



MIRROR ON Masculinities

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Introduction

Since 2019, our award-winning *Mirror On the Industry* initiative has been at the forefront of championing representation and inclusivity in UK advertising.

Each year, we audit the top 1,000 ads and run a bi-annual consumer survey to track progress and drive meaningful change across the industry. As the project has grown, our insight has expanded; launching a series of targeted *Mirror On...* studies to spotlight specific portrayals.

Our latest? A bold exploration of masculinities, with a specific focus on what it means to be a young man in the UK today.

Much of the current conversation around young men is occupied by fears of “toxic” behaviour, radicalisation, or cultural regression – understandably, brands are exploring how to respond.

But the realities are much more nuanced, there is no one shared experience, nor is there only one way to “be a man.”

Informed by the latest data around representation in media and advertising, the aim of *Mirror On Masculinities* has been to connect directly with young men. In partnership with global research agency National Research Group (NRG), we have explored personal experiences, as well as the kind of content and messaging that resonates.

By embracing that there is no singular “solution” on offer here, this report sets out to highlight creative opportunities for brands, to guide, inspire and relate to young men – and more broadly, to help shape the future of masculinities.



Beyond Equality have been a consulted partner on this project. They are a registered charity supporting men and boys in rethinking masculinities, building men’s allyship for gender justice and improving wellbeing. As part of this, they deliver transformative training in workplaces, schools, sports and universities.

A Note on Language

Throughout our study, we use both singular (masculinity) and plural (masculinities) language.

We preference masculinities as it is a clear signal of the need to broaden the conversation and actively move away from narrow, preconceived expectations associated with this topic. However, we used masculinity when engaging with respondents to avoid any unnecessary confusion.

The umbrella of masculinities also naturally creates space for a wide variety of important experiences and perspectives that do not always feature in this conversation.

We have endeavoured to account for as many relevant voices as possible, but note that our study specifically focusses on young men and predominantly reflects cisgendered experiences. We support and encourage further exploration, across all ages and gender identities.



If you only read one thing...

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👉 **Young men today are navigating a shifting and often confusing landscape of masculinities.** While most are proud to be men, many are unsure what being a man should or could look like.

👉 **A growing gender empathy gap is also adding pressure:** many young men feel they're trying to live up to ideals they think women expect of them – expectations that may no longer reflect reality.

👉 **In their own lives, young men aspire to masculinities that centre around taking care of yourself and those you love.** In an uncertain world, they're focusing on what they can control – building practical skills, growing their confidence, and improving life for themselves and those around them.

👉 Crucially, most aren't always seeing the kind of men they want to be reflected in the media, especially through brands and advertising. **There is a clear, commercial benefit to brands offering new, affirming ways for young men to see themselves on screen.**

Through our conversations, we identified three core pillars that consistently shape their understanding of masculinities:



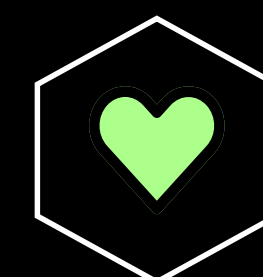
Men as builders

Actively working on improving themselves and their situation



Men as leaders

Beloved, respected and trusted members of their community



Men as providers

Proudly able to take care of the people they love

Though rooted in more traditional ideals (and deliberately named to reflect this), these pillars are not boundaries – they're a framework to build on. The opportunity is to evolve them gently, reflecting the realities of modern life and appealing to a broad range of men and boys.



Why we should consider young men





A sense of confusion

Young men are generally proud to be men – but many are unsure what that should, or could, look like...

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75%

of men 18-34 say that they are **"proud to be a man"**



6 in 10

view masculinity as a **"positive force"**

However, there is less of a belief that society treats masculinity positively:



Only

4 in 10

agree, dropping to less than 3 in 10 for men 18-24

The messaging directed at young men can feel disjointed and, at times, highly counter-productive:



91%

of men 18-34 have heard the term "toxic masculinity," with little difference between 18-24s and 25-34s



70%

say they have a "good idea" of what the terminology means, but this is lower for 18-24s (65%)

Unpacking pride in being a man

Pride in "being a man" is highest among young men from ethnic minority backgrounds – likely influenced by a broader sense of pride in representing their cultural heritage.

In contrast, LGBTQ+ (gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other identities and orientations within this community) and liberal young men report the lowest levels of pride in being men and are less likely to view masculinity as a positive force – indicating a more critical or complex relationship with the concept.

According to NRG's *From Bond to Beckham* paper, 42% of men 13-30 say that they "don't know what it means to be a man in today's society" ¹



"Toxic masculinity is a counter-productive term. Very few boys and men are likely to react well to the idea that there is something inside them that needs to be exorcised." ²

Richard Reeves, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters and What to Do About It*





Understanding masculinities

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For young men, their *understanding* of masculinities is shaped at home.

Family and friends are the primary influences on young men’s understanding, with 9 in 10 citing them as impactful. Friends top the list for LGBTQ+ men – speaking to the importance of found/chosen family for many in this group.

Teachers, coaches and mentors are especially influential for Black men, ranking equally with family.

Religion and culture are also key for ethnic minority groups, placing third for Asian men and fourth for Black men, but falling to the bottom of the list for White men.

However, the **pressure to *be* masculine comes from more external forces**, felt primarily among...

