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World Childless Week #Blog

[The un-held hand - Robin Hadley on Father's Day](#)

June 16, 2018

It is that time of year when strategies deployed at Christmas, New Year and sundry other 'national family centred event days' are taken down from the loft, dusted off and made ready: Father's Day to my mind, has followed the marketization of Mother's Day.

Undoubtedly, next Monday's news reports will give estimations of how many millions of pounds were spent on Father's Day and how much more was spent on Mother's Day. It would appear that in order to acknowledge biological or social fatherhood a card, a present, and a meal specially priced (and specially defrosted and reheated) is now mandatory. Wherever you go displays inviting you to acknowledge your father or the father of your children abound.

If you are one of the 25%* of men in the UK who are not fathers, then Father's Day can be a challenge. Of those 25% some will be delaying fatherhood because of career, fate, finance, housing, relationship and 'the-right-time' factors. Others would have decided they do not want to be a father. For those of us who wanted (or want) to be a Dad then Father's Day is special in a different way.

Firstly, a little about me - I am a white British man in my late 50's. I am a working-class lad from Manchester (UK) and have a large family of brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews. I expected to be a dad. I wanted to be a dad. I was very broody in my mid-30's and was very jealous of colleagues and friends who became Dads' (Hadley, 2013, 2018).

Father's Day for me is an event that reminds of the things I am not and that I expected to be. It is a connection to the milestone events that I will never experience: the parent-child bond, little hands never held, photo of the first school uniform and first day at school, the nativity play, bedtime reading of stories, playing in the garden or park, unlit candles on birthday cakes never baked. Later, the first day at work, qualification celebrations, meeting their first serious partner and first child.

This Sunday I will deploy my usual strategy for Father's Day: sidestep any places that has any sort of Father's Day theme including most media. During the day will give my attention to those little jobs and practical problems that I have put to one side. In the evening or if the weather is poor, I will read my copy of Nick Herron's latest Jackson Lamb book 'London Rules' and catch up on radio and TV shows that I have missed.

Father's Day for me is a day of loss and grief that is not acknowledged or recognised by wider society. Instead, men who dare to say that they want to be dad are often scorned and told that

"Men 'aren't bothered' about being a dad. Men can be a dad at any age."

Really? If half the sex in any species were not 'bothered' about, reproducing then the chances of that species surviving is remote. Being an older dad is quite rare – less than 2% of the men registered as fathers in England and Wales were aged 50 or over in 2016 (Office for National Statistics, 2017). Why then do most fertility clinics put an age limit of 35 on any sperm donors?

Here is what being a childless man who wanted to be a dad means to me:

A conversation ended before it began

Scatterling thoughts 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)

*There has been no routine collection of father's fertility history at birth registration in the UK therefore the level of male childlessness is unknown. Estimates from various studies indicate it is around 25%. Only Norway has collected such data on fathers – take a bow Statistics Norway (<https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/future-norwegian-elderly-a-regional-perspective>). Norway can plan for future demand on its health and social care.

References

[Robin Hadley](#)

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