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Me(*n*) and the MAWFIA: Men Ageing Without Family – Isolated & Alienated?

Dr Robin A Hadley

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)

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WARNING!

I discuss a very sensitive subject.
The contents of this presentation may
trigger painful experiences.
Please take self-care.

Who am I?



- 61, White-British, born working class, Lancastrian-Mancunian.
- Hard-of-Hearing (30% loss & constant tinnitus) via birth trauma.
- Left school with few qualifications.
- 1977- 2008 I worked as a scientific/technical photographer.
- Married -divorced 1986 -1990; Serious relationship 1992;
- Married 1999 – ongoing.
- Studied/trained as a counsellor 2003-2008.
- I am a 'mediated' childless man: I was very 'broody' in my 30's.³

Myths, men and reproduction

- *Why research childless men?* Little research on men's experience.

Men are FASCINATING

- *Men can reproduce throughout their lives!*

But most men don't for two reasons: Biological & Social. Men have a slow hormonal decline (andropause) and sperm slowly loses its efficacy from the mid-30's onwards. Most societies have an age limit (social clock) of an acceptable age to be a parent. Men indicate they don't want to be 'old' dads that can't interact with any offspring.

- *Men are not broody & not concerned about becoming fathers!*

There are few studies on measuring male broodiness. My study (2009) found that the level of broodiness between non-parent men and women was about the same. But men scored higher for depression, isolation and anger than fathers.

Publically stating desire for parenthood = social stigmatisation.

Also... if ½ the population were not interested in reproducing...

My studies of 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'?*
- 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'?*
- Answer: No – its about the same level
- PhD in Social Gerontology (2015): 14 men; aged 49 – 82
- Question: *'What is the impact of involuntary childlessness on older men?' Keele University doctoral studentship.*

Who are the childless?

- Childlessness cuts across all levels of society: 'not a homogeneous group' (*Wenger et al., 2007*)
- Typically seen as a binary: involuntary and voluntary
- 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*)
- Men who challenge 'traditional norms' for example, gay men, house-husbands, male nurses/carers and primary school teachers, are often subject to discrimination, exclusion, isolation, and mistrust from men and women (*Letherby 2010, 2012*)

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 post 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, 2009)*
- Difficult to assess the level of involuntary childlessness because people who do not access treatment are not recorded.
- Men's fertility history is not collected in the UK: it is not possible to assess the level of childless men in the UK or much of the world.

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)*

Cross cultural context

Resource	Type: year	Culture: Country	Author
Battling with Failed Procreativity: Involuntarily Childless Patients' Experiences in Bulawayo Public Hospitals, Zimbabwe	Paper: 2019	African: Zimbabwe	Sikhumbuzo Dube
I Only Wanted to be a Dad: A man's journey on the road to fatherhood.	Book: 2018	Christian-Cypriot: UK	Steve Petrou
The Pater. My Father, My Judaism, My Childlessness.	Book: 2015	Judaism: USA/Israel	Eliot Jager
The New Arab Man. Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East.	Book: 2012	Islamism: Middle East	Marcia Inhorn
England Expects	Video: 2011	British-Asian: UK	Rod Silvers
'You are a man because you have children': experiences, reproductive health knowledge and treatment-seeking behaviour among men suffering from couple infertility in South Africa.	Paper: 2004	African: South Africa	S. J. Dyer, N. Abrahams, N. E. Mokoena and Z. M. van der Spuy

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

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)
- **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).

Attitude to Fatherhood

Attitude	Participant	Age	Relationship status
Aspirational	Stephen	49	Single
	Frank	56	Single
	David	60	Married
Uncertain	Russell	55	Single
	Michael	63	Single
Mediated	Colin	59	Long term relationship
	John	59	Long term relationship
	Edward	60	Long term relationship
	George	60	Married
	Harry	64	Single/widower
	James	65	Long term relationship
	Martin	70	Married
	Raymond	70	Single/widower
	Alan	82	Single

Socio-cultural context: 'The package deal'

(Townsend 2002)

"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)

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*

Affect of childlessness

Regret: *“I’ve never discussed it (IVF). If people ask if we have children I say “regrettably no.” I quite like people to know we did want a family.”* Edward (60)

Peer network: *“It is noticeable that friends who have children drift away.”* Edward

