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# If you think men don't care about having kids, listen to what these childless men have to say

OCTOBER 21, 2014 BY INSIDE MAN

3 COMMENTS

Have you ever stopped to think what it feels like for men who don't become fathers? Robin Hadle has and here he shares the thoughts of some of the men he's interviewed about being childless.

— *This is article #13 in our series of #100Voices4Men and boys*

In my research, I have been honoured to interview men in the UK about their experiences of wanting to be a 'Dad'. All the meetings have been moving and reflected some aspect of my own thoughts and feelings regarding not becoming a father – a status so easily achieved and important that it can't usually be talked about. What do the men say?

Well quite, a lot and I can just give a flavour of the depth and range that the impact of male involuntary childlessness has had on them.

Shane (33) blamed his two divorces on his desire for fatherhood. He saw the children as completing a family and himself as person, "***You need to have the child to make you blossom as a person, as a family.***"

Such was the impact of not achieving his dream of being a father by the age of 30 that, ***“I was very, very depressed last year, suicidal.”***

Many men wanted to repeat their own experience of being fathered, ***“I saw him as a role model. For being a good Dad. Enjoying being a Dad. He was delighted to be a Dad. And I'd always assumed I'd become a Dad”*** (Phil, 51).

Harry (64), a widower, had assumed he would die first and so when his partner of 39 years died two years ago he was left bereft, ***“If we'd had children there would be a little piece of her still around”***. In addition, he now thought that because he was now a solo living, older man, he had to be careful ***“I don't want someone to look saying, ‘Watch that old man’.”***

The fear of being seen a paedophile has been very strong with the men I've spoken to. Frank (56) single and solo living in a large rural village said:

***“How is a man supposed to be a man?”***

I believe his questions reflected the dramatic changes that have taken place socially and economically over the past 60 years. How are you supposed to be a man in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How are you supposed to be a young man, a middle aged man, a young-old man, an old-old man? Is the breadwinner, provider, unemotional, yet virile ideal-man stereotype still valid? Was it ever? Where are the new resources that will provide the narratives to support men who 'don't quite fit'?

Finally, one of the most moving chats I had was with a man who had nothing to do with research. 'John' (45) was laying a concrete ramp at my home. As we chatted I explained my research and about my own expectation to have been a Dad. John (45) stood up and looked me in the eye and said with real emotion in his voice, ***“I don't know what I'd do without my kids.”***

In that moment, we shared an understanding. Men talk – it is the listening and the hearing that is the difficult part.

—Picture credit: Flickr/[RogerSchueeber](#)

To find out more about the Robin Hadley see his [profile at the Keele University website](#). Robin has a chapter on recruiting me for interview called “The impotence of earnestness & the importance of being earnest”. In *Studies of Ageing Masculinities: Still in Their Infancy?* Edited by Anna Tarrant and Jacqueline H. Watts, ISBN 978-0-90413-923-5

For information about Ageing Without Children see the website [www.awoc.org](http://www.awoc.org).

You can find all of the [#100Voices4Men](#) articles that will be published in the run up to International Men's Day 2014 by clicking on this link—[#100Voices4Men](#)—and follow the discussion on twitter by searching for [#100Voices4Men](#).

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- Debbie

Thank you for this. I'm wanting to look at masculinity and family for my PhD thesis, and this has been really helpful. Thank you.

- Inside MAN

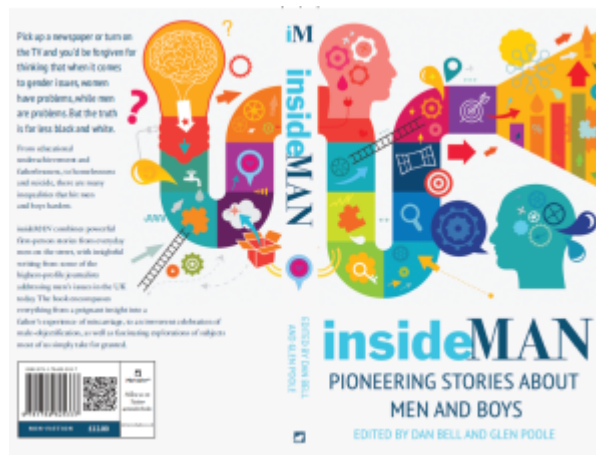
That's great Debbie, look forward to hearing more about your PhD.

- Nigel

This is a really interesting topic indeed. Over time and across cultures "father" appears to mean quite different things in terms of at least the social construction. I do look forward to any work looking at men in this context. To me we are in a paradoxical position in our society in which men are sort of "left out" of debates about children and parenthood. The result is actually a curious situation which focusses on mother and child. In the process wider family appears to be forgotten. Almost in junking the notion of the "nuclear family" we've moved to a sub-atomic unit.

InsideMAN is committed to pioneering conversations about men, manhood and masculinity that make a difference. We aim to create spaces where the voices of men, from many different backgrounds, can be heard. It's

time to have a new conversation about men. We'd love you to be a part of it.



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