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The Media and Me



The experiences of involuntarily childless men as they age

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Themes and Quotes



1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to examine the lives of older involuntarily childless (IVC) men. Research in the field of older men is important, not only because of an increasingly ageing population and a declining fertility rate (Dykstra 2009), but also because of the lack of research material on men as they age (Dykstra and Keizer, 2009). Divorced and widowed childless men show higher rates of depression than same status women (Zhang and Hayward, 2001). Older childless men have smaller social networks and are poorer in terms of health, diet, self-care, and well-being than those married with children (Dykstra and Keizer, 2009).

Erastophobia

'I'd hate someone to look saying, 'Watch that old man...'' (Harry, 64)

Reproductive Capital

'The currency of the sort of social network is children, usually.' (Martin, 70)

Existential Masculinity

'How is a man supposed to be a man?' (Frank, 56)

Solo living and 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)

Relationship Disruption

'We split up. I was 42, she was 35. She wanted kids but with someone her age or younger' (Steven, 59)

Economic Disruption

'The bloody interest rates hit 3%. It needed the two of us to be working that made us delay...' (John, 59)

Born at the right time

'I was very fortunate, the NHS had just been established, I managed to buy and sell houses just before it all went tits up' (Martin, 70)

Adopted grandfatherhood

'They asked if they could adopt me as granddad. That lasted 2 years. It was great. I felt I belonged... that's what I miss' (Alan, 82)

Peer relationships

'He had two daughters, I went through a period of being immensely jealous of him.' (Edward, 60)

Latent grandfatherhood

'I was 15, I knew I was gay, I wouldn't be getting married. You had to have kids then. I think, in a way, of the two little ones that work as the grandchildren I've never had.' (Raymond, 70)

Isolation

'People have no conception of just how isolated someone who hasn't got kids in middle age is.' (Russell, 55)

3. The study

Qualitative semi-structured biographical interviews were held across the country with 14 men, aged between 49-82 years. Giving an age range of 3, mean age of 3.5 and median of 0.5. 3 of the participants were White-British, one Australian, and two gay. 3 participants were interviewed twice with one refusing the second interview. Most interviews were held in the participant's home with 11 men interviewed face-to-face, 1 via Skype, 1 via email, and 1 via telephone. Total interview time ranged from 1hr 57mins. to 7hrs 58minutes. Nvivo9 was used to store, retrieve, and aid the ongoing thematic analysis.

*Pseudonyms have been used.

2. Lacuna

Men are missing from both childlessness and ageing research. Childlessness is typically divided into two types: voluntary and 'involuntary.' Most research focuses on the latter and is based on those in pre-participating in, or post, infertility treatment. Men are generally excluded from this research (Dykstra and Keizer 2009). Most gerontological research has focused on older women, as they lived longer, had high chronic co-morbidities, received more state benefits, and occupied the majority of the home care sector (Arber et al, 2003; Arber, 2004). Financial research has focused on differences in women's marital status (Arber, 2004).

4. Findings

Preliminary findings highlight the complex intersections between agency, structure, masculinity, economics, transitions over the life course, and relationships. The majority of the men reported the impact of shyness both in their formative years and throughout life. The fear of being viewed as a paedophile (erastophobia) was prevalent throughout the study. Quality of life and health were often conflated especially for those with chronic conditions. Future health was seen as one to decline with the loss of being active the commonest fear. Fictive kin were mostly via partners' family. Grandfatherhood had been experienced via four routes: Latent, Adopted, Surrogate, and Proxy.

