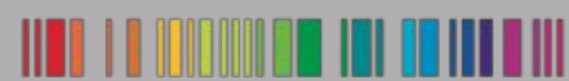


INSIGHT REPORT

# MAN DOWN!

DECODING THE FUTURE OF MASCULINITY



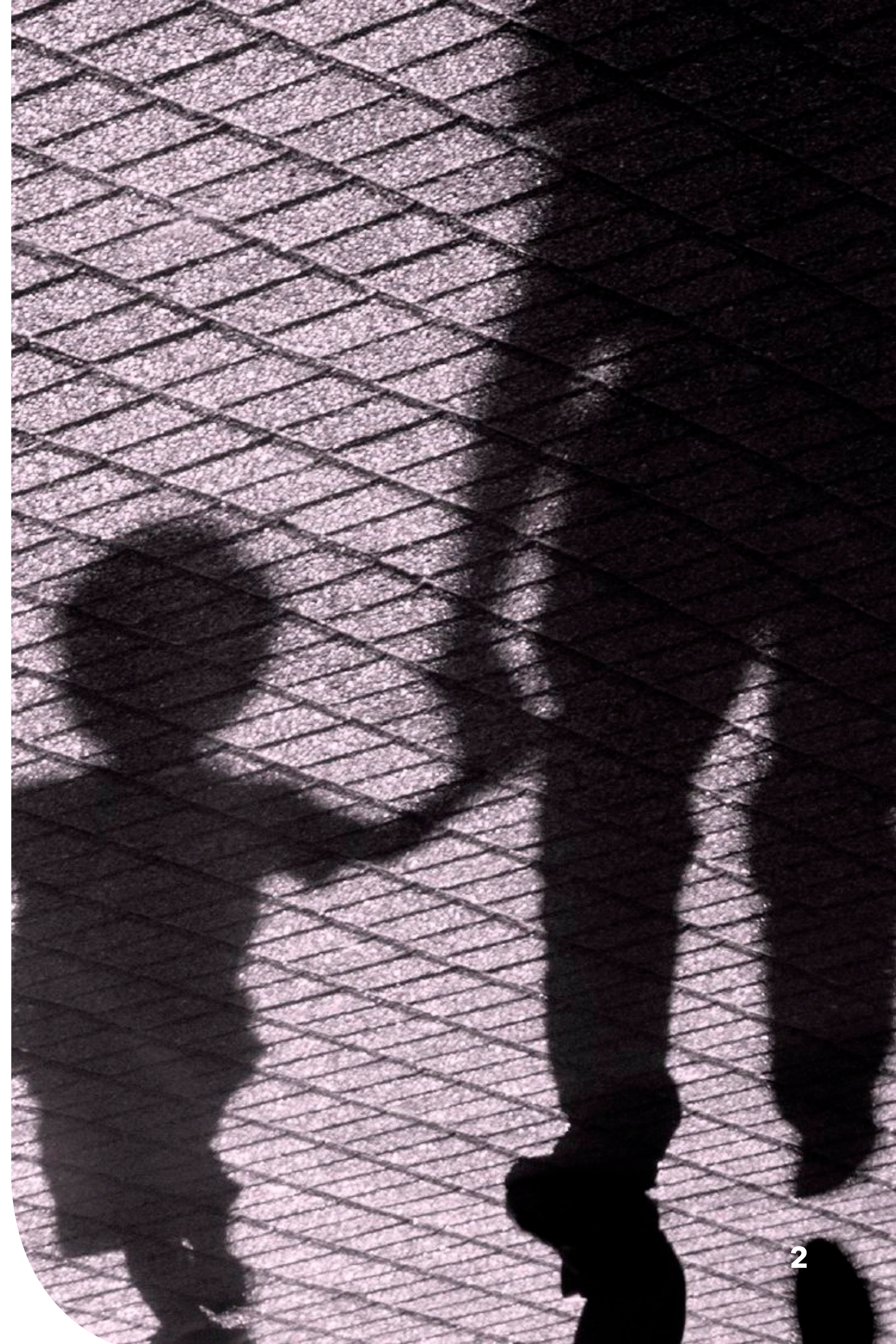
BRAND GENETICS

# INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be a man today? What does it mean to be a *good* man? Masculinity is a central part of men's lives and a man's sense of masculinity and manhood remains a key component of male identity and wellbeing.