- People they haven’t met before – **67%**
- On a date – **66%**
- At work – **66%** – there is a notable difference for Black men here (rises to 72% agree), where they are navigating both gender expectations and racial bias.

Top 5 Influences on Understanding of Masculinities

	White men	Black men	Asian men	Heterosexual men	GBTQ+ men
1	Family 92%	Family 95%	Family 96%	Family 93%	Friends 94%
2	Friends 91%	Teachers coaches mentors 95%	Friends 91%	Friends 92%	Family 89%
3	Teachers coaches mentors 83%	Friends 94%	Religion or culture 88%	Sports 87%	Fictional characters in media 87%
4	Celebrities or public figures 83%	Religion or culture 92%	Teachers coaches mentors 86%	Teachers coaches mentors 86%	Teachers coaches mentors 86%
5	Sports 82%	Sports 91%	Fictional characters in media 85%	Celebrities or public figures 84%	Celebrities or public figures 82%



Gender divergence

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Pressure to be masculine is **felt primarily to come from women...**

Over half of young men agree, rising to **64%** for those identifying as “conservative.” While we know from previous research that men do feel pressure to be mainly from other men, only **20%** agreed that this was where most of the pressure comes from.

This aligns to the **growing cultural and political divergence** between young men and women. On average, young women are:

- Becoming increasingly liberal at faster rates *(based on voting intention)*³
- More positive about the impact of feminism in society⁴
- Reporting less traditional ambitions for their own futures⁵

Feelings of pressure are the result of an “empathy gap” between the genders; an impaired ability to relate to each other’s perspective, exacerbated by increasingly isolated online and real-life spaces.

In part, this is **shaping distinctive mindsets for young men**, with some viewing women’s progress as their own loss.

According to Financial Times analysis⁷, there is also a growing attainment gap between young men and women:

- By 19, 54% of British women are in higher education vs 40% of men
- Women 20-24 are more likely to be employed and earning more on average

As found in *Gen Z: Trends, Truth & Trust*, **45%** of Gen Z men say that “we have gone so far in promoting women’s equality that we are discriminating against men”⁶

Most of the pressure for men to be masculine comes from...

(% strongly agree / agree)

Women Men

Total (Young Men 18-34)

56% 20%

Conservative Men

64% 20%

Liberal Men

45% 33%

Heterosexual Men

58% 19%

GBTQ+ Men

44% 32%



Shaping mindsets

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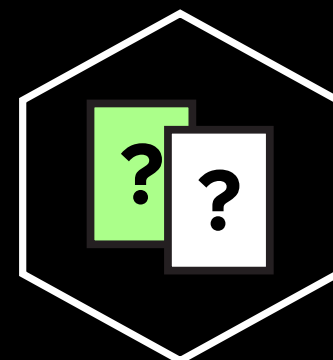
As found in *Gen Z: Trends, Truth & Trust*, there are Six Core Worldviews that define difference in Gen Z, uncovering some interesting gender dynamics for the UK's young men and women.

Two of these Worldviews are predominantly or completely male:



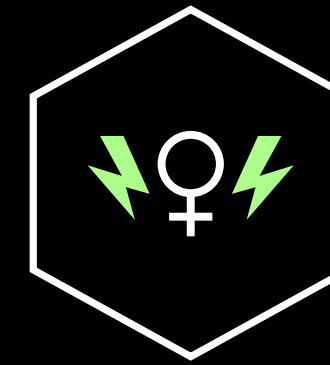
Boys can't be boys

- **82%** male
- Support traditional values
- Over-index on the belief that masculinity is under attack



Blank slates

- **100%** male
- Often neutral or disengaged
- Prioritise hobbies and friendships over societal concerns



One group had no male representation whatsoever – **Girl Power** – who are defined by their empowered and optimistic outlook.

This reveals a difference in how pride in gender identity is being experienced by young men and women. Crucially, it is impacted by distinctly gendered influences and messaging.

Young women are still experiencing many significant challenges of their own (with realities not always matching up to the messaging). But the conversation around “being a woman” often carries a more positive and aspirational tone compared to the narratives that young men are encountering about “being a man”.





Influences in media and entertainment

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Positive male influences are core components of how young men shape their views on what it means to “be a man”, particularly for young men who don’t have a strong presence of positive influences in their daily lives.

However, with masculinities framed both as something “fixed” and something to “be fixed,” the messaging often misses the mark...

