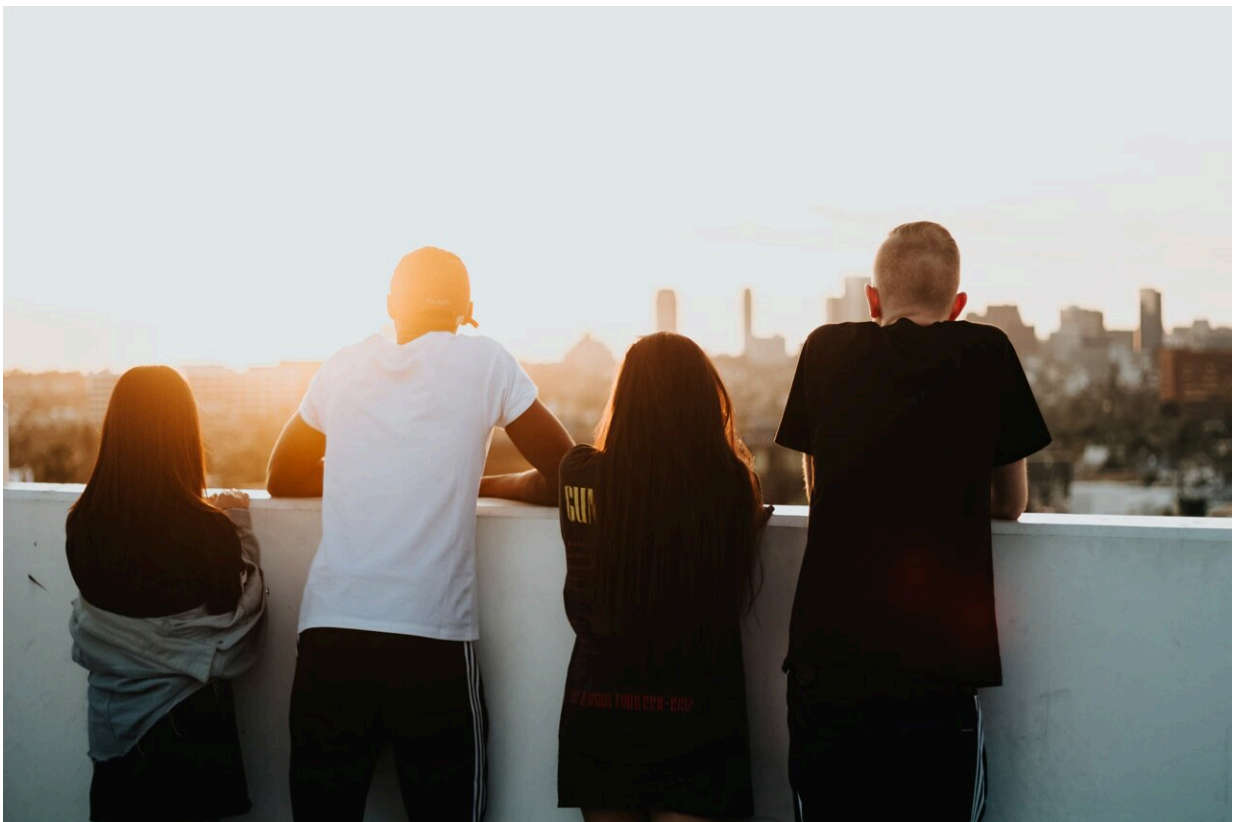


Masculinity and women's equality: UK report finds emerging gender divide in young people's attitudes

February 1 2024



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Young people's attitudes to masculinity and women's equality show signs of an emerging gender divide, with the views of men and women often

differing more within younger, rather than older, generations, [according to a new report](#).

The findings, from King's College London's Policy Institute and Global Institute for Women's Leadership in partnership with Ipsos UK, show the gender split in views is starkest among the young when it comes to how helpful the term "toxic masculinity" is, whether it's harder to be a man than a woman today, whether feminism has done more good or harm to society, and approval of the influencer Andrew Tate.

The research—which is based on a representative survey of 3,716 people aged 16+ using the Ipsos UK online random probability KnowledgePanel—also shows that in some cases young men today are no more supportive of action on gender equality than [older men](#), despite their generally being more socially liberal, and that young men tend to be more worried about the challenges facing men.

Is 'toxic masculinity' a helpful term?