Yet today masculinity is under fire, decried as toxic by some, hegemonic by others and obsolete by still others. In the wake of the #metoo movement and in a world where gender norms and roles continue to blur, masculinity is in flux and under threat.

Demonised, pathologised and precarious, the assault on masculinity can leave men unsure about what it means to be a man today, and what constitutes appropriate male behaviour. This report is a short primer and summary of current research and evidence-based thinking into the changing nature - and nurture - of masculinity.



# WHAT IS MASCULINITY?

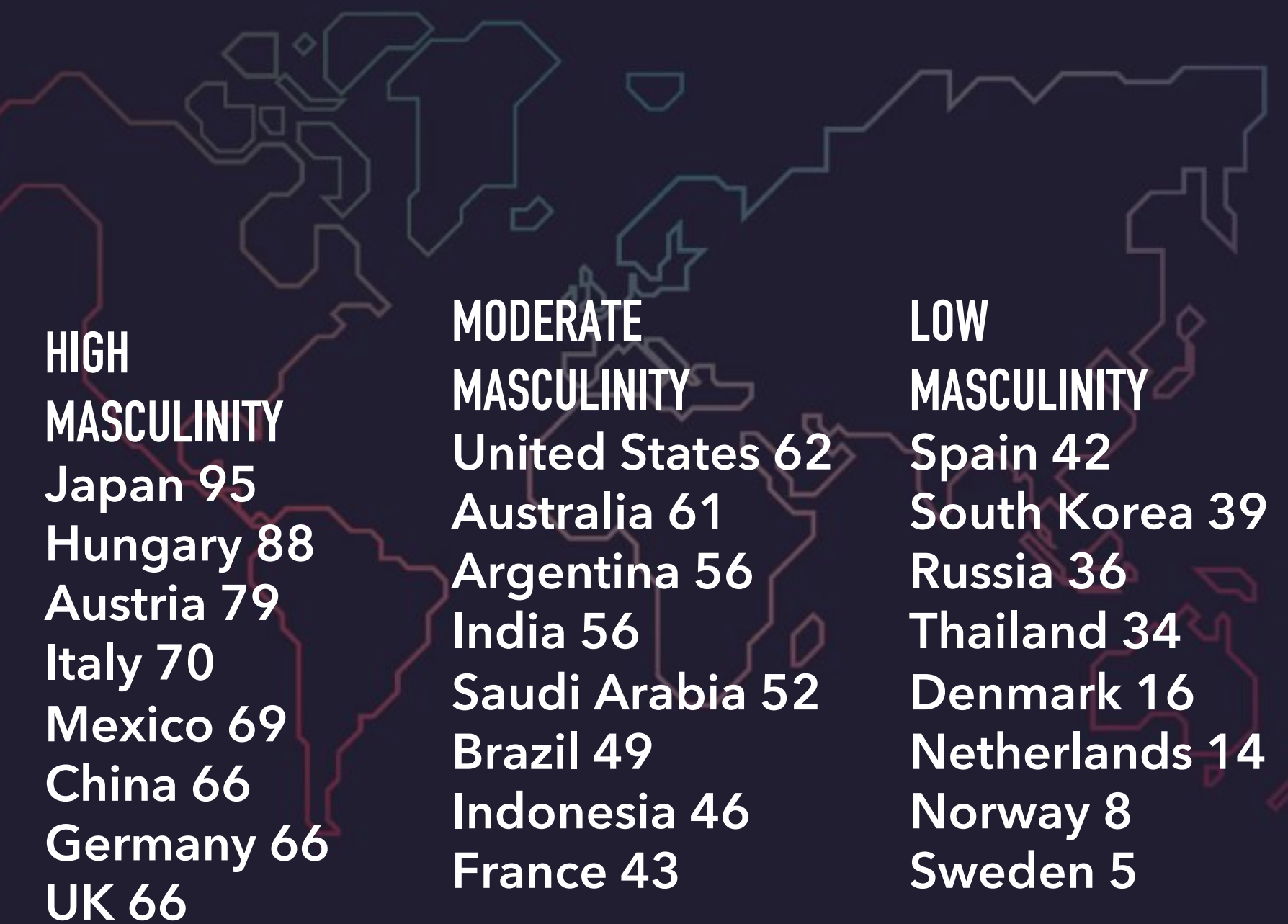
Masculinity refers to the physical, behavioural and psychological traits that are male-typical and that are used to distinguish men from women.