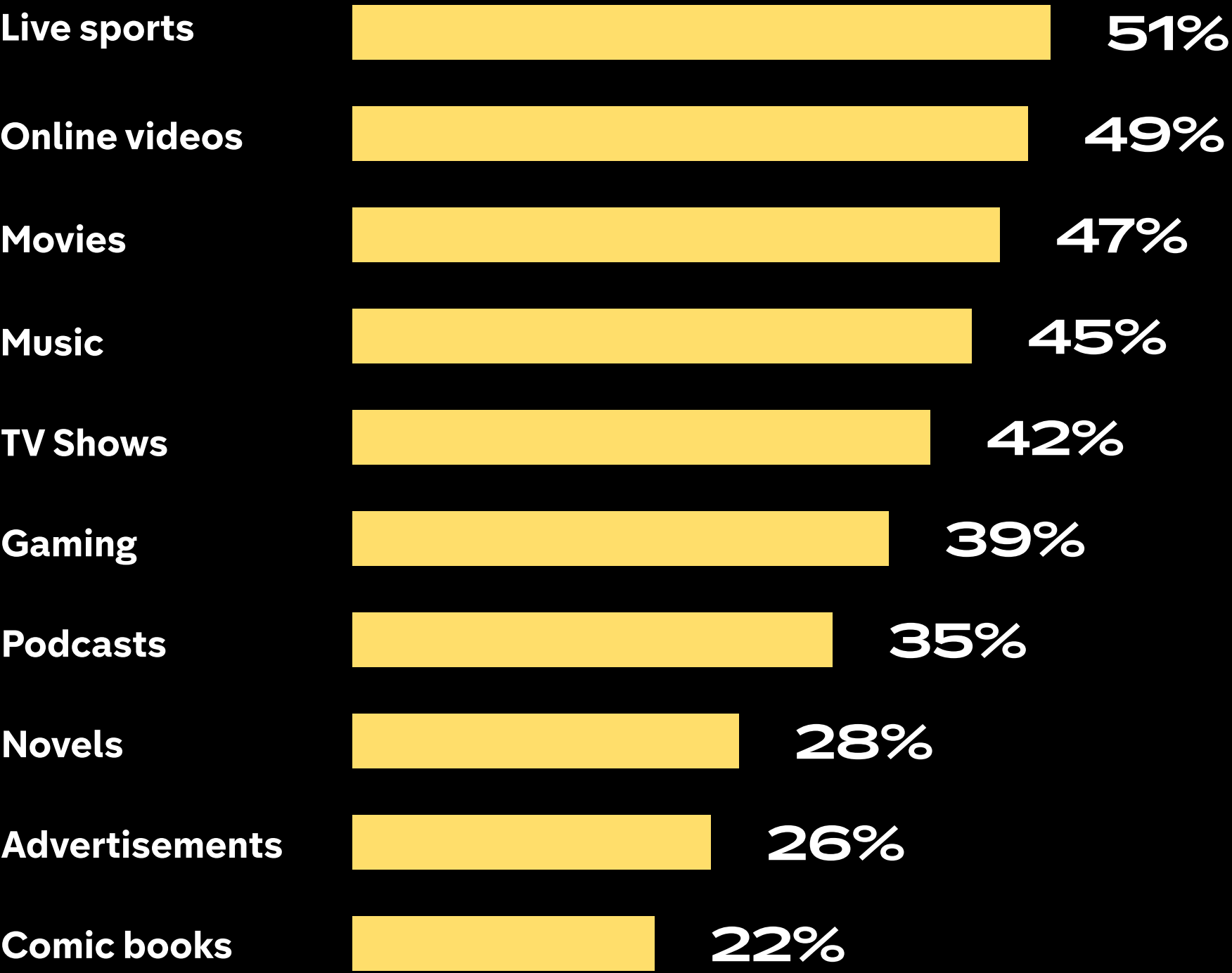
Aspirational examples are seen most in live sport and online videos, where they encounter ‘real men’ grounded in authenticity and relatability, rather than fictional characters.

A fragmented media landscape is also making it harder to navigate what it means to be a man in the world today.

In an online world where misinformation and insincerity is common, it can be hard to know who - and what - to trust. This opens up the potential for some young men to be exposed to harmful, zero-sum narratives around “being a man”.

I “often” see examples of the kind of man I’d like to be in...

(% select among Young Men 18-34 who consume this content)





How young men are experiencing masculinities





Being a “good man”

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Masculinity isn’t top of mind for most young men – being a good man is...

- For many young men, “masculinity” felt abstract, fluid, and hard to articulate, especially compared to talking about what it means to “be a man”.
- In some instances, the term felt loaded by the baggage of “toxicity.”
- What mattered most though was being resilient and reliable – in an uncertain world, young men are focussing on what they can control, such as developing practical skills and building their confidence.
- They are aspiring to visions of masculinities rooted in taking care.

When we asked young men to describe what “being a man” means, the following words came up repeatedly:



A Note on Intersectionality

There is no single way to “be a man” – and our discourse needs to reflect that.

Young men’s understanding of masculinities is heavily influenced by their lived experiences – shaped by a unique intersection of overlapping factors, such as race, class, sexuality, and disability. These influence how they see themselves, how they are seen by others, and what is expected of them.

Youth culture is also increasingly fluid, with identities, interests, and beliefs often pieced together as a kaleidoscope of different perspectives and experiences.





Three pillars of masculinities

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To truly understand masculinities today, we need to move beyond prescriptive portrayals and narrow role-models. By their nature, role-models often elevate certain traits, while overlooking the complexities of intersectional identities. **Instead, we need to offer young men a broader set of possibilities that reflect their diverse, lived realities.**

In our conversations with young men, we identified three key pillars that underpinned their understanding of masculinities and that transcended intersectional identities:



Men as builders

Actively working on improving themselves and their situation



Men as leaders

Beloved, respected and trusted members of their community



Men as providers

Proudly able to take care of the people they love

While they are rooted in more traditional ideals of masculinities (and deliberately named to reflect this), we see these pillars as a framework to build upon, not boundaries to stay within.

This framework allows us to avoid over-correction, yet provides the space to reimagine and evolve. **Masculinities should feel both relatable to young men's experiences and relevant to today's world.**

A Note on Gender Norms

These pillars are not exclusive to men or masculinities – they can be desired, pursued and achieved by anyone.

