



# NEWMALE STUDIES JOURNAL

## Report on the Conference on Curricula for New Male Studies

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*The University of South Australia will offer the first graduate courses and degree programs in male studies beginning in Fall 2014. The development of the curricula for these programs is described in this account of an international meeting of academics, healthcare providers and policymakers that took place at Wagner College, New York City, in Spring 2012.*

**Keywords:** male studies, curriculum development, gender, male sex, online courses



Beginning May 10<sup>th</sup> and concluding on May 14<sup>th</sup>, The Conference on Curricula for New Male Studies, exploring and discussing the creation of a new academic discipline, was hosted at Wagner College on Staten Island, New York. Participants included Dr. Miles Groth of Wagner College, Dr. John Ashfield of the Australian Institute of Male Health and Studies, Dr. Gary Misan of the University of South Australia, Dr. Rob Kenedy of York University, Dr. Dennis Gouws of Springfield College and the University of Connecticut, and K.C. Glover, Assistant Editor of *New Male Studies: An International Journal* (NMS). The conference was convened by the University of South Australia in conjunction with their Centre for Rural Health and Community Development and the Australian Institute of Male Health and Studies (AIMHS).

After an introductory meeting on May 10<sup>th</sup>, formal discussions began on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> with Dr. Gary Misan presenting on the present situation of Male Studies in academe. Differences between Men's Studies and Male Studies were quickly reiterated. The objective of the new program was stated as such:

to equip allied health, human services, education, and general industry professionals with knowledge and skills to more effectively engage and work with males to improve their health and wellbeing

to provide research or major supervised project work opportunities to university graduates, in order to contribute to the field of male health and male studies, in both academics and enhanced health and psychosocial outcomes for males

Much of the discussion was dedicated to the technical aspects of establishing a new post-graduate degree in Male Studies including the articulation of programs, including a graduate certification, graduate diploma, honors, masters and doctorate programs. Furthermore it was determined the correct number of units each program would require in order to coincide with the requirements of a legitimate degree. Also under discussion was the preliminary drawing up of syllabi for individual classes within the programs. While named Male Studies, it was stressed that Male Studies would be “not designed for men, but to educate about men.” In closing it was discussed how working in coordination with the journal (NMS) as well as an international faculty of experts would assist in the sustainability of the new degree.

Afternoon discussions began with a presentation by Dr. Rob Kenedy on the background of Male Studies and its relation to Men's Studies, second-wave feminism, and equity feminism. Male Studies is sometimes characterized as a backlash against feminism or a reactionary movement against increases in women's rights. Those who subscribe to “gender feminist” ideology have emphasized this view publicly. The designation “gender feminist” is meant to denote a movement that became popular as a result of extreme members of third-wave feminism asserting the superiority of women and the degradation of men in a climate of political correctness that serves to protect their views from valid criticism. In academic settings the movement has become entrenched in “Cultural Studies” programs, including Gender studies (formerly Women's Studies) and Men's Studies. Advocates

resort to purely social constructivist views of gender made popular by Michel Foucault and a selective use of empirical data meant to fortify their views, often at the expense of honesty. These views have leaked into popular culture helping to contribute to a climate of misandry. Those involved with Male Studies question this “climate of opinion” and seek to establish an interdisciplinary as well as more academically rigorous way of talking about gender issues. In this way it hopes to include the voices of men who have been silenced by the “moral panic” invoked by gender feminism.

Evening discussion began with the first presentation on the disciplines to be involved in the Male Studies curricula. Dr. Miles Groth presented an overview of his course on the psychology of boys and men. Psychology was presented as a unique perspective in that much of the discussion in gender studies surrounding men has focused on behavior and outward action, in contrast with inner experience, an area psychological investigation can provide. The course begins by looking at the embodied experience of male being, how the male body contributes to the unique existence of males. Psychosexual (Freud) and psychosocial (Erikson) perspectives on male development are presented to introduce students to the early years of the life of boys. David Gilmore’s *Manhood in the Making* presents the anthropological ubiquity of manhood in cultures worldwide as well as deepens the psychological perspective with the questions it brings to light about the male and his place in cultures. Warren Farrell’s *The Myth of Male Power* is included to question assumptions of male superiority and present students with a new way to think about power in gender studies, namely, as power over one’s own life. Mythic perspectives from two Jungian psychoanalysts, Luigi Zoja (*The Father*) and Eugene Monick (*Phallos*), offer deep psychological insights into the experience of having a father and fatherhood and a male’s relation to his own phallus, respectively. Contemporary issues are explored, most notably by looking at Roy Baumeister’s *Is There Anything Good About Men?*, which seeks to honestly answer whether men really are necessary in today’s world. In addition the syllabus provided offers a bibliography of substantial work done in the field of male psychology, as well as a list of films about boys and men.