By 41% to 22%, the public are twice as likely to say "toxic masculinity" is an unhelpful rather than helpful term.

And while [younger people](#) overall have a more favorable view of this phrase, there is a big gender divide in views among them: 37% of men aged 16 to 29 say "toxic masculinity" is an unhelpful phrase, roughly double the 19% of [young women](#) who feel this way. Correspondingly, young women (47%) are considerably more likely than young men (29%)—or any other age category—to find it a helpful term.

By contrast, views among older age groups vary less by gender—although older men are more likely than younger men to say "toxic masculinity" is an unhelpful term.

Young people are most divided by gender on whether women or men have it tougher today

Around half (48%) the public think it's harder to be a woman than a man today, while one in seven (14%) say the reverse.

The biggest gender gap in views is seen among the youngest generation: women aged 16 to 29 are especially likely to say it is harder to be a woman, with 68% feeling this way, compared with 35% of men of the same age.

Among men, it is the oldest who are least likely to say that men have it harder: 17% of men aged 60+ feel this way, compared with 25% of men aged 16 to 59.

And when asked if women in the UK generally have better or worse lives than men today, men aged 60+ (12%) are less likely than younger and middle-aged men (19%) to say women have better lives.

3 in 10 young men think it'll be harder to be a man than a woman in 20 years' time

One in six (17%) of the UK public overall believe that in 20 years' time it will be harder to be a man than a woman.

Men aged 16 to 29 (30%) are almost twice as likely to feel this way, including 19% who think it'll be much harder to be a man.

On the other hand, it is women of this age (48%) who are most likely to say it'll be harder to be a woman than a man two decades from now, meaning this youngest group is the most divided by gender on what the future will look like.

Young men are notably less positive than young women about the impact of feminism

Overall, just over four in 10 (43%) think feminism has done more good to society than harm, while only 12% think it has done more harm than good.

Among those aged 16 to 29, 46% of women think feminism has done more good to society than harm—10 percentage points higher than the share of young men who feel this way (36%).

And within this age group, one in six (16%) men say feminism has done more harm than good, compared with one in 11 (9%) women.

Young men are no more likely than older men to think equal opportunities for women should go further

13% of the UK public overall say attempts to give equal opportunities to women have gone too far—but a much greater share, 46%, say they've not gone far enough. A third (36%) say these attempts have made about the right amount of progress already.

Men (17%) are around twice as likely as women (8%) to say efforts to support women's equality have gone too far.

And when it comes to those who think efforts to provide equal opportunities have not gone far enough, the youngest men surveyed (36%) are no more likely than the oldest (37%) hold this view.

Only a small proportion of those who have heard of Andrew Tate say they have a favorable opinion of

him—though one in five young men have a positive view

6% of people who have heard of Andrew Tate say they have a favorable view of him, while 76% have an unfavorable view and 15% say their view is neither favorable nor unfavorable.

And while all age groups are more negative than positive about Tate, young men stand out as being the most likely to approve of him and statements he has made:

- 1 in 5 (21%) men aged 16 to 29 who have heard of Andrew Tate say they have a favorable view of him—three times the share of women in this age group (7%) and men aged 30 to 59 (7%) who say the same, and far greater than the proportion of men aged 60+ (2%). Yet most (61%) young men still feel unfavorable towards Tate.
- Among those who say they have heard about Tate's statements on men and women, 1 in 7 (14%) agree he raises important points about real threats to male identity and gender roles (61% disagree), increasing to three in 10 (30%) young men aged 16 to 29—far higher than any other age/gender group. People from ethnic minority backgrounds (35%) are also more likely to agree with this view, reflecting a broader pattern of approval of Tate among this group compared to those from a white ethnic background (though it remains the case that more people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more critical of his views than supportive).
- Majorities of those who say they've heard of Tate's statements find his views on men and women offensive (73%), but 1 in 5 (20%) men aged 16 to 29 who are aware of them do not—double the proportion of men aged 30 to 59 (9%) who say the same.

The public are mostly fairly accurate on the UK's gender divide when it comes to some behaviors and characteristics—but there are some important misperceptions

The public correctly identify some behaviors or characteristics that apply more to either women or men, including going to prison or earning a high income for men, and caring for family or being sexually assaulted for women.