As Beyond Equality note, prescriptive gender norms can be problematic for all of us, so these pillars are not intended to reinforce existing archetypes.

For young men, these are shared values that are experienced and expressed in a multitude of different ways.





Men as “Builders”





A journey of self-improvement

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We heard a lot that manhood is something to earn,

which leads to a goal-based approach to life...

- This belief is especially strong among 25-34-year-olds (81% agree) and Black men (84% agree).

While positively impacting motivation, productivity and personal growth, it

can also create feelings of inadequacy and overwhelm...

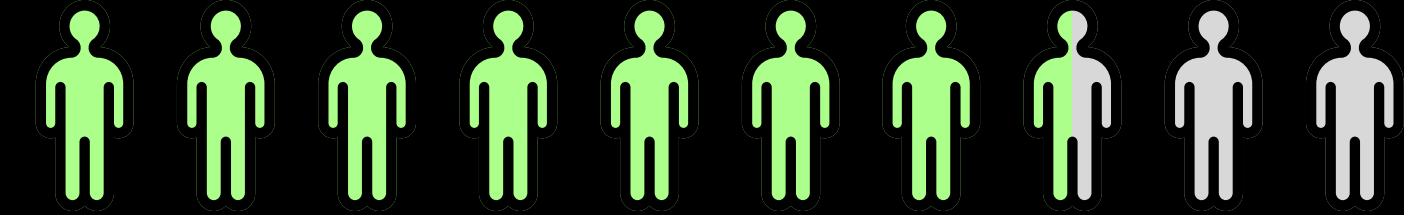
- Just 1 in 10 young men believe they should be happy with where they are in life.

Many young men head to social media for self-improvement motivation, a space which is heavily led by right-wing influencers...

- Messaging around personal responsibility and self-discipline taps directly into a desire to build a better version of themselves.

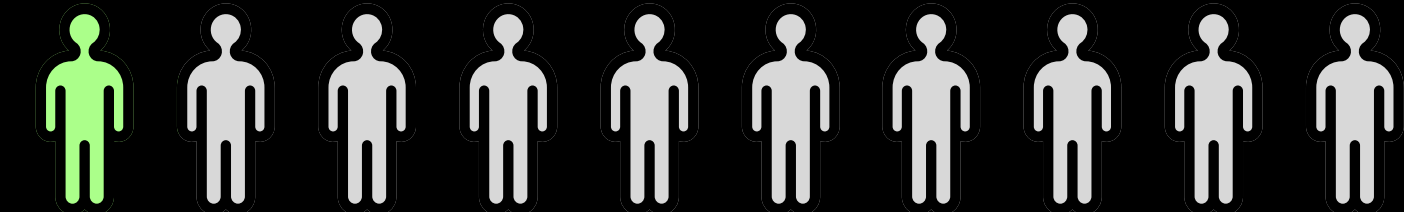
76% of Young Men Strongly Agree / Agree:

As a man, you should always have goals that you are working towards in life



9% of Young Men Strongly Agree / Agree:

As a man, you should just be happy with where you are in life



According to research from Movember⁸, 61% of men in the UK aged 16-25 watch “male and masculinity” influencers – those who regularly engage are simultaneously:

- More optimistic about their own futures and the futures of men
- Reporting higher levels of negative emotion and are more likely to participate in risky health behaviours





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Learning from experts

- Following influencers with practical skills (e.g. financial literacy, cooking, health and fitness).
- YouTube channels, such as Outdoor Boys, called out for their positive demonstrations of survival skills and resourcefulness.
- Creates nostalgia for a “simpler” time (that they may have never lived through).

In NRG’s *From Bond to Beckham* paper, “Men who are experts in a specific skill” ranked 1st as the type of man boys and young men (13-30) want to see more of on screen (53%)⁹

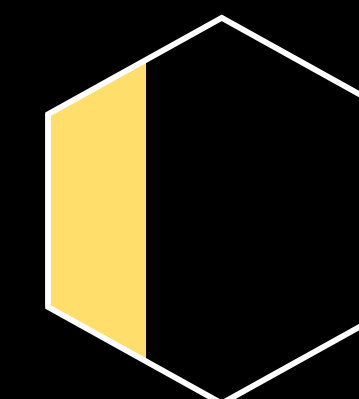
As a man, my value comes from...

(% agree among Young Men 18-34)



48%

...how others perceive me



30%

...how I see myself



“I’m into bodybuilding, sure it’s nice that you can build muscles, but I also like that it’s about working hard, not like in sport where it’s more about natural talent.”

24, White man



Physical fitness

- Going to the gym – taking pride in working hard to get bigger, stronger and fitter.
- Beyond aesthetics, it is a symbol of dedication, commitment and self-control – just like owning a big house or a nice car.
- For those who primarily find validation in the opinions of others, these external markers of success become much more important.





Reimagining Men as “Builders”

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1

Young men have a drive to improve

Many are actively working to build better lives for themselves and those around them; this ambition can be channelled into healthy, productive areas, achieved in collaboration, not isolation.

2

Progress over perfection

Success is a continuous journey, not a final destination; framing success as determined by your own values rather than a fixed, external standard helps young men stay motivated without feeling like they’re constantly falling short.

