


**Please cite the Published Version**

Hadley, Robin  (2019) Myths of Manhood: Breaking Dad, Fracking Fatherhood. Male Psychology Network website.

**Publisher:** The Centre for Male Psychology

**Version:** Accepted Version

**Downloaded from:** <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/635233/>

**Usage rights:**  In Copyright

**Additional Information:** This is a blog post which first appeared on Male Psychology Network website

**Enquiries:**

If you have questions about this document, contact [openresearch@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:openresearch@mmu.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)

## ‘Myths of Manhood: Breaking Dad, Fracking Fatherhood’ #Blog for The Centre of Male Psychology

“Men can have children at any time in their lives.”

“Men aren’t bothered about being a dad.”

These statements are often made, without really considering how much truth there is in them. These statements are often overheard by me and many other men who are childless-but-wanted-to-be-dads. Unfortunately, the belief that men are not interested in reproduction is widely held in the public and across the social sciences. Marcia Inhorn et al (2009) argue that men have become the ‘second sex’, in all areas of scholarship because of the ‘widely held but largely untested assumption’ that men are not interested and disengaged from, reproductive intentions and outcomes’ (Inhorn 2012: 6). The reality for men who don’t conform to the ideal of fatherhood is very different than many people realise. The majority of men are fertile from puberty onwards typically with sperm in constant production. However, there is increasing evidence that sperm is affected by the day-to-day environment – diet, heat, and stress all adversely affect sperm (Li et al. 2011). Moreover, sperm declines in efficacy from about the age of 35 years onward with a positive correlation between age and genetic issues (Yatsenko and Turek 2018). In addition to biological pressures, there are socio-cultural normatives to contend with. Most societies have expectations of when the most appropriate time to be a parent is. In Europe the maximum age to become a parent is commonly thought to be 40 for women and 45 for men (Billari et al. 2011). When an older rock star or famous actor becomes a father there is widespread media praise. However, few men become older fathers, with less than 2% of men in England and Wales, registered as fathers aged 50 or over (Office for National Statistics 2017). Men have reported a ‘biological urge’ or ‘societal duty’ or ‘personal desire’ as factors in their wanting to be a dad (Hadley 2021). Childless men indicate a sense of time running out to become a father deepened from their mid-30s onwards (Hadley and Hanley 2011). Consequently, men described feeling being ‘off-track’ compared to peers and anxious with regards how age would affect the quality of their interactions with their (potential) future children (Hadley and Hanley 2011, Goldberg 2014, Hadley 2018). The concept that men are unaffected and not interested in reproduction are ‘false and reflect out-dated and unhelpful gender stereotypes (Fisher and Hammarberg 2017: 1307). Moreover, the psychological impact of male infertility is on a par with suffering from heart complaints and cancer (Saleh et al. 2003). Fathers feel more happiness (Nelson-Coffey et al. 2019) and less isolation (Hadley, 2021) than men who want children, but don’t have any. Some men and some women do not want to be parents. However, to label all men as ‘not interested’ is to do a disservice to both men and women. In addition to ‘missing out’ in an important element of their identity, involuntary childless men are ‘missing’ from narratives about children and parenting. Being a dad is rewarding for men, children and families, so maybe let’s think twice before we glibly say that men don’t care about having children. Robin A Hadley is the author of ‘How is a man supposed to be a man? Male childlessness a Life Course Disrupted’ and Chapter 3, ‘Deconstructing Dad’ in the Palgrave Handbook of Male Psychology and Mental Health