

# **Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men**

Book summary by the International Council for Men and Boys

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## **1. Overview**

The book "Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men" by J. R. Macnamara presents an in-depth study on how the mass media represents, biases, and shapes male identity. The 230-page book concludes that negative media discourse can harm men's self-identity and self-esteem, with broader, devastating social implications.

## **2. Methods**

A media sample from newspapers, magazines, and TV programs from Australia, the US, the UK, and Europe was analyzed. Quantitative analyses characterized the volume, frequency, and type of reporting, while qualitative analysis examined underlying attitudes towards men.

### **2A. Media Sample**

A media sample was taken to reflect a broad swath of mainstream media in the world today. The sample contained content from newspapers, current affairs magazines, women's magazines, men's magazines, cable TV programs, and TV current affairs programs. Six Australian newspapers, including their magazine inserts, were chosen for their high quality and broad readership. (1) Six Australian magazines were selected based on the highest circulation and coverage of current affairs. Seven TV programs that aired in Australia were reviewed, based on ratings data. The TV programs' area of focus was news, talk shows with social issues, and life-style drama. Media sources originated from Australia, the US, the UK, and Europe.

The media sample included content from 650 newspapers, over 100 magazines, and more than 330 hours of TV. The total audience was 30,947,000 people.

### **2B. Quantitative Analysis**

In brief, each media publication was coded to indicate the source (article type and author) and positive or negative corresponding characterization using 15 different categories. The categories used were work and career, violence and aggression, degree of competition, physical health, mental health, suicide, education, fatherhood and family, commitment and responsibility, communication, social behavior, sexuality, body image, and domestic

involvement. Each media sample was further characterized as to the message it gave the reader or viewer, using 20 positive and 20 corresponding negative predefined coded messages. A total of 133 categories were used to characterize and quantify each media sample.

## 2C. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis using MAXqda software identified themes and key messages about men in the media. MAXqda was designed for qualitative data analysis testing using a set of text categories and codes that reflect corresponding positive and negative issues and media message. (2) The program is able to identify the overall focus of a publication, tone, message, and key words. Six media articles totaling over just over 1,000 words were selected for in-depth qualitative study using MAXqda. (3).<sup>(p165)</sup>

## 3. Findings

1,799 different publications that reported on men and male identity were identified in media published from July 1 to December 24, 2003. (4).<sup>(p98)</sup> The publications consisted of 1,568 newspaper and magazine articles and 281 television reports or program segments. These included news articles (63%), opinion columns (13%), TV news reports (7%), Feature articles (7%), Letters to the Editor (4%), TV current affairs reports (3%), talk show and lifestyle program segments (2%), and editorials (1%).

Two hundred of the 1,799 media samples contained more than one subject category, making a total of 1,999 media portrayals of men and male identity. Overall, 69% (n=1,381) of media portrayals of men were Unfavorable, 19% (n=370) were Neutral or balanced, and 12% (n=248) were Favorable (Favorable: Neutral: Unfavorable ratio: 1: 1.5 :5.6).

## 3A. Quantitative Analysis

### Part 1: Characterization Using Stereotypic Themes

81.6% of the media samples portrayed men negatively, primarily as villains, aggressors, perverts, or philanderers. Positive portrayals, such as good fathers or heroes, were rare.

*Table 1: Themes Identified in 1776 Mass Media Samples*

| Positive Media Characterization | N  | % of Total Articles | CFR* |
|---------------------------------|----|---------------------|------|
| Good Father                     | 85 | 4.8%                | 60.2 |
| Hero                            | 55 | 3.1%                | 68.8 |
| Protector                       | 47 | 2.6%                | 64.6 |
| Leader                          | 44 | 2.5%                | 61.5 |

*Table 1: Themes Identified in 1776 Mass Media Samples*

|  |      |       |      |
|--|------|-------|------|
| Good/ Loving Husband/ Partner          | 42   | 2.4%  | 55.6 |
| Good Citizen                           | 36   | 2.0%  | 64.7 |
| Good Provider                          | 15   | 0.8%  | 53.3 |
| Handyman                               | 2    | 0.1%  | 47.5 |
| Total                                  | 326  | 18.4% | 59.5 |
| <b>Negative Media Characterization</b> |      |       |      |
| Villain                                | 670  | 37.7% | 40.5 |
| Aggressor                              | 422  | 23.8% | 38.1 |
| Pervert                                | 148  | 8.3%  | 37.1 |
| Philanderer                            | 107  | 6.0%  | 41.8 |
| Power Abuser                           | 33   | 1.9%  | 37.9 |
| Incompetent Fool or Lazy               | 25   | 1.4%  | 40.2 |
| Deadbeat Dad                           | 24   | 1.4%  | 45.2 |
| Workaholic                             | 21   | 1.2%  | 46.4 |
| Total                                  | 1450 | 81.6% | 40.9 |

## **Part 2: Main Issue Categories**

Fourteen issue categories were identified, with "Violence and Aggression" being the most prevalent (32.3%).