3

“Softer” skills are incredibly valuable

Being a “Builder” is not just about physical strength or financial success; being capable can be about harnessing emotional reciprocity, domestic skills and creative outlets.

Gold Standard Ted Lasso & AFC Richmond (Ted Lasso)

The series follows a group of men working to build better versions of themselves.

While the initial focus is on mastering a physical skill (football), the three-season arc shows them growing far beyond the pitch. Along the way, they develop skills like emotional intelligence, resilience, communication, and the ability to both collaborate and lead.





Men as “Leaders”





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Aspiring to light up the room

We consistently heard admiration for men who are

effortlessly charismatic, funny and socially magnetic...

- Often referencing mainstream, US-based actors like Will Smith, Kevin Hart and Adam Sandler (both as people and in their acting roles).

Our friendship pairs often praised each other for being fun to be around, or for **being the driving force that brings their group together...**

- Being someone to connect people, make others feel at ease, and foster lasting friendships was seen as both admirable and aspirational.

Some of our more reserved young men spoke about **feeling pressure to appear confident and outgoing**, even when it doesn't come naturally...

- They feel expected to lead in social situations, like striking up new friendships, making group decisions, or even asking for the bill in a restaurant.



"He [my friend] is the glue of every social group that we possibly have. He is a very sociable person, very caring... he's the root of all the friendships we've developed since then. He's the best kind of social glue in any situation."

23, Asian man



"He [my friend] has got good charisma from the start when you meet him, we can have a laugh and a chat, he's intelligent and funny. He's got rizz and aura points."

19, White man



"The Fresh Prince was funny, relatable, easy going... I always wanted to be this kind of charismatic person that everyone likes. I liked him so much I copied his hairstyle!"

29, Black man





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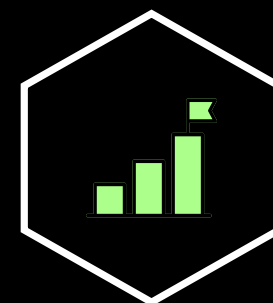
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Stepping up

- Seen as a responsibility, not superiority – a necessary “self-sacrifice”.
- **66%** of young men agree that, as a man, you should “step up and take the lead in most situations,” rather than “step back and uplift others” (where just 11% agree).
- Belief is strongest among conservative men (77% agree), but not limited to ideology (51% of young liberal men also agree).
- Associated with leading by example among progressives – treating others with kindness, speaking up and helping those in need.



“I express my masculinity by remaining calm, keeping control of my emotions in arguments or difficult conversations.”

27, Black man



Emotional control

- Men’s mental health conversation is cutting through – many articulate the importance of emotional literacy in men and want to see on-screen representations.
- Despite this, **65%** agree that a “real man” is seen as someone who can control their emotions, even in difficult situations (markedly lower for LGBTQ+ men at 42%).
- **68%** also agree that, as a man, you should “be careful about who you show your true feelings to” (markedly lower for LGBTQ+ men at 48%).



“I think it’s about who you show your emotions to. Your family is fine because they love and trust you, but if you show your emotions to anyone and everyone, they can spread bad things about you.”

23, Asian man





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1

Male friendships, and the emotional safety within them, are important

Many want to see more examples of deep friendships between men on screen, including examples of men who are kind and open with each other.

2

Normalise emotional openness but anchor it in self-awareness and action

It’s okay to feel deeply, but that it’s also okay to choose how and when to express it; emotional literacy is a tool (e.g. fear can become courage, grief can become purpose).

3

Spotlight men who lead through actions, not authority

Many admire those who earn respect by how they live (being kind, staying informed, taking care of others); leadership is not just taking charge, it is earned by showing up with empathy, integrity, and quiet strength.

Gold Standard Danny (Big Boys)

Danny embodies the kind of charismatic Leader young men are drawn to – fun, funny, and fiercely loyal.

His relationships with other characters show the rewards of emotional openness – specifically, a close friendship with Jack that beautifully balances banter with vulnerability.





Men as “Providers”





Supporting the family unit

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Laddered up from being a “Builder” and a “Leader”...

young men becoming the “Provider” was the most common theme of our interviews...

- Many spoke about responsibility, taking care of their family, and providing stability, while others explicitly referenced being the “breadwinner”.

6 in 10 agree...

that a “real” man is the breadwinner in his family...

- Being someone to connect people, make others feel at ease, and foster lasting friendships was seen as both admirable and aspirational.

