

ALPHA RISE

MASCULINITY AT THE BREAKING POINT

Prosumer Report

HAVAS

2026





The world feels harder. Rougher. Less predictable. And when the world shifts, masculinity shifts, too. In a context of geopolitical conflict, economic pressure, and social fragmentation, many men around the world feel something fundamental is slipping away. Not status, exactly. Not power alone. But their sense of self. Their *raison d'être*.

For some—the [Andrew Tate](#)s and [Le Raptors](#) of the world—the response is misogyny and even violence against women. We see that in the rise of the [incel movement](#), displays of “[hypermascularity](#),” and efforts to return women to a place of subservience. For other males, the result instead is a sort of social paralysis, with boys and men no longer clear on what the world expects of them in this century. While women continue to advance in academia and the workplace, many men feel adrift.

In early 2026, Havas Group surveyed 11,000 adults across 25 markets to examine how masculinity is being reshaped—by uncertainty, by culture wars, by social media, and by shifting expectations between men and women. What emerged is not the collapse of masculinity, but its radicalization.



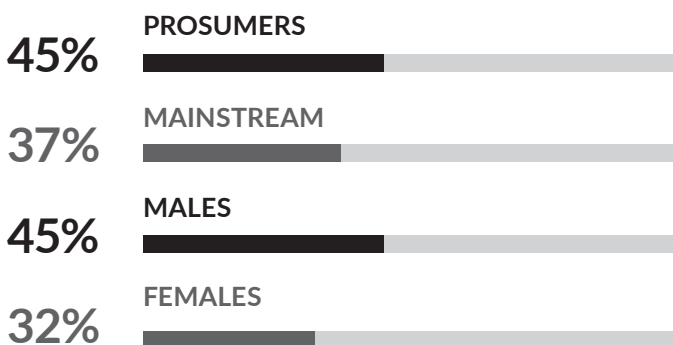
Masculinity “Under Attack”

Across countries, a striking number of respondents believe masculinity needs defending. This feeling cuts across geography, class, and age, though it is strongest among men and younger generations. Nearly half of Prosumers worldwide—including majorities in the U.S., China, and India—believe

masculinity is under attack. Around a third of women agree.

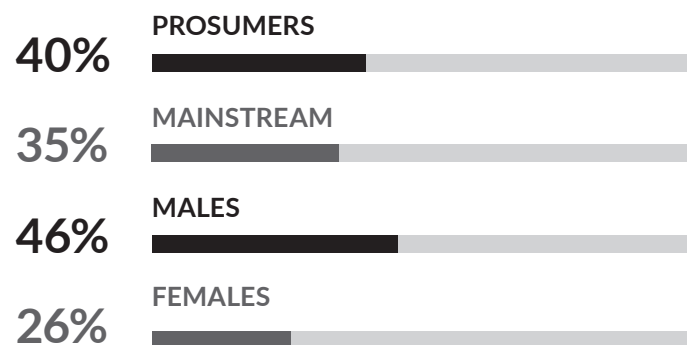
Moreover, nearly half of men globally (46%) think it’s more difficult to be a man today than a woman. Only around a quarter of women agree.

I believe that masculinity is under attack and needs to be defended



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

Today, it is more difficult to be a man than a woman



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)



How did we get here when it felt not too long ago that the genders were advancing together? The answer may lie in the perceived blurring of gender roles, which some might suggest has given women more—freedom, opportunity—while giving men fewer of the privileges once reserved for them.

In the future, I believe traditional gender roles will blur completely

58% PROSUMERS



50% MAINSTREAM

(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

The perception that being a man today is harder—socially, culturally, symbolically—isn't driven by a single loss, but by accumulation: the erosion of traditional roles, the multiplication of contradictory expectations, the sense of being judged but no longer understood or accepted “as is.”

The survey findings uncovered four shifts impacting men and gender relations: Men at War, Men Under Pressure, Battle of the Sexes, and Gen Z in the Crossfire.



Men at War

Havas Group's 2024 survey on **trust** revealed that more than 7 in 10 Prosumers globally believe the future is increasingly uncertain. As global anxiety rises, so does the value placed on physical strength, discipline, and dominance. Around one-third of Prosumers—rising to 61% of Prosumers in India—believe the rise in geopolitical conflict is contributing to men's intensified pursuit of physical strength. Working out is no longer about health or aesthetics alone; it becomes a form of protection. In a

world that feels uncontrollable, the body reasserts itself as an anchor of identity and agency.

The cult of strength for men is mainly linked to:
(Choose one—showing Prosumers.)



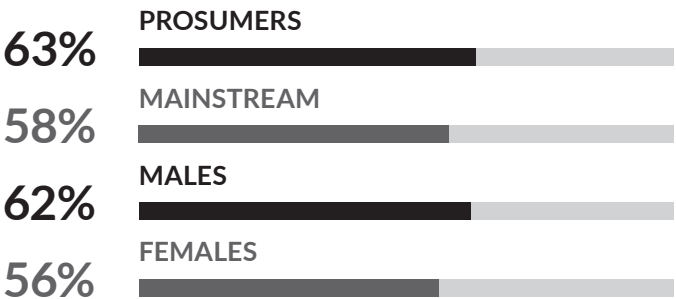
This is not nostalgia. It is survival logic.



SOFT IS NO LONGER AN OPTION

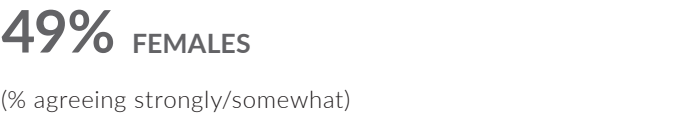
There is widespread agreement—including among more than 6 in 10 Prosumers and men—that men today are softer than in generations past. Most feel that part of the issue is that young boys are overly protected today, shielded from (or even forbidden from taking) the sorts of risks that once built strength and daring. The word *soft** surfaces repeatedly online, not as an insult but as a fear. Soft equals vulnerable.

I think men today are softer than previous generations



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

I think today, young boys are overly protected, and they won’t be able to stand up as men in the future

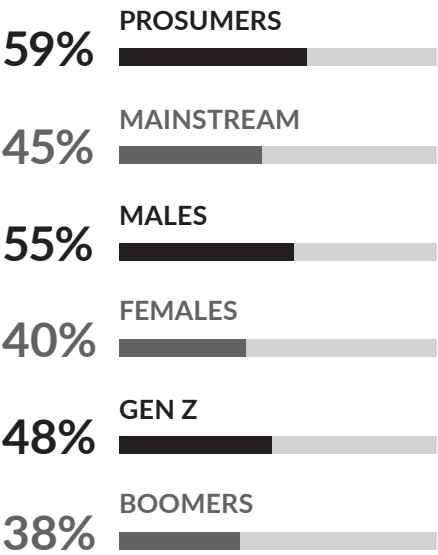


Consequently, a large segment of modern society wants to see a return to male competitiveness and heroism. Around 6 in 10 Prosumers globally believe competition brings out the best in men, and the same percentage admire men who engage in war to defend their country. There is a generational split on that last statement, with 57% of Gen Zs admiring military defenders, compared with just 43% of baby boomers, who may have grown more cynical about the purpose and costs of war. This generational divide is also apparent in the political realm, with more than one-third of Gen Zs admiring “strongman” political leaders who inspire fear, versus less than a quarter of boomers who feel the same.

