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# NEW MALE STUDIES – AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

## VOLUME 9, ISSUE 2 – 2020

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### PREFACE

We are pleased to welcome Quinn Duclos and Kyle Glover to our Advisory Board. Quinn is a Doctoral Candidate in Public Health Education at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. He received his MS in Nutritional Sciences from the University of Connecticut in 2017, and before that he graduated from Springfield College with his BS in Applied Exercise Science. Quinn's primary research focus is on social media use by health educators. Kyle is obtaining his PsyD. in Applied Clinical Psychology at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology at San Diego. He received his BA in interdisciplinary studies at New York's Wagner College and an MA in Child Psychology from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. For a number of years, he worked as a mental health service provider for underprivileged populations in New York City. He was also the assistant editor of *New Male Studies* during its early years.

Kyle's "Being male," is one of two shorter articles published in this issue. Kyle describes his experience of the adverse consequences of male embodiment (evident in his involuntary circumcision and his bad experience with gynocentric schooling). His educational growth, fostered by a supportive male-studies professor and the men's group at his college, enabled him to dignify his own maleness and to pursue graduate studies in psychology. Kyle is concerned about misandry in the mental-health field, and he advocates for a better understanding of males in the women-dominated helping professions.

The other short piece is Jerome Teelucksingh's interview with Kenny Mammarella-D'Cruz, the founder of MenSpeak, which describes a different kind of male-affirmative advocacy. A non-hierarchical, male-centred British men's group, MenSpeak celebrates men's experience rather

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than imposing theoretically informed pronouncements of what men should be. Group members support one another's quests to live more fulfilling lives and hold one another accountable for their actions.

The three refereed articles in this issue examine fatherhood after parental separation, boys' early school leaving, and men as displaced refugees. R. A. W. Bradford's "The language of deceit, division and dominance" exposes how feminist-dominated academic research on parental separation sustains a gynocentric status quo and alienates fathers. The article reveals "the mechanisms which continue to propagate this intuitional deceit." Having described a system wherein "Truth is what you get away with," the author concludes, "It is convenient to espouse the poststructuralist edifice of verbiage only because it lends spurious legitimacy to deceit."

Paul Hopkins and Colin Baker describe the design and the implementation of a male-appropriate student-support protocol in "Sports students as mentors for boys and young men: Developing an undergraduate module to address boys' early school leaving." Titled *Sports Students as Mentors for Boys and Young Men*, the module provides "students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with sufficient knowledge, skills and confidence to mentor boys and young men in schools and informal education settings who are underachieving at school." The authors note, "Whilst the focus was very much on sports students working with boys the module would likely have strong appeal to, and have a use in, other academic areas with an interest in work with young males in health, educational and social contexts." We look forward to reports on the module's implementation in the future.

Dan Le's "The experiences and needs of displaced refugee men: A review of the literature" is occasioned by his observation that "psychology literature displays a fair amount of research on displaced individuals, but little on the experiences of externally displaced men to a country other than their nation of origin." His article examines "outcomes of male-focused refugee studies regarding mental health, physical health, and economic factors." He concludes, despite "the lack of published reports [...] there appears to be some consolidation to the experiences and needs of displaced male refugees."



Jan Andersen has contributed four photographs from his recent work to this issue: each pictures an expressive young male model. While the environment is apparent to the viewer, the circumstances informing the male's reactions remain elusive. The viewer paradoxically experiences closeness but not intimacy—a situation most strikingly apparent in the image of the blindfolded, open-mouthed youth: we see inside his body but have little insight into his thoughts.

It should be noted that the opinions expressed by the authors herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Team. The papers published here are offered in a spirit of open, evidence-based dialogue regarding sex, gender, relationships, and issues related to male experience. Thank you to the article reviewers for their contribution to this issue.



Dennis S. Gouws

**Editor in Chief**

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NEW MALE STUDIES: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL (NMS) IS AN OPEN ACCESS ONLINE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES FACING BOYS AND MEN WORLDWIDE.

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## THE LANGUAGE OF DECEIT, DIVISION AND DOMINANCE

*R.A.W. Bradford*



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### ABSTRACT

*In the UK, fathers often face great difficulties maintaining a meaningful involvement in their children's lives after parental separation. Men who are victims of partner abuse face almost universal disbelief and a dearth of provision to help them. The reality of male victims of partner abuse is kept submerged, whilst that of female victims is sometimes amplified in order to undermine fathers' attempts to obtain court orders for child contact. Feminists dominate the academic research in these areas and hence control the narrative which shapes Governmental and judicial policy, and this maintains the status quo. By concentrating upon the recent works of one individual as an exemplar, and by deconstructing the language used and its poststructural trappings, the mechanisms which continue to propagate this institutionalised deceit are exposed.*

**Keywords:** parental alienation, domestic abuse, poststructuralism, family court

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## INTRODUCTION

The language in question is that of Adrienne Barnett. Dr Barnett is a Senior Lecturer in Law at Brunel University London. She formerly practised for many years as a family law barrister. I shall focus particular attention on two of her works. Firstly, “A genealogy of hostility: parental alienation in England and Wales”, (Barnett, 2020). This paper discusses the role of parental alienation (PA) within the English and Welsh family courts. I shall refer to it as “the PA paper”. Secondly, Adrienne Barnett’s PhD thesis from Brunel Law School, UK, “Contact at All Costs? Domestic Violence, Child Contact and the Practices of the Family Courts and Professionals”, (Barnett, 2014), henceforth “the thesis”.

I hold no animus towards Dr Barnett. I use her works as exemplars of a kind because she has been particularly active in these matters this year (2020), as will become apparent from this article. If the issues raised here were merely the foibles of one individual, they would merit scant attention. The subtext, therefore, is a widespread prevalence of views, arguments and language essentially the same as those exemplified by Barnett. It would be too long a digression to demonstrate this claim thoroughly, but I shall allude in passing to evidence for it from contemporary events within the UK Government and Parliament. If said views, arguments and language were labelled simply as *feminism*; then the claim that it is widespread, and influential, would hardly need defending.

I shall begin gently with a critique of the PA paper. Here I shall use empirical evidence and elementary logic. That may seem an unnecessary statement. Regrettably, no longer. The terms of engagement have changed. As we will see, there is no longer a mutual agreement that the purpose of argument (or *discourse*) is to seek the truth about some objective empirical reality. Words are no longer the servants of reason but instead are the instruments by which the world is created, we are being told.

The deconstruction of the PA paper will lead us naturally to the epistemological issues which underlie this peculiar shift. Hence it is useful to look at Barnett’s thesis in which these matters are explicitly discussed. The thesis is informed from the start by the poststructuralist perspective, and in particular the role of *construction* which I shall examine in some detail.

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I finish by looking at events this year (2020) in the UK Government and its legislative activities which serve to illustrate the impact, and dominance, in practice of the perspectives exemplified by Barnett's work in the context of domestic abuse and the operation of the family courts in the UK.

The burden of this article shall be that, whatever the intellectual merits of poststructuralism might be in principle, it is being deployed to lend spurious legitimacy to deceit in the service of promoting dominance of a divisive narrative which eschews balance. Thus, whilst the academic language of poststructuralism may seem arcane and a long way from everyday affairs, in fact it is having a catastrophic effect on our society.

### **THE PARENTAL ALIENATION PAPER**

Defending the psychological validity of parental alienation is not part of this article, and my argument here does not depend upon the validity of PA. However, I must state what parental alienation is, or is claimed to be. Parental alienation is a process by which a child's natural attachment to a parent is disrupted and replaced by an irrational, and often extreme, dislike for that parent. The condition is induced in the child by persistent negative portrayal of one parent by the other. It is an induced psychological pathology in the child. The alienating parent effectively uses the child as a weapon against the target parent. It is primarily a form of child abuse, but may also be considered a form of domestic abuse of the alienated parent (though it is not recognised as such in English law).

The striking thing about the PA paper is that Adrienne Barnett neglects almost entirely the alienated children – until the last sentence, when she seems to remember what she should have been addressing. The entirety of the paper is presented from a sex war perspective. Claims of parental alienation are portrayed in this paper as a weapon being deployed by abusive fathers against mothers and their children, and—Barnett claims—credulous courts are falling for it.

Barnett appears to have little interest in PA. Her paper is actually about *claims* of PA, rather than PA itself, and about the effectiveness of such claims in influencing the outcomes of adversarial contests in the family courts. Any discussion relating to PA as principally a form of child abuse is notable for its absence. Instead her perspective revolves around *claims* of PA being a weapon deployed by men against women in a sex war: the child disappears from the picture.

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There is much to say here. Let me unpack it in parts. The principle parts are these,

- (i) The status of PA, specifically the existence of a credible body of evidence that PA is a diagnosable form of induced psychological pathology in the child, and hence a form of child abuse;
- (ii) The claim that PA is asserted as a counter-attack to allegations of domestic abuse perpetrated by the father;
- (iii) The language used in the paper and what it reveals.

Let's take these in turn. Firstly, people of Barnett's persuasion do not believe that PA is real. They regard it as a ruse. Specifically, Barnett's position is that claims of PA are a cunning stratagem by abusive fathers to deflect attention away from their abuse of the mother and/or child. She writes in her Conclusion, "PA is a concept that is proving more powerful than any other in silencing the voices of women and children resisting contact with abusive men. PA is not an 'equal' counterpart to domestic abuse, it is a means of obscuring domestic abuse, and should be recognised as such."

Over and over again throughout the paper this perspective is reiterated. A couple of quotes will suffice,

*"It is no coincidence, it is suggested, that PA, in its initial form of parental alienation syndrome (PAS), emerged when the courts recognised domestic violence as a factor militating against contact."*

*"The emergence and development of PA in England and Wales shows a clear pattern of (initially PAS) and PA being raised in family proceedings in response to concerns about and measures to address domestic abuse. This, it is suggested, cogently reveals PA's intended purpose – to shut down domestic abuse in private family law."*

To "shut down domestic abuse"? She means, of course, "to shut down the effectiveness of allegations of domestic abuse".

Note how the language betrays that PA itself, i.e., the child abuse, is ignored. The phrase "PA's intended purpose" makes no sense unless we interpret it as the author clearly does in her own mind as "the intended purpose of *allegations of PA*". It is not the child abuse which interests her, and this is why reading the paper is so disturbing. She is only interested in the effect of



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*claims of PA*, interpreted as a tactic to manipulate judicial rulings and score a hit in a sex war between parents.

This is the language of division. It is the opposite of what we should learn from the reality of parental separation (whether one accepts PA as a valid condition or not), namely that parental conflict should be overcome for the sake of the child. But Barnett does not want conciliation. She wants mothers to *win* and is willing to subordinate the best interests of the child to do so. If this seems a rather harsh interpretation of her position, we will see shortly how Dr Barnett views “the welfare of the child”.

Adrienne Barnett also has an article in the house magazine of the UK Association of Magistrates (Barnett, 2020B), “Parental alienation and the family courts”. In it she states simply, “There is little, if any, credible scientific support for the theory of PA”. This is a statement which is readily proved to be false. I should emphasise that whether or not PA is a valid phenomenon is not my concern. An assertion that it is would require a thorough examination of the whole body of literature on the topic, with a view to discerning if a consensus has arisen. That is unnecessary here. All that is required to refute Barnett’s contention is to establish the existence of a substantial body of evidence in the literature, and that this evidence has been provided by workers with credible credentials. Consequently, the following observations will suffice.

By 2016, parental alienation and alienating behaviours in separated or divorced families had been well documented in over 500 references drawn from the professional literature across 30 countries, (Harman et al, 2016).

By 2018 there were more than one thousand research and clinical studies reported in scientific and professional journals, books, and book chapters, (Kruk, 2018). That reference summarises the position as, “Research evidence of the many facets of parental alienation is much more robust than is often assumed”.

According to chartered psychologist and PA expert Dr Sue Whitcombe (2017), the prevalence of alienation within the general community of separating parents has been estimated from random sampling to be up to about 15%, but in samples of the most intractable cases the prevalence can be up to 40%. She quotes Sarah Parsons, Principal Social Worker and Assistant Director of the UK’s Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) as

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stating in July 2016 that “parental alienation is responsible for around 80% of the most intransigent cases that come before the family courts”. Whitcombe has estimated that this implies that parental alienation is likely to be a feature in a minimum of 9,000 family proceedings applications per annum in England and Wales, involving more than 18,000 children.

(Lorandos, 2020) has performed a search for PA cases in US courts between 1985 and 2018. His search terms are defined in detail in the paper. Searching on the basis of relevant text alone produced 3,555 case reports. This will be only a small fraction of cases in which PA was mentioned as most trials will not be reported. Lorandos and his co-workers then filtered those 3,555 cases by requiring either, (a) that an independent expert testified on the subject of PA, or, (b) the court found on any basis that there was PA. These criteria were rigorous, e.g., in (a) a recognised PA expert was required, not a general therapist, mediator, etc. As regards (b), mere speculation by the court on the subject of PA was not sufficient. 1,181 cases made it through this filter. The incidence of PA cases recognised by the US courts (i.e., within this filtered dataset) was found to have increased steeply in the last three decades. 25% of the alienators were fathers, 75% mothers. On the basis of his extensive dataset, Lorandos concluded,

*“In the thirty-four years since the term PAS was first introduced and then later reformulated, trial and appellate courts across the United States have found the construct PA to be material, probative, relevant to their tasks, admissible, and worthy of discussion, as they have grappled with emotionally abusive parents and damaged children. Review of the thousands of opinions located by the query reveals that courts understand that there is a distinction between ‘when one parent says negative and disparaging things about the other parent to the child’ and when an aggressor parent ‘engages in behavior designed to sabotage the child’s relationship with the victim parent.’ Hundreds of opinions illustrating courts confronting ‘unreasonable negative feelings and beliefs (such as anger, hatred, rejection, and/or fear) toward a parent that are significantly disproportionate to the child’s actual experience with that parent’ were located.”*

Barnett’s dismissal of PA on the grounds that “there is little, if any, credible scientific support for the theory of PA” is thus established to be false. Whilst PA does have its detractors, that is not the same as denying the existence of the credible body of academic work alluded to above. Moreover, it is not just widespread academic support, but a vast tranche of judicial opinion over decades. The disturbing thing about Barnett’s claim is that it was made in the house journal of the UK Magistrates’ Association, suggesting an attempt to seriously misdirect

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an influential judicial body.

We shall see below that Barnett has had an even more recent opportunity to influence the UK Ministry of Justice directly.

Let us turn now to the claim that PA arises as a counter by fathers when they are accused of abuse in the courts. Barnett draws upon 40 cases of PA in courts in England or Wales in the period 2000 to March 2019, nearly 20 years. Hence just 2 cases per year on average. It is not clear if these were all the cases that could be found, or if they were selected. She writes, “A total of 40 cases (comprised in 54 judgments) were reviewed in which PA/PAS was raised or referred to. These were identified in Family Law Reports and on BAILII, and a few unreported judgments were identified in Casemine.” She adds, “The reported cases cannot provide a representative sample of all such cases.” Indeed, they cannot. One is thus left wondering what one is supposed to make of the observations which follow.