Existentialism: *“I think having kids is a way of producing a sense of continuity. Otherwise, death feels very final. If you're leaving kids, you've left something of yourself.”* David (60)

Advantages: *“The advantages then, of course, are not having to plan and worry about others.”* Edward

Social impact: Isolation and Alienation

Isolation: *“People have no conception of just how isolated someone who hasn't got kids in middle age is..” 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)

“When couples get older, they have a whole raft of experiences... you're shut out along with everything else.” Russell

Alienation: *“It is noticeable that friends who have children drift away.” Edward (60)*

“I’m missing out and I think I have something to give and it’s a pity. It’s one of the challenges of life - I feel I’ve missed out” David (60)

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)

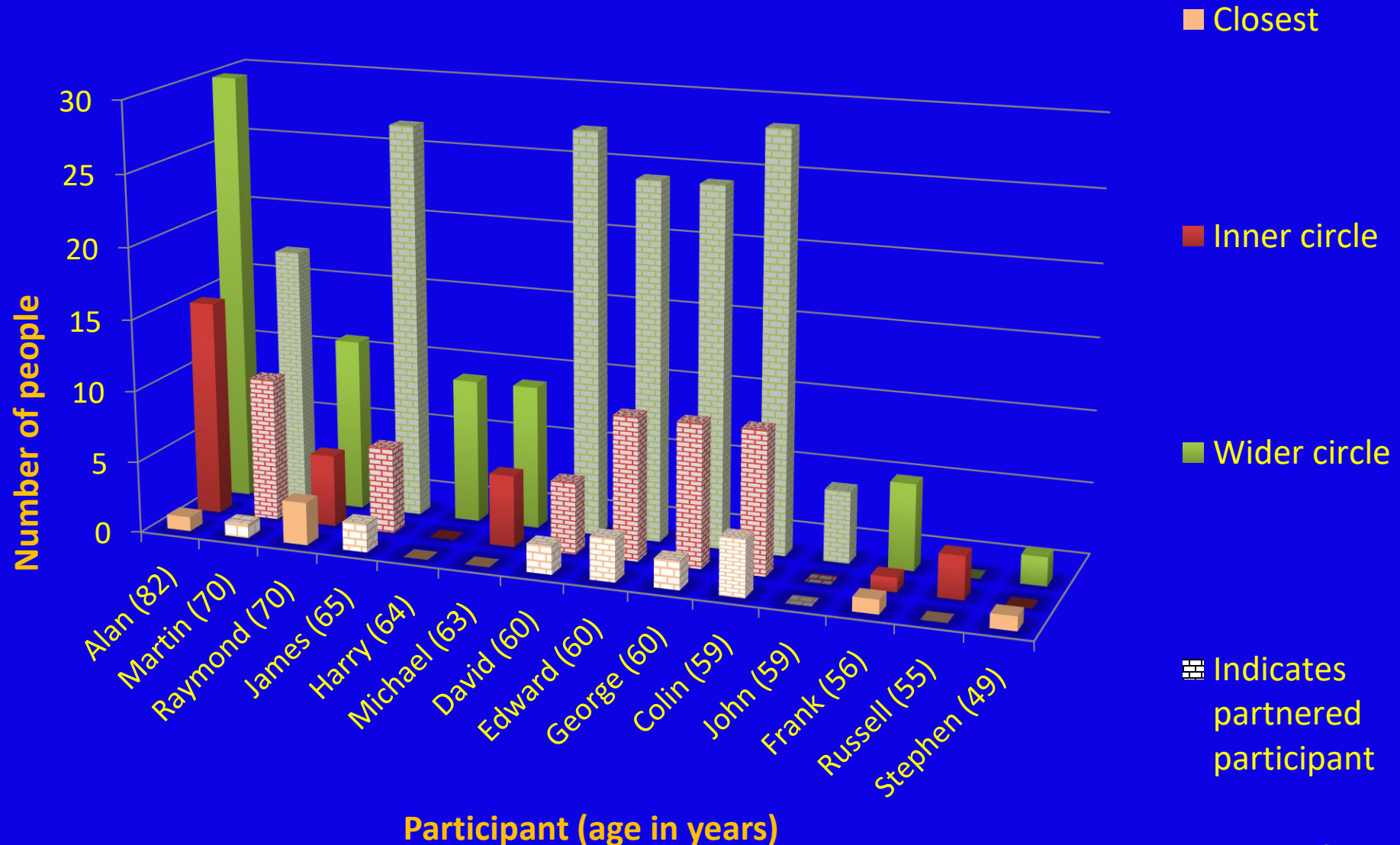
“It’s something I will never stop regretting. You know, it won’t go away.” Martin (70)

“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)

Networks

(Counsellor - I'm in love with a graph...)