*This is distinct from “[softboy](#)” culture, which prizes emotional sensitivity and gentle aesthetics.

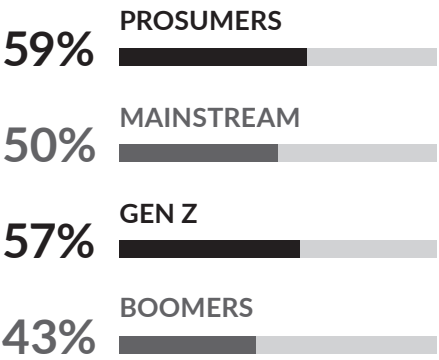


I believe that competition between men brings out the best in them



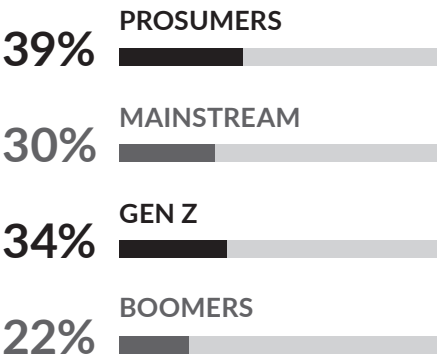
(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

I admire men who are engaged in wars around the world to defend their country



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

I admire political leaders who show strength and inspire fear in others



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

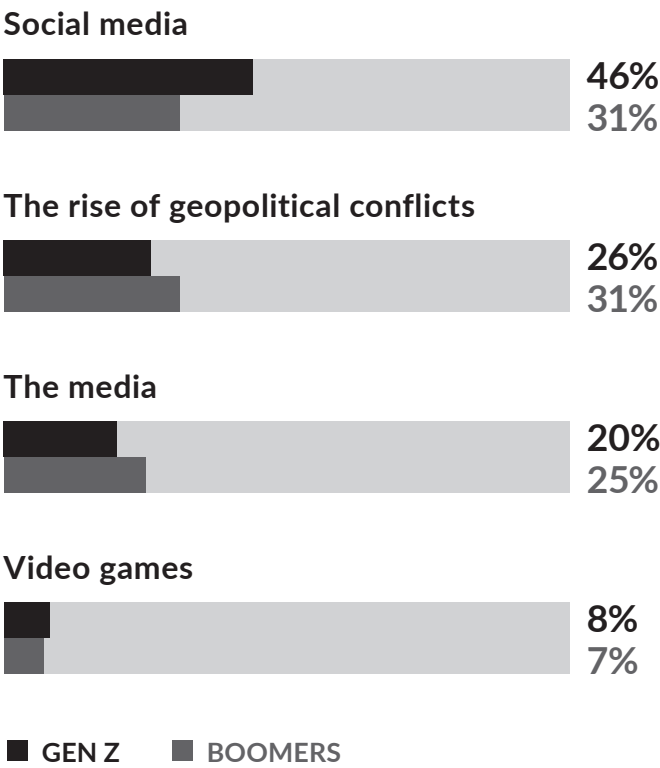
This speaks to the younger generation's vocal embrace of traditional masculine instincts: self-control, toughness, competition, stoicism. Emotion is permitted—but only if it doesn't undermine power.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA TRAP

Social media did not invent masculine anxiety. But it monetizes it. Algorithms reward outrage, provocation, and hyper-clarity. Ambiguity doesn't perform. Nuance doesn't trend. Extremes do.

For young men especially, male-oriented communities online promise belonging, validation, and answers—often reductive ones. Many boys and men find there the recognition and acceptance they don't feel elsewhere. Around half of Gen Zs attribute men's heightened interest in physical strength to the influence of social media.

The cult of strength for men is mainly linked to:



The manosphere* isn't marginal. It's scalable. And once inside, language shifts. Worldviews sharpen. Attitudes harden. Identity becomes content.

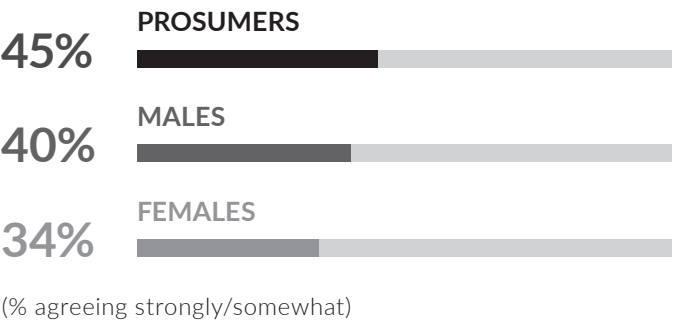
*Merriam-Webster defines the manosphere as "a network of websites, online forums, and other digital media typically characterized by anti-feminist and misogynistic views and the promotion of ultraconservative models of masculinity."

WHO LET THE ALPHAS OUT?

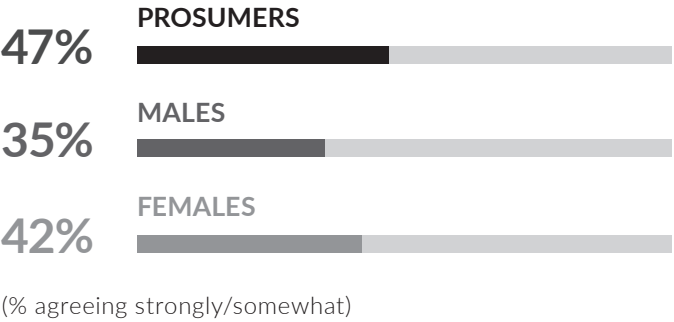
One side note: The manosphere is all about the veneration of the so-called "alpha male." The phrase came to prominence in the early 1980s thanks to *Chimpanzee Politics*, a book by a Dutch primatologist. While the author emphasized the alpha chimps' strengths as peacemakers, protectors, and coalition-builders, conservative leaders instead focused on traits such as intimidation and dominance, encouraging younger conservatives to assert control.

Today's interpretation of "alpha" is all about strength and dominance. So it's interesting to see that Prosumers are somewhat more likely to think it's a good thing for women to behave like "alpha females" than for men to behave like "alpha males." It seems likely that misinterpretations of what it means to be an "alpha" have tainted the term when applied to men.

