* Edward (60)

# Mediated childlessness

- **Age:** *"Since I was about 47 I accepted that it won't happen."* Colin (59)
- **Health:** *"That was when I found out I was infertile and probably had been from being a teenager."* Martin (60)
- **Relationship:** *"Liz [ex-wife] stated that she didn't want children, I just quickly put those inklins' to one side..."* James (65)
- **Sexuality:** *"I could never have been a [biological] father, I don't think so."* Alan (82)
- **Loss:** *'If you have a child there would be a part of Helen still walking the streets.'* Harry (64)

# 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)*

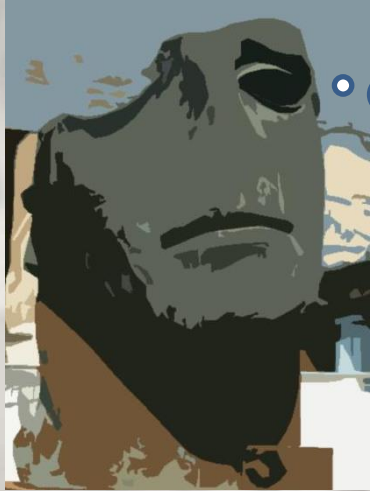
*“You're suddenly aware you're no longer invincible.” John (59)*

**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)*

# AWOC wonders...

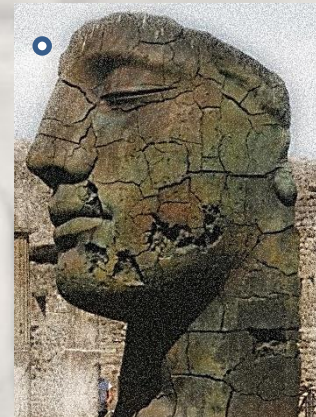


1: **1 million people over 65 never been parents: how did they miss that?**

2: **Adult children provide and facilitate care for older people. Yet total silence around the impact for AWOC people?**

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

**2030: at least 2 million people 65 and over Ageing Without Children**



# Difference and the missing 'something'

**Surrogate:** "I said to the parents, "You know, this baby when it comes hasn't got a paternal grandfather. Can I be a surrogate grandfather?" Which I am."

**Difference:** "We arrived at the hospital just after she was born and they handed me this tiny little thing; it was, what six hours old? And I was just smitten - I'd never understood the bond between a parent and a child until that moment. I just looked at her and said, "If I had been a father, I can, you know, nurture you for the rest of your life. So then I understood what the whole parent thing was, really. So that's why she is important to us."

**Missing:** "And maybe that's what men who don't have children don't realise because you can see what you are missing physically. You know, social connections and all the rest of it, but you don't know what you are missing emotionally." Martin (70)

# *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.*

# Ageing Without Children (awoc.org)

- Grass roots organisation campaigning for the recognition of 'AWOC' people. Includes those childless by circumstance, choice, bereavement, disruption, & self defined.
- More people now in their 40s will age without children than ever before; estimates are between 20-25%.
- The population of older people in the UK is increasing.
- Assumption in health and social care policy and practice that older people will have family members to fill the gap left by the state.
- The ageing childless are not recognised in policy and practice documents.
- Seeking funding to conduct more research.



# Thank you!



Robin Hadley

[www.wantedtobeadad.com](http://www.wantedtobeadad.com)

@robinhadley1

# Publications

Hadley, R. A. (2018). "I'm missing out and I think I have something to give": experiences of older involuntarily childless men. *Working with Older People*, 22(2), 83-92. doi:10.1108/WWOP-09-2017-0025

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# Re/Me - searcher

"It's crowded he said" and I agreed with the man who looked like Richard Dreyfuss from Jaws.

His Irish accent grew stronger or my hearing attuned as the human flotsam and jetsom washed out and in and out again. His voice dips and swells as he skims the lifescapes of the Irish greats of the English

'I am one of those' when he heard about my research. The few times he had the chance and if he could go back and he would do it different.

We are swimming in the sea of the unspoken and the tides of regret unites and separates us.

The shark exits at Finchley Central.

# 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.

**Older men are viewed 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)