Continuity and family dynamics

“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.” Colin (59)

“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. I'm in contact with me brother [youngest]. Cousins, I would be hard-pressed to recognise - it's been so long. So now relative strangers.” John (59)

Singletons: partnered & bereaved

“I think my wife and I are very much for each other, so we tend to be our own social field. How do we socialise? Family. Of course it’s my wife’s family, ‘cos I’ve not got any. And that’s really just her siblings saying, “Let’s visit”, and the surrogate grandchild.” Martin (70)

“There’s no inner circle, no. [...] 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. [...] There’s two long time mates that I got that, if I rang, would come at a click.” Harry (64)

Organisations influence on social networks

“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’.” Alan (82).

“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?” Raymond (70).

Missing

“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.”

“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)

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)

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 is a man supposed to be a man?



At least 24% of men are childless

Men's experiences of childlessness excluded from much 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

Men fear being seen a paedophile



Summary

1. Involuntary childlessness as disenfranchised grief (*Doka 2002*) where some losses are not socially valid: Loss of expected self & social identity & present/future role. Add losses associated with ageing.
2. *'If you are not counted, then you don't count'* (*Sheffield 1979*) . If those who do the counting will not count you - then you are **doubly discounted**.
3. The older childless not recognised in health & care policy & practice.
4. Men are blamed for not accessing 'health care'. Or does 'health care' not access them?
5. Masculine stereotypes set embedded in-service delivery adds to exclusion, isolation & stigmatisation of older and childless men.
6. Older men are viewed as 'other': genderless & sexual threat (*Walz, 2002*).

What I learnt: me-flections

- Its OK to struggle...
- ‘What part of me is stopping me from understanding this’: my therapist converted this to, ‘I can do anything.’
- It’s possible to fall in love with a graph.
- How much I carry my background with me: young end of a big family - shyness/reticent; working class – not fitting in – leading to imposter syndrome.
- I read my work and think ‘this fella seems to know what he is talking about.’
- Men are fascinating...

Forthcoming book... September 2021

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REVIEWS

"I think this is an excellent piece of scholarship that covers an often unspoken topic in a sensitive, novel and comprehensive way. In this sense, it contributes important new knowledge to an area by considering it from a different viewpoint - most notably moving beyond a simple biomedical view or an experiential view of younger men and infertility." • **Steve Robertson**, University of Sheffield

"This is an important piece of work that addresses areas of masculinity, sexuality, life and an exploration of lived lives through research that have previously been underrepresented in the academic and public press." • **Josephine Tetley**, Manchester Metropolitan University

DESCRIPTION

The global trend of declining fertility rates and an increasingly ageing population has serious implications for individuals and institutions alike. Childless men are mostly excluded from ageing, social science and reproduction scholarship and almost completely absent from most national statistics. This unique book examines the lived experiences of a hidden and disenfranchised population: men who wanted to be fathers. It explores the complex intersections that influence childlessness over the life course.


[Robin A Hadley](#) is an independent research consultant who has conducted research with the Open University and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) where he is an associate lecturer.

Subject: Gender Studies and Sexuality Anthropology (General)

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Thank you!



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Suggested reading

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Life: a dash between two numbers



Auto/biography (A/B)

- A/B widely associated with the feminist approach.
- Central to feminist scholarship is researcher reflexivity: 'to be explicit about the significance of their personal, as well as intellectual autobiography.' (Stanley, 1993, Letherby, 2014, p. 52)
- Mykhalovskiy (1996) argued that masculinity in the social sciences excoriated the 'texture and variety of men's experience.' No acknowledgement of infertility in masculinities literature:
- Men marginalized as the 'second sex' in social sciences: assumption they are not interested in reproductive intentions & outcomes. (Inhorn et al, 2009)
- A/B 'value explicit': self; involvement, privilege, and power are acknowledged in the research process. (Letherby, 2002b, Hugill, 2012)
- Views the biographies of 'the researcher and the participants are an inextricable part of the research process.' (Carroll, 2013, p. 457)