I think it's a good thing that some men behave like alpha males



I think it's a good thing that some women behave like alpha women





Men Under Pressure

As noted earlier, nearly half of men globally (46%) believe it is more difficult to be a man today than a woman, pointing to their sense of being treated unfairly. This may seem absurd to some people, but it is grounded in harsh realities. In the European Union (EU), for instance, **suicide rates** are around three to four times higher among men than women, and loneliness may be a factor. In the U.S., 42% of men under age 30 **report** having no close friends,

compared with 27% of women of the same age. Simultaneously, in most OECD and EU countries, boys are significantly more likely than girls to **leave school early** and are less likely to complete higher education. This is taking place against a backdrop of what the American Economic Association has termed “**the blue-collar blues**,” a condition stemming from widespread losses in manufacturing jobs, long a mainstay of male employment.

ENTER: THE AGE OF CONFUSION

Here lies a core tension for many men: the push and pull between being a *good man* and being a *real man*.

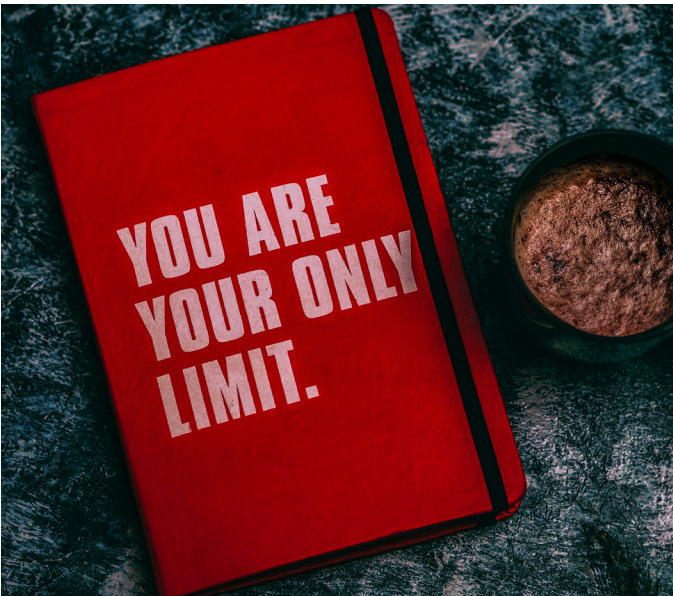
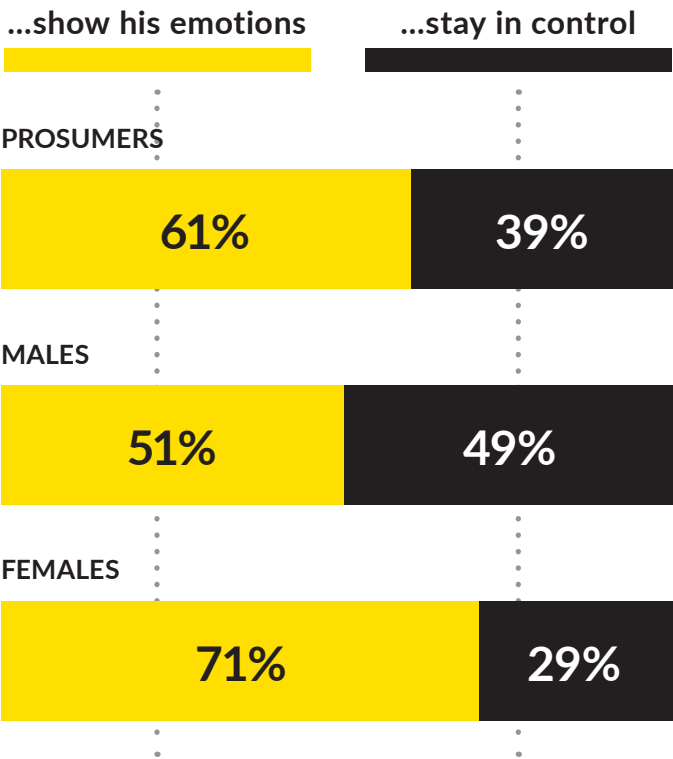
What's the difference? A *good man* is typically defined as someone responsible, respectable, empathetic, and emotionally intelligent. Good men uphold honor, duty, and sacrifice and stand up for "the little guy." A *real man*, in contrast, demonstrates strength, stoicism, success, and confidence. Real men rarely show their feelings, and they play through the pain.

Men today are expected to be both. At the same time. Without contradiction.

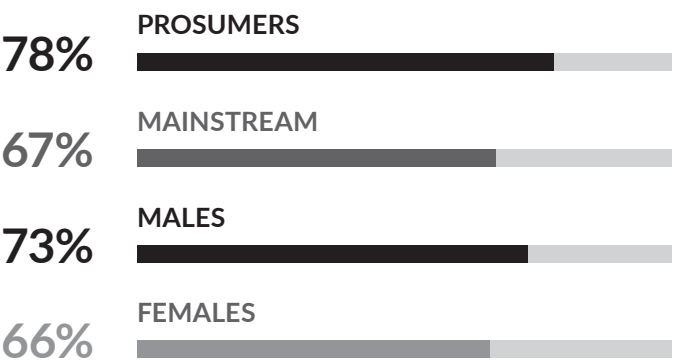
While 61% of Prosumers—and 71% of women—think it's more important for a man to show his emotions rather than stay in control, 78% of Prosumers think men need to be more self-disciplined. Out with the soft.

Which comes closer to your point of view: (Choose one.)

It's important for a man to...



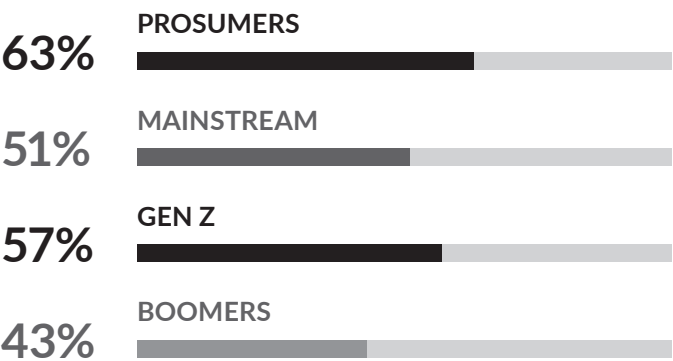
More self-discipline is exactly what men need right now