Of these 40 cases involving PA, in 35 cases the father claimed to have been alienated, and in 5 cases the mother claimed to have been alienated. Abuse was alleged in 27 cases (and I assume this means alleged abuse by the father in all cases, though that is not made clear). Hence, in 27 out of 35 cases a father who was alleged to be an abuser claimed there was alienation (77%). This appears to be a strong association, albeit from a tiny dataset with uncertain provenance.

However, an association tells us nothing regarding whether the allegations of abuse were causal in bringing about an assertion of alienation. One might alternatively argue that, where PA is genuinely present, a false allegation of abuse is also likely. Barnett concludes that, “The emergence and development of PA in England and Wales shows a clear pattern of (initially PAS) and PA being raised in family proceedings in response to concerns about and measures to address domestic abuse. This, it is suggested, cogently reveals PA’s intended purpose – to shut down domestic abuse in private family law (see Meier 2020).”

Let us leave aside the statistical weakness of making such a sweeping claim based on 40 cases which Barnett admits cannot be representative. The conclusion would be invalid even if there were one thousand cases because the connective “in response to” asserts a causal connection about which no evidence at all has been presented. One might assert with equal logic

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(or lack thereof) that allegations of domestic abuse are raised in response to allegations of parental alienation. Barnett's paper provides no evidence of the direction of causality, or even that there is a causal connection.

However, she advises that we look at (Meier, 2020). Let's do so then. Joan Meier identified 669 cases in the USA in which one parent made an alienation claim against the other, but, of these, only 222 involved mothers accusing fathers of abuse and fathers accusing mothers of alienation. The data used by Meier is strongly skewed as they originate overwhelmingly from appeal courts. Nevertheless, from that sample, two-thirds of alienation claims could not have arisen as *tactical counters* by fathers in response to them being accused of abuse – because they were not accused of abuse. Consequently, Barnett's claim that "allegations of fathers' alienation arise in response to accusations of abuse by fathers" gets little support from this source either. This is particularly noteworthy as the skewed nature of the sample of cases identified by Meier would tend to enhance both factors (i.e., allegations of abuse and of PA).

Nor does Barnett's claim have anything to say about the 25% of allegations of alienation made by mothers in Lorandos's far more extensive dataset.

One might have expected a researcher to be disconcerted about having drawn a conclusion in a published work which is so easily discredited. But this is to misunderstand the mindset involved, which has scant interest in consistency of reasoning or statistical significance. This is betrayed by the language used, and by the poststructural position on *truth* which underlies it, as we shall see.

## **THE LANGUAGE OF THE PA PAPER**

Turning now to the language used in the PA paper, and what it reveals. Let us unpack the following sentence, "PA is underpinned by, and premised on, a particular dominant construction of children's welfare, that constitutes the involvement of fathers in post-separation families as overwhelmingly important for children's emotional, psychological and developmental welfare."

This is not the language of true empirical enquiry, but the language of sly insinuation. Note the corrosive role of the word "construction" in that sentence. It betrays the author's poststructuralist mindset: there is no objective truth, only *narratives* vying for dominance. The idea that fathers are important in child development is one such constructed narrative, the

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author implicitly claims. I shall examine more closely in the next section the poststructural usage of *construction*.

The word can have a benign meaning, especially in theoretical psychology where it may be understood as a collection of correlated behaviours which it is useful to give a name. Thus, the big five personality traits, such as extroversion or openness, are constructs. But this is not how Barnett is using the word. There is an analogy here with the way the word *theory* is correctly used in science, in contrast with the everyday expression “that’s just a theory”. Barnett’s usage of *construction* is closer to the latter, with its intended connotation of being unsubstantiated, arbitrary and optional. At this point it is helpful to reproduce a quote from (Gill, 1996) taken from Barnett’s thesis, (Barnett, 2014), “The notion of ‘construction’ is important in discourse analysis because it ‘emphasizes the fact that, in a very real sense, texts of various kinds construct our world.’” I shall have more to say shortly about this conception of the world being “constructed” by “texts”, rather than having an objective existence. My position will be that it is being used as a device to provide spurious academic legitimacy to deceit and prejudice.

Fathers’ importance to child development is not a “construction”, in Barnett’s sense of being something that can be magicked away by appropriate discourse: it is a well-documented empirical reality. But this is the origin of the dispute in which we are engaged. The main goal of the feminist movement has, from its inception, been to make women independent of men, and this includes making the family independent of men, (de Beauvoir, 1949), (Greer, 1970), (Lyndon, 1992). The feminist credo is precisely *families don’t need fathers*. It is the most staggering arrogance, as well as being false.

Even the most hardened adherent of the view that men bring nothing of social, emotional or psychological value to a child (or a partner) will not be able to sustain the claim that families don’t need fathers unless they are also willing to forego both the child maintenance and also all welfare benefits, which are 73% financed by men’s taxes. Barnett opines that “PA is underpinned by, and premised on” the “construction” that fathers are significant in their children’s development. She is telling us that PA is an invalid concept because it is predicated upon the significance of fathers to their children’s development – which she also regards as an invalid concept.

Here we reach the nub of the issue as far as the PA paper is concerned. Barnett refers to the “FRM” (Fathers’ Rights Movement), exemplified by such organisations as Families Need Fathers. Am I being overly imaginative, or can one sense the curling of the lip into a sneer? Between the lines we read that fathers deserve no rights; the very thought is obnoxious.

But it isn’t about father’s rights. The assertion explicit in the appellation *Families Need Fathers* is entirely different, but one which the prejudiced movement represented by Barnett equally oppose: that families have any need for fathers. There would have been no impetus to create organisations with such a name unless there were a belief within some parts of society that fathers were, in fact, superfluous to requirements. The feminist position which has gained dominance in academe and in politics is that fathers are not necessary.

Yet it is not so. Indeed, if one broadens the claim from fathers to men in general, it becomes the height of silliness for women to imagine they do not need men, but that does not stop it being asserted, (Rosin, 2013). What such women really mean is that things have now been so arranged that men’s contributions to society in general, and to women in particular, need never be acknowledged, and so all respect and appreciation can be foregone and replaced with denigration instead. Yet any job which predominantly involves interaction with inanimate matter is overwhelmingly dominated by male effort. Whether it be the production of food, the creation and maintenance of built infrastructure, both commercial and domestic, the provision of fuel, energy, water and disposal of waste, and the transportation of goods, men do almost all of it. Men do it because women do not want to (or they undoubtedly would).

In the UK, men put very nearly three times the taxation revenue into the Exchequer as women, which then pays for the welfare state from which women benefit far more than men. For the unemployed, or working poor, single parents (overwhelmingly mothers) receive far more in direct benefit payments than a single person, e.g., a non-resident father, (Collins, 2020). The public sector is funded entirely from taxation, and twice as many public sector employees are women as men, though men are paying three times as much to support it. Overall, the UK taxation and benefit systems constitute a process to syphon money from men to women, and so long as this prevails it is mere conceit and self-delusion for women to pretend that men in general, and fathers in particular, are now redundant. It would be more accurate to note that this transfer of money from men to women has now been rendered almost entirely anonymous and

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impersonal, and so it passes unrecognised and increasingly unappreciated.

However, I digress. It is not financial matters that are the immediate issue. Barnett's contention is that the "construction" that fathers are important to their children's emotional and psychological development is invalid, i.e., it is merely a construction. Actually, there is a huge literature on the role of parents in their children's psychological development, and this includes literature specific to the significance of fathers. A tiny fraction of it has been reviewed by (Collins, 2019). Nor are the roles of mother and father identical and mere strength in depth, but distinct in some aspects. I shall not rehearse the case again here. The deleterious effects of fatherlessness have become increasingly well documented since the classic polemic "Families Without Fatherhood", (Dennis and Erdos, 1992, 3rd ed 2000). Both authors professed to be socialists of some complexion, so dismissing their work as the rantings of antediluvian conservatives will not do. What we have now in our culture is not the outmoded conflict of left and right, but the perennial power play of divide and conquer, and this time the division is between the sexes.

There are rich pickings in Barnett's PA paper when it comes to language. I'll just list a few and leave the reader to deconstruct them at leisure,

- "political fathers" (nothing political about Barnett herself, of course).
- "discursive" as in referring to PA as "part of the discursive repertoire of current family law", noting that "discursive" implies digressing from the subject. In what way are the courts digressing from the subject in considering a potential harm to a child when their statutory duty is to make the child's best interests paramount?
- "unimpeachable" as in "the myth of the unimpeachable father on which PA is premised". This is a lovely straw man argument. No one has claimed that every allegation of PA is valid, and no one has claimed that every instance of PA involves a saintly father. But more disconcertingly this is another instance of Barnett's blindness to PA as a harm to the child and her insistence that it is only a strategy in a battle between the parents;
- And one of my favourites, "abuse perpetrated by 'normal' fathers" – oh, so sly.

That the axis which insisted "the personal is political", the original axe blow which aimed

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to divide the sexes, should now be a bit stuffy at fathers being “political” is rather rich. The sex war has been inflamed by this axis for fifty years, with ever increasing intensity.

## **THE THESIS, POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND POWER**

I now turn to the thesis, (Barnett, 2014), which is most helpful in making explicit the theoretical position which underlies Barnett’s other work. Recall that the thesis is about how domestic abuse is addressed by UK family courts in the context of fathers’ contact with their children. As promised, I will concentrate on the role of *construction*. Barnett tells us that her PhD study will, “provide a productive framework for exploring the world constructed in and by current family law, how meanings are represented and produced, and the consequences of those representations and meanings for judicial and professional practice and consequently for the women and children who are subjected to those practices.” Fathers, it seems, are not subject to those practices, and it is made amply clear that they (or the patriarchy on their behalf) are the ones doing the “constructing” to ensure that it is women and children alone who are “subjected to those practices”. But let us apply discourse analysis to that quote. It is itself the enunciation of a construction, namely that it is men who are actors (agentic) while women are acted-upon (hypoagentic). This is a familiar construction: it is the construction of the traditional gender roles. Thus, at least in this case, Barnett’s perspective itself emanates from the construction of traditional gender.

This may seem paradoxical to readers who understand feminism to be smashing traditional gender roles. But feminism opposes traditional gender roles only when it suits. The narrative of oppression, or victimhood, is the engine in the feminist machine, and it is powered by the traditional view of the vulnerable female in need of protection. Developing this theme further would take us too far from our present objective, but see (Collins, 2019). It is important to draw attention to it, however, because Barnett’s own discourse is presenting us with a construct of how the courts operate, and we are predisposed to accept this construct precisely because it aligns with the ancient constructions of gender.

Consider this quote, from the Abstract of the thesis: “This study concludes that in order to regain a valid and authoritative voice for women in current family law we need to expose and disrupt law’s construction of the ‘scientific truth’ about children’s welfare”. Are you happy with “disrupting scientific truth”, i.e., radically changing or destroying scientific truth? Especially



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where it impacts children's welfare? No? And yet you are being inveigled to go along with it on the grounds that scientific truth is actually merely a construct called "scientific truth". Do you see how cunning this is? It cuts the ground away from any counterargument based on empirical evidence, however crushing a case it might appear to present, because actually it is all just a tale that one may spin, a mere construct.

You think I may be overstating? Then digest this quote: "These perspectives recognise that data, like meaning, are constructed, not 'discovered', and reject the purely positivist notion of scientific objectivity, including the privileging of 'scientific' research, which has been criticised for perpetuating patriarchal power relations, and the silencing of women's voices." [Barnett here cites (May, 1993), (May, 2001), (Judd, Smith and Kidder, 6th ed 1991)]. Clear now? Data are constructed. Reject scientific objectivity. Do not "privilege" "scientific" research.

And in case there is still any ambiguity, "What post-structural feminist and 'systems' theories share is a rejection of modernist, interpretive principles, where individuals are seen as the primary sources of social meanings, and where 'true' and certain knowledge is considered possible. At the core of feminist post-structuralist ideas and, it is suggested, Luhmannian thought, "is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge." We can thus see the phenomenal world – the world that has meaning for us – as wholly constructed...". [Barnett cites (Banakar and Travers, 2005), (Reinharz, 1991), and (King, 2006)].

It was inevitable that historic power differentials would feature: "The founding insight of post-structuralism is that language constitutes, rather than reflects, social 'reality', so that meaning and therefore knowledge is not absolute, fixed and certain, but is "always bound up with historically specific regimes of power and, therefore, every society produces its own truths which have a normalising and regulatory function." [Barnett cites (McNay, 1992)].

If you struggle with some of these quotes, it helps to remove extraneous verbiage to leave the core meaning exposed. For example, from this, "Deploying gender as an analytical tool enables us to disrupt and displace the hierarchical bipolar oppositions, such as the binary divisions of male/female and public/private that structure gendered power relations, as well as the moral validity of objectivity and neutrality, thereby creating the space for other ways of

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knowing”, we can extract the more cogent but deeply disturbing “deploying gender enables us to disrupt the moral validity of objectivity and neutrality”. Clearer?

In the next section when we see that Dr Barnett has been commissioned by the Ministry of Justice this year (2020) to produce a major literature review of the operation of the family courts, do remember her commitment to “disrupting” objectivity and neutrality and her determination not to privilege scientific research. Then ask yourself what chance the unemployed, under-educated young father has when, his partner tiring of him, he is thrust, all unknowing, into the steam press that has been prepared to crush him by a generation of Adrienne Barnetts. Then tremble for his son.

Let’s look at how these poststructuralist ideas play out when explicitly applied in the family court context. We are told that “implacably hostile mothers” are...yes, you guessed, another “construct”. So are “safe family men”, of course. So, there’s no such thing as either (or so it is slyly implied). Here is an extract which explains that “the welfare of the child” is also just another construct, so we really don’t need to fuss about it: “concepts such as ‘the welfare of the child’ have been selectively constructed by the reductive operations of law. By deconstructing the notion of ‘the welfare of the child’ and locating it within its historical, social, political and ideological context, it can be seen to operate as a mechanism of power that serves particular interests.” Barnett is presenting “the welfare of the child” as just another ruse used by wicked fathers against the mothers of their children. So, it’s nothing to do with the risk of a child being beaten, neglected or otherwise mistreated – perhaps by the mother? Ah, but “the welfare of the child” does revert to being literally the welfare of the child when the father is the abuser. That is what Barnett means by “the welfare of the child” is a “contingent and unstable familial construct”. Yes, it is contingent upon who the abuser is as to whether she sees it as abuse.

Let us pause a while to reprise what we have learnt. The world, we are to believe, is constructed, and hence contingent, not objective. There is no world as it really is. There are only various possible views of the world, established and upheld by discourses. We must concede that there is a limited sense in which this perspective is undoubtedly valid. But this limited sense insists that we interpret the world as consisting only of the beliefs and behaviours which can be successfully instilled in the public at large, and those in authority especially. Thus, the limited sense in which the poststructuralist epistemology is valid is so limited as to degenerate into

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tautology. If all one means by *the world* is the set of beliefs and behaviours which people can be inveigled to adopt, then clearly the ability to influence those beliefs and behaviours through persuasive discourse constitutes changing the world in that limited sense. But that leaves the matter of truth and objective reality all untouched – not discredited but axiomatically ignored. Thus, the entire edifice of poststructural epistemology stands exposed as vacuous: a smoke screen whose purpose is to misdirect.

