

This is a man's world? Yes and no, says new book

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"Man up!" is an emerging expression whose significance has become loaded in our society, according to Anthony Synnott, a professor at the Concordia University Department of Sociology and Anthropology. In his most recent book, *Re-Thinking Men: Heroes, Villains and Victims* (Ashgate), Synnott documents the increasingly confusing roles men are to assume in society.

Synnott spent a decade researching the book, where he chronicles how males are no longer the principal bread-winners in their homes or leaders across all spectrums of the [workforce](#). So when, exactly, did traditional male roles change? "The invention of the birth control pill had the biggest impact on the definition of [men](#)," says Synnott. "Until then, men had been the main providers of their families and in World Wars I and II the main protectors of their countries. Men had also been rulers – in terms of politics and economics – despite the universal suffrage in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K."

The author says the [birth control](#) pill, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, facilitated a number of social changes: a plummeting birth rate; an increase of women in the labour force; a shift in the balance of economic power as women earned their own money; a rise in the divorce rate; the women's movement from 1968; the increased politicization of women; the increased enrolment of women in universities (with parity in 1985 at the bachelors level).

"The resulting implications changed occupational distribution among

genders and income distribution," says Synnott.

Growing anti-male bias

The book also examines a pervasive anti-male bias that's grown over the last few decades. Since the 1970s, Synnott says it has become acceptable in Western society to express hatred for men, e.g. misandry or the flipside of misogyny. Television has fuelled the trend, he says: "Watch any sitcom to witness contempt against men."

Bumper stickers began sporting cheap shots such as "So Many Men. So Little Ammunition" and T-shirts have been emblazoned with slogans reading "Boys are stupid, throw rocks at them." Systemic misandry is high – both in individual and societal terms – and Synnott continues to research how it applies to male suicide.

Propelled to an early grave

Another topic investigated in Synnott's book is the disparity of male-to-female death rates. Figures are stark: Men make up two thirds of accidental deaths, whether these occur in the workplace, in a car, on a bicycle or crossing the street. Disproportionately high numbers of men find themselves homeless, addicted to drugs or in prison.

Each year, approximately 9,000 Canadian men die violent deaths – mainly at the hands of other men. Canadian men constitute 99 percent of military victims of the war in Afghanistan; 73 percent of the homicide victims, 77 percent of suicide victims; over 90 percent of workplace fatalities as well as constitute the majority of homeless people. "This presents a rather different picture of men as victims," says Synnott.

Heroes versus villains

Perception of modern males continue to be challenged in the 21st Century, stresses Synnott. "A turning point was 9/11 when 403 mostly male members of the New York City police and firefighters were killed while saving total strangers. They demonstrated amazing heroism."

"With the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, men were once again defined in heroic mode," he continues. "Earlier definitions of men as villains are now being complemented by perceptions of men as victims and then as heroes."

More information: Re-Thinking Men: Heroes, Villains and Victims: www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754677093

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