But large proportions are wrong on other facts related to gender divides in the UK. For example:

- Over half the public believe there is no gender divide in starting a new business, yet among working-age people, 15.1% of men are involved in "total early-stage entrepreneurial activity"—which includes the owning or running of any business that is less than three and a half years old—compared with 10.7% of women.
- The latest data on university attendance shows 57% of higher education students in 2021/22 were female, while men made up 43%. However, more than three-quarters of the public wrongly believe going to university is something that applies to both men and women equally.
- Most of the public correctly identify that men are more likely than women to die by suicide—but 3 in 10 (30%) think this is something that affects both genders to the same degree, when in reality, the male suicide rate is 16.4 per 100,000 people in England and Wales, roughly three times higher than the female suicide rate of 5.4 per 100,000.

And there is a clear gender divide in perceptions on some issues, with men more likely than women to think housework and care responsibilities are split equally: Men are around twice as likely as women to say doing housework (35% vs. 17%) and caring for family

members (29% vs. 16%) are things that apply to both genders equally, despite evidence showing that in reality women do significantly more of both on average.

However, despite this gender divide in perceptions, most men do correctly recognize that these behaviors or characteristics are more likely to apply to men than women.

Professor Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Institute at King's College London, said, "A gender divide has emerged among the youngest generations in their perceptions of whether feminism has done more good or harm, what the future looks like for men and women, and key terms in the debate, like 'toxic masculinity.'"

"This is a new and unusual generational pattern—normally, it tends to be the case that younger generations are consistently more comfortable with emerging social norms, as they grew up with these as a natural part of their lives. For example, in equality debates of the past, such as whether men should take the jobs and women stay at home, it is older generations that are more divided by gender, while there is hardly any difference between men and women in younger generations.

"It has to be said that larger proportions of young men still think it's harder to be a woman today, that feminism has done more good than harm and have an unfavorable view of Andrew Tate. But there is a consistent minority of between one-fifth and one-third who hold the opposite view—in stark contrast to young women, who are by far the most likely across age and gender groups to believe it is harder to be a woman in the UK and will remain so in 20 years' time.

"This points to a real risk of fractious division among this coming generation of young—and the need to listen carefully to both. That includes much more work on understanding the challenges facing young

men today, or we risk that void being filled by celebrities and influencers, and this nascent divide being exacerbated."

Professor Rosie Campbell, Director of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London, said, "This data shows it's not just young men's attitudes that stand out. For example, young women are much more likely than any other group to think 'toxic masculinity' is a helpful term, and are most pessimistic about the prospect of future progress on gender equality.

"What we are seeing is a polarization in the attitudes of young men and women towards gender equality that matches the gender split in party support in the younger age groups, with women to the left of men. We're just at the beginning of understanding what's driving this but the fact that this group is the first to derive most of their information from social media is likely to be at least part of the explanation."

Gideon Skinner, Head of Political Research at Ipsos UK, said, "There is some pessimism among both young men and young women about their futures, but from different perspectives. Both young (and more middle-aged) women are most likely to feel that despite the advances of feminism, women's lives will still remain harder than men's over the next few decades, and that gender equality has further to go.

"But younger men, on the other hand, are more worried that life will be harder for them, and are more uncertain over male gender roles.

"As we have seen in the rest of our research about culture wars, it is important not to exaggerate the divides—it is still only a minority of young men who think equal opportunities have gone too far.

"But there are signs of a gender split among younger generations (young men and young women also have different attitudes towards being called

'woke,' for example). And the lessons are that polarization can increase if we don't take steps to understand these divisions and do more to improve the prospects for young people's lives."

Technical details

Ipsos UK interviewed online a representative sample of 3,716 adults aged 16+ across the United Kingdom between 17 and 23 August 2023. This data has been collected by Ipsos's UK KnowledgePanel, an online random probability panel which provides gold standard insights into the UK population, by providing bigger sample sizes via the most rigorous research methods.

Data are weighted by age, [gender](#), region, Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, education, ethnicity and number of adults in the household in order to reflect the profile of the UK population. All polls are subject to a wide range of potential sources of error.

More information: Emerging tensions? How younger generations are dividing on masculinity and gender equality. [www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute ... merging-tensions.pdf](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute...merging-tensions.pdf)

Provided by King's College London

Citation: Masculinity and women's equality: UK report finds emerging gender divide in young people's attitudes (2024, February 1) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-masculinity-women-equality-uk-emerging.html>

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