There is an objection to poststructuralist views which will immediately occur to those of us so antediluvian as to believe in objective reality and absolute truth: if there is no truth, why do poststructuralists bother writing anything at all? But this is easily answered. The puzzlement only arises if one sticks stubbornly to the notion that argument is for the purpose of establishing truth, or our best approximation to it. To those of us who still adhere to this laughably archaic idea, all purpose of discussion, argument and writing disappears if there is no truth to discover. There is no point in firing an arrow if there is no target to hit. But it does, in fact, make perfect sense within the poststructuralist purview. One only has to divest oneself of stubborn notions of empirical reality, neutrality, fairness, truth, etc., and instead to embrace the idea that the purpose of all discourse is to impose one's will upon others. All writing is an exercise in power. This is the ultimate cynicism, and one can only guess at the depths of moral and spiritual bankruptcy from which it springs.

When Dr Barnett writes, she does not – according to her own lights and words – seek to expose a pre-existing objective truth, rather she seeks to impose her will upon you. The *truth* for her has been redefined to be whatever she can successfully induce you to believe. It is all an exercise in power, and that's all it is.

There is a small problem here, so very obvious that I am almost embarrassed to mention it; but mention it I must. Given that all Dr Barnett and her ilk are attempting to do is to impose their will upon us, why should we not simply tell them (in the invective of your choice) to go away?

## **UK GOVERNMENT AND LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES IN 2020**

This article has concentrated upon the work of one individual, but I want to close by illustrating how this is embedded within, and characteristic of, the operation of Government and

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legislation in the UK. For this reason, the intellectual impostures of poststructuralism cannot be dismissed as harmless academic gobbledegook because they adversely affect the lives of millions. The reader will be patient while I lay out the UK legislative background before returning to Adrienne Barnett's part in these very recent proceedings.

At the time of publication, a new domestic abuse Bill, nearly three years in the gestation, has completed its passage through the House of Commons in the UK and has started its journey through the House of Lords. Addressing the content of the Bill would be too long a digression. Suffice it to say that it is draconian in many respects, not least in respect of the appointment of a Commissioner for Domestic Abuse whose supra-governmental powers, in the hands of an unelected person, are worrying.

The progress of a Bill through Parliament includes a Committee stage in which a Committee of around 16 MPs debate the amendments proposed and return an amended Bill for its third and final reading in the House of Commons. The Committee therefore has considerable power over which proposed amendments will be included in, and which excluded from, the near-final version of the Bill. Anyone can submit written evidence or opinion to the Committee via Parliament's Scrutiny Unit. However, it is at the Committee's discretion whether they invite individuals or organisations to be interviewed in person by the Committee. The Committee is under no obligation to give credence to any of this written or presented evidence; they have complete discretion. In practice, the Committee's sympathies or concerns are indicated by whom it is they invite to be witnesses in person. In contrast, unsolicited written evidence is likely to be given scant attention, and much will not be looked at by the Committee at all.

Between 4<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 the Committee for the Domestic Abuse Bill received 95 written submissions, (House of Commons, 4-17 June 2020). A number of these (at least 8 and perhaps 10 or 12) were from individuals or organisations sympathetic to male victims and concerned that the Bill did not reflect their position (one being from a charity of which I am a Trustee). Most of these supported certain proposed amendments to the Bill, such as including parental alienation and false allegations as recognised forms of domestic abuse. However, the 15 individuals or organisations who were interviewed in person by the Committee were all strongly feminist, or female victims of abuse, and excluded all representatives of fathers or male victims of domestic abuse. The amendments proposed to reflect men's experience of abuse were not

taken up in the revised Bill put forward by the Committee.

All these outcomes were entirely predictable, and I doubt that anyone sympathetic to male concerns were in the least surprised. The reason, as was clearly reflected in the witnesses called by the Committee, is that only one voice is heard in the corridors of power on matters related to domestic abuse and it is the feminist voice, typified by Adrienne Barnett.

To cement this claim here is further evidence. In parallel with the progress of the Domestic Abuse Bill through parliament, the UK Ministry of Justice (MOJ) saw fit to instigate, in May 2019, a review of family justice to address “how the family courts protect children and parents in cases of domestic abuse”. They convened a panel to conduct the review, claiming that, “The panel members represent key organisations from across family justice including the Judiciary, academia, social care, policy officials and third sector organisations which represent and advocate for victims of domestic abuse”, (Ministry of Justice, 2019). With the possible exception of the MOJ chair and Justices (though even that is in serious doubt), the academic, social care and third sector advisors were unambiguously of strong feminist sympathies. Complaints were levied at the MOJ from organisations representing male victims, but the response was to draft further feminist representatives onto the panel.

The MOJ reported the outcome of the panel’s deliberations on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020, (Ministry of Justice, 2020): interesting timing given that the Domestic Abuse Bill was then poised for its third and final reading in the Commons. The MOJ announced a major overhaul of family courts to protect domestic abuse victims. Of greatest concern to fathers is this statement in the press release, “Ministers will launch a review into the presumption of ‘parental involvement’ that often encourages a child’s relationship with both parents, unless the involvement of that parent would put the child at risk. It will examine whether the right balance is being struck between the risk of harm to children and victims, and the right of the child to have a relationship with both parents.”

This threatens to be a further wedge which will be driven between separated fathers and their children. 92% of non-resident parents in the UK are fathers. Exact figures are not available, but about half of separated fathers fail to obtain sufficient time with their children to maintain a meaningful parental involvement. Even for the luckier half, the *de facto* standard has become

three days per fortnight with just one or two overnight stays. Nearly one-in-three separated fathers ultimately fail to have any contact, or only extremely infrequent contact, with their children as striving Dads morph into McDads and finally achieve deadbeat status in popular parlance, driven there by forces beyond their ability to counter.

In the family courts of England and Wales, 50% of cases addressing child contact involve allegations of domestic abuse, a frequency of allegation which is beyond credibility. This suggests that more than half the allegations are fraudulent and made for the advantage such allegations provide to the accuser in court.

The output from the MOJ's family justice review consisted of three documents: a 216 page final report, a 19 page implementation plan, and a 171 page literature review by Adrienne Barnett, (Ministry of Justice, 2020B). One cannot accuse Dr Barnett of being lazy; she has had a productive year, her latest being (Domestic abuse and private law children cases A literature review, 2020). I will not attempt a critique of this lengthy document lest I strain the readers' patience overmuch. It suffices to observe that the MOJ has seen fit to commission such an influential piece of research from a person with known partisan sympathies and a poststructuralist perspective on truth.

Allow me to regale you with some final quotes from Barnett's thesis which make clear how she views research.

*"The task of research, according to a poststructuralist perspective, is to examine historically how knowledge (and in this context, dominant patriarchal knowledge) and truth in society is produced, to deconstruct the processes by which that knowledge is formed, and make visible the relations of power that give rise to discursive claims to truth."* [Barnett here cites (May, 1993), (May, 2001)]

*"Hesse-Biber and Leavy note that "many feminists openly question the viability and utility of neutral, value-free research methods and the positive concept of objectivity itself", in particular because quantitative research is based on and validates the 'masculinist' values of neutrality and 'objective detachment'."* [Barnett here cites (Leavy, 2007)]

*"...feminists question and render problematic the concepts of rationality, impartiality and objectivity by showing that these are historically specific and contingent generalisations embodying dominant values which, in the process, devalue those attributes associated with 'the feminine' such as 'unacceptable' emotions and desires."* [Barnett cites (McNay, 1992)].

We can conclude, then, that Barnett is opposed to impartiality and objectivity, and rejects the utility of neutral research methods and quantitative research as being “masculinist”. This compounds Barnett’s other poststructuralist opinions exposed in the preceding section. Why, I am compelled to ask, would the MOJ commission empirical research from someone with such views on the nature of research? By doing so they have become complicit in the complete erasure from judicial policy of two major features of domestic abuse: the abuse of men by women, and the abuse of children by women, both of which are comparably frequent as the abuse perpetrated by men. This is the actual, real, empirical truth which is rendered invisible by Barnett’s poststructuralist discourses, which we may call, with less pretension, simply bias and prejudice.

## **CONCLUSION**

Under Dr Barnett’s tutelage we have learnt that the world is constructed by whatever discourses are dominant. It is not as epistemologically deep as it appears. Actually, it exposes how restricted is the scope of the world in the minds of those who adopt this philosophy. Their world has shrunk to whatever they can persuade sufficient people to believe; their world has shrunk entirely to the exercise of power. Bias and misdirection cease to be bias and misdirection according to this outlook if no one that matters knows. Truth is what you get away with. It is convenient to espouse the poststructuralist edifice of verbiage only because it lends spurious legitimacy to deceit.

Who would wish to legitimise deceit? Would that be those who are genuinely disadvantaged, or those who are not but wish to appear so?

And who would be best placed to make use of suitable discourse to mould apparent reality? Would that be those who dominate the narrative by being the only voice within policy and legislative decision making – or those who are excluded from it?

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## AUTHOR PROFILE



Back in the mists of time **Rick Bradford** obtained his degree in theoretical physics from Cambridge University and a PhD from University College London. He worked as a professional mechanical engineer in the power generation industry for nearly 40 years and is now semi-retired. Since retiring he has been a Visiting Professor and an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, Engineering Department, teaching at MSc level and supervising PhD students. He has been married since the world was a very different place and has two sons in their mid-30s. To convince himself he is still a physicist he published a book on quantum mechanics in 2020 (*The Unweirding*). In 2019 he published a book on male disadvantages, *The Empathy Gap: Male Disadvantages and the Mechanisms of Their Neglect*, under the pen name William Collins. He blogs under that name on men's issues on *The Illustrated Empathy Gap*.

**Contact details:** [RickatMerlinHaven@hotmail.com](mailto:RickatMerlinHaven@hotmail.com)

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**SPORTS STUDENTS AS MENTORS FOR BOYS AND YOUNG MEN:  
DEVELOPING AN UNDERGRADUATE MODULE TO ADDRESS BOYS'  
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING**

*Paul Hopkins, Colin Baker*



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**ABSTRACT**

*The article describes the development of the Sports Students as Mentors for Boys and Young Men undergraduate module developed for sports students attending universities in six European countries, sharing a common concern for boys' early school leaving. The module provides students with knowledge and skills of mentoring work along with strengths-based Positive Youth Development methodology and its 5Cs framework, enabling them to work with young males in educational settings, to motivate them to stay at school and improve their educational attainment and vocational choices. The module also instructs students on support for young male mental health, teaching them this is a key issue affecting educational performance. This article outlines broad contextual issues before outlining key steps, concluding with future development aims.*

**Keywords:** boys' education, early school leaving, mentoring, positive youth development/5Cs, sports students, higher education

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## INTRODUCTION

From November 2017 to December 2019 a partnership of five European universities from the Czech Republic (CZ), Greece (EL), Ireland (IR), Spain (ES) and the UK, and an Italian NGO (IT), collaborated to develop an undergraduate module for sports students: *Sports Students as Mentors for Boys and Young Men—SSaMs* (SSaMs, 2019). SSaMs aims to provide students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with sufficient knowledge, skills and confidence to mentor boys and young men in schools and informal education settings who are underachieving at school. In doing so, the ultimate aim is to motivate them to stay at school and improve their educational attainment and vocational choices. The module also instructs students on how to support young men's mental and emotional health; this is a key issue affecting their educational performance and outcomes. For students these knowledge and skills can be utilised in the sports workplace, particularly sport in the community work. The module, which has already been implemented at the University of Thessaly (EL) during 2019, its components and details of its formative progress are freely available to view and download online from the SSaMs website. This paper describes the module's development, first briefly outlining broad contextual issues, before outlining key steps and concluding with future development aims.

## SSAMS CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The European Union's (EU) Europe 2020 strategy seeks to reduce the proportion of early leavers of education and training to less than 10 % by 2020 (European Commission, 2010), and the indications are that progress is being made, recent data showing a reduction from 17% in 2002 to 10.6% in 2018 (Eurostat, 2020). Research suggests that positive health and wellbeing is important for academic achievement (PHE, 2014), and pupils who feel confident about their learning develop the ability to cope with challenges (Aronson, 2002). However, not all pupils are able to realise these benefits: those experiencing disadvantage are more likely to fail academically and to disengage or drop out of education altogether (Thomas, 2000; Weinstein, 2002) due to inequalities in opportunity, attitudes and access to resources (Becker & Luthar, 2002). The link between poor mental health and risk of dropping out (Breslau, 2010; Breslau et al., 2011) has focused attention on promoting emotional, social, cognitive and physical development in order to help break the cycle of disadvantage (Joint Action on Mental Health and Well-being, 2017). High-quality education is central to this with respect to providing a context and an environment in which whole-person development is promoted. This may usefully combat negative academic

experiences, such as alienation and poor academic achievement which serve to affect confidence, self-belief and mental health negatively (Brannlund et al., 2017; Becker & Luthar, 2002). It is concerning, therefore, that the rate of early school leaving (ESL) is higher amongst boys than girls in all EU member states [except Bulgaria and Romania (European Commission, 2017)]; males are more likely to leave education with a lower secondary education at most, yet on educational support to prevent ESL there are “a shortage of initiatives specifically targeted at boys” (EURYDICE, 2010).

| European country    | Male  | Female |
|---------------------|-------|--------|
| Czech Republic      | 6.4%  | 6.0%   |
| Greece              | 9.4%  | 6.4%   |
| Italy               | 17.5% | 11.8%  |
| Republic of Ireland | 8.4%  | 5.4%   |
| Spain               | 24.0% | 15.8%  |
| UK                  | 11.7% | 9.8%   |

**Table 1.** 2015 male and female rates of early school leaving for countries involved in the SSaMs programme (European Commission, 2017)

Underpinned by an ecological framework that emphasises interactional effects impacting students and the wider school and community context on achievement (Becker & Luthar, 2002), the SSaMs project recognises the role of education as a known social determinant of health influencing employment, income and housing outcomes; all of these factors critically affect male health (Macdonald, 2005). In this respect, ESL affects wider society by impacting economic growth, poverty, criminality and social exclusion (Brunello & De Paola, 2014). Indeed, a higher standard of education is associated with increased financial income and better health outcomes, those with higher levels of educational attainment having lower death rates from common chronic and acute conditions (Telfair & Shelton, 2012). The project’s approach is also consistent with the World Health Organization (WHO) policy objectives concerning intersectoral collaboration to address health concerns and outcomes in respect of “actions undertaken by sectors outside the health sector, possibly, but not necessarily in collaboration with the health sector” (WHO, 2008, p.2), and the role of schools as a setting affecting health and action on social determinants to address male health (WHO, 2018).