Masculine traits are often, but not always, contrasted with feminine traits. They are also often, but not always, associated with the presence of the male y sex chromosome and the male sex hormone, testosterone. As gendered\* labels for human traits as opposed to observed sex differences\*, perceptions of masculinity vary across time and geographies and are believed to be the product of complex interactions between genes and environment (evolution and socialisation), including the family, cultural and social environment. This means that there is no universal standard of masculinity, rather there are diverse, variable and multiple 'masculinities'.

## MASCULINITIES AROUND THE WORLD

3

How masculine is your country? The Hofstede cultural dimensions framework measures masculinity around the world. Characterised by a cultural focus on individual power, strength, assertiveness, achievement and success, some nations are more masculine than others.



# 10 FACTS CHALLENGING MASCULINE STEREOTYPES



1. British men now spend more on grooming products and treatments each month than women ([Barclays Research](#)).
2. Worldwide, male grooming products represent a \$50bn industry ([FT](#))
3. 15% of males across Europe say makeup products are important to their daily personal care regime ([Euromonitor](#))
4. “[Millennial pink](#)” was selected as the colour of the year in 2017, and was enthusiastically adopted in men’s and women’s fashion around the world (a century earlier, pink was a considered a [boy’s colour](#), blue for girls)
5. In the UK, whilst the majority of men over 65 consider themselves completely masculine, only 2% of 18-24 males consider themselves completely masculine ([YouGov](#))
6. Rather than binary masculine and feminine genders, Facebook has expanded its base list of 58 genders to a limitless range, allowing users to create and set their own gender in their personal profile ([BBC](#))
7. Coined in the 1980s, global Google searches for the term “toxic masculinity” increased 543% between the beginning of 2016 and 2018 ([Google](#)).
8. In the UK, young men (18-24) are more likely to see masculinity as a negative trait than a positive one ([YouGov](#))
9. In the UK, 40 % of men 16-24 now shave, trim or wax their pubic area (AKA “manscaping” including the “Boyzilian”, Brazilian wax for men) ([Intel](#))
10. In the UK, one third of men (32%) would not describe themselves as exclusively heterosexual ([YouGov](#))

# THE MASCULINE LOOK

Although masculinity varies, there are certain stereotypical physical traits associated with masculinity that tend to be true. These are based on “secondary sex characteristics” that distinguish men from women (“sexual dimorphism”).

These masculine traits include being taller and heavier (men are about 15% bigger than women), more muscular, with broader shoulders, facial hair, a squarer and more angular face and jaw, larger forehead, smaller eyes and narrower lips.

Research suggests that men are considered attractive when they appear moderately masculine, combining more gracile feminine features with masculine traits. Physical attractiveness (the biggest predictor of a second date) includes a preference for tall, youthful, lean, conditioned mesomorphic men with a v-shaped torso, clear skin and facial features that are symmetrical (“bilateral symmetry” - people are attracted to the distinctive scent of symmetrical men) and that represent a composite average of a local population (perhaps as an indicator of genetic health when “gene shopping”).



# MASCULINE (MIS)BEHAVIOUR?

Unlike womanhood perhaps, manhood is not a uniquely biologically-based designation - so men tend to demonstrate their masculinity through behavioural displays and performance. Certain stereotypical male behaviours tend to hold true cross-nationally (whether they *should* hold true is another matter). These include displays of physical strength, skill and dexterity, dominance, status, effort, competitiveness, ambition and success. Aggression and physical violence is also associated with masculinity and elevated testosterone.

Although competitive, challenge-oriented and geared to impress, male behaviour can also be more group-centred, with men often coalescing into teams and engaging in (or supporting) competitive sports, games and play (football!). Masculine behaviour also tends to be characterised by tempered (or “constricted”) emotionality and expressivity. To connect with others and build alliances, men are more likely to use humour and play. Typically, masculine behaviour is object-oriented (about things rather than people), goal-oriented (on a mission) and action-oriented (active). It is also more often sex-oriented, with men typically displaying more sexual interest than women.