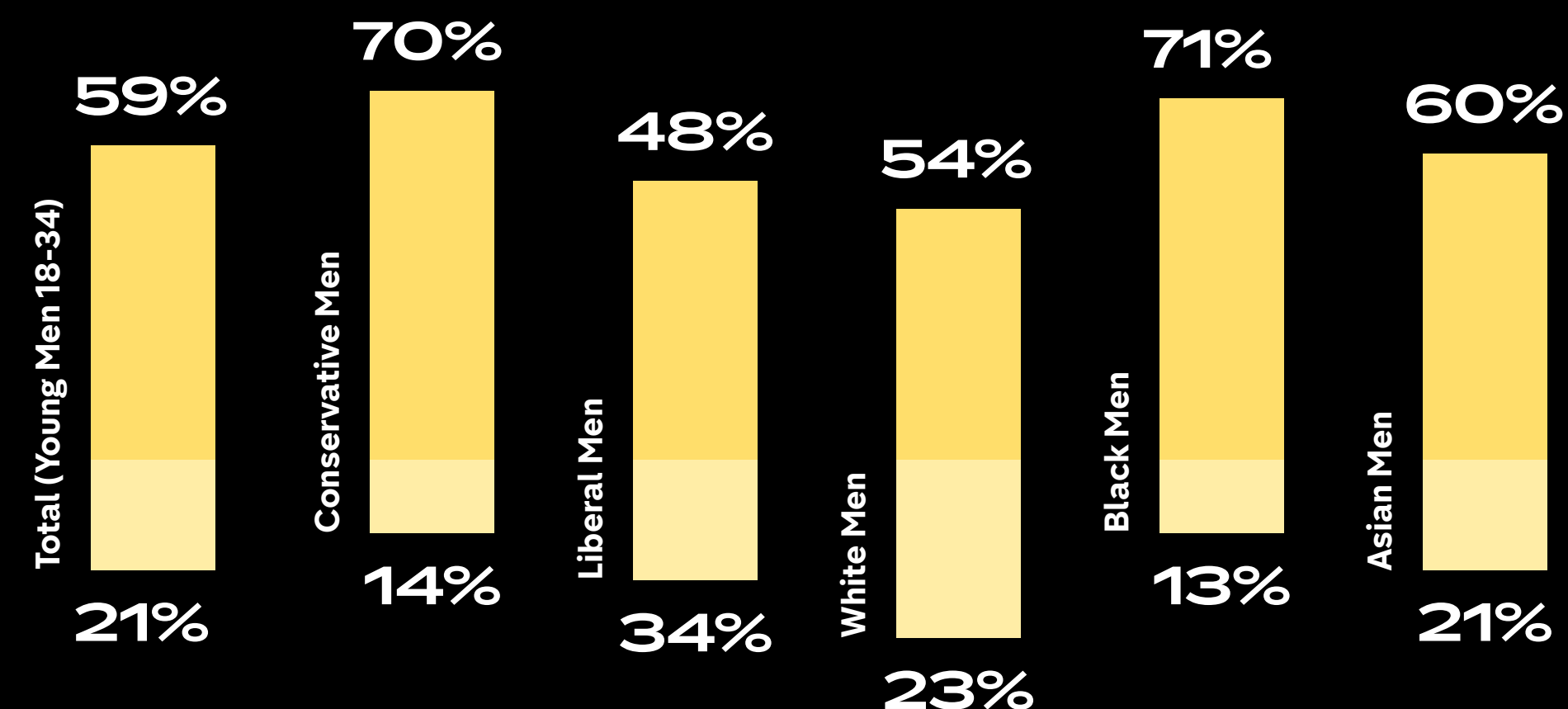
Being a good man was consistently linked with...

being a good father; present, dependable, and able to provide...

- Some viewed the process of bettering themselves today as equipping them with skills to pass down to future children.

A “real” man is the breadwinner in his family

(% strongly agree / agree)



You don't have to be the breadwinner in your family to be a “real” man

(% strongly agree / agree)





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Characteristics & Tensions



In theory vs in practice

- Notion of the sole-provider expectation feels outdated and impractical for many.
- Most also support the idea of men not having to be the primary earner – a sentiment of “if it works for your family – go for it!”.
- But it feels harder to emulate personally – just **1 in 5** young men agree that you don’t need to be the “breadwinner” to be a “real man” (drops to 16% among ethnic minority respondents).
- Carries a perceived implication that your other “manly” traits would have to work harder to make up for it.



“Don’t get me wrong, if my girlfriend said ‘I make enough money, you don’t have to work’ I’d be over the moon. But you need to work together to provide for each other, and it’s the mans responsibility to make sure things are okay.”

19, White man



Binary norms

- Masculinities are reductively defined in contrast to femininity – not being the “breadwinner” is equated with taking up an emasculated role as the “homemaker”.
- Broadly, this disconnect shows up in media preferences – young men are least interested in portrayals of stay-at-home dads, men in traditionally feminine jobs, or men who dress in non-traditional ways (according to NRG’s *From Bond to Beckham*).



“[Being a man means] providing for your family, being the breadwinner - can’t just stop if you feel like it, you have to keep going. Society doesn’t give you any benefit of the doubt in that sense, they’d just think you’re lazy.”

30, Asian man



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1

Provision goes beyond just financial support

the desire to provide is about purpose and value; young men that are needed beyond their income (for their presence, care, ideas, and emotional support).

2

Non-traditional providers can be aspirational, not the punchline

Too often these men are shown as lazy, emasculated, or dependent; flipping the narrative shows them as confident, capable and valued (because of their contribution, not in spite of it).

3

Domestic and emotional labour can be masculine strengths

Vital life skills like cooking, cleaning and caregiving are not gendered tasks; men taking on these roles can be framed as a highly respected duty.

Gold Standard **Jack Pearson (This Is Us)**

Jack embodies the Provider pillar through both responsibility and emotional presence.

While he initially sees financial success as the key to being a good father and partner, his journey shows that true provision is about more than money; it's about being present, dependable, and emotionally engaged.





What this means for brands





There is a disconnect between representation and portrayal

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Levels of representation

Men have a strong presence in TV advertising; however, the representation of men tends to skew older – with less young men being represented than young women.