### ***Why sports-based mentoring?***

Adopting the maxim that policy should translate into practice if it is to be effective, trainers should provide practitioners with the skills necessary to implement practices that produce the intended outcomes. Sports personnel are well placed to work with boys and young men in schools, informal learning environments and youth sport, and there are many examples of male health-related initiatives utilising male affinity with sport as a conduit of work with boys and men (Hunt et al., 2014; Pringle et al., 2014; CTCT, 2019). Sports personnel routinely work with young males on health improvement and social concerns in schools and non-formal education settings, and there is evidence of sports coaches working with boys as mentors in a small number of UK schools (Eaude, 2008; Gulati & King, 2009; Beattie et al., 2014). However, these personnel generally lack the knowledge and skills required to work effectively in supportive education, health, and social contexts (Parnell et al., 2013), and there is very little evidence of dedicated training for sports coaches and personnel in addressing male-specific concerns.

### ***Innovation***

Given the broader international context of the SSaMs project and the varied skill-set of the participants, an innovative approach was adopted to develop SSaMs, drawing on best practice to achieve the project's intention of developing a module suitable for use in different national settings, within the collective experience of boys' ESL. The SSaMs consortium consisted of academics and practitioners with wide experience of work with boys and young men in health and education contexts—and participants with no experience of gendered work, but who contributed knowledge of sport and community work skills to SSaMs. A participating HEI reported that the project was innovative in terms of –

- a) applying a gender lens to tackling a universal problem across member states (lower educational attainment and early-school leaving among boys);
- b) drawing on principles of best practice to engage boys around positive models of mental health;
- c) looking beyond boys and young men as the problem by drawing on established practices of mentoring to engage boys and young men;

- d) exploiting different examples and analogies from sport to enhance mentoring strategies used in the programme; and drawing on different socio-cultural contexts from partner countries to find more holistic solutions to address common problems. (SSaMs Final Report IR, 2020).

## **THE SSAMS DEVELOPMENT APPROACH**

### ***Needs Analysis***

As a principal project activity, a needs analysis was undertaken via a survey to investigate what was happening in the partner countries concerning activities being undertaken by HEIs sports science departments to –

- a) Improve educational and health outcomes for young males in the participating six countries;
- b) Explore student opinions of mentoring work with young males;
- c) Inform the development of the national contexts of the SSaMs Learning Materials.

The needs analysis consisted of a HEI survey (HES) and a Student Stakeholder Questionnaire (SSQ). All five participating HEIs took part in the HES and SSQ; in Italy this was facilitated with an Italian university via the Italian partner NGO. The HES and SSQ content and questions were jointly agreed and administered in partner countries by the SSaMs consortium, with the UK HEI responsible for data collation and producing a report for the consortium to inform SSaMs development.

### ***Responses to the HES***

Fifty-one representatives of universities out of a total of 101 HEIs contacted in the six participating member states responded; this included three responses from universities in non-participating EU states (Cyprus, Finland and Sweden). 10% of responding HEIs demonstrated interest in activities to reduce ESL. 11 HEIs indicated work by Faculty of Sport and Exercise teaching and research staff to reduce ESL; 4 IR, 4 IT, 1 EL and two HEIs from non-participating EU nations (Cyprus, Finland).

Seven responding HEIs indicated that they undertook research into reducing ESL; eight also reported teaching provision. Seven HEIs indicated involvement in practical mentoring work

with young people in the local community to support their academic achievement; 3 IR, 3 IT, with one in a non-participating country (Finland). Responses evidenced that no male gender-responsive mentoring programmes existed in any responding HEI, and mentoring that is undertaken is gender-blind and targeted at both males and females.

HEI representatives were asked if they perceived mentoring work with schools and youth groups to reduce ESL as a potential area of work for sports science students. 13% of responding HEIs indicated a positive interest in this area of work (4 IR; 1 CZ; 3 EL, 3 IT; 2 other - Sweden and Finland), and 15% of responders indicated that they would like further information about the work. Respondents were also asked if a module providing knowledge and skills of mentoring work with young people would be compatible within the sports science programme modules of their respective HEI, for which 20% HEIs gave positive responses.

After ascertaining interest in generic mentoring work with young people, HEIs were then asked if a module providing knowledge and skills of mentoring work specifically with young males to reduce ESL was compatible within the sports science programme of their HEI. Interest in this area from responding HEIs was reduced, but still elicited 11% positive responses indicating interest (4 IR, 3 CZ, 1 EL, 1 IT, 2 other – Finland and Sweden). A further 10% of responding HEIs were interested in receiving further information.

Overall, responses from Ireland and the non-English language countries about the module's potential was more enthusiastic than from the UK, as typified by qualitative feedback: "I'm not really in a position to complete the survey as it stands. I can make some estimates for you, and tell you that this kind of work is quite distant from the focus of the academic department at [UK university name withheld]". A reason for this might be that the UK has many community sport projects working on or around male health and social concerns, including those based with professional sports clubs, but that academic grounding in this is not perceived to be a necessary requirement for this area of work. We contend that higher education is not yet realising the opportunity for provision of sports-based courses addressing an identified need for training in this area. Conversely, neither are professional sports organisations necessarily realising the potential benefits of educating practitioners in male gender-responsive work, despite opportunities for potential commissioning of work by education, public health and local authorities.

Cognisant of these issues, the SSaMs consortium sought to develop a module applicable within diverse HEI contexts that provides a demonstrable rationale for work with boys and men, whilst acknowledging a scarcity of governmental involvement in male gender-responsive work in a wider European environment; further, the resource recognises the pioneering work already underway in the Republic of Ireland in the form of the Irish *National Men's Health Action, Plan HI-M 2017 – 2021* (HSE, 2016) as an exemplar of gender responsive policy. From a policy perspective, the SSaMs consortium's precursory scoping of government programmes found that boys' and men's concerns are often overlooked in the majority of the members' countries: the notion that *this is how men are* is common. Work with boys and men, whilst not part of the everyday discourse, is at least familiar in English speaking countries but less so elsewhere. Indeed, an interesting challenge arose as the project progressed with respect to sensitivities within HEIs concerning the overt focus on boys and young men in respect of gender equality, despite wide discrepancy in rates of male to female school ESL.

### ***Responses to the SSQ***

**SSQ. Part 3. Q2: Support I would need as a sports student for mentoring work with boys and young men?**

"A mentor for myself. A person who has been a mentor to young men and boys previously to facilitate my (cpd) learning process in this field. A link with other mentors who are at same level of experience in relation to working with the demographic". *Male student, IT Carlow, Ireland*

**Table 2.** Example of an SSQ response

For the SSQ, which sought to investigate students' perceptions concerning the need for, and nature of components of a sports-based male mentoring course, a total of 168 responses were received from students across the five partner university institutions. Students indicated a preference for a practice-based rather than an overtly theoretical course and described the skills and competencies they perceived would be required to deliver a male mentoring module, including -

- a) a *mentor for the mentor* (highlighted as a prominent theme by students);
- b) an introduction to psychology (non-sports-based);
- c) counselling skills;
- d) communication skills;
- e) information about child development and welfare.



Accordingly, the SSaMs consortium focused on a practical coaching approach to mentoring: couching mentoring in familiar and engaging terms in order to incorporate these views in the completed module. It was acknowledged that accommodating all of the needs, skills, and competencies identified by students was not possible due to time constraints; however, some of these were likely to be met by other provision within HEIs.

## THE MENTOR LEARNING MATERIALS

Mentoring is a well-established, non-formal method of improving academic attainment. On addressing youth unemployment, the European Commission recommendations include enhancing support for non-formal education workers—for example, those in mentor roles (European Commission, 2014). The SSaMs learning materials are informed by the Mengage (UK) *Unit Award in Mentoring Boys and Young Men* materials (Mengage, 2020) which provide practical knowledge and skills for people interested in mentoring young males. In providing an AQA Unit Award certificate, the Mengage materials utilise the strengths-based Positive Youth Development (PYD) methodology (Lerner, 2005), which in turn underpinned the SSaMs development methodology. Strengths-based mentoring is used in sport settings to develop key athletic strengths; PYD specifically utilises a system familiar to sports personnel, with slight variations, called the 5Cs. This approach develops a young person's strengths, each C relating to a domain that can be worked on with a young person according to his or her individual developmental needs (Lerner et al., 2013). The 5Cs are:

1. **Competence**—enabling and having a positive view of a person's actions in specific areas: social, academic, cognitive, health, and vocational.
2. **Confidence**—a sense of self-worth and self-efficacy.
3. **Connection**—having positive bonds with people and institutions: peers, family, school and community.
4. **Character**—a respect for societal and cultural norms, possession of standards for correct behaviour, a sense of right and wrong and integrity.
5. **Caring**—having sympathy and empathy for others.

A principal rationale for adopting the PYD strengths-based approach for SSaMs was its compatibility with both a salutogenic (Super et al., 2018) and social-determinants-focused model of improving male health (Macdonald, 2011). The men's health policy experience of Ireland and

Australia has indicated the importance of a strengths-based approach to male health (Macdonald, 2005; Smith et al., 2018), and the SSaMs project's focus on developing basic learning skills is intended to help boys secure the 5Cs. Further, PYD and the 5Cs framework is currently administered in practice as a mostly gender-blind methodology, and research into PYD and its 5C indicators on gender is limited to a small number of studies (Conway et al, 2015; Gomez-Baya et al, 2019). The SSaMs work informs practical strengths-based work with young males and exemplifies a gendered approach using PYD.

## YOUNG MALE MENTAL HEALTH

It has been long established that poor mental health is associated with poor educational attainment and early school dropout (Cornaglia et al., 2012; Brännlund & Edlund, 2017); “for boys, mental-health problems during the early and late teens were (equally) strongly associated with lower grades” (Brännlund et al., 2017, p.6). Given that we were asking sports-based mentors to assist boys' educational performance, we asked what sports-based mentors could actually do to improve boys' mental health. It would not be ethical to ask sports students to take on roles for which they are not professionally qualified; therefore, our focus was on using PYD/the 5Cs framework as a means of exploring internal and external assets and using or developing these to increase resilience. Where mentors encountered mental health concerns beyond their remit, signposting to appropriate services is advised, and a core component of SSaMs was that all students would undertake and demonstrate competence in understanding personal boundaries and safeguarding concerns. A stance of *anything that makes you scared – note and report it* is strongly encouraged, and student mentors are expected to work to the safeguarding protocols of the school in which they are working. Further, there is a requirement, as recognised in the SSQ for a *mentor for the mentor* to ensure students are able to develop and refine their skillsets. Whilst sports students will be working in support of boys' mental health, they may encounter mentee scenarios that affect their own mental health, or which are beyond their capacity to assist. In these instances, the *mentor for the mentor* would be the SSaMs course lead who will also be working in liaison with the schools that the sports students are attending. SSaMs students are also provided with a Mentor Reflection Workbook to record both their own and mentee perspectives on how they are progressing toward attaining the 5C goals and to record any significant observations.

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## BARRIERS TO SSAMS IMPLEMENTATION

During SSaMs development a number of issues arose concerning the focus of SSaMs, including –

- a) Gender-responsive work with males is more familiar in English speaking countries than in non-English speaking nations;
- b) There is commonality of boys' educational underachievement and ESL across Europe. Other than in Ireland there are limited policy contexts in individual nations to act as a driver of this area of work;
- c) Without knowledge of why single gender-responsive action may be required, authorities tasked to implement equalities work will, in all likelihood, default to a gender-blind position. Either or both equality legislation and authorities' understanding of how this should be implemented hindered SSaMs in one country;
- d) HEI sports departments generally focus on sports performance. Whilst sport in the community, at least in UK and Irish contexts, is a known concept and well-developed area for sport and leisure organisations, provision of gender-responsive courses is an unfamiliar concept to European HEI sports departments.

Government policy can act as a driver of research and practice in this area of work. Indeed, countries such as Ireland and Australia already provide examples of interventions, but it is important to understand *why* gender-responsive work is needed in order to help locate this as an accepted feature of health-based interventions. The WHO *Health and well-being of men in the WHO European Region: better health through a gender approach* (WHO, 2018) policy document indicates an acknowledgement of need and recommendations for action, but this is not mandatory, and it remains to be seen whether individual nations take heed and respond with meaningful activity.

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The finalised SSaMs module and materials were launched in partner countries during November and December 2019. The completed module, translated into partner country languages, consists of six hour-long teaching sessions supported with a further six sessions of practical mentoring work with boys that students are expected to undertake with local schools, to be arranged by their own HEIs. Components of the module include *train the trainer* materials and accompanying PowerPoint presentations, as well as student texts relating to each module session and complementary resources. The module sections are detailed below (Table 3).

|                   |                                                                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Section 1.</b> | Why work with young men?                                                |
| <b>Section 2.</b> | What is mentoring?                                                      |
| <b>Section 3.</b> | Effective mentor-mentee relationships and safeguarding                  |
| <b>Section 4.</b> | Positive Youth Development and the 5Cs                                  |
| <b>Section 5.</b> | Practical strategies to promote life skills through the 5Cs             |
| <b>Section 6.</b> | Supporting the emotional and mental health needs of boys and young men. |

**Table 3.** SSaMs modules

The module is designed to be flexible and can be used as a stand-alone resource to be run on consecutive days or weeks, or its components can be used discretely to support work in work in other areas. Whilst the focus was very much on sports students working with boys the module would likely have strong appeal to, and have a use in, other academic areas with an interest in work with young males in health, educational and social contexts. SSaMs was implemented at the University of Thessaly in Greece in the spring 2019 semester. Other SSaMs consortium partners are currently exploring implementation of the module and the University of Gloucestershire will be implementing SSaMs as part of its *Your Future* programme.

The SSaMs consortium consisted of partners from Palacký University, Czech Republic; University of Thessaly, Greece; IT Carlow, Republic of Ireland; CESIE, Italy; Universidad de Murcia, Spain; University of Gloucestershire, UK. For individual contacts and further information please visit: <https://www.sportsmentors.eu/>

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## AUTHOR PROFILES



**Paul Hopkins** is a Visiting Fellow of the University of Gloucestershire and has an extensive background in developing practice-based work with boys and men in Health Promotion, Public Health, and charitable work. His academic interests include the use of social marketing methodology to inform the development of male-friendly services, sports-based men's health initiatives, and mentoring work to improve health and education outcomes for boys and young men. He is a director of the not-for-profit company, *Mengage*.

**Contact details:** [phopkins1@glos.ac.uk](mailto:phopkins1@glos.ac.uk)



**Dr Colin Baker** is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Gloucestershire with more than 10 years' experience in undertaking quantitative and qualitative research of health promoting interventions for physical activity, mental health and behaviour change. He has collaborated on projects exploring collaboration within the UK sporting landscape and the role of youth programmes on the wellbeing and citizenship skills of young people. His current research interests include community health programmes and alternative settings and approaches for the promotion of physical activity, health and wellbeing.