The conference resumed on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> with the second presentation of disciplines for Male Studies, with Dr. Rob Kenedy presenting on sociology. The presentation focused on the social status of fathers and families. One of the major issues of our society today is the decline in fatherhood and the absence of fathers from parenting. Instead of attributing this to some sort of moral inferiority on the part of men, the ways in which court systems have been set against men are explored. With divorce cases often depriving men of much of their wealth and child custody cases depriving them of their children, men are often faced with a toxic environment that threatens their well-being following relational breakdowns. Fathers, if they have chosen to stay in the first place, have become increasingly expendable, save for their wallets. The court systems have become influenced by gender feminist ideology, which sees fathers as unnecessary or secondary parents at best. False allegations of physical or sexual abuse are accepted uncritically if made against fathers. Psychological issues that arise out of losing children are dismissed as strategies to manipulate children or seen as reactions to patriarchal privilege being denied them. A more positive approach toward fatherhood needs to be taken in order to encourage men to stay on as fathers.

The afternoon session saw the third discussion of disciplinary perspectives, this time the humanities and fine arts. Dr. Dennis Gouws presented on how male-positive methodologies can be utilized in an academic environment when teaching in the humanities and fine arts. Male-positive

methodologies would:

explain how patriarchal and chivalric models for male behavior have both impelled males to be pleasers, placaters, providers, protectors and progenitors, and assumed that the male body is primarily an instrument of service to others;

examine how men experience gynocentrism (exclusively women-centered advocacy and practices) and misandry (the hatred of, and prejudice against, males) as inhibitors of masculine affirmation;

value various embodied masculinities; and

formulate both positive male identities and post-hegemonic masculinity male interactions.

A sample course would introduce students to male literacy, looking at males in literature as well as introducing students to contemporary men's issues. Survey and elective courses were also discussed, ranging from exploring chivalry to how males are represented in the visual arts.

The evening presentation focused on a fourth and final disciplinary perspective to be discussed focusing on men's health and wellbeing. Dr. John Ashfield presented on medical clinics and how they treat and reach out to men. Courses in Male Studies focusing on male health would hope to instruct those who want to work with men in practices that do not alienate men and would encourage them to return for help with their health issues. Contrary to the belief that men do not care about their health, men will seek out help when an environment is male-friendly. The inclusion of the physical sciences within Male Studies is in line with its promise for an interdisciplinary approach, one that is lacking in gender studies. Gaining insight into male health, both physical and psychological, opens up opportunities for greater discussion on the issues facing men and boys in society.

The morning of May 13<sup>th</sup> began with a discussion of men on college campuses. The presentation, by K.C. Glover, was intended to provide a report on the state of college men internationally. Men now make up fewer than forty percent of college students in America. It is argued that the campus has become an unfriendly place for most males. College and university men's groups where young men can meet and discuss issues pertaining to their unique experience in the world have begun to form on campuses in America and the United Kingdom. Best practices for maintaining these groups as well as encouraging men to become involved on campus were briefly discussed. Much attention was paid to how college men's centers may assist those involved in obtaining a degree in Male Studies. While a degree in Male Studies will first be online, an eventual position within universities would allow for more interactive learning and add the potential for community engagement.

A brief discussion then began about the future of the Male Studies with reference to a vision of Camille Paglia in her book, *Vamps & Tramps: New Essays*. In it she advocates for sex studies, "based on the rigorous study of world history, anthropology, psychology, and science" (Paglia, 102). This interdisciplinary approach would replace the outdated gender studies, with its focus on social constructivism and postmodern cronyism. While focusing on males, Male Studies, with its interdisciplinary approach, has the potential to bring about a return of academic integrity to discussions

about sex.

The afternoon and evening discussions once again focused on technical issues such as the creation of syllabi for courses, electives within the degree, and requirements for graduating with a degree in Male Studies. The degree was fine tuned in order for proper submission to the University of South Australia as a proposal for an official degree. Discussions also included the adding faculty in the areas of law, economics, and anthropology. The creation of an international faculty with knowledge in various disciplines will assist in the teaching of well-rounded students who know how to apply their knowledge in various fields involved with the assistance of males.

May 14<sup>th</sup> saw Dr. John Ashfield delivering closing remarks and discussing prospects for research, curriculum design, and pedagogy involved in Male Studies. After five productive days of presentations and discussion, the groundwork for the establishment of Male Studies as a field of study and as a degree concluded. It is predicted that the degree will be available internationally in 2014. The degree will be aimed at those who work with males or who are entering fields that require an understanding of them, but with its interdisciplinary focus will also provide an opportunity for those who have grown tired of ideologically driven, social constructivist courses focusing on males.

## References

Paglia, Camille. *Vamps & Tramps: New Essays*. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.



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