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Background

- Sent in abstract for the BSA 2013 conference.
- Contacted by *Tony Trueman* (BSA Media Consultant) a press release before the conference highlighting the research.
- I had to revisit my MSc and SPSS to provide statistics and my MA for quotes: stats needed to be both % and numbers.
- Tony developed the 'release' and I agreed to its contents. My only issue surrounded that I had 'given a talk'. Tony replied:

"It is OK no one will come and there is little chance of it being picked up"

Outcome of press release

- I attended the BSG PG Pre-conference day on Tuesday 4th April
- 02/04/2013: 4pm. I was contacted by Tony asking if he could give my mobile number to journalists. Contacted by The Times.
- 03/04/2013: 9.30am. Contacted by the Daily Telegraph who ask to speak to participants directly – refused. They understood but still pushed. I offered my own experience and Sarah Rainey interviewed me over the phone. Sent a photographer and then contacted me to say they were running the piece the next day.

Wednesday 03/04/2013

MailOnline

Men without children are 'more depressed and sad' than childless women

- Men are almost as likely as women to want children, say British researchers
- Also feel more isolated, depressed and angry if they don't have them
- Main reasons men want children are 'cultural' and due to family pressures
- For women, it is more about personal desire and biological urge

By [Anna Hodgekiss](#)

Robin Hadley, of Keele University, found that 59 per cent of men and 63 per cent of women said they wanted children.

Of the men who wanted children, half had experienced isolation because they did not have any children, compared with 27 per cent of women.

Thirty-eight per cent of men had experienced depression because they did not have any children, compared with only 27 per cent of women.

One in four men had experienced anger because they did not have any children, compared with 18 per cent of women, while 56 per cent of men had experienced sadness because they did not have any children, compared with 43 per cent of women.

However, no men had experienced guilt because they did not have any children although 16 per cent of women had.]

Mr Hadley said: 'There is very little research on the desire for fatherhood among men.

PUBLISHED: 00:02, 3 April 2013 | **UPDATED:** 00:28, 3 April 2013

Thursday 04/04/2013

I know all about broody men who long to be dads. I am one



Robin Hadley

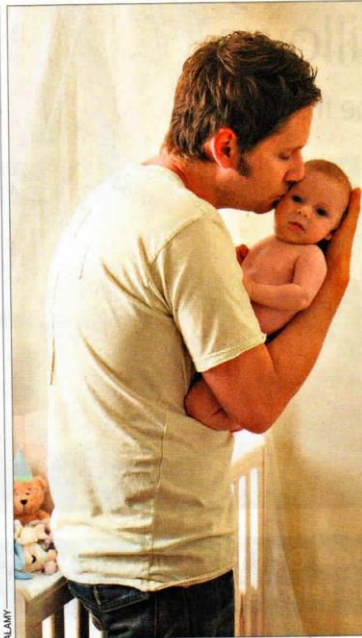
When I was a teenager and my parents wanted to stop me doing something, they'd always come out with the same thing. "You'll have to make these decisions when you're a parent," they would say. "It's not easy. You'll realise that when you have children of your own."

I'm 53 now and I'm not a father. I never will be. I am happily married – to my second wife – and we have no children. It's not that we didn't want any; since my mid-thirties, I have been broody, desperate for the kids that I watched my friends and colleagues having over the years. I always assumed it would happen. But, for me, it was never the right time.

The study reported in yesterday's *Daily Telegraph*, which found that childless men can be just as broody as women – and, indeed, are more prone to feeling depressed and angry about not having kids – was part of my PhD research project at Keele University. For it, I interviewed men who, like me, long to be fathers and have felt utterly devastated when it hasn't come to pass.

I married my first wife when I was 26; she was five years younger. We got engaged within six months and married shortly afterwards. We bought a three-bedroom house in Rochdale, outside Manchester, and started trying for kids. At the time, I remember thinking: "I'm going to be a father. I'm going to have to provide for my child." So I went into overtime at work – I was a technician at Manchester University – to try to get a promotion. Four years passed, we never had children and eventually the marriage failed.

Afterwards, I was stuck with the house, rattling around on my own. It was a macho thing – I can survive, I thought, I can do this. In reality, it was all a bit sad. Meanwhile, all my peers were getting married



'A lot of hurt comes from the unfulfilled desire to be a dad,' says Robin Hadley

and having children – having a life, I suppose. When I was 35, I got into a relationship with a great woman. At one point, she said: "I'd like to have children with you." I was so ready then. I yearned for a son or daughter. But, sadly, we split up soon afterwards.

