



## **MUD HUTS, HAIRCUTS AND HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS: THE 3RD ANNUAL MALE PSYCHOLOGY CONFERENCE, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON, JUNE 2016**

**Dr John A. Barry**, guest editor of this *NMS* Special Issue

University College London, Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology, Faculty of Brain  
Sciences, London WC1E 6BT. Email: [john.barry@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:john.barry@ucl.ac.uk)



For decades, despite persistently high suicide rates and low academic achievement, there was little sign that psychology as a profession in the UK was paying any attention to the notion that men and boys were in any sort of crisis. However this example of what become known as *male gender blindness* (Seager et al, 2014) was challenged in December 2010, when *The Psychologist* journal published a letter from consultant clinical psychologist Martin Seager, proposing a Male Gender Section of the British Psychological Society (BPS) (Seager, 2010). This was a lightbulb moment for psychologists like me. 2011 saw the start of what is now the *Male Psychology Network*, and 2017 will see the inception of the Male Psychology Section of the BPS.

Meanwhile in the US and Australia, the first issue of *New Male Studies* (NMS) was being planned, which was published in 2012. *NMS* has an important place in academia, providing a platform for work that focuses – without apology - on the issues facing men and boys. *NMS* published a paper on the first Male Psychology Conference in 2014 (Seager et al, 2014), organized by Martin and I, a sign of the healthy international synergy culminating in the special issue you are now reading. Sadly today the importance of such material is often overlooked by more mainstream journals, who perhaps see this field as too controversial in recognising that men and boys are experiencing problems in a way not fully recognised by most psychologists. Given that *NMS* is a pioneer in academic publishing in this field, I consider it an honour to have been invited to be the editor for this special edition of the *NMS*. I hope that I have justified his decision in doing this, and I hope readers of the papers in this issue find the experience rewarding, informative, and enjoyable.

Before I introduce the content of this edition of *NMS*, let me express my sincere thanks to the editor, Professor Miles Groth, for giving us the opportunity of dedicating this special issue to material from the Male Psychology Conference (University College London, June 2016). Although none of the papers are are expensively-funded demonstrations of the latest technology – they are nonetheless important for being pioneering work in this new field of study. The material included gives a sense of the exciting and eclectic mix of topics that is male psychology today (view the full program of the conference here <http://www.malepsychology.org.uk/male-psychology-conference/>), and I hope you enjoy reading about the relevance of *mud huts*, *haircuts*, *high school dropouts* and other delights in this special issue.

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**Martin Seager, Dr Warren Farrell, Dr John A. Barry.** *The male gender empathy gap: time for psychology to take action.* [Pages 6 – 16]

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First up is a paper representing what could be seen as an underlying theme of the conference: psychologists need to wake up to male psychology and take the field seriously. This paper was written by myself (John Barry) and Martin Seager, the main organisers of the conference, along with a man who in many ways is the grandfather of male psychology, Dr Warren Farrell. Farrell has written seminal texts on this subject, such as *The Myth of Male Power* (1993), and has lived through times when being an advocate for men’s issues has been more often greeted with apathy and antipathy than sympathy or empathy. At the Male Psychology Conference in June 2016, Farrell delivered his material (a workshop, a presentation and a keynote) with outstanding insight and professionalism. We were proud to have him at the conference, and are delighted that he could co-author a paper for the special issue.

This paper highlights how symptoms of depression in men are often different from those in women, and how this might contribute to less empathy for men. Solutions – for example, improving our understanding of masculinity - are suggested.

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**Prof. Gijsbert Stoet & JingJing Yang.** *The boy-problem in education and a 10-point proposal to do something about it.* [Pages 17 – 35]

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One of key questions facing male psychology is how we deal with the so-called boy crisis in education. Although this problem emerged in the late 1980s, psychology as a profession has done little to address it. In this paper, Professor Stoet demonstrates why he leads the field in the UK on this topic, as he uses his expert knowledge to clearly define the key points that need to be addressed in education. Policy makers and educationalists: take note of the suggestions in this paper.

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**Belinda Brown** *From Boys to Men: The Place of the Provider Role in Male Development.* [Pages 36 – 57]

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Keeping with the theme of the boy crisis, anthropologist Belinda Brown explores the ways in which the erosion of the role of *male provider* (i.e. breadwinner) in modern western culture has left a vacuum in which boys may struggle to find a satisfactory place in life. Brown assesses the evidence that the male provider role benefits the individual, the family and society. She takes fascinating examples from various cultures around the world which offer templates by which the journey from boyhood to manhood can be completed successfully. This anthropological perspective challenges us to step outside the constraints of our modern western mindset, take a fresh look at ourselves as human beings and the future we provide for our boys.

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**Tamika Roper & Dr John A. Barry.** *Is having a haircut good for your mental health?* [Pages 58-75]

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To many people, the link between haircuts and mental health is tenuous to say the least. However just as some haircuts are more attention-grabbing than functional, so the title of this paper is more for show than for information. Readers of this paper may perhaps be surprised to learn about a field already humming with interest in the idea that men talk more about their mental health to their barber than their family doctor. There already exist several community-based projects, and this paper represents a first academic venture into the field. We hope that this

paper helps academia and the NHS catch up with the idea the therapist's couch is not the only place where mental health issues are dealt with.

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**Dr John A. Barry & Tamika Roper.** *The development and initial validation of the Wellbeing Benefits of Everyday Activities Scale (WBEAS) and the Hairstylist Visit Questionnaire (HVQ): a short report.* [Pages 76-87].

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This paper might have been part of the previous one, but we decided that the psychometric focus would be unduly heavy going for many readers. We are sure however that a minority of readers will find this paper very useful indeed. For those who are looking for a questionnaire to assess the wellbeing benefits of visiting a hairstylist (HVQ), or any everyday activity (WBEAS), this paper could be very helpful. For example, people who are running activities - such as the increasingly popular *Men's Sheds* - that require a flexible way of measuring potential wellbeing benefits, the WBEAS could be ideal. It being Christmas time, we wish readers many happy assessments using these questionnaires.

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**Dr Kevin Wright & Prof. John McLeod.** *Gender difference in the long-term outcome of brief therapy for employees.* [Pages 88-110].

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Wright & McLeod have produced a paper that is important for three reasons. Firstly, it is the first demonstration of the effectiveness of brief therapy provided through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Secondly, the paper demonstrates that the treatment was more effective longitudinally for women than men. Thirdly, and most profoundly, it demonstrates that assessments of therapy can be completely meaningless unless you take the sex of the patients into account. There is a prevailing and somewhat unhelpful generalisation in psychology that the similarities between men and women are more important than the differences (e.g. Hyde, 2005). Wright & McLeod demonstrate the crucial importance of opening our eyes to gender differences. After all, if we refuse to recognize important gender differences, we are not only compromising the credibility of psychology as a science, but also compromising the efficacy of psychology as a therapy.

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