# MASCULINE MINDSET

Many of the stereotypical and alleged differences between the male and female mind are exaggerated or false (e.g. "Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars". Actually, we're all from Earth). However, there is compelling evidence to support some differences, summarised by the male mindset being more 'instrumental' (goal-oriented) and 'systematic' (analytical), whilst the feminine mind has been characterised as being more 'expressive' and 'empathic'. However, psychologists typically view masculinity and femininity as separate dimensions rather than polar opposites. This means it is quite possible to be both highly masculine and highly feminine. And as an internalised schema rather than a biological imperative, it is also quite possible for men to index highly on more feminine mental traits and vice versa for women.

Mental traits perceived as more masculine include self-confidence, self-reliance, goal-directedness, risk-taking, competitiveness, assertiveness and aggression. In terms of personality, men simply appear to have less of it - scoring lower on all five dimensions of human personality (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) except openness to ideas (if not to feelings). Significantly, men tend to be less emotionally expressive. On the other hand, men tend to over-index on the 'dark triad' of personality - the three negative traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. In terms of cognitive skills, men tend to perform worse on verbal fluency and memory tasks (visuospatial and lexical - i.e. remembering lists and where things are), but more highly on numerical reasoning and visuospatial tasks involving mental rotation, aim or transformation.

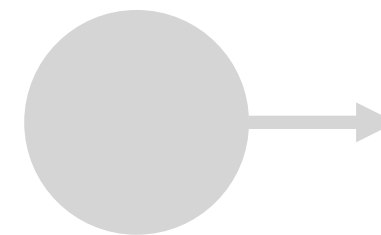


# MASCULINITY IS CHANGING

## TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

Male-typical traits (physical, psychological and behavioural) used to distinguish men from women and define male identity

SOCIAL  
CHANGE



## PRECARIOUS MASCULINITY

Changing norms and the uncoupling of gender from biological sex leading to the rise of gender fluidity, stress and uncertainty about how to be a male



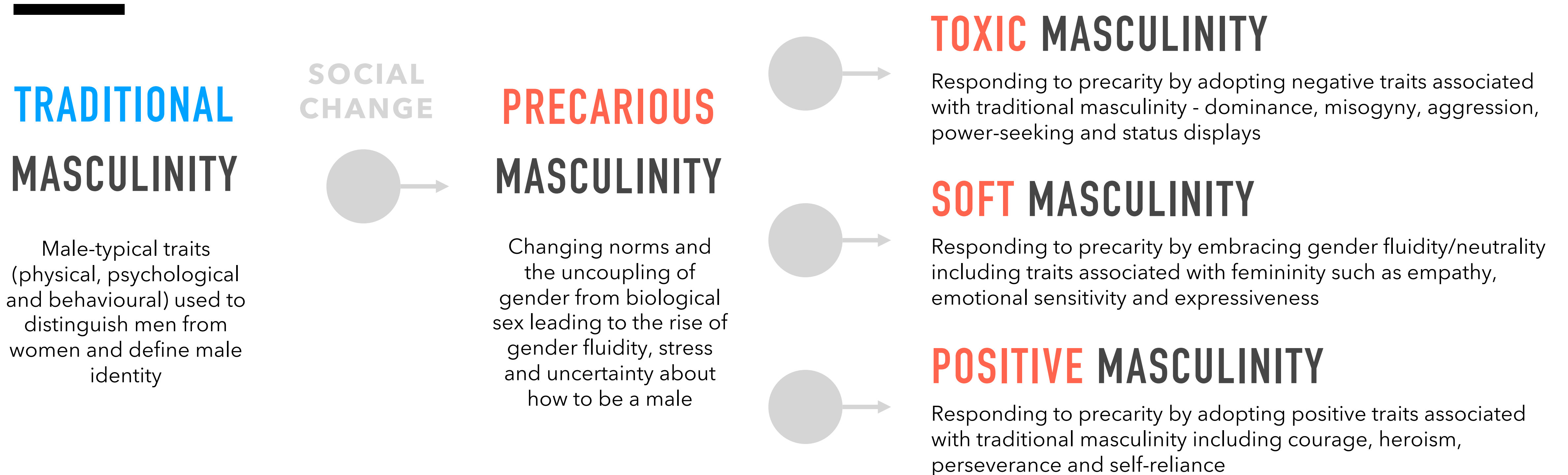
# PRECARIOUS MASCULINITY

To the degree that masculinity involves display and performance, masculinity is precarious. Men are just one unmanly move away from being perceived, and perceiving themselves, as less masculine and less of a man.