It was around this time that I started to feel envious of men who had children. There was a guy I'd been to school with who worked in the same building as me and he had a baby when he was in his late twenties. I remember being intensely jealous of him. I told him: "I want what you've got. You have the life that I should have."

At 37, I met my wife. She is a few years older than me, and when things started to get serious, we had the chat about

kids. She told me she was past wanting children – she had once been broody, but not any more. It was then that I had to make a choice. Did I leave her and try to find another woman who might want to get pregnant? Or did I stay in this relationship with this wonderful woman, and sacrifice my hope of having children? My mind was made up.

I am happy with my decision, but there are regrets. On the street where we live, there are some young girls who ride up and down on their bikes. My wife and I love hearing them out and about. They have birthday parties, and other parents in the neighbourhood are invited – but we aren't. I completely understand: they're nice people and they probably think we wouldn't be interested – all that noise and hectic running around and fizzy drinks. But the truth is we'd love to be there.

Children are a bridge to a social life – to school gates and clubs and activities – that we are not a part of. As I get older, being a grandparent has crossed my mind, too. That is something I will never experience. It hits me at certain times of the year. I would have loved to have gone to a nice Nativity play. I would be such a doting father; I'd be in tears before I even got to the school car park.

There is a stigma around men who don't have children. We don't talk about it. Women are nurturing and kind; men are stoic ones. You don't want to be seen as a big softie for admitting you're broody. In reality, a lot of hurt comes from the unfulfilled desire to be a dad. There's an African saying: "You're not a man unless you're a father." In the past, I've certainly felt that. I've felt like I've failed; like having children was the one thing I was predisposed to do – and I didn't do it. Now, all I can do is adapt.

People say there are advantages to not having children – you have a bit more money and freedom. You can form other relationships, keep yourself busy and try to come to terms with it. Still, nothing can fill that gap. Nothing makes up for not being a dad.

The Times: 06/04/2013

Being a father means nothing else matters

It has been a terrible week for fathering. But some of us wouldn't dream of missing a single bathtime

Giles Coren



Research was presented at the British Sociological Association on Thursday that revealed that being childless hits men harder than it hits women.

While acknowledging that women are still marginally more likely than men to want children in the first place (63 per cent compared with 59), clipboard boffins from Keele University discovered that, when people end up not having kids at all, men are much more likely than women to feel isolated, depressed, angry and sad about it. Fully half of the men questioned said they had experienced "isolation" because they did not have children, compared with only 27 per cent of women; 56 per cent of men were "sad" about not having had children, but only 43 per cent of women; 25 per cent of men were "angry" about their childlessness, compared with only 18 per cent of women. And so on.

This was reported reasonably widely across the media, and I think we were supposed to be surprised about it. But I cannot for the life of me think why. I was absolutely boiling furious for 41 years about not being a father. Mad as a bag of rappers. I was, until I fixed it. But women I know of my age who have not had children, they're more like: "Meh, I'll get cats."

I sometimes wonder if that is because a cat can provide a reasonable substitute for what a mother gets out of mothering — small warm thing to

cuddle that grows gratifyingly quickly at first but then slows down, needs you to feed it and deal with its poo, sort out its bed, nurse it when it is sick, weep when it becomes independent and heads off into the world on its own for the first time — but doesn't provide much of what a father might hope to get from his child, crap at football, no desire to go round castles and battlefields, not up for Saturday morning swimming, not impressed by the zoo, no likelihood of growing up to achieve all the things you never quite managed.

In short, motherhood is a biological near-inevitability with a finite timeline that is either going to happen or not happen. A woman is likely to spend a certain number of years determined not to become pregnant, a certain number hoping that she will and the rest knowing that she can't. Emotions such as rage and sadness about the mere fact of it are pretty much otiose. Men on the other hand spend all but the very beginning of their lives "able"

26 months ago my tragic sense of mortality evaporated

to perform the brief biological requirement of fatherhood, without ever really knowing if they ought to, or when, or understanding what their responsibilities will be if they do.