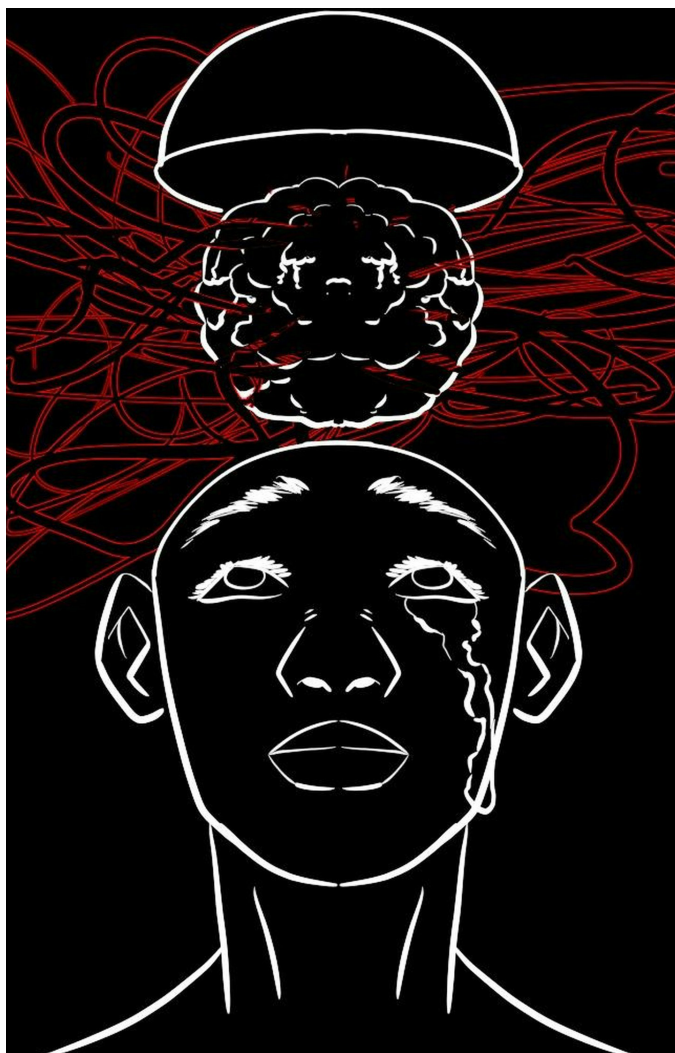
(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

And while nearly two-thirds of Prosumers think it's important to show strength to command respect, 89% want men to be more open about their mental health.

It's important to show strength to command respect



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)



PLAYING BOTH SIDES

Much progress has been made in recent decades in bringing mental health out into the open, removing much of the stigma that for too long shrouded treatable conditions in shame and secrecy. We can see progress in the fact that nearly half of the men surveyed (46%) say they're comfortable crying in front of others when they're moved or upset. Moreover, therapy today is not only more common; it's embraced as a strength. When we asked respondents whether a man seeing a therapist gains power or reveals weakness, fully 89% of Prosumers and 83% of men chose the former.

I'm comfortable crying in front of others when I'm moved or upset

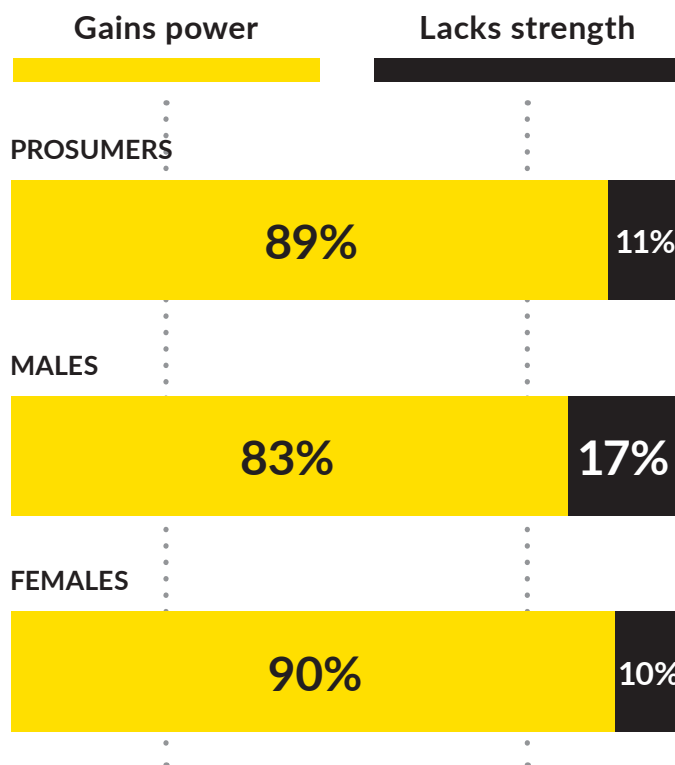
46% MALES



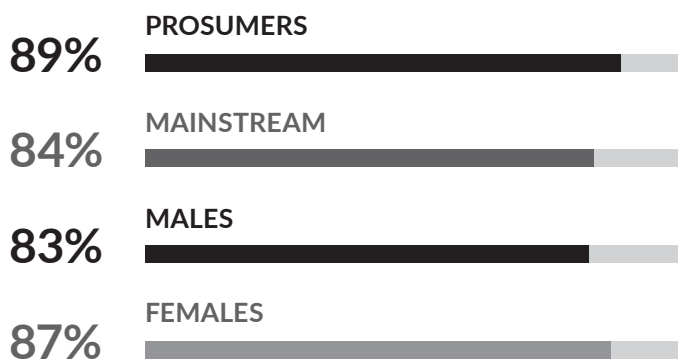
59% FEMALES

(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

**A man who is going to therapy:
(Choose one.)**



I think men should be more open about their mental health



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

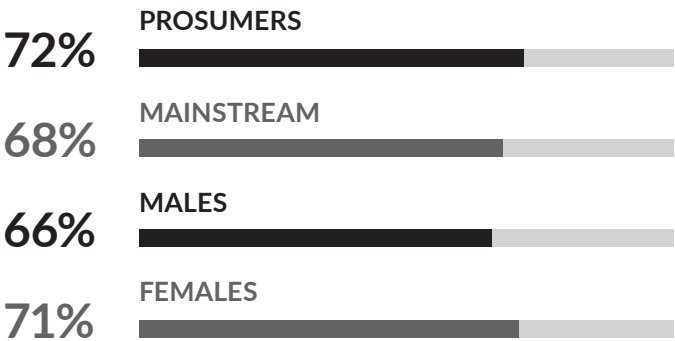
So...men need to be strong but vulnerable. Authoritative but willing to reach out for help.

For some, the result is paralysis—exhaustion from trying to balance incompatible demands. Men don't know which self will be rewarded—and which will be punished.



We do see the “good men versus real man” tension reveal itself, however, on the question of professional success. Nearly three-quarters of Prosumers and two-thirds of men think that men who choose to be stay-at-home fathers are every bit as masculine as those who climb the corporate ladder. And yet, nearly half of Prosumers, 43% of men, and around a third of women think a man’s professional success and earning power are the *primary measure of his worth*. That’s a weighty burden.