A Brief history of Psychology and Infertility

- <1970's: infertility often diagnosed as psychogenic and assumed to reside in the female. Also belief that adoption facilitated conception by relieving neurosis/worry/stress: disproved.
- > 1970's: improved diagnosis of biomedical cause of infertility.
- psychodynamic & other therapies view external sources of stress may negatively influence fertility, then...
- stress/distress seen as a consequence not a cause: concept of infertility as an unfolding major life crisis.
- Leads to: support groups; motivation for research, hypothecation of emotional expression, patient/client experience & practice: grief process recognised.
- Couples response to infertility as numerous threats & losses inc., identity, self-esteem, self-control, socio-cultural expectations, status, intimate & social relationships, beliefs & world view.

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



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

Men, semen, infertility and mental health

- Some studies show no issues for men before infertility treatment but changes during & after.
- Increased stress hormones lead to reduced essential precursors for sperm production. *(Gollenberg et al 2010)*
- Higher age, smoking, alcohol consumption, & psychological stress were all risk factors for poorer semen quality *(Li et al 2011)*
- Psychological factors & semen quality: anxiety scored highest.
- Men with high anxiety: had higher rates of cigarette smoking, alcohol use, & sexual difficulties.
- Infertile men significantly less likely to discuss emotions.
- Infertile men had specific impairments in quality of life related to self-regard. *(Fisher & Hammarberg 2017)*
- Men's responses to male factor infertility equal women's infertility responses: sense of loss, stigma, & reduced self-esteem.

Main Causes of Male Infertility



Varicocele



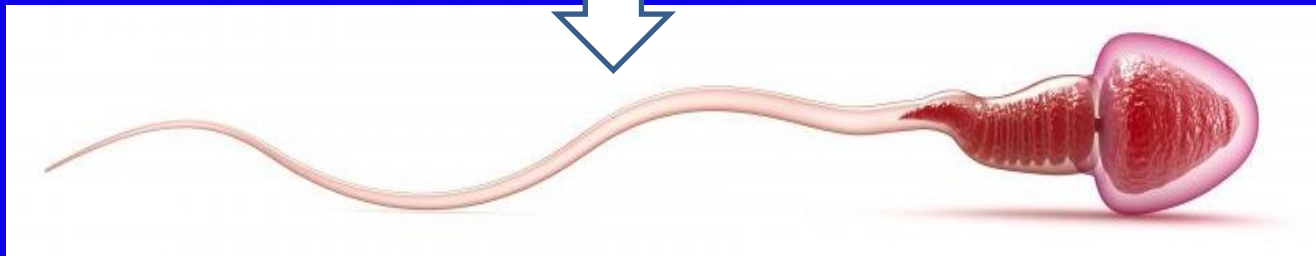
Hormone abnormalities



Genetics



Infections and injury



Decrease in sperm number & quality

'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
25 November
Book now

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

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

The Package Deal*: Ideal Masculinity?

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

Dove 'Manthem':

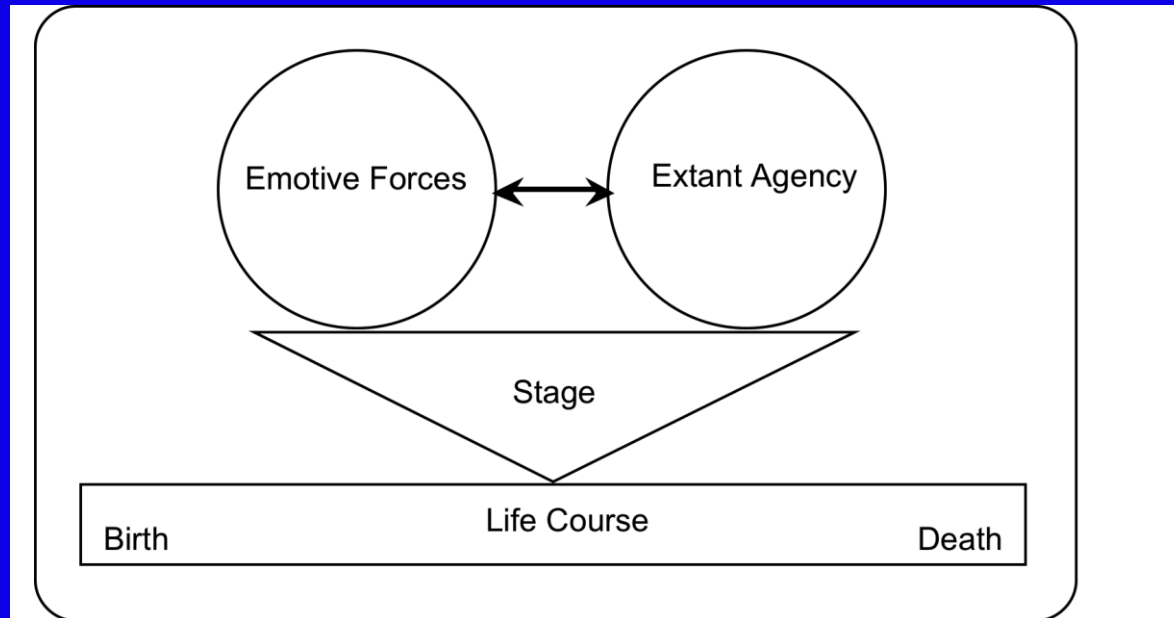
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNOIqfEFew4>