In a week of pisspoor fathering, it is not the example of Mick Philpott that seems best to underline this point, but that of Jamie Cumming, jailed for life for a knife murder outside a Dundee pub, who has 17 children by 15 different mothers. That is 15 women grimly succumbing to biological inevitability and one man doing... God alone knows what. But not fathering, by any



Giles Coren, with a good reason for no longer being angry, sad and depressed

means. Nor would it be anything but laughable to suggest that his incarceration deprives 17 children of a dad.

A man is just a sperm donor — whether he puts it in a pot for a tinner down the sperm bank, offers it gratis to seedless friends, or deposits it inside his wife by any of the myriad means available. That'll make someone a mother. But it won't make him a father. A father is something you have to become.

And that is why I was so angry, sad, isolated and depressed for so long. Not because I did not have tiny humans trailing around after me with their thumbs in their mouths, or because my fertility was unproven (three terminations over the years were in no way especially cheering), but because I had not become a father. Or anything else much at all.

A woman's life is changed by having a child. A man has to agree to change his life. A woman reacts to a straightforward corporeal trauma and its human aftermath with an inevitable change of priorities, ambitions, self-image... while a man merely observes the trauma, cradles the

aftermath in his arms, and then either changes or doesn't.

I know quite a few men who have had children without really becoming fathers. They're still angry and depressed. Or in denial. They thought that one ejaculation was the end of their responsibilities, not the beginning.

For my part, becoming a father changed me totally. Everything that I am today, I became on February 3, 2011. Everything I was before that is forgotten. Nothing I do matters apart from being a father. It is not that being a father matters more, it is that nothing else matters at all.

Whether I get to present this or that television show, or write this or that book, or lose it to someone younger and cheaper than me does not matter a jot, except in so far as it enables me to support my daughter, and the son we are expecting next month. But in truth my wife could do that, along with whatever money I have made already, and, if it comes to it, the welfare state (which doesn't kill children, only saves them). All I can do, with my relatively whopping income, is see that my kids

have comfier shoes and better cheese. And nobody could call that important.

Nor is it important if I live or die, except in so far as I can be useful to my children. But my tragic and self-regarding sense of my own mortality, per se, evaporated 26 months ago. I know that my biological function on Earth is served and I could go to any sort of death quite calmly. It's a very relaxing feeling. And I did not used to have it. No wonder I was angry and depressed.

While I am alive, though, I devote every available second to being a father. I do not work after 5pm or at the weekend, ever. And never will. I see successful men being asked in magazine interviews what is their greatest regret, and replying, all of them, every time: "Working so hard that I did not see my children growing up." Losers. Fools. That will not happen to me. There is no material reward on Earth that is worth missing a single bathtime for.

Nor even does being a husband matter. My wife could easily find another one: she is hot, and has some money. But my daughter has only one father. Only me. So I must make myself the best father possible: earn her respect without ever scaring her, support her unquestioningly, be available unconditionally, never let her down. Never, ever let her down.

My wife does not have to worry about any of these things. She just is her children's mother. She can work or not work, go out or not go out, be faithful to me or be unfaithful, get drunk or not get drunk, without ever ceasing to be their mother. But I can lose the name of "father" in the blink of an eye. A father is a luxury in 2013, not a necessity. A chargeable executive extra that by no means comes fitted as standard.

Being a father matters so much to me, because I do not matter at all.

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- Draws on the press release % statistics.
- I am promoted to 'Clipboard boffins'.

SELF magazine: August 2013



- Many emails from this USA magazine. A number were very pushy requesting copies of my MSc and MA: refused.
- Reduced to a “a researcher at Keele University” and a low res copy.