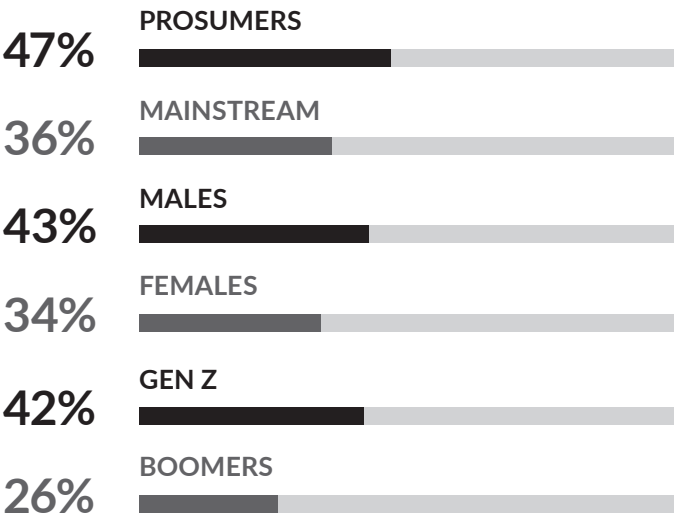
I’m convinced that men who choose to be stay-at-home fathers are just as masculine as those who climb corporate ladders



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)



The primary measure of a man’s worth is his professional success and earning power

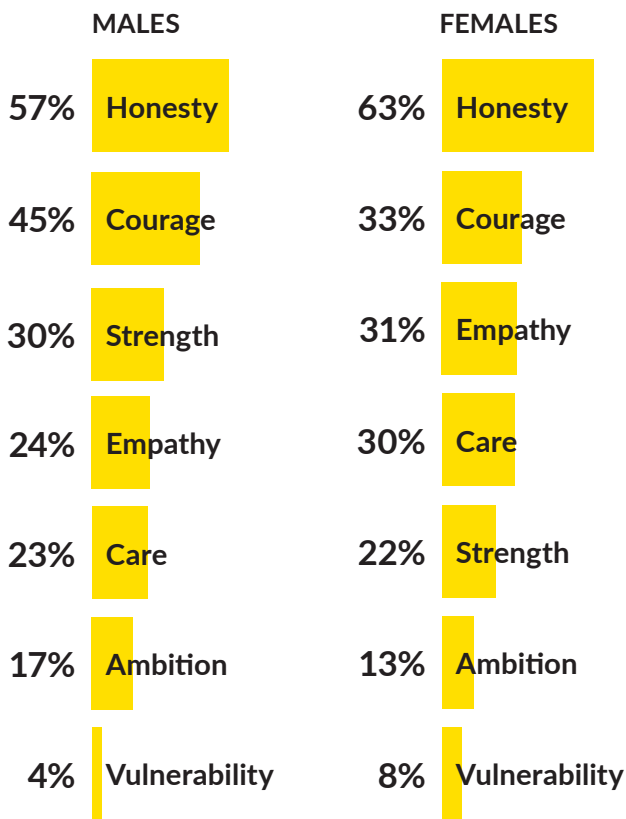


(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

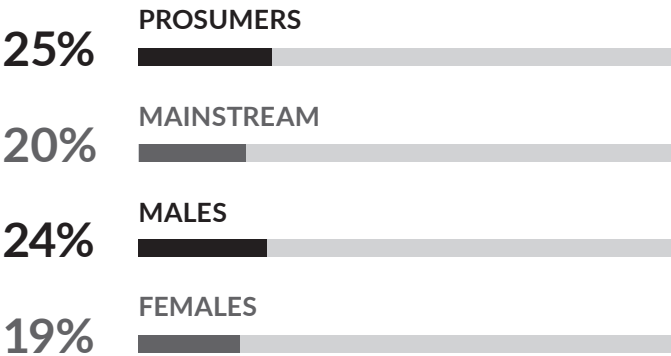


Responses to another question are equally revealing: When we asked which of a set of qualities were most important for a man, both men and women placed honesty and courage at the top. However, women also placed two “softer” traits high on the list: empathy and care. This preference for good men is also reflected in the fact that women were less likely than men—19% versus 25%, respectively—to agree that “bad guys” are more attractive than gentlemen.

The most important quality for a man is: (Choose two.)



I think bad boys are more attractive than gentlemen



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

Men tend to admire real men, while women place more value on good men—adding to the tension.



Battle of the Sexes

With masculinity in crisis, are women facing smooth sailing? Not exactly. While males juggle the “good man versus real man” conflict, women struggle with conflicting pressures of their own. Females have far more opportunities at school and work today. However, many are frustrated by a system that continues to limit their advancement in the workforce while still demanding that they be the primary parent and keeper of the home. Rather than having it all, they’re expected to do it all. And they don’t see how that system can be fixed unless men are willing

to make radical changes in their attitudes and behaviors.

At one end of the spectrum, some younger women—influenced by social media—are seeking a reset, looking back nostalgically to what they imagine was a simpler, more rewarding life in the pre-feminist era. These women are aligning themselves with the “[tradwife](#)” movement, seeking a return to the time when men were heads of households and sole providers, and women tended to the home and family. In theory, tradwives align well with the rise of the alpha male; in practice, it isn’t feasible for most families nowadays to survive on a single paycheck, and some early advocates of the tradwife lifestyle are having [second thoughts](#).

A separate trend is seeing women forgo romantic relationships entirely, preferring to go it alone or with friends. Morgan Stanley [forecast](#) that by 2030, 45% of women aged 25–44 in the U.S. will be single. As one headline put it: “American women are giving up on marriage.”



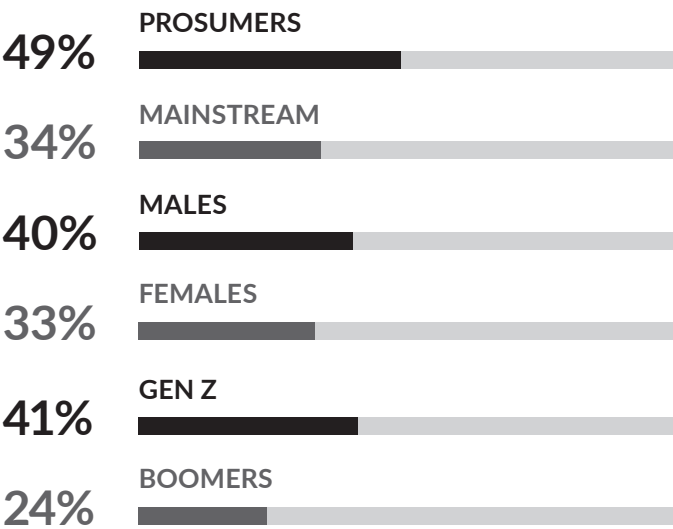
ARE WE EXPERIENCING THE GREAT DETACHMENT?

At present, male-female relationships feel heavier. More fraught. More transactional.

Many women express fatigue and a sense of being “over it.” Many men express frustration and resentment. Both sides feel misunderstood, put upon, and undervalued. The sexes are not just renegotiating gender roles; they are renegotiating coexistence.

