

Period drama! Pop culture makes menstruation 'overly traumatic'

July 12 2012

A study by the University of Melbourne has raised concerns about Hollywood's treatment of menstruation, and whether it's frightening girls into believing it is worse than the reality.

Researcher Dr Lauren Rosewarne, from the University's School of Social and Political Sciences, has analyzed hundreds of representations of menstruation in film and television.

"The presentation of menstruation on screen is an overwhelmingly negative one," she said.

The analysis included jokes, plotlines and references from popular TV shows such as The Big Bang Theory, Mad Men, Friends and Grey's Anatomy, and blockbuster films like Annie Hall, Anchorman and Monty Python's The Meaning of Life.

"The regularity, normalcy and uneventfulness of real life menstruation is rarely portrayed on screen. Instead, it's treated as traumatic, embarrassing, distressing, offensive, comedic or thoroughly catastrophic," she said.

"There are numerous portrayals where menstruation is considered as evil, disgusting and as the root of all female evil."

Dr Rosewarne said these negative representations affected how women approached their own experiences.

“Girls in real life are viewing menstruation as a hassle, women are happily filling prescriptions to make it go away, men are mocking it, loathing it and rarely understanding it,” she said.

“On screen presentations likely have some complicity.”

The research identified the representation of [menstruation](#) in Carrie (1976) as perhaps the most traumatizing.

“The fusion of a naked girl, shower stream, screaming and blood harked back to cinema’s most famous shower horror scene from Psycho. Even though the audience presumably recognized Carrie was only menstruating, the character’s terror was contagious.”

Dr Rosearne’s full analysis will appear in her upcoming book, Periods in Pop Culture, to be published by Lexington Books.

Provided by University of Melbourne

Citation: Period drama! Pop culture makes menstruation 'overly traumatic' (2012, July 12) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-07-period-drama-culture-menstruation-overly.html>

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