**Contact details:** [cmbaker@glos.ac.uk](mailto:cmbaker@glos.ac.uk)

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## THE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF DISPLACED REFUGEE MEN: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*Dan Le*



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### ABSTRACT

*In 2016 there were an estimated 17 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations worldwide. Refugees face a myriad of negative experiences and psychological issues including trauma, distress, and poor economic outcomes such as unemployment or inadequate housing. Psychology literature displays a fair amount of research on displaced individuals, but little on the experiences of externally displaced men to a country other than their nation of origin. This review reveals that outcomes of refugee and displaced men have to date been ignored, and increased research is warranted as they often experience negative outcomes before and after displacement. This literature review reports on outcomes of male-focused refugee studies regarding mental health, physical health, and economic factors.*

**Keywords:** Refugee, displace, men, economic, physical, and psychological health implications

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## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated in 2019 that worldwide 41.3 million people were internally displaced (i.e. forced from their homes within their nation of origin), that 10 million people were without citizenship in any country, and that 1.7 million new claims of asylum were made in 2017 (“What is a Refugee?”, 2019). The organization’s most recent Statistical Yearbook (UNHCR, 2016) further reported that in 2016 there were over 17 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations. This international population included persons who left their homes as a result of war or natural disaster or for political or religious affiliation risks – many were at risk of repatriation as a result of their citizenship status. Despite these large numbers and the many humanitarian efforts to improve their lives, refugees continue to experience a myriad of negative outcomes ranging from social challenges in the form of discrimination (da Silva Rebelo, Fernández, & Achotegui, 2018), to psychological disturbances of trauma and distress (Davidson, Murray, & Schweitzer, 2008; Kivling-Bodén & Sundbom, 2002), and poor economic outcomes such as unemployment or inadequate support (Desmond, Gershenson, & Kiviat, 2015; Wright et al., 2016).

While the worldwide number of displaced individuals is extremely high, not all displaced persons are forced into displacement or are seeking asylum. Other examples of individuals not living in their home nations include those who voluntarily cross borders to seek improved economic or employment opportunities. For example, in June 2019 Pew Research reported that as of 2017 there were 10.5 million unauthorized individuals in the United States (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2019), many of whom crossed the U.S.-Mexico border. However, unauthorized individuals in the U.S. are not limited to Mexican origin as more than half (53%) were reported to arrive from other countries around the world. Other reports further indicated that immigrants into the U.S. from nations other than Mexico experienced abuse and isolation as LGBT identifiers (Alessi, Kahn, & Chatterji, 2016), lingering trauma after migration (Chu, Keller, & Rasmussen, 2013), and severe levels of depression (Cummings, Sull, Davis, & Worley, 2011).

Research indicates that many of these individuals experience a long list of hardships and negative outcomes including struggles with social services (Mallet, Calvo, & Waters, 2017), clinically significant distress from discrimination (Garcini et al., 2018), and biased incarceration (Valdez & Golash-Boza, 2017). While much political attention and humanitarian aid has been

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given to refugees in recent years, several authors have argued that too little research has been conducted which reported on the outcomes of refugees and ways in which they might be helped (Lo, Patel, Shultz, Ezard, & Roberts, 2017; Reed, Fazel, Jones, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012). Because societies in destination countries may display hostile and mistrusting attitudes toward these individuals, refugees often experience negative effects on their well-being such as helplessness and frustration (da Silva Rebelo et al., 2018).

Clearly refugees and people in refugee-like situations face experiences that lead to personal, economic and social hardships on the individual and societal level. These topics have been addressed from humanitarian and policy-related perspectives, although the psychological impacts of displacement have been understudied. The matter becomes more acute when considering the lack of studies done to assess or to understand the experiences of specific subgroups of refugees and those in refugee-like situations. Specifically, very little attention has been given to the outcomes of men, relative to women and children, who have been displaced (Indra, 1999).

In part because of men's roles in military organizations or other political or social leadership positions, it should be expected that male refugees and asylum seekers experience displacement-related outcomes that are vastly different than those of displaced women and children (Griffiths, 2001). These men's loss of control over their relationships and finances, their loss of social support, and negotiating a new post-displacement identity places them in a precarious situation if proper interventions are not available. For example, Furman and colleagues (2013) contended that the lives of undocumented immigrant men in the United States are often filled with stress and chaos.

The need for a focus on the outcomes of displaced men is twofold. First, their pre- and post-displacement experiences are vastly different than those of women and children (Al-Roubaiy, Owen-Pugh, & Wheeler, 2013; Griffiths, 2001; Horn & Parekh, 2018). Second, to date too little research has been reported on their outcomes (Indra, 1999). This review delineates what has been published in peer-reviewed psychology literature on the impact of displacement and refugee-like status on men and suggests what remedies might be available. Herein I present a thorough search and review of the psychological literature published since 2000 which reported on the mental health, physical health, or economic outcomes of displaced men.

## **METHOD**

In the psychology literature and in social discourse, ideals associated with *migration* have been understood to indicate an economic component of displacement, while *refugee* and *asylum-seeking* often imply displacement for political or war-related reasons (Khan, 2013). In the literature search described below, the term *refugee* was overwhelmingly used to describe individuals who relocated from their home nation to a new geographic location, whether internally or externally. Similarly, the term *displaced* was very often used to describe the act of relocating, including those seeking exile. As such, participants within this text are referred to as refugees who have been displaced for one reason or another. For specific terms used in each publication reviewed, readers are referred to its respective full-text document.

### ***Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria***

Because the purpose of the review was to identify and report on the outcomes of men who have left their home nation for a variety of reasons, inclusion criteria for potential review stipulated that study authors report on at least one outcome of interest within mental health, physical health, or economic resources and also report on externally displaced individuals (i.e. those displaced to a country or nation that was not their homeland). Studies which reported on the outcomes of internally displaced citizens (i.e. those who left their home or region but remained within the borders of their home nation) were excluded because such populations were expected to have much different experiences than externally displaced individuals including access to resources and support, remaining within their culture, and ability to return to their home after time.

Prior to beginning the literature search, it was determined that the psychology literature served as the most appropriate search source because publications within the field were expected most likely to report on individual or sample outcomes. Further, it was determined that the psychology literature was also most appropriate for identifying studies in which improvement of interventions and individual outcomes might be identified. To this end, the psychology-focused PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and Academic Search Complete databases within the academic search engine EBSCOhost were used to select identify potential articles for full review.

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## **Database search**

The first step of the search process included adding the Boolean terms *refugee* or *asylum* or *undocument\** or *illegal* into the search engine's search box. These terms were selected to represent the type of individuals about whom I wished to learn more. The second step included concurrently adding the Boolean terms *deport\** or *repatriate\** or *displace\** or *exile\** into a separate search box. These terms were selected to represent the action by which such individuals' experience might be described. By arranging the search terms in this manner and running the search for both Boolean search strings concurrently, returned results were expected to include articles which included at least one term from the first step in addition to at least one term from the second step. The use of an asterisk in the Boolean terms allowed for the databases also to return variations of the search terms such as *undocumented*, *deporting*, *displacement*, etc.

The database search parameters were set to search for at least one of the search terms from step one, and also at least one of the terms from step two. Search terms could be included anywhere within a publication including its title, abstract, full text or key words. Additional search parameters stipulated that articles were published in the year 2000 or later, that the full-text of the publication was available in the databases (to allow for full-text review), that articles described a research study in which participants provided some form of data (e.g. excluding editorials, special edition overviews, conference proceedings, etc.), and that the articles were written in English.

The initial search parameters described above returned a total of 412 articles for potential review, of which 37 were removed as duplicates by the EBSCOhost search engine. Citations for the remaining 375 publications were then downloaded in RIS files and imported into EndNote citation management software for archiving and writing purposes. Upon importing the references into the EndNote program, an additional six sources were removed by the program as duplicates, leaving a final sample of 369 articles.

## **Inter-Rater Agreement and Preliminary Coding**

To achieve inter-rater agreement for article inclusion, an electronic random number generator was used to select 50 of the 369 articles to be reviewed by three independent reviewers (i.e. the author and two additional research professionals). At this stage, each reviewer independently read the title of the 50 articles and coded whether they believed it should be

included for further review (i.e. abstract review) based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria described. If an article were determined to qualify for inclusion at the title review stage, the reviewer coded it as such and continued to read the article's abstract, coding it again for inclusion or exclusion, based on the criteria described. Additional preliminary coding of articles at this preliminary stage included coding each source for information such as type of publication (e.g. research study, review), type of study (e.g. quantitative, qualitative), outcomes of interest (i.e. mental health, physical health economic), homeland, and nation of relocation.

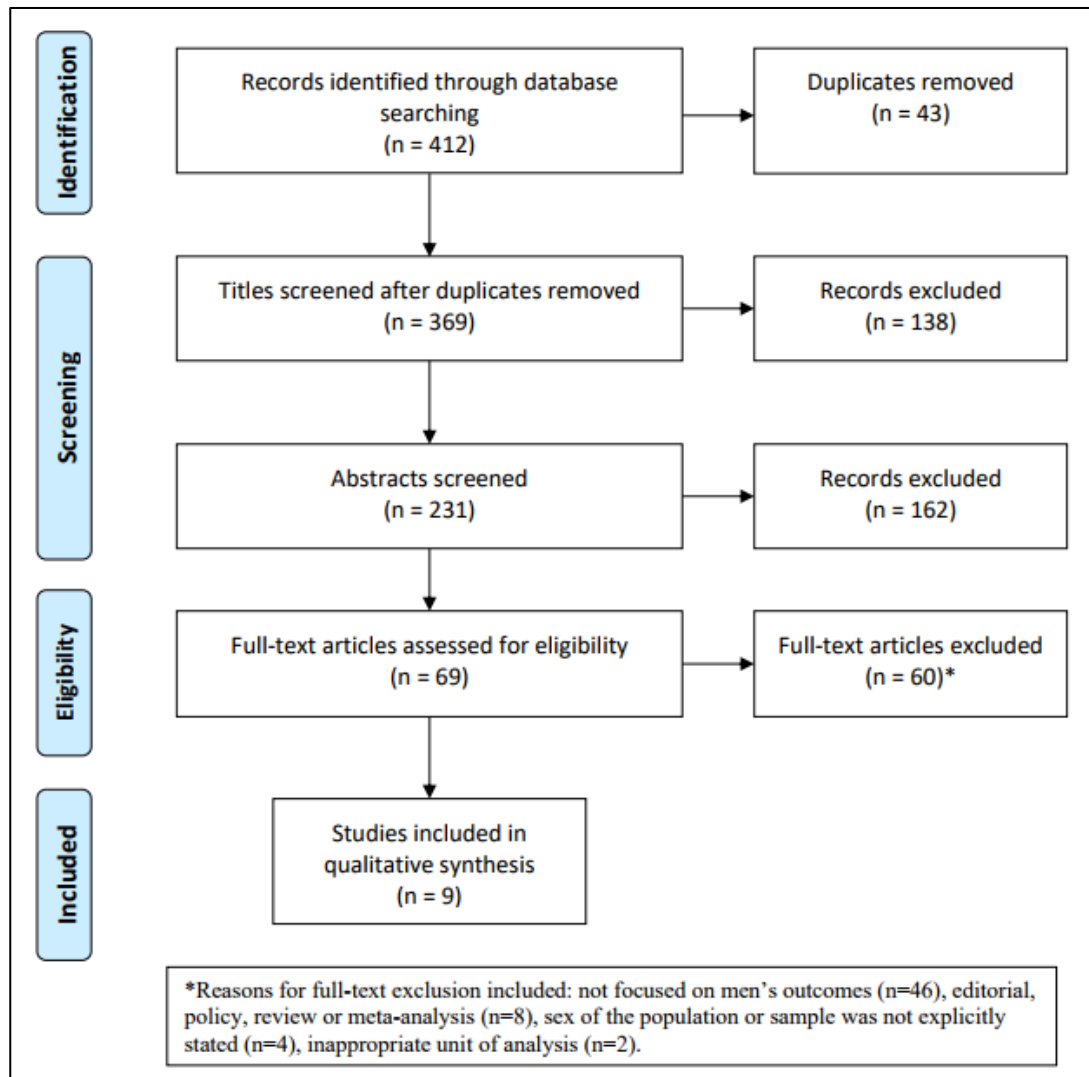
After all three reviewers coded the 50 randomly selected articles, they deliberated to discuss their individual results and any caveats for discrepancies when there was rater disagreement. This preliminary review resulted in 48% total agreement in which all three reviewers agreed that 24 of the 50 randomly selected articles should be included or excluded for abstract review. At the abstract review stage, a 46% total agreement was found in which all three reviewers agreed that 23 of the 50 articles should be included or excluded. This collective discussion of agreement, disagreement, and reasons for each decision allowed for clarification and refining of the coding among reviewers. After this discussion among the three reviewers, the author continued independently to review and fully code all 369 sources for potential final inclusion.

## RESULTS

As shown in Figure 1 below, 138 articles were removed at the title review stage and an additional 162 were removed at the abstract review stage. The remaining 69 articles then underwent a final full-text review. Of these, a substantial number were removed because they did not focus on the outcomes of men. The reasons for remaining exclusions at this stage included inappropriate report type or non-study article, unclear sex of sample studied, and inappropriate unit of analysis. The final list of articles at this stage, and the focus of the present review, included nine articles.

Because the intention here was to report on outcomes of externally displaced male refugees, the lead coder also coded for outcomes within the three overarching areas of interest: mental health, physical health, and economic factors. Definitions used for each of the outcome categories are provided within their respective overview sections below.

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of final articles selected for qualitative synthesis



A total of nine articles were identified which met the search criteria. Publication years of the final sample ranged from 2003-2018. Homelands of displaced individuals studied reflected a rounded global presence including from the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. With the exception of Suerbaum's (2018) report, nations of destination were all high income countries including the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany. While not all authors reported reasons for which men in their studies were displaced, some reasons provided include seeking political asylum, forced displacement by their country of origin, fleeing war or violence, and seeking economic opportunity. Table 1 below depicts sample characteristics and topics for each study reviewed.

**Table 1.** Summary of participants and study topics of articles reviewed

| Authors                  | Participant Homeland        | Participant Destination | Reason for Displacement | Study Topic                                                                                               |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Al-Roubaiy et al. (2013) | Iraq                        | Sweden                  | Exile*                  | Experiences of post-exile stress with implications for service help.                                      |
| Furman et al. (2013)     | Latin*                      | United States           | Various                 | General risk factors associated with undocumented immigration to the United States.                       |
| Hermansson et al. (2003) | El Salvador<br>Iran (Kurds) | Sweden                  | War; Forced Migration   | Effect of potential future repatriation, reconstruction of identity.                                      |
| Kahn (2013)              | Afghanistan                 | United Kingdom          | Not Specified           | Experience of khapgan (feeling down) and experiences of unfulfilled promises.                             |
| Kluttig et al. (2009)    | North Africa                | Germany                 | Political Asylum        | Cooperation in inpatient treatment and trauma therapy by way of narratives.                               |
| McKinnon (2008)          | Sudan                       | United States           | Civil War               | Social- and self-identity after resettlement.                                                             |
| Muir & Gannon (2016)     | Afghanistan<br>Iraq         | United Kingdom          | Refugee*                | Relationships of young adult refugees arriving as unaccompanied minors with their location of settlement. |
| Robertson et al. (2012)  | Mexico                      | United States           | Not Specified           | Initiation of injection drug use by undocumented men after first migration.                               |
| Seurbaum (2018)          | Syria                       | Egypt                   | Forced Displacement     | Identity, ideals, and perceptions of masculinity.                                                         |

**Notes:** Furman et al. described outcomes of displaced men but did not report on a research study. Its inclusion was determined because of its depth of information and specificity to the present review. \*Specific Latin nation(s) not provided. \*Specific reason for displacement not provided.