For some boys and men, one solution is to seek out male-only “safe spaces”—forums where they can communicate freely and escape pushback from women. Nearly half of Prosumers and 4 in 10 men consider male-only online communities to be providers of valuable support that men can’t find elsewhere.

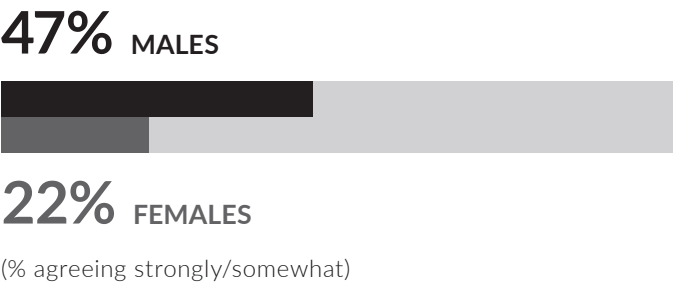
I believe that online male communities (forums, Discord servers, subreddits) provide valuable support that men can’t find elsewhere



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

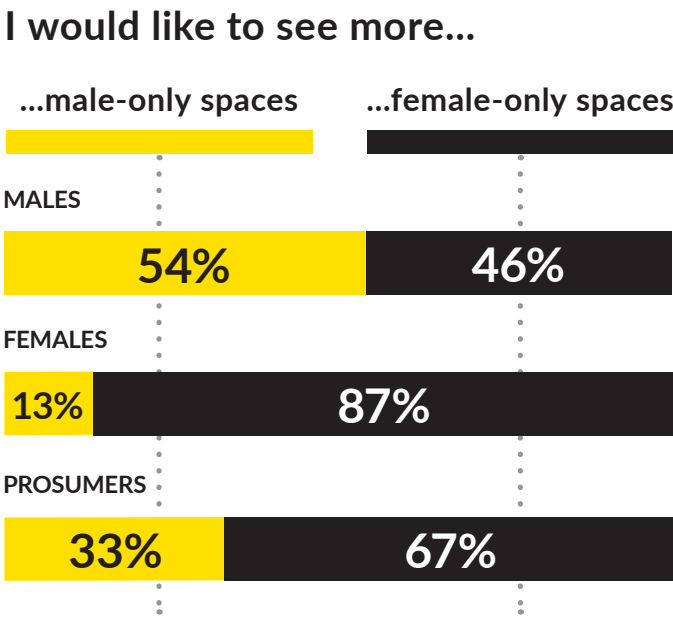
A recurring topic in some of these forums is the supposed tougher hand today’s men have been dealt. For instance, nearly half of men versus under a quarter of women believe the dating market has become unfair to men. It’s certainly a different “market” from the one their grandfathers faced, when men held all the cards and a woman without independent wealth needed a husband to survive.

I believe the dating market has become unfair to men



And yet, it’s interesting to note that when asked to choose between more male-only spaces and more female-only ones, two-thirds of Prosumers opted for the latter. There is an abiding sense that male-only spaces either exclude women from critical opportunities or fuel negative attitudes and actions. In contrast, female-only spaces are seen as offering women a much-needed level of physical safety and emotional support.

Which comes closer to your point of view: (Choose one.)

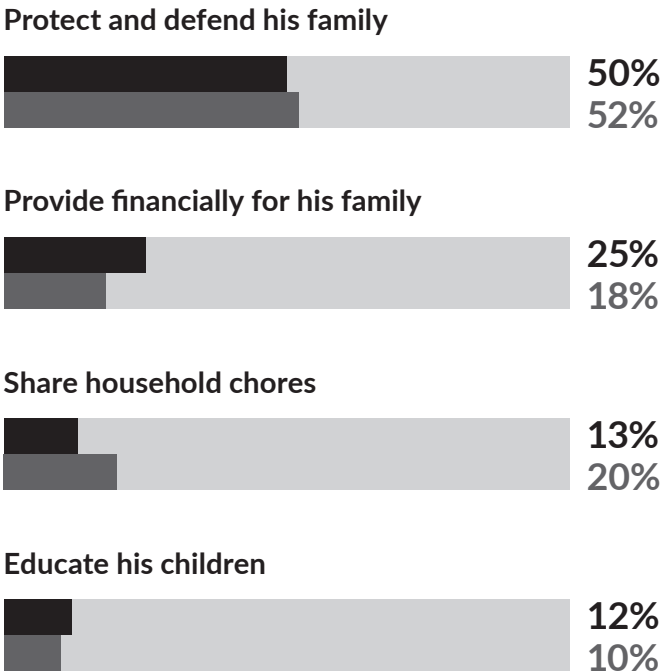


DON'T KISS TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES GOODBYE JUST YET

Since the women's movement gained steam in the 1960s, there has been considerable convergence in gender roles, as women have entered domains once exclusive to men and more men have taken on expanded roles in childcare and household maintenance. This does not mean, however, that the roles are wholly blurred.



I think a man's role is to: (Choose one.)

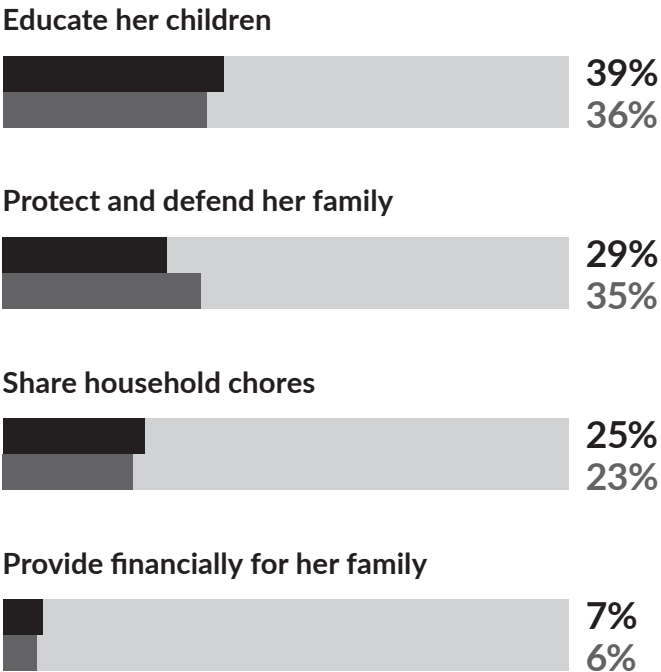


■ MALES ■ FEMALES

When presented with a list of responsibilities, both men and women agreed that the primary role of the man is to protect and defend his family, while a woman's first responsibility is to educate her children. Digging deeper into the responses, we do see some differences between the sexes. Men, for instance, are less likely to cite household chores as their top responsibility, while women are more apt to consider themselves first and foremost protectors of the family.



I think a woman's role is to: (Choose one.)



