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# Hadley May 2014 Condemned as a 'Typical' Man

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Posted on **May 13, 2014** by **ReValuing Care**

**By Robin Hadley**

A few months ago, I attended a seminar on infertility treatment. The audience included those involved in infertility treatment, academics, practitioners, and interested others. The complexities surrounding infertility treatment are vast and range from the very intimate and personal to legalities at national and international level. Conducting research in such a sensitive area is fraught with difficulties and the speakers were all very aware of the ethical implications of their research and practice. I was particularly interested in the researchers' experience of accessing and interviewing men. The general view in infertility studies has been that men are not interested in participating in research, and many studies are heavily weighted with female respondents. As one researcher described her many efforts to interview the male partner of a couple, a ripple of sympathetic recognition of her struggle arose from the audience. 'Typical man' seemed to be the collective verdict, mine included. As I reflected back on the day I returned to that incident. The audience reaction was one of sympathy for the researcher and I wondered if that man did not also deserve some empathy. I know from my own research that many men assume that they will be fathers and that that knowledge is so embedded that it is not discussed. The assumption expressed has been that one would leave school, get a job/go to university/get a job, find a partner, find accommodation, have children. That being the case I tried to put myself in that man's position: the assumed 'natural' event had not happened. How would I feel? Shocked to the very core? I think so. Perhaps I had been brought up not to show feelings and instead, to show control – 'mastery' – through actions and/or rationality. In which case my reactions may include striving to balance things up by working and playing harder, or not becoming involved. Being raised in an environment where I am not expected to express emotions, I possibly, do not have the confidence or vocabulary to verbalise my emotional state. Here are my musings on what may have been 'going on' if I was that unwilling participant, *"So, here I am, not fulfilling the role I expected to – and that others seem to achieve with ease – and I cannot make it right. There is only one person I can talk to and that is my partner but it is worse for her and the one thing I can be is strong for her. Then there is this University researcher who wants to have a talk. She's talked to my partner, and wants to talk to us both. My partner thinks it will do me good. I don't know how to express these feelings inside without bursting. I want to support my partner, part of me thinks it would be good to release the emotions but I can't risk overwhelming her in the way I am sometimes overwhelmed. I'll say I'll do it and then see."*

If the participant's thoughts and feelings were similar to the above then it is understandable why he was ambivalent about being interviewed.

Infertility has been seen as a form of complex bereavement consisting of multiple losses (Adler, 1991; Lechner et al., 2007) with levels of distress in women recorded as high as those suffering from serious medical conditions (Domar et al., 1992; Domar et al., 1993). However, recent research shows that, post infertility treatment, men who did not become fathers suffered poorer mental health than those who had become fathers (Fisher et al., 2010). In their conclusions Fisher et al (p.6) state '...that stereotypes that infertile men conflate fertility and masculinity, are less distressed than women about potential loss of parenthood, and adjust more readily to childlessness appear inaccurate.' Men may or may not be 'typical' by choice but there are many social factors that influence their behavior and how their behavior is perceived. The belief that men are not interested in taking part in research, and their absence 'condemned to be meaningful' (Lloyd, 1996: p.451), reflects a lack of insight by the research community. I feel I must stress here these are my own reflections based on my research on involuntarily childless men and not a particular person or persons.

### **Useful websites**

Infertility Network UK: <http://www.infertilitynetworkuk.com>

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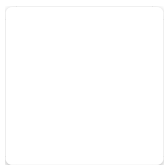
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