'Features' experience

- I was approached by two different freelance journalists for features pieces for the 'Femail' section of the Daily Mail.
- The first was in 2012 and was on 'childless' men and involved both telephone and email interview. Insisted on photographs that included my wife.
- Photographer and make-up artist sent to house. Photographs have to fit "house style": Woman in smart dress, man dressed in smart trousers and smart shirt. Typically man behind the woman. Cannot show images due to copyright.
- Edited from article: *"The broody men left bereft by high-flying career wives who refuse to have babies"* (Antonia Hoyle, Daily Mail, 09/05/2012: <http://www.antoniahoyles.com/assets/ah-work-article-74.pdf>)

What journalists want you to know

- They operate on a same day turnaround: Contact people in the morning; write piece in the afternoon to file copy by 4pm.
- Unavailability on the day generally means the story won't run.
- Want case studies and image taken by staff photographer.
- People to be contactable at short notice, willing to talk through the piece, and to be photographed.
- Academics to have: research/areas of expertise readily available online, with appropriate contact details. The research to be easy to find, well labelled, and easy to contact the relevant author.
- They are looking for an expert, a specific field, or a specific case study. If these are 'tagged' to academic work they will be accessed.
- Useful if an academic can signpost others working in the appropriate field.
- Need the full and correct title as the short turnaround means this is sometimes missed.

(with thanks to Sarah Rainey of the Daily Telegraph)

Radio

- 03/04/2013: noon. Lunchtime live interview on Radio Ulster: with another guest who started by talking about his daughter.

Tip: Always ask what sort of interview. Refuse if you want: offer to talk separately.

- 03/04/2013: 4.20pm. Pre-recorded interview with BBC Radio Stoke. Although radio tend to prefer 'live' they seem happy to do a 'pre-rec' with the show's host before the show starts.

Tip: Good for being able to repeat or adjust what you say. Often these are syndicated around networks.

- 04/04/2013: 6pm. Pre-rec with Canada BC: syndicated country wide.
- 07/04/2013: 9pm. Live interview with ABC Radio Australia.

Tip: Be flexible - ABC was a Sunday evening but 8 - 10am drive time show.

Radio: in the studio

- Get there early: take a cab or if you drive make sure you can contact the studio if you are delayed.
- The presenter will lead you and use the breaks to prepare for the following section.
- Take a bottle of water in case your mouth goes dry.
- Have 3 main points that you can keep plugging/fall back on.
- Get a friend or colleague to listen and be a critical friend.
- Note what you think went well and what didn't.
- Use Twitter before and after interview.

Tip: Put link to interview on your website and at end of emails.

Tip: Ask for a copy of the interview on first approach/before recording.

Media networks and social media

- National newspapers all have online versions so any story has the potential to have an international audience.
- All have related media outlets in other countries that may pick up your story.
- My coverage went international and I am still being contacted by journalists regarding my research.
- The majority have contacted me by email.
- A basic website is essential.
- Twitter is very influential and heavily monitored by the media.
- Trolls: Not had any but don't read the online media comments. Get a friend to have a look and give a brief overview.
- Don't engage: "We've created a world where the smartest way to survive is to be bland" (*Jon Ronson: So You've Been Publicly Shamed*)

Summary of my experience

- I've enjoyed my experience with the media. I've treated it as part of the exciting adventure of doing research.
- Great 'ego-stroke' – people are interested in my research!
- Journalists always say they need answers urgently...
- I've been nervous about appearing on radio but tried to focus on core message.
- I listen to radio interviews differently now.
- I have been told by a BBC radio producer that being a 'Dr' carries more kudos when they are considering 'experts'.
- A few members of the public have contacted me by email: asking for details of organisations or wanting to take part in my research.
- It would not have happened if the BSA did not have a policy of engaging with the media.

Thank you the BSA for giving me the platform.

A special 'Thank you' to Tony Trueman for writing the press release and for the continuing support and encouragement.

Thank you for listening: any questions?

”Det finns en smärta i att inte få bli pappa”

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Bild 1 av 2



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