



claire

# Talking WM sense

**H**ARPER Seven – it wouldn’t work in the Valleys, would it? My colleague walked into the office yesterday asking, “What did Victoria Beckham call her baby in the end?”. When I answered Harper Seven, she said, “I thought it was 7.55. And what did they call it?” Many guffaws. Yes, congratulations Victoria and David Beckham, who have named their baby girl, born early Sunday morning, Harper Seven.

The Seven is thought to be David’s football number when he played for Manchester United and England, the Harper probably an homage to one of VB’s favourite fashion magazines. Who knows? We do love to take the upper hand and laugh at a ridiculous celebrity baby name, and the famous parents probably do it to guarantee attention.

What should be less acceptable is criticising that deeply personal decision to become, or not become, a mother. With more women working longer hours and delaying marriage, you’d think society would be comfortable with a group of women deciding that motherhood is just not for them.

But I was shocked this week to find out how isolated many who have made the informed decision not to have children feel, and how pressed they are on a regular basis to justify that choice as if it’s anybody else’s business. I asked a friend for her thoughts on the subject and ,

while she was candid as ever with me, she insisted: ‘I wouldn’t like to be named. It’s something I’ll speak to my friends and family about but apart from that I keep it close to my chest as people think you’re a weirdo.’ And it surprised me, this normally so outspoken woman felt shamed into silence. “People are so angry and vehement towards women who don’t want to have kids.” The 31-year-old continued: “I’ve always known I didn’t

**Women are pressed to justify their decision to remain childless**

want children. I don’t hate them, I’ve just never had the inclination to be a mother. Whenever the subject comes up friends and family laugh, and with a pitying look say I’ll change my mind. I won’t.

“It’s something I’ve thought through. Yet somehow I’m the one in the wrong. “It’s as if I don’t have a right to be here because I’m not fulfilling my God-given ability to have a child. “These people seem to forget the earth can’t support the number of people on the planet at the moment, yet I’m wrong for choosing not to add yet another mouthful to the mix.”

Other women I asked talked about dinner parties spent silently gazing into the silverware after being frozen out by a group of mothers, leaving them wondering why their childless status suddenly left them out of the conversation.

We’ve spoken to two women, childless by choice, over the page.

And we’d love to hear what you think about their stories.

**WM**

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# “People don’t believe me – they think I must either have health problems or be crazy”

**Why are women assumed abnormal if they don’t feel the urge to procreate? And why should females past 30 justify their decision not to pass on their genes? Claire Rees speaks to an author who wrote a novel about the stigma she faces being a childless 48-year-old by choice, and hears from a woman who explains why other mums make her realise she’s right to never want to start a family...**

**V**ICTORIA Beckham has just given birth to her fourth, and the world is on baby watch for the moment the Duchess of Cambridge announces she’s expecting an heir. It’s enough to make you broody or else there’s something wrong with you, right? The first question most newlywed wives are asked starts with ‘when’ and ends with ‘the patter of tiny feet’, but what if the answer to that question is, “never, out of choice” ?

Novelist Sonja Lewis knows this predicament, she is a 48-year-old who decided she didn’t want children and in a society she says is obsessed with procreation, it’s not a decision those around her have always taken so well.

Her new book, The Barrenness, tells the story of a 39-year-old advised by a childless aunt to start a family or “see your womanhood fade” and now she says she is campaigning to encourage women who feel, as she does, that motherhood isn’t for them.

“I wrote it as a novel because it’s a whole lot easier than having to say it’s about you,” says Sonja, who is from Georgia in the US but now lives in London.

“Women are socialised to think that womanhood and motherhood are intrinsically linked and they are told if they don’t have children they can’t be fulfilled.

“And it’s a really inappropriate message.”

Sonja became interested in the subject when she was a 38-year-old enjoying the first year of marriage and began considering the ‘viable option’ of having a baby.

“I experienced a tugging, between what I had learned (I have five sisters and 13 female cousins and they all have children) and my instincts,” she says.

“I really believe women need to discern between their own wisdom and conventional wisdom and I fought between them but my own wisdom won and I owned the decision.

“I came to the decision it wasn’t for me.”