■ MALES ■ FEMALES

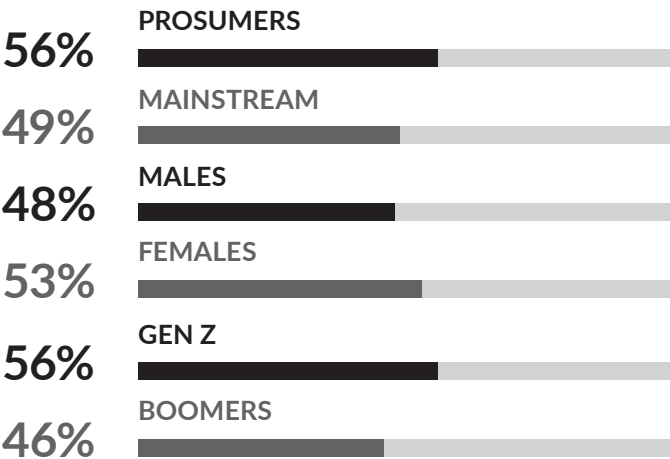


This confusion is not abstract. It overlaps with real pressures, including loneliness, educational disengagement, mental health struggles, and economic anxiety.

Young men are not only angrier. They are more lost.

And social media is exacerbating the situation: A majority of Prosumers, women, and Gen Zs are convinced that social media algorithms are shaping a more violent generation of men.

I am convinced that algorithms on social media are shaping a more violent generation of men

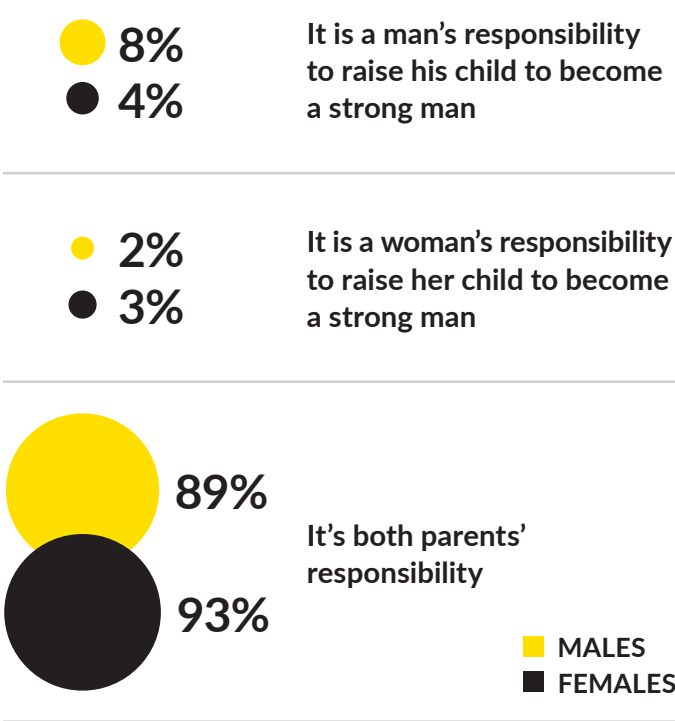


(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

HOW DO WE FIX THIS?

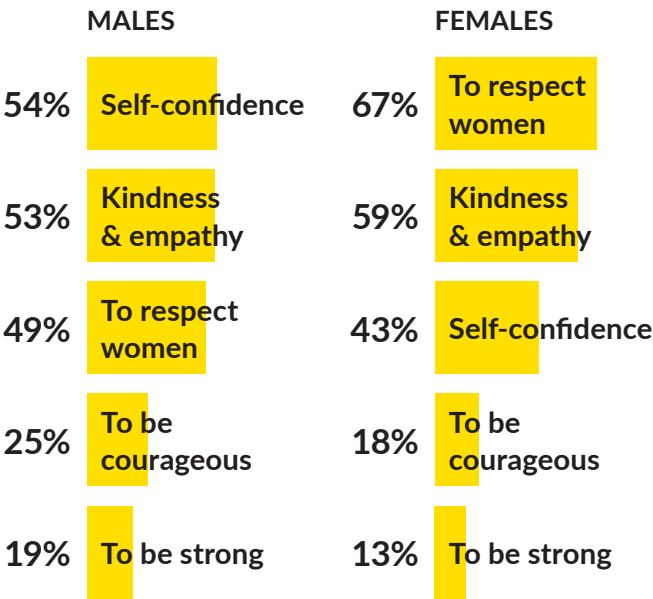
First answer: parents. Almost everyone agrees that raising boys into strong men is a shared responsibility of both parents. Most consider that joint responsibility to extend to teaching boys to be kind and empathetic and to respect women.

Which comes closer to your point of view: (Choose one.)



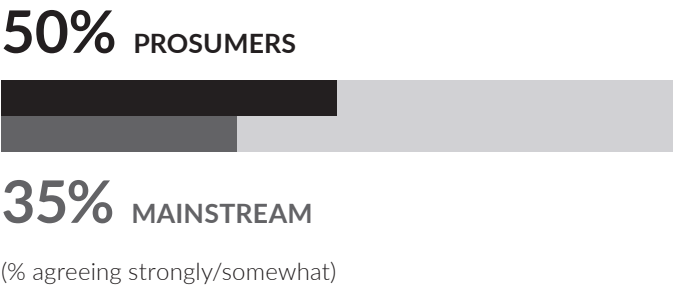


If I had a boy child, I would teach him:
(Choose two.)



The second answer may be more surprising: technology. Many believe that AI can be used to detect and prevent violent impulses in men. This is especially the case among Prosumers in Saudi Arabia (68%) and India (72%).

I believe that AI and technology should specifically be targeted to men to detect and prevent violent impulses



But no system can replace cultural narratives.

Masculinity is not a bug to be fixed. It's a story to be rewritten.



The Role of Brands

Brands are not neutral observers. Just over 4 in 10 men globally feel that male grooming and beauty brands have gone too far—blurring masculinity to the point of erasure. At the same time, most of our respondents expressed concern that male beauty standards on social media have become just as toxic as the standards applied to girls and women. There is also a general distrust of male influencers and content creators who promote a return to “traditional masculinity,” often in a way that denigrates women.