While the types of studies and ways in which data were collected were divergent within qualitative research methods, the use of quantitative methods were nearly nonexistent with the exception of Hermansson (2003) who employed a mixed method study. Table 2 below outlines outcome type, study type, sample size, and general findings for each article reviewed.

**Table 2.** Summary of studies and findings included in qualitative synthesis

| Authors           | Outcome Type | Data Collection and Outcome Type                                                               | Findings                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Al-Roubaiy et al. | M, E         | Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis Interviews (n=10)                                       | Feelings of disempowerment, discrimination, and marginalization from host society. Perceived valuable social support from fellow displaced individuals.              |
| Furman et al.     | M, P, E      | Issue Summary                                                                                  | Attention to men's needs in social work and social science research is lacking.                                                                                      |
| Hermansson et al. | M, P         | Mixed Method – Quantitative data collection and interviews (n=10 Salvadoran, 12 Iranian Kurds) | Many experienced reconstruction of identity regarding past guerilla involvement and transitioning to new host country. Potential repatriation impacted future plans. |
| Kahn              | M, E         | Case Study (n=1)                                                                               | Past events permeate into future plans, and may be muddled to individuals. Displaced men are responsible for financial contribution to their distant families.       |



| Authors          | Outcome Type | Data Collection and Outcome Type                                           | Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kluttig et al.   | M            | Case Study (n=1)                                                           | Immobility is a source of distress.<br>Trauma therapy and narrative vocalizing helped to improve PTSD symptoms.<br>Challenges lead to feelings of helplessness.                                                                                            |
| McKinnon         | M, E         | Interviews (n=11)<br>Focus Groups*<br>Observations+                        | Displaced men may not identify with labels ascribed to them.<br>Racism and discrimination were salient for participants.<br>Displaced men express fear of law enforcement and desire more support from elders.                                             |
| Muir & Gannon    | E            | Interviews (n=6)                                                           | In treatment, it is relevant to move beyond trauma to explore experiences.<br>Communities and community centers can be a source of support.<br>Displaced men felt comfortable at local community centers but judged and controlled by formal institutions. |
| Robertson et al. | P            | Interviews (n=23)<br>Surveys (n=309)                                       | Initiation of drug injection in the U.S. predicted by consuming drugs prior to migrating, younger age, and being incarcerated in the U.S.                                                                                                                  |
| Suerbaum~        | M            | Ethnographic Interviews (n=61)<br>Observations+<br>Informal Conversations+ | Men's displacement led to loss of symbolic capital status and definitions of the self as it relates to traditional masculine roles and statuses.                                                                                                           |

**Notes:** \*Number of focus groups not specified, each included approximately 5-7 participants. \*Specific n not provided.  
~Includes interviews of women, included for review because of its focus on men's outcomes. M=Mental Health, P=Physical Health, E=Economic.

### ***Mental Health Outcomes***

For the purpose of this review, mental health outcomes were defined as those which could potentially be diagnosed according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), or were perhaps more latent observations such as general negative affect and self-identity. The most salient mental health outcomes identified in the present review were trauma or extreme distress followed by personal-identity negotiation.

### ***Trauma***

Among the men they interviewed, Al-Roubaiy et al. (2013) reported on participants' perceptions of immense distress, which resulted from experiences with racism and oppressive attitudes in their host society. Further, most participants expressed distress levels which rivaled those experienced during pre-displacement war and political oppression. Regarding mental health outcomes, Hermansson et al. (2003) reported on participants' experiences with war and

its effect on trauma and its relationships with identity reconstruction. The authors also reported that for their sample the traumatic impact of war was not immediately clear although some experiences were perceived or described by participants as evidence of heroic acts. The perception that violent behaviors in war are heroic may be participants' attempts at framing the situation in a positive light, thereby reducing negative mental health outcomes.

Some authors criticized the PTSD diagnosis and treatment among displaced men. For example, Khan's (2013) account of trauma was provided by way of a case study which explored the everyday suffering of a single Afghan man displaced to the United Kingdom. The author expressed criticism of traditional assessment of PTSD which might pathologize common distress while studies of Afghan men's PTSD often minimize non-war related trauma or otherwise inappropriately assessed individual experiences. For example, symptoms associated with trauma often are inherently intertwined with global capitalism or homeland political and economic structures, which cause individual feelings of negative affect.

Kluttig et al. (2009) also offered alternative approaches to PTSD treatment among male refugees in their case study of a single 44-year-old refugee. Detailing their participant's success and failures with initial treatment for drug use and other issues, and their subsequent approach to treating his trauma, the authors concluded that treatment of trauma may be most effective when done separately from psychotherapeutic treatment. Conducting an interview study of young Iraqi and Afghan men displaced to the United Kingdom, Muir and Gannon (2016) reported on trauma relative to historical approaches, and also suggested alternative ways in which refugees and asylum seekers might be viewed. The authors contended that typical reports of trauma (e.g. PTSD) too often focus on individual-level experiences while neglecting the roles of larger-life events and post-displacement experiences. The authors concluded that their findings supported the relevance of including the relationships between social and environmental forces in addition to those of the body and mind. Al-Roubaiy (2013) further contended that a strength-based approach which focuses on empowerment and advocacy may be most relevant when assisting male refugees to overcome post-displacement stressors. In this way, the authors make the same contention that others have with identity, as presented below, in that strength-based approaches to intervention may be more prudent for these men's outcomes.

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## **Identity**

Relative to issues of identity, several authors reiterated the role of masculinity when discussing displaced men's identity, and Suerbaum (2018) identified that focusing on the masculinity of displaced men has only recently been acknowledged. From her qualitative study, the author noted that masculinity of displaced men should be understood as a transformative process, and that these men's responses to such change are often done reactively to unexpected or unpredictable change. Similarly, reports of emasculation were observed by Al-Roubaiy et al. (2013), highlighting that participants were required to renegotiate at least part of their personal identity as they strived to retain their Iraqi sense of male-self. Furman et al. (2013) further provided masculine identity discourse by way of the hegemonic masculine ideal within the culture of Latin men. As the authors explain, men in Latin cultures are expected (and strive) to perform specific gender-based roles such as financial provision of family leadership. However, when these men are not able to fulfill these roles as part of their post-displacement masculine identities, they may experience a sense of failure and exacerbated isolation. These examples of displaced men's struggles with identity through changing masculine ideals portray ways in which they suffer as a result of the displacement process.

However, not all issues of displaced men's identity revolved around masculinity, and not all were framed from a negative perspective. For example, the importance of identity was observed as an overarching theme by McKinnon (2008), who noted that shared memories and identities among participants perhaps aided in a sense of belonging. For participants in the study, this act of identity refinement included negotiating, along with other issues, what it meant for the men to be a "Lost Boy". Additionally, the author recommended that perceptions of these men's identities should include a more complex intersection of race and experiences. This broader understanding of identity is similar to that proposed by Hermansson and colleagues (2003), who concluded that refugee men's reconstruction of identity should be considered within a context greater than immediate and obvious individual characteristics. For participants in their study, the reconstruction of identity included coming to terms with past war experiences and cultural issues within their host society.

Collectively, a theme among authors who reported on concepts of identity is that displaced men may experience better outcomes when their native identity is acknowledged, and

when there are similar others around them with whom they can associate. Additionally, multiple authors reported on the importance of addressing and reporting on identity from multiple facets including past experience, varying cultures, and role expectations. In such a way, we may begin to view these men as strong survivors and providers, rather than as victims. That is, these positive approaches to issues of identity of displaced men may ultimately have a positive effect on their own self-identity.

### ***Physical Health Outcomes***

When reviewing and coding the literature, the reviewers defined physical health outcomes as those which inferred a negative impact or outcome on the physical body. Examples of physical health outcomes sought included diseases (e.g. heart disease, HIV), physical harm (e.g. war, crime), or abuse (including sex abuse).

Two studies reported on Latin men's physical health outcomes as a product of the displacement process. First, Furman and colleagues (2013) provided an account of physical risks experienced by undocumented Latino men during and after their displacement to the United States. In line with Latin men's desires to fulfill their masculine roles previously described, the authors contended that of all risks faced by displaced Latin men, the greatest risks are to their physical health. For example, many Latin men endanger their own lives by engaging in human smuggling, or experience dangerous workplace conditions to provide for and to lead their families as a part of their displacement process. Second, Robertson et al. (2012) also reported on the physical health of Latin men displaced into the United States. Despite the propensity of men in general, and for some groups of Latin men in particular, to abuse substances (Negi, 2011), theirs was the only study which addressed displaced men's substance use or abuse. Results from the mixed-methods study showed that being younger, being incarcerated in the United States, and having ever used drugs in Mexico prior to displacement were all positively associated with initiation of drug injection after migrating to the in the United States. Other positive associations with initiation of injection drugs included pre-migration unemployment, not relocating for economic opportunities, and not knowing someone in the U.S. at the time of first migration.

Accounts of physical outcomes were not limited to Latin men, or to physical outcomes experienced during the displacement process. Specifically, participants in the Hermansson et al.

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(2003) study all experienced war injuries which were sustained prior to displacement. The authors reported that for all men in their study, war-related injuries resulted in termination of their guerilla military lives, forcing them to leave their homelands – an act which caused them to reassess their identity. Additionally, many of the men reported being exposed to substantial organized violence prior to relocation or had been imprisoned and abused, for which they recommend that more interdisciplinary research be conducted.

Furman et al. (2013) concluded that their exploration of displaced Latin men's experiences highlights a lack of attention to this population. As the authors argued, the needs of neither these men's wives/partners nor their children can be fully met until these risks and outcomes are attended to appropriately. Findings from the present review, in which only three studies reported on physical health outcomes of displaced men, confirm that much more research can be done to understand these men's experiences and to identify efficacious interventions.

### ***Economic Outcomes***

During the coding process, economic outcomes were defined as sources of support which included those of financial nature, employment or housing opportunities, and family or other social support. A variety of reports regarding economic outcomes in the form of receiving support from family, friends, and other social sources were identified. Furman and colleagues' (2013) report described economic necessity as a reason for many undocumented men leaving their homeland. As the authors described, pre-displacement economic crises faced by Latin men often leads to additional post-migration economic problems including poverty and inability to secure safe and satisfying work. Often, these individuals have positive impacts on the economic and labor markets of their country of destination while at the same time experiencing a loss of masculinity when they cannot be economic supporters and breadwinners for their families.

Similar to the Latin men described by Furman and colleagues, Khan's (2013) case study described that post-displacement economic opportunities were negatively affected by unfulfilled promises by host societies, leading to social and economic immobility. As it relates to trauma, the author further argued that PTSD symptoms are often prioritized as a result of war, when in fact negative economic ideologies may play a role in the trauma experience. As a result, attention to economic aspects which lead to trauma and depression is an area of promise for

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professionals who service this group.

Non-financial economic outcomes were also identified in the literature. For example, Al-Roubaiy et al. (2013) reported that after displacement refugee men overwhelmingly recounted valuing social support from other Iraqis in exile, and that such support assisted with adapting to post-displacement life and maintaining a culture and heritage of their homeland. Similarly, Muir & Gannon (2016) described the positive influence of a community center in providing support in the form of advice and advocacy on issues such as immigration for Iraqi and Afghan men. For participants, the center provided economic outcomes in the form of social support from center staff, which was a foundation to their process of acculturation. The authors concluded that support systems such as community centers may be more accessible and more appropriate than clinical interventions. Yet contrary to these positive reports of social support, McKinnon (2008) reported that participants described a lack of support from local elders when attempting to negotiate adjustment and wellbeing, which caused their transition to be more difficult. These elders, who were estimated by one participant to outnumber refugees at the settlement, were perceived to be a source of wisdom and power yet did not share in decision-making among their community.

## **DISCUSSION**

To my knowledge, this review is the first to outline the psychology research which reported on the experiences and outcomes of displaced male refugees. Overall, it is not surprising to learn that little research has been conducted in this area, as the outcomes and experiences of men in many areas have not adequately been addressed in the literature whether in the United States or abroad (Banik et al., 2019; Bottom, 2013; Britton, 2019). Given that men have many different experiences than women, and that their outcomes are often different even when experiencing similar situations, the need for more male-focused studies and subsequent remedies is urgent. However, it is perhaps encouraging that results from the present review show that several authors reported on multiple outcomes of interest within their reports. For example, Hermansson et al. wrote about the intersection of pre-displacement trauma, new identity formation, and physical injury sustained prior to displacement. Such examples give evidence that perhaps the most salient experiences of externally displaced male refugees (e.g. trauma, identity reformation, social support) are intertwined regardless of from where these men

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originate and to where they are displaced.

Upon conclusion of this review, I have identified what I believe to be five prominent themes which require attention from researchers, social scientists, service providers, and other stakeholders.

### ***Theme 1: Too little is known about male refugees***

Within the general topic of refugees and people in refugee-like situations, the psychology literature appears to be fairly attentive to these populations, with appropriate attention given to global humanitarian issues and broad assessment of individuals from many nations. However, this review indicates that despite several calls for more research on understanding of refugee men's experiences and outcomes, there is a paucity of published material in the psychology literature (Furman et al., 2013; Indra, 1999). For example, of 103 articles for which gender was coded during this study's review process, 72 focused on both men and women, 13 focused specifically on women, and nine (8.7%, as reviewed herein) focused only on men—an average of less than one-half publication per year since 2000. Accordingly, of those 103 publications for which participant gender was identified, there were 1.4 times more publications dedicated to women compared to men.

Collectively, the publications reviewed here indicate that male refugees, regardless of their homeland, the country to which they were displaced, or the reasons for which they migrated, experience many issues for which more and better understanding is needed. These include appropriate intervention for trauma with attention to alternative treatment methods; support from family and other prominent social contacts; and understanding the individuals and their identity perceptions before and after their transitions. Further, the male refugee population deserves specific attention to issues related to their identity and roles as leaders and providers in their new lands as well as for the families that they leave behind (Khan, 2013), constructs which cannot be explored in studies which also include exploration of women and children (Al-Roubaiy et al., 2013). These experiences include injury due to war and violence, loss of masculinity and identity, and reduced effectiveness as provider (Hermansson et al., 2003).

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## ***Theme 2: Refugee men's outcomes are a worldwide concern***

As mentioned, the articles reviewed herein represented a rounded report of countries of origin and destination. Regardless of the home nations from which participants were displaced and the new nation to which they immigrated, common outcomes were identified, as indicted by the several studies which recounted commonalities such as trauma, identity, and social support among displaced men. This commonality of experiences across cultures and experiences may provide some optimism that proven treatments could be efficacious across male-refugee sub-populations. However, because of the very limited number of studies identified herein and the low numbers of participants within them, I expect that much caution should be utilized when considering cultural, ethnic, and other individual factors when treating male refugees. Certainly, there is much room for additional work and reporting in the area of externally displaced men and their treatment.