53%

of ads between 2020 and 2024 featured male characters of lead or minor roles¹⁰

45%

of lead and minor characters in ads between 2020 and 2024 were male¹¹

only 17%

of male characters are assumed to be 19-29 compared to 28% of female characters¹²

Portrayal in TV advertising

When we ask how the total population typically see each of the below groups portrayed in TV advertising, **the top portrayals say a lot about the bar we’re setting for men as an industry.**¹³

#rank	Men	Women
1st	Strong	Friendly
2nd	Successful	Sensitive
3rd	Intelligent	Intelligent
4th	Overly masculine	Overly feminine

Among the young men we spoke to, many adverts are still felt to lean on a narrow, glossy vision of masculinities to sell their product.¹⁴



The [male-targeted beauty and cosmetics ad] is so one dimensional and voyeuristic. You know it’s just there to sell something.”

24, White Man

How men feel about ads

Despite a strong presence on-screen overall, stories and portrayals that connect are limited, driving a **perception of absence or loss.**

There is a sense that **the “ideal” male image shown in adverts does not feel relatable** – either in values, lifestyle, or appearance.

A Third

of men 18-34 say they rarely or never see examples of “the kind of man they want to be” in advertising¹⁵

Over a Third

of men say TV advertisers need to do more to include men in ads, rising to HALF of men aged 25-34¹⁶



There is opportunity in the challenge

For men, being on screen isn't the barrier, but the way they're portrayed is...

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The challenge

Men have a longstanding history of being the dominant group in society, and there is still plenty to do to achieve gender equality.

However, as the cultural conversation around gender roles, identity and masculinities has evolved in recent years, **some men have been left feeling lost and unseen.**

The challenge is to create messaging that corresponds to these changes, whilst still feeling relatable and providing optimism.

The opportunity

Our findings show that masculinities are **plural, personal, and highly nuanced.**

For brands, this is a creative and cultural opportunity. Young men want, and expect, aspirational advertising, but they want it to be anchored in some sense of realism.

Brands that stand still risk irrelevance.

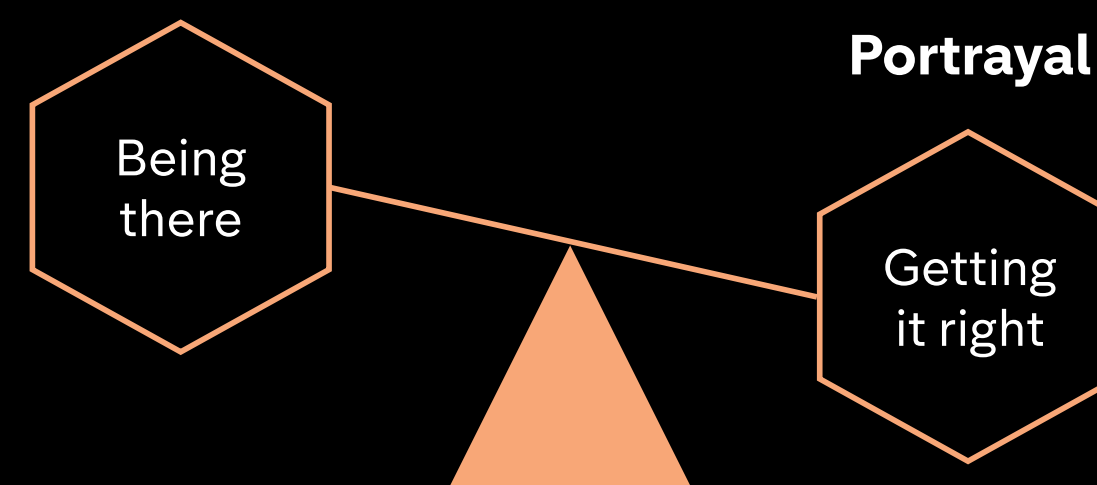
Evolving these portrayals not only benefits young men, but wider society too.

The business case

Whilst there is a strong social case for the need to change the way we're representing, understanding and supporting young men today, let's not overlook the commercial benefits of getting this right.

The Male Gender Unstereotype Metric predicts that **positive portrayals of men in advertising improves both brand equity and short-term sales.**¹⁷

Representation



The Male Gender Unstereotype Metric uses Kantar's LINK+ global ad-testing database to capture whether portrayals of men set a good example for others, and how effective those positive portrayals are at driving key brand metrics.

Brand equity

+37 Percentage points

Short term sales

+27 Percentage points





6 key tips to turn representation into resonance

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1

Modernise the pillars of masculinities

You don't need to reject traditional values – just update them. Build on what matters to young men, inclusive of emotional depth, vulnerability, and growth. Remember to evolve, not overcorrect.

2

Explore intersectional nuance

Masculinities are not monolithic. Culture, class, race, sexuality, and disability all shape how manhood is expressed. Representation must reflect that complexity.

3

Take cues from their culture

Sport and the online video space are cultural arenas where young men see aspirational figures that resonate. Use this to inform storytelling and partnerships in your TV advertising.

4

Celebrate male friendship

Explore bonds with other men as a vehicle to create spaces for emotional safety. Embrace the imperfections; from failure to success, and conflict to unity.

5

Build bridges, not sides

Masculinities don't exist in isolation. Use storytelling to build empathy between men and women. Equality is a shared project and mutual understanding is key.

6

Don't forget the fun

Masculinities aren't all weight and struggle, humour and joy are central to how many young men relate to themselves and to others. Let lightness sit alongside depth.