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

* (Townsend, 2002)

MA: Core theme

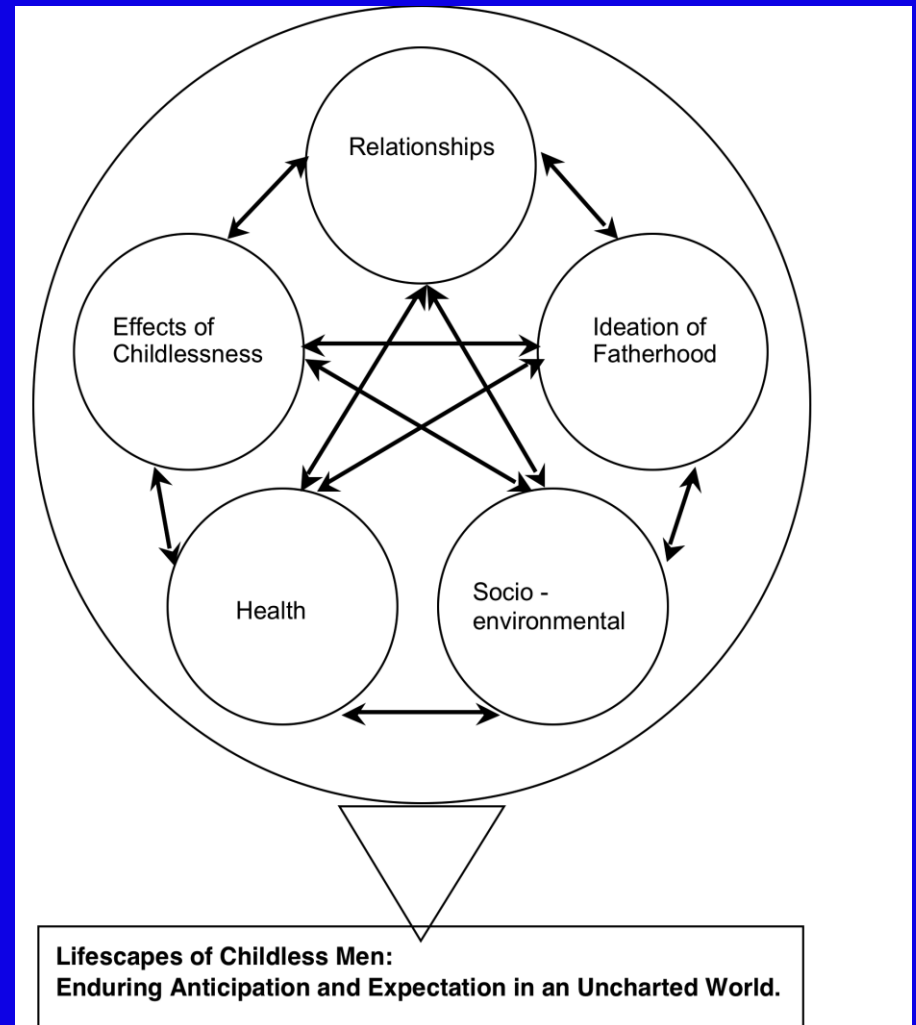
Lifescapes of Childless Men: Enduring anticipation and expectation in an Uncharted World.