## ***Theme 3: Interventions other than those for trauma are limited***

Over a decade ago Rosen et al. (2008) argued that because trauma (i.e. PTSD) diagnosis criteria widely overlap with diagnostic criteria of other mental disorders and may rely on generalized assumptions of several life situations, it is essential to broaden assessments to include other issues such as depression and anxiety. Within the present population of interest, Turrini et al. (2017) performed a review of published review papers and identified only 13 review articles which reported on the prevalence of common mental disorders among refugees and asylum seekers. The authors contended that much attention has been given to assessing, identifying or treating trauma while too little attention was given to other mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and others. The present review endorses this lack of research attention in the refugee space, and further confirms that we know even less about displaced men's mental health outcomes. It should be noted that during the process of identifying articles for inclusion in the present review, multiple intervention-specific publications were identified (Opaas, Hartmann, Wentzel-Larsen, & Varvin, 2016; Ruf et al., 2010), yet these sources were excluded from review for reasons such as lack of data collection or non-qualifying samples of interest. If social work and other helping professionals are to offer positive interventions for the subgroup of externally displaced men, much more research and subsequent intervention methods are needed to better understand their experiences and needs.



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***Theme 4: Male refugees' loss of self lacks exploration***

Although many refugee men are important contributors to labor forces and other social outcomes in their new countries, they have received unwarranted scrutiny as a result of local and national legislation based on their social positions, producing negative social attention to the groups as a whole (da Silva Rebelo et al., 2018; Furman et al., 2013). It is my intention to highlight the struggles of identity which externally displaced men experience in order to amplify conversations about the importance of these men's identities, including how their identities are formed and preserved. Perhaps more important here is that we call attention to social service, to helping professionals (such as counsellors or psychologists), and to helping agencies in understanding the knowledge gap in the literature and previous researchers' suggestions to improve interventions. Ultimately, if these professionals and organizations are able to improve the lives of refugee men, they may in turn improve the lives of their families and those who depend upon them.

***Theme 5: Studies on male refugees lack empirical quantitative evidence***

Another overarching concern identified was the lack of longitudinal and quantitative studies which reported on the outcomes of externally displaced men. As Hermansson (2003) argued, small sample sizes in quantitative research studies limit our ability effectively to draw conclusions which can be extended to larger populations. Yet despite this awareness, quantitative data and mixed-method studies are all but non-existent today, over a decade and a half later. Indeed, nearly all studies described herein included sample sizes of fewer than 25 participants. The helpful but narrow scope of case studies and interviews is not able to produce robust results which might identify or explain group differences between or among refugee populations. In consideration of generalizing results of quantitative and longitudinal studies across samples and populations of refugee men, I find comfort in knowing that, because they share many experiences, such generalization may not be as difficult to imagine as previously thought.

**LIMITS AND CONCLUSION**

Three methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, the utilization of only three databases, each with a focus on the psychology literature, likely reduced the potential number of articles returned for review. While researchers and other professionals in other fields

such as law and political science have surely addressed the experiences of refugee men, my intention was to address research gaps and to synthesize coverage of the population for better understanding of their outcomes. Second, it is possible that the search terms and parameters limited the number of relevant studies which have been published. For example, while my inclusion criteria of having access to full articles within the databases may have restricted review of some studies, it was my intention to report on publications which were most easily available and accessible by others. Finally, limiting the coding of returned publications to those which only included a focus on men's outcomes may have excluded several reports of men's outcomes relative to women and children. I encourage further systematic reviews of the literature to also include studies which assessed all ages, sexes, and other demographic factors to continue building the body of literature for the increasing global refugee population.

To conclude, I believe there is as much reassurance from my findings as perhaps there is discouragement in the lack of published reports. There appears to be some consolidation to the experiences and needs of displaced male refugees. In as much as the focus of the present review was to highlight what is known (and not known) about these men's experiences and outcomes, I also acknowledge that strength-based interventions have been utilized and assessed among other subgroups of refugees including Southeast Asian refugees (Grigg-Saito, Och, Liang, Toof, & Silka, 2008) and the resilience of international adolescents (Stark et al., 2019). Effective future interventions may do well to incorporate findings from studies of other refugee subgroups in their pursuit to improve displaced men's outcomes.

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## Author profile



**Dan Le** holds a Master's degree in Education and a secondary-level teaching credential in social sciences from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is currently assistant professor of English at Aichi Shukutoku University and a PhD student in sociology at Kanazawa University, Japan where he examines the role ICTs have on re-acculturation patterns among second generation return migrants upon return to their ancestral homeland.

**Contact details:** [danle@ucla.edu](mailto:danle@ucla.edu)

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## BEING MALE

*Kyle C. Glover*



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### ABSTRACT

*The author describes his experience of male embodiment; the adverse impact of gynocentric, often misandric, education practices on his schooling; and his subsequent quest for personal and professional fulfilment. A college professor's male-affirmative mentoring enabled the author to develop a sense of himself not possible in typical feminist-theory informed college courses. This professor's psychology courses "opened up" the author's "thinking about the role of sex in human life." The College's men's group encouraged male camaraderie. The author is currently undertaking graduate studies in psychology; he sees misandry in the mental-health field and a need for a better understanding of males in the women-dominated helping professions.*

**Keywords:** boys, embodied, males, male studies, men

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My education in male studies began from birth, where by fate or fortune I was born a male baby. Whatever the fashionable gender politics of our time may decree, my existence is ineluctably bound to this male body, or, in a word: it is *embodied*. I shall never know what it is to have bodied forth as a female, nor shall any female know my embodied experience. She may have her experience of me, experiencing her, experiencing him *ad infinitum*, but the body each of us is inseparable from the body each of us have. All else is game playing, both fun and serious.

What an introduction to life this body of mine had! Stuck in the birth canal for hours (sorry, Mom) until I was cut and medically plunger-ed out with my head resembling one of the Coneheads of *Saturday Night Live*. Upon seeing me for the first time my maternal grandfather exclaimed “What’s wrong with his head?” One theme of my life was already developing – being messed up in the head. I was then promptly circumcised on my parents’ orders. I’ve never gotten a good explanation for why that was the case, though their being in the medical field they were probably following the doctor’s orders.<sup>1</sup> My parents told me that during the procedure their colleague, a Jamaican nurse, cried out “Dat baby got the biggest penis [on a baby, I assume] I ever seen!” So, a second early theme – confusion about and fixation on my manhood.

My later education and reading about issues facing males today has informed how I see some of what happened to me during my childhood and adolescence. Most notably I look at how my grade school years in the 90s and the start of the new millennium were affected by school reforms meant to privilege girls. I am one of four siblings, two boys and two girls. My sisters, who are very intelligent and hardworking people, were typically at the top of their class and generally excelled in school. My brother and I, also intelligent though a bit undisciplined, were lucky to graduate. Surely, some of that can be attributed to the age-old differences between male and female school performance, but as I was to learn, there was more going on.

Christina Hoff Sommers in *The War Against Boys* (2000) has written critically of the social science that was used to inform changes to schools and society that looked to elevate girls

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<sup>1</sup> For medical and ethical concerns about circumcision see Geisheker (2013) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/60> and for the psychological impact of circumcision see Watson and Golden (2017) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/261/317>.

above their male counterparts. It was in 1990 (when I was two years old) that Carol Gilligan declared America's girls were in crisis and that broad societal changes needed to be made to help them. Though her evidence was spotty at best, she attracted attention from the *New York Times* and other large publications. Based largely on the wave of woe-are-the-girls literature and research inaugurated by Gilligan, in 1994 the U.S. Congress passed the Gender Equity in Education Act in order to ameliorate the ostensible differences in performance between boys and girls in school.

However, like much feminist rhetoric, it sometimes appeared there was less concern with empowering girls and more with trashing boys. In fact it appeared that boys were a new enemy in the path to women's liberation. Whatever sins six-year-old me had committed to that point, I doubt one of them was oppressing girls. If I recall correctly, girls actually quite liked me at that age (I was pretty cute). As Sommers (2000) has shown using U.S. Department of Education data, there was already an achievement gap between boys and girls in the 1990s *favouring girls*. The changes made in schools to favour girls' learning and school engagement only deepened the divide. I know it is a small sample size, but as a case study my own siblings' performance in school during the '90s and early 2000s backs Sommers' findings over Gilligan and company. If you consider that we are all genetically related and probably have similar levels of intelligence, it would make sense that situational factors were contributing to the stark divergence in our performance. My sisters would say I was lazier than them (fair enough), but I'm nearing my doctorate in psychology now, so what do they know (sorry, Carly and Paige).

Despite my disadvantage (or laziness) I did make it into college due to getting my act together in the last year and a half of high school. I would attend Wagner College on Staten Island, New York, where unbeknownst to me there was a college men's group forming under the guidance of Dr. Miles Groth. I wouldn't meet Miles until my sophomore year. Starting off at college I had a few ideas of my own about the world but was open to exploring all the liberal arts had to offer me. Mostly I was interested in studying the world's religions, but they didn't have a major in that at Wagner. I was politically liberal and was caught up in most of the things associated with campus leftism. All things considered, it was nowhere near as virulent and demonstrative as it is now. Mostly it involved smoking cigarettes and talking about the plight of the proletariat.



I also had a dalliance with feminism, as I took my female classmates' statements about the plight of women seriously. I really was a sophomore both in year and knowledge of the world. I took a course on feminist philosophy which was intriguing at times though class did devolve into male-bashing occasionally, intellectualized male-bashing, but bashing all the same. I recall that after sitting through a few classes, I said to myself "Why is everyone so mad at men?" It was towards the end of that semester that in another philosophy course a rather physically imposing classmate named Andy would ask if I'd join the college men's group. I agreed to give it a try, and he told me to reach out to Miles Groth.

My relationship with Miles, which has taken many forms throughout the years, began in the basement classroom of Parker Hall with a brief conversation about joining the men's group. I agreed and this began a fruitful collaboration between us that has lasted over a decade. Though the course of our thought has led us more towards concerns about psychotherapy, his courses in gender studies at Wagner were, I think, the birth of male studies as a curriculum and opened up my thinking about the role of sex in human life.

My experience in the men's group was one of camaraderie. Three of my best friends to this day were in that group and we spent much of it in discussion about the world. We didn't even necessarily talk about men's issues and unlike most people thought it wasn't a place to bash women either. We didn't even talk about women unless someone was having romantic troubles. We'd go on retreats in Upstate New York due to the generous grant we were given and there we'd talk about what it meant to us to be men, what our relationships were like with our fathers, how we saw the world. For the most part we enjoyed one another's company and ate good food.

Outside perception of the group was a bit different. On a campus that was mainly comprised of women (about 70%) there was some distrust but mainly just lack of understanding. Occasionally, you had those who believed it was a conspiracy to oppress women on campus, but they were few and far between back then. Mainly the lack of understanding could be summarized by a question asked by my friend Katie at the time: "What is it, some kind of gay thing?" It wasn't though gay guys were certainly welcome to join. One guy who did join tried to use the group as a dating service, but he didn't last too long. These two attitudes about males coming together to meet, that it is either (1) conspiratorial or (2) homosexual in nature is, I think, a fairly neat summation of attitudes towards men in the U.S. Much of this I think is

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attributable to the particular feature of the narcissism of women who think that men must always be thinking about them.

I attended Wagner from 2007-2011, and the sort of campus activism that is now commonplace was not happening yet. Looking back, I can see that it was simmering under the surface but it was still held in check by the general collegiality of the campus atmosphere. However, upon returning a year later to see the campus there was a new feeling in the air. The young guy who was running the campus men's group told me that during the club fair at the start of the semester young women had come up to him and called him a "fucking pig" and spit at his table. People had been suspicious of our men's group before, but they'd rarely been hostile. I heard stories of rape accusations that sounded an awful lot like the awkward sexual encounters we had as young people discovering our sexuality. This was no doubt a product of the "Dear Colleague" letter which the Obama administration used to weaponize Title IX to form the campus kangaroo courts which mainly put young men's sexuality on trial.<sup>2</sup> I was a first-hand observer of the formation of many of the disturbing trends on campuses that took place during the 2010s. My position from within the Wagner College men's group gave me a unique perspective to see the resentment forming in young people towards (mainly white) males.

After college I would obtain a research position in South Australia due to the generosity of Miles, and Drs. Gary Misan and John Ashfield. There I would do research on men's sheds, which is a kind of male space outside of the home where men can tinker around and work on things. There was and is movement in Australia where these sheds have been expanded into mainly male-only spaces where men young and old can enjoy one another's company and learn from one another. I also assisted on some research on men's mental health and suicide as part of a team that primarily did research on issues facing rural populations. My work on sheds was published in *New Male Studies* in one of its first issues.

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<sup>2</sup> For insight into sexual politics on the college campus (as well as a prescient warning about "fake news") see Glover (2015) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/185/216>. Joe Biden has occupied a central place in promoting radical feminist ideas into respectability meaning we are poised for another round of their ideological influence.

I was stationed in Whyalla, a little town close to the Outback in South Australia. It was a pretty lonesome life there, which was what I needed at the time though it was difficult to accept. There I really started to build my life, first by taking up cooking my own meals. The men in my family have been the cooks, especially on my father's side. My grandfather was a chicken farmer from Texas, and he would cook up fried chicken throughout my dad's childhood, and my father combined that love of all things fried with my grandmother's French cooking (lots of butter). If I die from a heart attack do not be surprised. But by 24 years old I could barely cook an egg and so my own passage to manhood started in the kitchen of all places. Also, during this time, I shed much of my youthful narcissism and folly as I became more resolute to face the world on my own.

Time spent in Australia was time searching for the Father such as has been written about eloquently by Luigi Zoja in *The Father* (2001). As the place of the father within society has declined in Western civilization, perhaps unsurprisingly it has given way to greater chaos that has reached a fever pitch in recent years. The hatred expressed towards males, especially by women, and the wayward place of boys in society is a direct result of the disappearance of the father. Only his malevolent side is acknowledged as was seen in the daily media spectacle of bashing outgoing president Donald Trump. But it was the decision long ago of human males to become fathers that led to the formation of civilization as we know it and as they go so will we. This search within myself continues to today and is a daily struggle in determining what kind of man I will be.

After Australia I served for a time as assistant editor on this journal as it got its start. During that time, I had also returned to New York to live in Brooklyn and took my chances in the city. After a few years of working bad jobs and having generally troubled relationships I began to lose interest in male studies as I realized I needed to turn attention towards my own struggles. In rather petulant and unceremonious fashion I left as assistant editor (sorry, Dr. Ashfield) and turned towards other interests. It was during this time that I learned of what the well-educated and creative class of people in chic Brooklyn thought of males. The men would denounce their privilege and speak about their need to be allies to women. The women were mostly uninteresting apart from their fashion choices. The men were self-effacing in the hopes of courting one of these women and the women took sadistic glee in talking trash about men. In

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the bizarre romantic world of Brooklyn our twisted sexual politics have turned into a sadomasochistic game.