The new royal couple have yet to celebrate their three-month wedding anniversary yet already the media are speculating on signs of a new arrival from Kate innocently touching her tummy to hugging a child in a crowd.

“In Kate’s situation, because of the family she has married into, it’s expected of her to have a child,” says Sonja.

“She has all these pressures on her and it’s very unfair, they don’t even know if they can have children, it creates this pressure that must be terrible and it can apply to many newlyweds or those in long-term relationships.



Photographs like this of the Duchess of Cambridge meeting children appear alongside news articles speculating on when the newlyweds will produce an heir

“It can internalise and create real health problems, which obviously isn’t good for a woman whether she’s trying for a baby or not.

“I’m on a campaign to encourage women to follow their instincts, not just older women but younger women like Kate.”

Sonja says she is noticing a trend – with celebrity interviews filled with the romanticising of child bearing and female stars who gush it’s the best thing they ever did – for women to assume they must have children in order to be fulfilled.

“Society is obsessed with babies, from Victoria Beckham’s new baby, I’ve even heard of pregnancy parties where women send out invites to their friends, and the media has become

frenzied,” she says.

“I don’t begrudge that excitement and I love children but there should be some level of sensitivity towards women who choose not to go down that route.”

The issue of having a child is a deeply personal one, wrapped in sensitivity, and Sonja thinks stories of other women’s fertility problems can cause those who decide against motherhood to feel embarrassed or even guilty with their own life choice.

“People say to me, ‘I don’t believe you’, they think there must be some medical reason for me not having a child, or they think I’m crazy,” she says.

“There are women who want children but can’t have them who get upset with those who choose not to.

“It is a deeply personal, emotional subject and unfortunately all the talk about infertility suggests to women that if they don’t have children they are of less value.”

Yet a study last week found some 43% of university-educated Gen X-ers – women born between 1965 and 1978 – have no children, joining the likes of high-profile females like Cameron Diaz, Oprah Winfrey and Kim Catrall.

Actress Diaz has spoken of her fears about being ostracised for admitting she may not want children and Sex And The City star Catrall says, “Being a biological mother just isn’t part of my experience this time around”.

Sonja says: “I’ve had feedback on the book from women who say they just aren’t convinced – how can I be a

## Why I’d rather have a nice car than a baby

**Says Cardiff poet, Mab Jones, 33 (pictured on the cover, aged three)**

“Since I was a child myself, I knew I never wanted to start my own family. Women who have children become boring, I don’t see some good friends any more since they became mums.

I’m not interested in how many times someone’s baby was sick that day, and they’re not interested in my trips to London and the visit I’m planning to Berlin this summer.

My mum was 18 having me, her mum was 16, and her mum was 15.

I should have followed and had a child when I was around 19 but I have never, ever felt maternal and I’m the black sheep of the family.

Mum had four children and my aunt had five and when they’re on the phone they talk about everyone in the family but me – I don’t have children so what’s there to say about me?

I made it clear from an early age that I wanted to do something different, I was the first person in my family to finish school and university. My parents have always accepted my choices, but they have said, “We hope your sisters don’t end up like you”.

My sister is 30 and she has two children, one’s six and one’s eight, and while I love them, I know I don’t want my own.

Kids are fun and bright – I just like them to go away after a couple of hours.

I want to travel, I want to have a nice house, a nice figure, and a car – I’d rather have a nice car than a baby.

As a child I never played ‘Mummies and Daddies’, so dull. I never had Barbie or baby dolls, I had a typewriter and Jem – she was a business woman by day and a rock star

by night and I thought that was amazing – she didn’t need Ken.

I had no dolls except for a Cabbage Patch doll, and I enjoyed that because it looked weird. My sister’s dolls, like Tiny Tears that cried all the time, were so boring.

People rarely understand – if you say you don’t want children it’s as if you’re a terrible person, you’re Myra Hindley.

I can find it difficult to talk to women with children and we have nothing in common. They get caught up, they become unavailable. Women with babies want to be around women with babies and I’ve lost one party girl to kids and the kitchen.

I think people can be jealous, I know my mum wishes she’d seen more of life.