- Emotive Forces: internal energies such as biological/genetic drive and cultural and societal norms.
- Extant Agency: mediates between the external environment, what's legal, socially acceptable etc and the desires of the individual.

Emerging Themes:

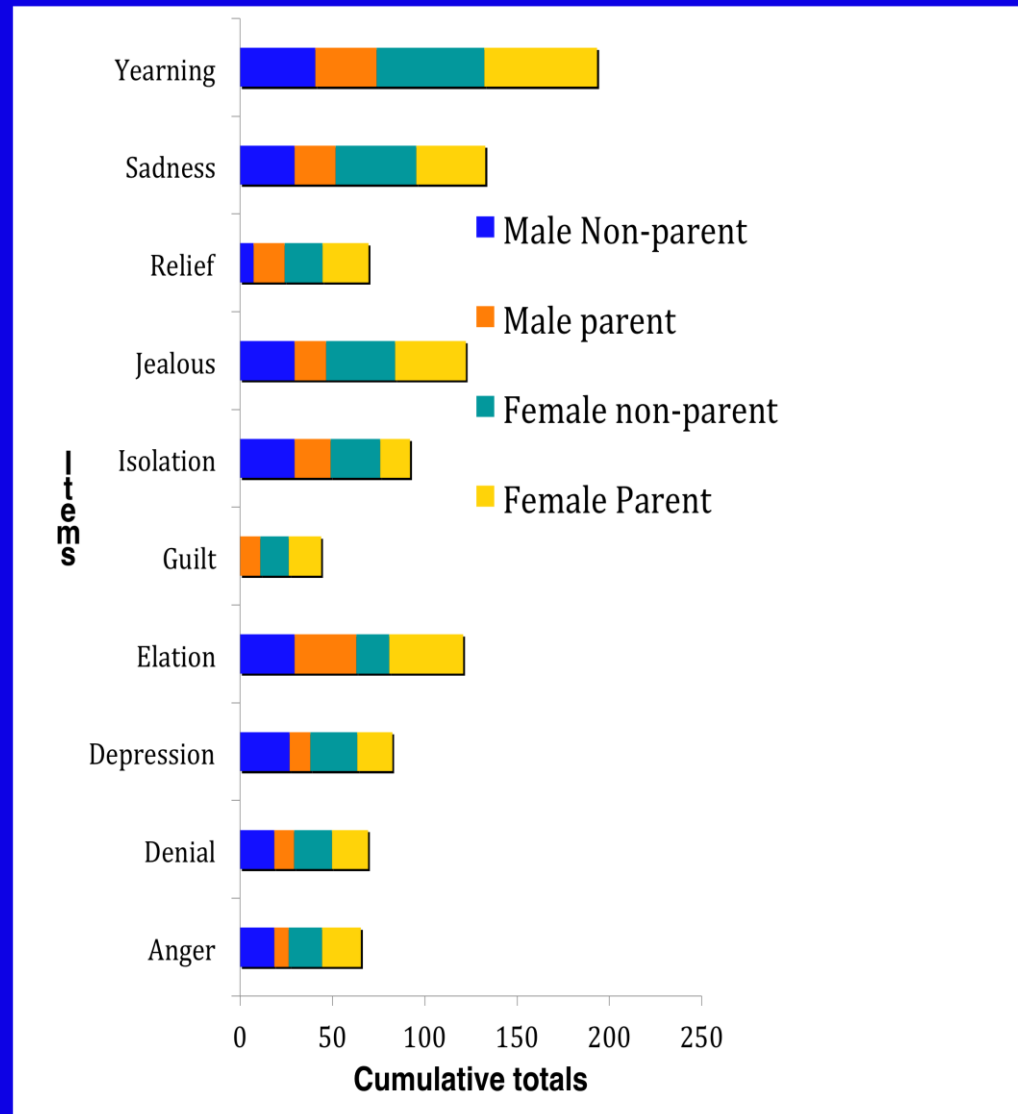
- Consequences of childlessness
- Ideation of Fatherhood
- Relationships (childhood and adult)
- Socio-economic
- Health



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. Compared to parents, *non-parents* were more affected by **Yearning, Sadness, and Depression**.
- *Females* from both groups had similar response levels, with *non-parent females* indicating higher responses in **Isolation and Sadness**.
- *Male non-parents* 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**.