*Table 2: Leading Issue Categories Reported in the 1,799 Media Samples*

|                               | <b>Favorable</b> | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Unfavorable</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Total %</b> | <b>CFR*</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| Violence and Aggression       | 19               | 105            | 1054               | 1178         | 32.3%          | 40.6        |
| Fatherhood and Family         | ...              | ...            | ...                | 361          | 9.9%           | 50.5        |
| Sexuality                     | ...              | ...            | ...                | 357          | 9.8%           | 42.6        |
| Work and Career               | ...              | ...            | ...                | 328          | 9.0%           | 48.8        |
| Social Behavior               | ...              | ...            | ...                | 260          | 7.1%           | 47.8        |
| Commitment and Responsibility | ...              | ...            | ...                | 226          | 6.2%           | 54.5        |
| Physical Health               | ...              | ...            | ...                | 211          | 5.8%           | 44.1        |
| Body Image                    | ...              | ...            | ...                | 181          | 5.0%           | 45.9        |
| Mental Health                 | ...              | ...            | ...                | 141          | 3.9%           | 41.7        |
| Communication                 | ...              | ...            | ...                | 104          | 2.9%           | 49.4        |
| Competition/ Competitiveness  | ...              | ...            | ...                | 100          | 2.7%           | 50.6        |

Table 2: Leading Issue Categories Reported in the 1,799 Media Samples

|                      | <b>Favorable</b> | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Unfavorable</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Total %</b> | <b>CFR*</b> |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| Suicide              | ...              | ...            | ...                | 91           | 2.5%           | 46.1        |
| Domestic Involvement | ...              | ...            | ...                | 53           | 1.5%           | 50.9        |
| Education            | ...              | ...            | ...                | 52           | 1.4%           | 51.6        |
| <b>Total</b>         |                  |                |                    | <b>3643</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>  |             |

*Violence and Aggression Category*

The category included violent crime, sexual abuse, general crime, and other subjects, with violent crime being the most reported (39.7%).

Table 3. Leading Subjects in Mass Media Reporting of Violence and Aggression by Men

|                          | <b>Favorable</b> | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Unfavorable</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>% Total</b> | <b>CFR*</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| Violent Crime            | 2                | 8              | 458                | 468          | 39.7%          | 39          |
| Sexual Abuse             | 5                | 42             | 194                | 241          | 20.5%          | 40.4        |
| Crime, General           | 1                | 36             | 182                | 219          | 18.6%          | 43.5        |
| Domestic Violence        | 5                | 4              | 77                 | 86           | 7.3%           | 40.2        |
| Boy's Violence           | 1                | 4              | 53                 | 58           | 4.9%           | 40.8        |
| Risk-taking Behavior     | 3                | 9              | 41                 | 53           | 4.5%           | 44.5        |
| Fights/ Brawls/ Thuggery | 0                | 2              | 28                 | 30           | 2.5%           | 39.3        |
| Gangs                    | 0                | 0              | 20                 | 20           | 1.7%           | 39          |
| Militarism               | 2                | 0              | 1                  | 3            | 0.3%           | 51.7        |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>19</b>        | <b>105</b>     | <b>1,054</b>       | <b>1,178</b> | <b>100.0%</b>  | <b>40.6</b> |

\* average CARMA<sup>®</sup> favorability rating

**3B. Qualitative Analysis**

MAXqda analysis found the main focus to be demonizing and trivializing men, with common key words like “murder,” “killing,” and “misogynous.” Fear, ridicule, and anger were the most common attitudes identified.

**3C. Leading Message About Men**

In 85.4% of media publications, the leading message was negative, portraying men as criminals, aggressive, violent, or sexual abusers.

Table 4. Characterization of the Main Message About Men in Each Media Publication, in Order of Frequency

| Positive Message                                   | Favorable (N) | Unfavorable (N) | Negative Message   |
|--|---------------|-----------------|--|
|  | 0             | 183             | Criminals  |
|  | 0             | 166             | Aggressive   |
|  | 0             | 149             | Violent  |
|  | 0             | 81              | Sexual abusers/ predators                                      |
| Commitment oriented and responsible                | 73            | 0               |  |
|  | 0             | 61              | Chauvinists/ Oppressors/ Misogynists                           |
| Protectors/ careers/ gentle/ non-violent           | 59            | 0               |  |
|  | 0             | 58              | Stupid or Incompetent  |
|  | 0             | 57              | Insensitive, out of touch with feelings                        |
| Law abiding responsible citizens                   | 54            | 0               |  |
|  | 0             | 43              | Commitment phobic/ lack commitment                             |
|  | 0             | 43              | Sensitive new age guy/ metrosexuals/ shows "feminine" behavior |
|  | 0             | 39              | Power focused/ obsessed  |
|  | 0             | 36              | Not committed to children                                      |
| Intelligent and capable                            | 35            | 0               |  |
| Sensitive  | 35            | 0               |  |
|  | 0             | 35              | Groomed/ waxed/feminine appearance                             |
| Paternal and care for children                     | 34            | 0               |  |
|  | 0             | 34              | Sex-, sports-, cars-, male friend-focused                      |
| Strong active but non-aggressive                   | 31            | 0               |  |
| Don't do their share/ lazy domestically            | 0             | 29              |  |
| Strong, rugged, traditionally masculine appearance | 23            | 0               |  |
| Good communicators                                 | 21            | 0               |  |
|  | 0             | 20              | Do not take care of their health/ risk taking                  |
|  | 0             | 20              | Work focused   |
|  | 0             | 19              | Poor communicators/ women are better                           |