Men's grooming and beauty brands have feminized masculinity too much

41% MALES



33% FEMALES

(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

Male beauty standards on social media are just as toxic as female beauty standards

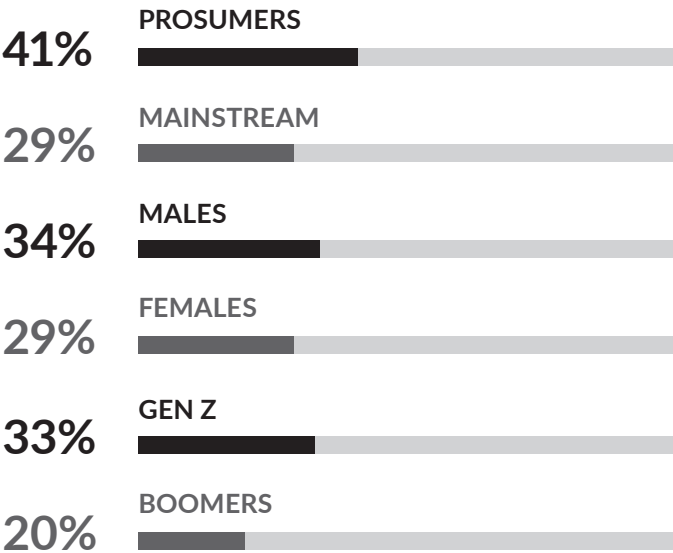
59% MALES



61% FEMALES

(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

I trust male influencers and content creators who promote a “return to traditional masculinity”

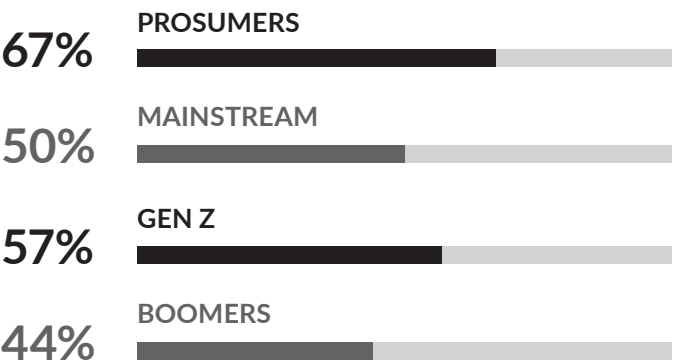


(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

GIVE MEN THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

A central tenet of feminism is the right to decide whether and when to have children, to marry, and to choose among all academic and career pathways. Essentially, freedom of self-determination. Now, men want the same when it comes to expressing their masculinity—and brands are in a position to help.

It’s the responsibility of brands to show diversity in masculinity



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

Which comes closer to your point of view: (Choose one.)

Media should show more traditional masculine heroes



Media should show more vulnerable and emotional men



We need both types equally



MALES FEMALES



In looking at advertising from recent years, we can see a real progression in views of what it means to be a “man.” Consider these commercials, each offering a different pressure valve:



Parkside’s “[You’ve Got This](#)” reframes masculinity as competence without bravado, using Arnold Schwarzenegger not to intimidate but to reassure.



Veet Men’s “[Odyssey](#),” by BETC, goes further, inviting men to cast aside unnecessary toughness and accept ease and self-care as choices to be applauded rather than vanity or weakness.



The **Atlético de Madrid** × **Netflix** / **Peaky Blinders**: “[The Immortal Man](#)” collaboration leans into the enduring appeal of brotherhood, ritual, and shared codes—offering men not guidance on who to become, but a place to belong.



In contrast, the **CeraVe with Michael Cera** “[Michael CeraVe](#)” Super Bowl ad opts out of male mythology entirely, stripping masculinity of performance and hierarchy. By centering care in awkward, unserious normalcy, it tells men that some things—such as looking after one’s skin—needn’t say anything at all about manhood.



Together, these advertisements don't deliver a single definition of masculinity so much as a menu of exits from anxiety: reassurance instead of pressure, humor instead of shame, belonging instead of isolation, and permission to stop treating every choice as a referendum on what kind of man you are.

What's Next for Brands?

OUR ADVICE:

Disarm the extremes.

Move away from "hard versus soft" polarization. Show that men can embody contradictions—strength and vulnerability, ambition and care—without compromising their manhood.

Protect the next generation.

Take an active role in shielding Gen Z from toxic masculine narratives by promoting healthier role models, fostering critical thinking, validating kindness, and creating spaces that value respect (for self and others), empathy, and self-awareness.

Be the peacemaker.

Actively bridge the growing divide by easing tensions between the sexes—encouraging dialogue and moving away from opposition and exclusion toward mutual understanding and shared progress. Highlight role models who succeed without asserting dominance.

And then there's the juxtaposition of **Old Spice's "Smell Like a Footballer"** and **AXE's "Bear: The Power of Sweetness,"** which explore masculinity from opposite ends of the same anxiety. "Footballer" exaggerates traditional masculine codes—sweat, physical dominance, sporting status—into parody, letting men enjoy familiar strength fantasies while acknowledging their absurdity.



"Bear," in contrast, shifts the tension inward. Set in an intimate, emotionally coded space, the attacking stuffed bears don't suggest that sweetness is dangerous, but that men can feel overwhelmed when they misread or panic in environments associated with closeness and vulnerability. The threat comes not from softness itself, but from the man's anxiety about losing control.

Each of these two ads reflects a common male stress response today: clinging to exaggerated strength for reassurance or freezing when faced with emotional unfamiliarity. AXE's underlying message isn't to abandon masculinity but to recognize that being a man now depends less on performative power and more on staying grounded when old scripts no longer apply.

IN A NUTSHELL



1.

Masculinity is increasingly perceived as “under attack,” fueling a backlash and sense of identity threat among some men.

2.

In a world feeling increasingly uncertain, many men are adopting a “soft is not an option” mindset, valuing strength, competition, and control to the exclusion of other traits that bind us as a society.

3.

Social media plays a harmful role in amplifying and monetizing antagonistic, hyper-masculine content, reinforcing echo chambers.

4.

Men face a deep internal paradox, expected to embody both the “real man” and the “good man” simultaneously.

5.

This tension contributes to a growing disconnect between men and women, with signs of relational fatigue and separation.

6.

Gen Z appears to be the most exposed, with rising concern that young men are being shaped by toxic representations of masculinity.

7.

Brands are challenged to “build bridges, not binaries” and take responsibility for providing healthier representations.

8.

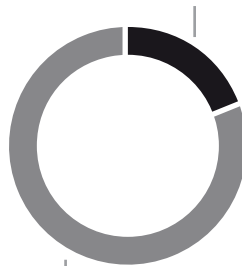
The opportunity is to reclaim strength without glorifying dominance, balancing power with emotional openness.



About the Study

In the first quarter of 2026, Havas partnered with Market Probe International to survey 11,000 people aged 18+ in 25 markets: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States.

The survey sample was made up of **18% leading-edge Prosumers**



and **82% mainstream consumers.**

Who Are Prosumers?

Prosumers are today's leading influencers and market drivers. They have been a focus of Havas studies for more than two decades. Beyond their own economic impact, Prosumers are important because they influence the brand choices and consumption behaviors of others. What Prosumers are doing today, mainstream consumers will likely be doing 6 to 18 months from now.

Find out more about Prosumer Reports



havas.com/prosumer-reports/

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Prosumer Reports is a series of thought leadership publications by Havas—part of a global initiative to share information and insights, including our own proprietary research, across the Havas network of agencies and client companies. Havas is one of the world's largest global communications groups, bringing together nearly 20,000 people in more than 100 countries. For more information, visit havas.com.

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