

Men's Experience of Stillbirth: Gender identities, fathering and the social mediation of male grief

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a degree to any other University or Institution.

Signed:

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Abstract

Research within the social sciences examining experiences of stillbirth has consistently focused on women's perspectives, while men's perspectives and experiences have received little attention. The limited research available has illustrated the need to incorporate men's perspectives to gain a better understanding of the gendered character of stillbirth. Biologically determined sex role theories have significantly influenced previous research agenda, shaping, in turn, cultural beliefs around men's experience of pregnancy loss and the importance and validity of male expression of grief. However, contemporary approaches to gender research focus on the negotiation of identities and multiplicity in masculine and feminine identities. Such theorisations of the social construction of gender and grief provide the conceptual frame for the study presented here. The study is based on a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews with 12 Australian men who had experienced stillbirth. Their accounts begin to reveal the ways in which some men identify as fathers to their unborn and stillborn child and how they develop dynamic and ongoing relationships with their child post stillbirth. The results show that demonstrating masculinities in fathering and grief is complex and negotiated territory, in which masculinities are constructed and enacted in gendered relational contexts.

I think as a father, which I like to consider myself to be..... [Sam]