|                                    |           |             |  |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|--|
| Well rounded/ balanced             | 16        | 0           |  |
| Balance work/ personal/ family     | 15        | 0           |  |
| Traditional men/ male behavior     | 14        | 0           |  |
| Share power/ rights/ opportunities | 13        | 0           |  |
| Treat women equally/ with respect  | 13        | 0           |  |
| Do their share domestically        | 7         | 0           |  |
| Fathers deserve equal child rights | 7         | 0           |  |
|                                    | 0         | 4           | Inconsiderate/ ineffective lovers                          |
|                                    | 0         | 3           | Don't deserve/ can't be trusted<br>with equal child rights |
| Care for their health              | 2         | 0           |  |
| Sexually responsible/ considerate  | 2         | 0           |  |
|                                    | 0         | 2           | Boys do not/ girls need more<br>attention                  |
| Boys need special/ more attention  | 1         | 0           |  |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <hr/> 455 | <hr/> 1,082 |  |

### 3D. Who is Authoring the Media Portrayals?

The authors of the content were evenly split between men and women, with opinion columns more frequently authored by women.

### 3E. Differences by Media Type

The media sample was obtained from 21 different media outlets. Most publications had an unfavorable average CARMA© favorability rating, with television news reporting the most unfavorable behavior.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of internationally and nationally published media in Australia found negative characterizations as the norm for men and male identity. Men in the media were predominantly depicted as violent and aggressive thieves, murderers, abusers, molesters, perverts, deadbeat dads, or philanderers. Almost 70% of media reviewed presented a negative male identity and over 80% were unfavorable by analysis. Men were often reported as “innately and culturally evil” (5).

The decline of traditional methods of promoting self-image (such as family, local community, and church) and the rise of media presence has created an environment where media increasingly influences and molds societal views. The consistent negative portrayal of men sends a clear, damaging message to the public and raises concerns about the influence on male behavior.

These portrayals present a limited view of men, influencing women's expectations and damaging men's self-image. "Men in contemporary Western societies are presented with a misogynistic world that devalues, marginalizes, demonizes, objectifies, and tries to change them" (6). These negative views block men from forming a strong, positive personal view and from entering certain societal sections. They are not conducive to positive mental health and misrepresent the reality that only a small proportion of men behave negatively.

False accusations by women exacerbate the negative image of men. Purdue University reported over 40% of rape cases investigated by police were false claims. DNA testing by the FBI exonerated 30-35% of 4,000 men accused of sexual assault over four years. Numerous anecdotal reports of false claims exist, but they are not widely reported in the media (7).

Positive portrayals of men were reserved for stereotypical roles such as war veterans, firefighters, and rescuers. Men portrayed favorably were generally feminized. Mass media often reflects and popularizes academic thought, with media publications frequently sourced from university lecturers, trainers, writers, and senior political appointees, reflecting academic and intellectual thinking.

Current models for male behavior, increasingly proposed by women in academic and political fields, are often negative and intended to support women's growth in society. Programs supporting feminist changes have led to new discrimination, with resources supporting girls in education and lower college graduation rates for men compared to women.

Views on feminism support a wide range of personal expression for women, suggesting men should also be offered a similar range of expression. Media does not provide appropriate role models for boys, instead teaching the marginalization and devaluation of boys and men.

The book draws on feminist theory but advocates that male gender should not be formulated solely in feminist terms or used to support a "gender war." As feminist Germaine Greer said, "Wars cannot be won..... Women who adopt the attitudes of war in their search for liberation condemn themselves to acting out the last perversion of dehumanized manhood" (8).

#### **4. Strategies and Solutions**

To address negative media portrayals of men, the following strategies are recommended:

1. Media Literacy Education: Teach critical thinking skills to evaluate media messages.
2. Diverse Representation: Advocate for positive and diverse portrayals of men.
3. Challenging Odious Stereotypes of Men: Promote healthy behaviors and reject harmful norms.
4. Positive Role Models: Highlight men who exhibit empathy and emotional intelligence.
5. Collaboration with Media Industry: Encourage responsible content creation.
6. Policy Changes: Regulate harmful media content and promoting ethical reporting.
7. Stereotype Awareness: Raise awareness about the impact of stereotypes.

8. Community Dialogue: Engage in critical conversations about media influence.
9. Promote Positive Narratives: Celebrate stories that challenge stereotypes.
10. Collaboration Across Sectors: Develop comprehensive strategies for positive media portrayals.
11. Work Related Flexibility: Allow more flexibility for men to participate in childcare.

## References

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