

Men become the main target in the new gender wars

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Women have battled for years against stereotypical and sexist portrayals in the mass media. However research shows that men are increasingly the target for negative press.

The long-term effects of negative portrayals should particularly concern anyone who is raising boys, says the author of the study, Dr Jim Macnamara.

Dr Macnamara, who works as a media researcher, conducted the research for his PhD at the University of Western Sydney. He has recently published his findings in a book, 'Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men.'

As part of the study, he undertook an extensive content analysis of mass media portrayals of men and male identity focusing on news, features, current affairs, talk shows and lifestyle media. Over six months, the study involved detailed analysis of over 2,000 media articles and program segments.

Dr Macnamara found that, by volume, 69 per cent of mass media reporting and commentary on men was unfavourable, compared with just 12 per cent favourable and 19 per cent neutral or balanced.

Some of the recurring themes in media content portrayed men as violent, sexually abusive, unable to be trusted with children, 'deadbeat dads', commitment phobic and in need of 're-construction'.

"Men were predominantly reported or portrayed in mass media as villains, aggressors, perverts and philanderers, with more than 75 per cent of all mass media representations of men and male identity showing men in on one of these four ways," Dr Macnamara says.

Further, in somewhat of a back-handed compliment, when positive portrayals of men as sensitive, emotional or caring were presented, these were described as men's and boys' 'feminine

side.'

"The idealised image of the metrosexual - largely a creation of the media - only further adds to the confusion being felt particularly by boys trying to find their identity in the modern world," Dr Macnamara says.

Negative stereotyping of men and male identity can contribute to significant problems in society in three key ways, Dr Macnamara warns.

"Highly negative views of men and male identity provide little by way of positive role models for boys to find out what it means to be a man and gives boys little basis for self-esteem.

"In the current environment where there is an identified lack of positive male role models in the physical world through absentee fathers in many families, and a shortage of male teachers, the lack of positive role models in the media and presence of overwhelmingly negative images should be of concern."

This makes the research not only of relevance to men, but also for women, he says.

"Women who are the mothers of sons have equal cause for concern with the trend towards demonising, marginalising and trivialising of men and male identity."

"Ultimately such portrayals could lead to negative social and even financial costs for society in areas such as male health, rising suicide rates and family disintegration," he warns.

'Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men' is published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Source: University of Western Sydney

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