One really cool, fun friend of mine hooked up with a guy, hit 30 and had a baby with him even though they weren’t even getting on.

It’s like this desperate urge kicks in to have a baby no matter what and I don’t feel it and honestly don’t think I ever will.

I don’t agree you can have it all, I’m an idealist and probably one of the reasons I won’t have children is because I don’t want to give anything up.

Many women lose their identity when they have children, their Facebook profile becomes a picture of their baby and not them and I think that’s sad. I don’t want to submerge my life into that of another human’s.

Maybe that makes me selfish.

But it’s an overpopulated world. We don’t need any more children.”

■ **What do you think? email claire.rees@mediawales.co.uk**

■ **Mab Jones**

48-year-old without a child and really be happy?

“I was at a party recently and this woman came over to me, said hello and instantly started talking about her daughter, and then she said, “And who do you have?” and I answered, “Do you mean children? I don’t have any children”, and it was a real conversation-stopper. She didn’t want to talk to me anymore, she couldn’t get away quick enough.”

Sonja also believes the close bond between a mother and a daughter can heap pressure on a young woman considering her maternal options.

“Mums can put on the pressure. I think my own mum was concerned, she wanted me to have a blood relative, especially as I was the only one living

on the other side of the world,” she says.

“She never said ‘go forth and have children’ but I know she was concerned. “I think sometimes mothers can see it as almost a betrayal of that bond when you, their daughter, don’t want to recreate it.

“I want to say, ‘Calm down, it’s OK if your daughter doesn’t want a child. She’ll be OK!’ There are so many other opportunities for women, and that decision should be supported.

“Having a baby is not the only thing a woman can do with her life and it’s not the end of the world if she doesn’t.”

■ **Sonja Lewis’ novel, The Barrenness, is out now on Prymus Publications and available at Amazon.**

## This week we’ll be mostly...



**Wondering ...**  
... when Gaga became Marge Simpson. Good to see Lady Loopy rocking one of autumn’s biggest colours at a press conference in Singapore, but we’ve never had the yellow one down as a style icon. Who knew?

**Charity shopping ...**

... Mrs Hince may be able to afford Miu Miu on the front of August Vogue as she channels next season’s biggest trend, but for the rest of us it’s off to the nearest Oxfam. The forties are back, people. PS, the news the former Miss Moss’s little sister Lottie is being billed as the next big supermodel after photos of the 13-year-old at her sister’s wedding worry us a bit. Give the poor dab a childhood.

## Awaiting bootylicious fashion ...

... Julien Mac, currently making us hide behind a cushion on Britain and Ireland’s Next Top Model on Living TV every Monday night at 9pm, has been gushing over Beyoncé wearing one of his pieces for the very first time, and her own clothing line, House of Dereon, is launching this autumn, so he may have competition.

Sigh, so far exclusive to Selfridges and not on our doorsteps. But in closer to home news, designer to everyone from Princess Diana to Jackie Onassis, Zandra Rhodes has created a plus size collection for online brand Simply Be, in sizes 14 to 32.

## Wowing ...

... at Emma Watson’s Oscar de la Renta at the world premiere of Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows. Also loving the addition of the white blazer – our favourite instant glam up for summer for anyone who doesn’t have a designer wardrobe.



## celebrating/ bemoaning ...

... Twitter’s five-year anniversary. The social networking site was created on March 21, 2006 when founder Jack Dorsey (@jack) made his first tweet: ‘just setting up my twttr’ and his co-founders @ev and @biz also first created their accounts before later launching it to the public five years this Friday. The site was called ‘Twttr’ until September 2006 when they added in the vowels.

## afternoon tea-ing ...



... we’re not sure why it’s taken so long but Cardiff’s glammy Park Plaza Hotel has just launched an afternoon tea menu. With pick-me-ups including freshly-baked warm tea-infused sultana and buttermilk scones and Welsh cakes, the only decision that needs to be made is whether to swap the speciality tea for a glass of fizz. Afternoon tea is now served from 1pm-5pm, Monday to Saturday and from 3.30pm-6pm on Sundays. It costs £15 per person or £22 for the champagne option.