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-culturally & economically, & 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

Acknowledgements

- To the men who participated in this study – my infinite gratitude.
- PhD studentship funded by the Centre for Social Gerontology, Keele University.
- Supervisors: Prof., Mo Ray & Dr Emma Head.
- I acknowledge that terms like ‘childfree’ ‘childless’ ‘voluntary’ ‘involuntary’ ‘infertile’ ‘old’ ‘older’ ‘elderly’ ‘gay’ ‘straight’ and others I may use are contentious.
- Be aware this talk contains POETRY... (well sort of poetry...)

Academia: Paucity of Men's Voices

1. Childlessness or Ageing seldom feature in masculinities research, including Connell's (1995) and Kimmel, Connell and Hearn's (2005) influential books.
2. Inhorn (2012, 2009) & Marsiglio et al (2013) argued that feminist scholarship has retained the theoretical and experiential spotlight on women's reproductive issues.
3. 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.
4. Lohan (2015, p. 215) argued that men are absent from literature 'on family planning, fertility, reproductive health and midwifery.'

How to structurally alienate and isolate men: blame the men

- Men are blamed for not accessing 'health care'. Or does 'health care' not access men?
- Men viewed as 'socially reticent' and 'difficult to access' for research on personal matters. *(Arber et al., 2003)*
- Men reported as 'not interested' and their 'non-participation condemned to be meaningful' by infertility researchers. *(Lloyd, 1996)*
- Men are seen as the 'second sex' in academia: anthropology; social sciences; sociology; demography; health; gender studies. *(Inhorn, 2012)*

How to structurally 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 experience of ageing, infertility/childlessness. (Arber 2004, Arber et al, 2003; (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
- There are more childless men than childless women.

Fictive grandfatherhood

Aspirational and *uncertain* men related grandfatherhood to biological primacy:

“If you don't have children, you're not gonna have grandchildren.”

Frank (56)

Four of the nine *mediated* men had experienced a form of *fictive grandfatherhood*. The remainder took similar positions to the *aspirational* and *uncertain* men.

Demographic change: family size and shape

- Demographic change **seen in change to** 'Beanstalk' family **structure**: Increased vertical ties & reduced horizontal ties. *(Bengtson, 2001).*
- **A greater number of** older people **in** grandparental role **for** longer **to** fewer children. *(Timonen and Arber, 2012).*
- **Research into** grandparenthood **has mainly** focused **on** grandmothers. *(Mann, 2007).*
- Recent **research has highlighted the** complex role of grandfatherhood: **reflecting** fluidity in family practices **and** configuration. *(Tarrant, 2012).*

Grandfatherhood: Latent

“I mean I think in a way of the two little ones in the pub as the grandchildren I’ve never had. I don’t say that - I don’t even let them know it, or their Dad. Their dad wouldn’t mind, but I don’t want people saying, “Oh, he’s a bit of a paedophile, this one, looking at the kids.” You know?” Raymond (70).

Grandfatherhood: Adopted

“They asked if they could adopt me as a granddad. That lasted 3 years, it was great.”

“They still always talk; he always comes down, the young one that still goes... he still comes down, or 'e waves, yells, and 'e always yells “Granddad!” Make me feel belonged. Makes me feel I'm part of something. That's what I miss.” Alan (82).

Grandfatherhood: Proxy

“Liz’s grandchildren appeared on the scene - I discovered what a pleasure that is, you know? I’m keenly interested in them, as I would be if they were my genetic grandchildren, I think.”

“Liz’s ex-husband, he’s ‘Granddad’ and there’s a South American granddad – I am ‘Pappous’ the Greek word for Grandfather.” James (65)

Grandfatherhood: 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. (...) “They call me ‘Sgrampy’, which is an ‘orrible word, but its surrogate grandfather, surrogate grampy.” Martin (70)

Summary

1. **Routes to childlessness**: complex intersection between agency & structure: age, social status, relationships, economics, culture, health & timing of events. 'Social clock'.
2. **Attitude and behaviours**: informed by gender, sexual orientation, social expectations, upbringing, relationship skills, relationships, economics, location & social networks.
3. **Quality of Life**: influenced by economics, health, relationships & social networks: chronic co-morbidities felt older than their age; most men with siblings & partners had larger networks than those without; positive impact of support groups e.g. MTL & +50 LGBT.
4. **Policy**: The childless not recognised in policy & practice documents.