Luckily for me I spent a lot of that time in a training analysis for therapy. I also met my future wife and returned to school for psychology. After getting married we moved to San Diego where I have been getting my doctorate in clinical psychology and exploring my interest in existential therapy. My work published in this journal on school shooters was one of my first forays in years back into the psychology of men.<sup>3</sup> Though my focus is mainly in therapy, my work in therapy is deeply informed by my experiences throughout my twenties while involved with male studies. Most of my patients now are young men, mainly alcoholics and opiate addicts, who along with their struggles with drugs are struggling with manhood in our chaotic era. The misandry that Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young<sup>4</sup> have written about for years is present within the mental health field and is expressed as a harsher attitude toward male patients.

Perhaps nowhere is it more apparent that the picture of the all-powerful male is a lie than in the therapist's office. Here you will hear stories of men beaten by wives, abused by neighbours, unloved, uncared for, fundamentally and deeply lonely behind the smile they wear most days. The majority of people in the helping professions are female. Some are adequate to the task of caring for males, many are not. *New Male Studies* stands poised to provide a resource for those looking to provide more adequate care for males. I first sat down to write this on International Men's Day which was receiving its annual derision from the Twitterati and the elite media class. The familiar refrain "Every day is men's day!" Tell that to those who are suffering, tell that to those whose crime is being male.

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<sup>3</sup> See Glover (2019) <http://www.newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/article/view/301/362>. This piece attempts to deconstruct the notion of toxic masculinity as well as the typical psychiatric account of school shooters.

<sup>4</sup> [Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture](#) (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); [Legalizing Misandry: From Public Shame to Systemic Discrimination against Men](#) (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); [Sanctifying Misandry: Goddess Ideology and the Fall of Man](#) (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); [Replacing Misandry: A Revolutionary History of Men](#) (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), and [Transcending Misandry: From Feminist Ideology to Inter-Sexual Dialogue](#) (in press).

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## Author profile



K. C. Glover is obtaining his PsyD. in Applied Clinical Psychology at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology at San Diego. He received his BA in interdisciplinary studies at Wagner College and MA in Child Psychology from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. For a number of years, he worked as a mental health service provider for underprivileged populations in New York City. He was also the assistant editor of NMS during its early years.

Contact details: [kglover@ego.thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:kglover@ego.thechicagoschool.edu)

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH KENNY MAMMARELLA-D'CRUZ, THE FOUNDER OF *MENSPEAK*

*Jerome Teelucksingh, Kenny Mammarella-D'Cruz*



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### ABSTRACT

*Menspeak* is a non-hierarchical, male-centred British men's group. Its underlying philosophy encourages men to explore their passion, their purpose, and their soul (rather than to subscribe to a theoretically informed code of conduct prescribed by experts). The group encourages men "to live beyond" their "histories and explore" their respective identities and their needs. Group members support one another and hold one another accountable in their quest to become the men they want to be.

**Keywords:** boys, males, masculinity, men, *Menspeak*

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## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

**Jerome:** Tell me a bit about yourself: were you born in England? What made you interested in helping men?

**Kenny** I'm a refugee from Uganda. My parents were both born in East Africa, and we were on Idi Amin's death list. Officially we are refugees from Uganda of Goan heritage with a Portuguese culture who ended up in refugee camps in the UK. My father was smuggled to Italy from Uganda. Once we were reunited, we moved to his refugee camp, then to a small town in Wales. We were the only non-white family of the community.

I started holding men's groups because I wanted to be met at depth by my own friends after travelling and working abroad for five years. When I came back to London, my friends were distracted by drink, drugs, money, power, sex, love for the wrong reasons, and I wanted more out of them. So, I called a dozen or so men into my living room 20 years ago and asked for more from them. It's grown to hundreds of men and free e-books for men to start their own groups around the world, as well as live and online men's group facilitation trainings. My latest e-book is selling for £4.95 but free for those who cannot afford it.

**Jerome:** Is it correct to say you are the founder of the *Menspeak* men's group? What is the underlying philosophy, or what are the group's objectives?

**Kenny:** Yes, I'm the founder. The groups are different to therapy and other personal development groups, because they are as near to daily life as possible. People get to tell the truth and really get to know not only who they are, but who they no longer need to be. And it's non-hierarchical, so I'm not the leader or the smart one—we all learn from each other's experiences, successes, failures, and we get to share our fears and fantasies. We get to live beyond our histories and explore who we are, what we want, and support each other and hold each other accountable to grow into these lives.

**Jerome:** Why did you see the need to form such a group? Is it a registered charity? Who comprises the members? Is membership free?

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**Kenny:** When I was about 30, I had everything that I wanted in my life apart from sunshine. I went travelling and ended up travelling the world for five years.

The time came to return to the UK. I hooked up with my old friends, and I made a few new male friends. Something felt off though. I didn't feel met. I felt like my friends, especially my old friends, were distracted by money and power addictions, love and sex addictions, drug and alcohol addictions-any distractions from themselves they could find. So, I guess they took one fork in the road, and I took another. Mine had more passion and maybe purpose and soul-searching, and I missed that: I needed to share that with them. I needed to be met at some depth. And I couldn't really join their world. So, I called a meeting of a dozen or so friends in my front room and said to them, "I don't know what a men's group is, but I'm starting one now. You're all in it. And I need to be met at some depth, and I will still go raving to you and hang out like we've always hung out, but I need this depth, and if you can't meet me here then you're chucked. "

People got to hear about our group and people told friends who told friends, and before I knew it, this idea took form with ground rules and a check-in round and structure, and I took it out of my lounge and into a public space. And today, I hold about a dozen men's groups a month (a few men still come along who were at that first meeting!) as well as trainings to train others to facilitate men's groups: men, women, therapists, coaches, and anyone off the street who wants to learn the tools of running a simple men's group.

It is a branch of my private consulting company, though we're making the application to for *Menspeak* to become a charity and separate entity.

The members are very varied. Some have outgrown their life, a lot of people have everything crossed off their list, but they realize that they're still empty inside. Also, some men who are empty inside, and they don't have anything crossed off their list, or those going through changes in their lives, those who want to fall in love, or those becoming parents, those changing career or who are at some sort of a crossroads.

Also, men who have not really had great relationships with men, maybe it's because



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of boarding school, maybe because like me, they were more around mothers than mates.

These days, there's a lot happening around turning boys into men: initiations and trainings, howling in the woods and getting naked and stuff like that. And men who've done that, as well as men who've tried the pickup artist community, and various other social, sporting, 12 steps communities show up to our meetings. Once they've done all of those or alongside those, including going to therapy, they will come to the men's group to use it as a kind of stepping stone from all of those things into daily life in a calm, grounded, connected manner. At *Menspeak* they can connect with their authentic selves and other men and test drive who they think they are, who they might be, get some feedback, and live it into daily life.

We charge an entry fee for most events to cover costs, and these vary by the type of event and who's facilitating. Generally, a group is between £10-£25 though we have concessions, and we never refuse men on financial grounds.

Since Covid-19 we hold weekday lunchtime mini-men's groups by donation, to help keep men connected during social isolation and to take the edge off anything that might be triggered from the past or feared from the future, so in the present we are connected, supported, and able to respond to the challenges that life may bring.

**Jerome** Are there branches or arms of *Menspeak* men's group in other parts of London, Scotland, and Ireland?

**Kenny:** Currently we only have men's groups running online, though before Covid-19 we held them in Notting Hill, South Kensington and Camden Town. There are people using my men's group format all over the world, and I hear from them from time to time by email. We hope to have accredited trainings up and running next year to spread the tools with quality across the globe. The online groups and facilitator trainings have become very popular of late.

**Jerome** Tell me more about the work of the *Menspeak* Online groups? And your Newsletter-how long has it been circulating?

**Kenny:** Online groups are held via Zoom, and in much the same way as the in-person

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groups. It's hard to put into words the difference. It's not worse or better, just different. But it's amazing to have men from all over the world gathering and getting real with each other. When Covid-19 hit, we launched MenCheck-in, a daily weekday online check-in, by donation. This proved invaluable for some men: it's a brilliant daily sanity check and chance to connect and get stuff off your chest.

I launched my newsletter about five years ago, and we have a growing influx of subscribers. I love sharing my tips, tools and techniques, and I enjoy great feedback from those who read it. It's got to be fun, as well as insightful!

**Jerome:** In your view, during the past 10 years, has the masculinity crisis worsened or have you seen signs of improvement?

**Kenny:** I think it's improved. Ten years ago, people weren't even talking about men's mental health. It wasn't newsworthy or given much consideration. Today it's almost a buzz word, and it's very popular. I think there have been lots of steps in a positive direction with many male public figures opening up about their issues. The younger generation are especially so much more articulate about their mental health, and it's inspiring to listen to how sharp and insightful they are. Sometimes there needs to be a crisis, or breakdown even, before there can be breakthrough!

**Jerome:** How have you and your groups observed International Men's Day in England?

**Kenny:** We've done many different things over the years. My favourites have been when we hired a farm in Essex and cooked together, sat around the fire talking, listening, and laughing into the night. Another year we had a story-telling evening and invited men to spontaneously stand up and share their stories before men and women. An elderly man sang a song about touch, intimacy, and loneliness which makes my heart open whenever I listen to it. I've never known a room to be so moved to tears with open hearts for such a long time. We mostly hold men's groups to mark the day as well, put stories in the media, invite men and women to communicate with the men who have shaped them, and the feedback has been astounding.

**Jerome:** Do you believe that activists should collaborate with governments to solve problems affecting men?

**Kenny:** I think they should collaborate as well as create their own means of supporting men—unfortunately we can't rely on the government for everything, and we have to empower ourselves—then share the power. If you see an issue and you're passionate about it, then surely, it's better to collaborate rather than going it alone, but also as Gandhi said "be the change you want to see in the world. " If, for example, you're passionate about men opening up and sharing their issues before it's too late, then demonstrate sharing your issues, and create spaces for men to share their issues.

**Jerome:** You recently began the *Menspeak* Radio show to educate the public. Tell me how you have used this medium to deal with men's issues.

**Kenny:** With *Menspeak* Radio each episode involves exceptional men courageously sharing their most intimate stories. We don't put on a show and pretend we have it together all the time, and we hang out with depth, which hopefully allows the listener to re-think the way they think about their own masks and about men and friendship. We've had everything from a homeless man, to personalities in the public eye, to men who regularly come to men's groups who were willing to take part in a live or recorded men's group and show the world how we show up as ourselves to each other and communicate with consciousness, depth and laughter! We don't believe in experts to give our power away to or to save us, though we listen to the facts and learn from the experiences of others. We certainly demonstrate how we believe men's issues could be solved by discussing our own and sharing our outcomes, so listeners can learn from our experiences and follow our lead, should they find our offerings helpful.

**Jerome:** Do you believe that an issue such as parental alienation affects more boys than girls? If so, why?

**Kenny:** I don't know if it affects boys more than girls, but I do know that it has such a strong effect that it should not be ignored. I've worked with a lot of men who have issues with depression, lethargy and myalgic encephalomyelitis (or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome), and more often than not they did not get much attention from their mothers growing up. So many men who work with me privately and come to men's groups lacked a father, a present father, or a sober adult role model, and the lack of a

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self-respecting adult male has caused an array of issues and deep damage to so many.

**Jerome:** You are also a pioneer in beginning the *MenFacilitate* facilitator trainings. Approximately how many men have you helped?

**Kenny:** We've trained probably around a hundred people to facilitate men's groups, and I know of at least 50 groups that have been started after that training. Once you add in the fact that each man who comes to a men's group has an entire network of people around him, whom he then affects, then the numbers really add up. I've heard amazing feedback from partners and family members of men's-group men, saying that they're so much more stable, emotionally-available, kind, and caring. I originally held the day trainings quarterly; now it's monthly, and we're looking at fortnightly to meet demand. Beyond the trainings are the free [Quickstart Guides](#) that people have used to start their own groups the world over, and those have been downloaded in the thousands. I'd imagine far greater numbers with the [How to Facilitate an Online Men's Group e-book](#) that will soon be available-so necessary in these days of social isolation and the issues and opportunities that that brings.

**Jerome:** Is counselling a solution for men seeking healthier relationships? Or should we prescribe medication for a happier & healthier life?

**Kenny:** I think each person deserves an individual solution: there is no one-size-fits-all. There's evidence showing that women in general prefer one-on-one counselling, where men prefer side-by-side communication, but that doesn't mean it's the same for everyone. Many men see a therapist alongside their men's groups, and if that works for them then great! I do think that for men, men's groups (or "social medicine" as best-selling author Johann Hari called our groups), should be a serious option and ideally prescribed before medication or therapy. They're cheaper, and with no side-effects! I've always feared medication, though I know little about meds, and I've never taken them. I've seen men safely reduce their dosages while attending regular men's groups, and I've seen men in danger, on the edge, manage themselves better while on medication, enabling them to work safely through their stuff and get

back in balance, or better still, move forward in their lives rather than just surviving.

**Jerome:** Would an increase of social workers and psychologists reduce issues such as domestic violence and homicides?

**Kenny:** I imagine it would, but it's an expensive and also quite impersonal solution. I think providing peer-led talking and wellbeing groups would be a much cheaper, and probably a more effective solution. Those who are angry and violent usually just need to be heard and understood, not judged or fixed by a professional. That's not to say that I'm against social workers and psychologists, quite the contrary. I believe a man needs to be met in his places of past-and-present darkness, so he can be in control of his pain and not inflict it on himself or others. Once these places are met, they no longer have the ability to take a persona over as the red mist falls.

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## AUTHOR PROFILES



**Jerome Teelucksingh** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of the West Indies. He revived International Men's Day (19 November) and also initiated the inaugural observance of World Day of the Boy Child (16 May). Dr. Teelucksingh has been promoting IMD since 1999, and it has spread to approximately 90 countries.

Contact details: [j\\_teelucksingh@yahoo.com](mailto:j_teelucksingh@yahoo.com)



**Kenny Mammarella-D'Cruz** is a best-selling author and the founder of *Menspeak* men's groups. He has been dubbed "The Man Whisperer" by Newsweek. For the past 20 years, Kenny has created safe spaces for men's voices to be heard, empowering men to open up and talk about their mental and emotional health. Kenny is a regular commentator on men's mental health issues in the media, and also runs training workshops for practitioners and the public on how to facilitate men's groups.

Contact details: <https://mensgroups.co.uk/contact-us/>

More information about *Menspeak* is available here: [www.mensgroups.co.uk](http://www.mensgroups.co.uk)

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## AUTHOR PROFILE



**Jan H. Andersen** is a Danish photographer, software developer, and author specializing in topics surrounding children and teenagers. With a degree in child care and with many years of experience working with troubled kids and families, he writes with passion about child psychology, boy issues and parenting. You can read more at his website [www.jhandersen.com](http://www.jhandersen.com)

Contact details: [jha@jhandersen.com](mailto:jha@jhandersen.com)

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