Working with Channel 4

Channel 4 is the perfect partner to work with on this.

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We have a portfolio of content that speaks to the pillars of masculinities and are on hand to bring you on board – whether that be for an advertising campaign, sponsorship, or creating bespoke social branded entertainment.

Diversifying Strengths



“The Last Leg deals with serious issues related to men’s mental health and societal expectations, despite being a comedy programme”

Male, 16-24

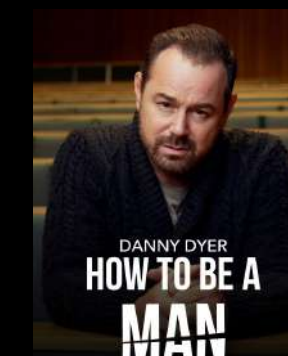


Examining Stigmas



“[Watching the men on Virgin Island] I felt a lot of respect for them for going on the programme and being able to grow as people ”

Male, 16-24



Showcasing Friendship



“[Danny in Big Boys] balanced responsibility, vulnerability, charm and love for his friends”

Male, 25-34





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Channel 4 and NRG, a global research agency, co-funded and developed Mirror On Masculinities. Building on both our existing research in this space, we conducted further qualitative and quantitative research in June 2025.

Qualitative

- Conducted sixteen 60-minute interviews with twenty-four young men aged 18-34 across the UK. We interviewed both individuals and pairs (they could be friends, siblings, couples) and participants were selected to ensure regional representation and a broad mix of ethnic backgrounds, social classes, neurodivergence, and sexualities. Ahead of their interviews, each participant completed a week-long homework diary, documenting the media they engaged with and any depictions of masculinities that stood out to them. They also answered reflective questions about who they are as young men today, and what makes them feel proud.

Quantitative

- Ran an online quantitative survey among 1,000 young men aged 18-34 in the UK (with a natural fall-out of race, sexuality, and political leaning). The survey explored young men's beliefs about masculinities, how they experience it in their day-to-day lives, and how it's represented in the media they consume.

Other Primary Sources

- Mirror On the Industry, developed by Channel 4 with research agency, Tapestry, consists of an annual advertising audit of the top 1,000 TV adverts in the UK, alongside a bi-annual consumer survey of 4,000 adults (nationally representative). This study was conducted from March-May 2025.
- Gen Z: Trends, Truth and Trust, developed by Channel 4 with research agency, Craft, consists of a survey of 3,000 13-65-year-olds (2,000 13-27-year-olds and 1,000 28-65-year-olds, using a nationally representative sample), alongside 30 in-depth interviews and ethnographic visits (with people across the UK aged 16-27), and a comprehensive literature review. This study was conducted from May-August 2024.
- Through their in-house Core4 and 4Youth communities, Channel 4 surveyed 1,042 adults in the UK (18+) on the topic of portrayals of masculinities in the media. This study was conducted in May 2025.
- From Bond to Beckham: The Search for Positive Visions of Masculinity in UK Media, developed by NRG, consists of a survey of 750 boys and young men in the UK — including 500 teens and young men ages 13 to 30, and 250 boys ages 8 to 12. This study was conducted online in June and July 2024. Additional data comes from a study of 250 parents of young boys in the UK, conducted in tandem.





Citations

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¹ NRG (2024), From Bond to Beckham, survey.

Base: UK 13–30-year-old males, n=500, UK 8-12-year-old males, n=250

² Richard Reeves (2022), Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters and What to Do About It (London: Bloomsbury Academic)

³ Financial Times analysis of British Election Study (January 2024), ‘Emerging tensions? How younger generations are dividing on masculinity and gender equality’, Ipsos & King’s College London

⁴ Ipsos & King’s College London (2024), Emerging tensions? How younger generations are dividing on masculinity and gender equality

⁵ Starling & Tapestry (2025), The Rift

⁶ Channel 4 & Craft (2024), Gen Z: Trends, Truth & Trust, survey. Base: UK 13-27-year-olds, n=2,000

⁷ Financial Times analysis of UK Labour Force Survey and UK Longitudinal Study (September 2024), ‘Young women are starting to leave men behind’

⁸ Movember & The Good Side (2025), Young Men’s Health in a Digital World

⁹ NRG (2024), From Bond to Beckham, survey. Base: UK 13–30-year-old males, n=500, UK 8-12-year-old males, n=250

¹⁰ Channel 4 & Tapestry (2025), Mirror On the Industry, advertising audit

¹¹ Channel 4 & Tapestry (2025), Mirror On the Industry, advertising audit

¹² Channel 4 & Tapestry (2025), Mirror On the Industry, advertising audit

¹³ Channel 4 & Tapestry (2025), Mirror On the Industry, survey. Base: UK 16-65-year-olds, n= 4,000

¹⁴ NRG & Channel 4 (2025), Mirror on Masculinities, in-depth interviews

¹⁵ NRG & Channel 4 (2025), Mirror on Masculinities, survey. Base: UK 18-34-year-olds, n=1,000

¹⁶ Channel 4 & Tapestry (2025), Mirror On the Industry, survey. Base: UK 16-65-year-olds, n= 4,000

¹⁷ Kantar (2024), Connecting with Men: How Brands Can Decode Modern Masculinity



Please note, this list refers only to those sources not cited within the main body of the report.



MIRROR ON Masculinities