“Precarious masculinity” refers to this idea that men are insecure over their sense of manhood. This may lead to a form of stress known as masculine gender role stress (see appendix to take the test and see how stressed you are about your own masculinity). Men experience gender role stress as a result of the precarious nature of masculinity, perceived social pressure to conform to masculine norms and a perceived mismatch between one’s own self-image and male stereotypes. Examples include ‘manxiety’ over failure to perform (physically, sexually, intellectually) or appear strong and dominant (i.e. adopt “alpha-male” behaviour). Similarly an inability to mask emotions may be a cause of stress. Likewise, perceived pressure to conform to media representations of the highly conditioned male physique may add further stress that undermines masculine identity and self-esteem. Combined with changing gender norms that may create ambiguity about what being a man means and requires today, precarious masculinity may be a mental health issue that is on the rise.



# A NEW MODEL OF MASCULINITY IS IN PLAY



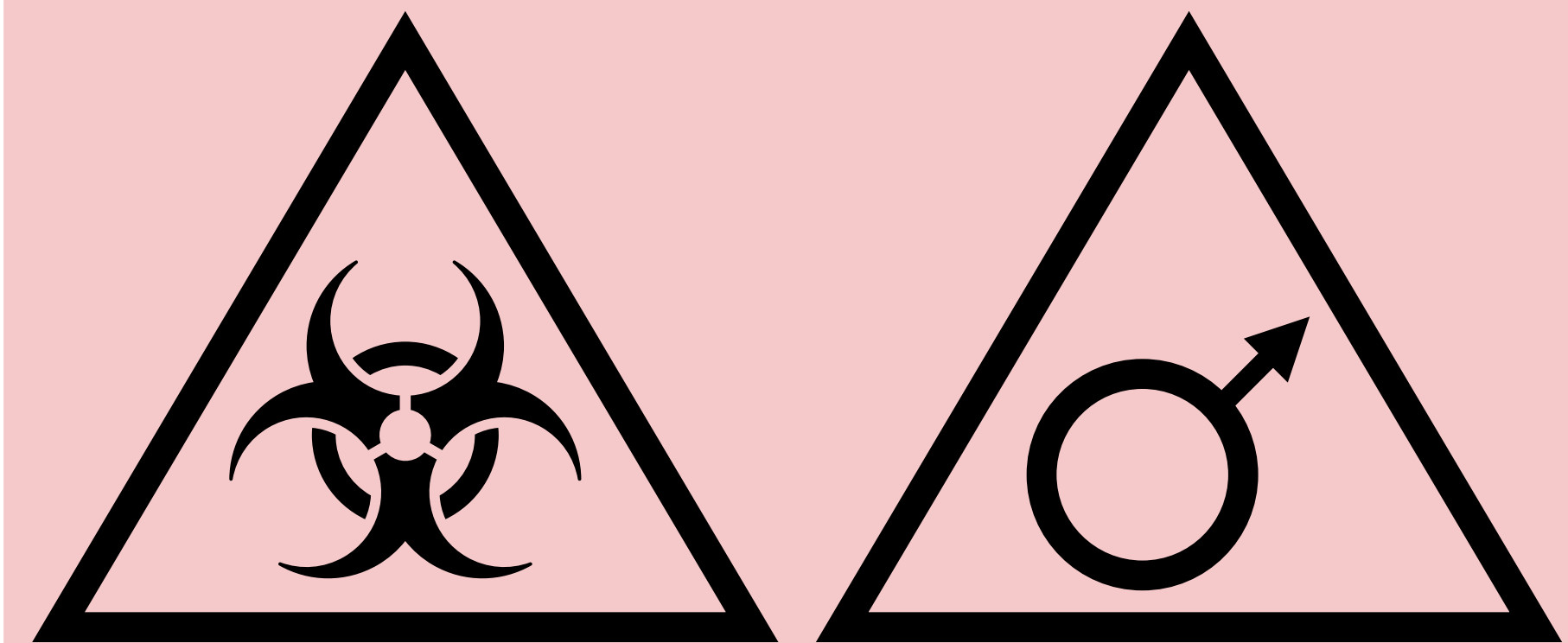
\* From Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) – Short form fColley, A., Mulhern, G., Maltby, J., & Wood, A. M. (2009). The short form BSRI: Instrumentality, expressiveness and gender associations among a United Kingdom sample. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 46(3), 384-387

\*\* From positive masculinity framework Kiselica, M. S., & Englar-Carlson, M. (2010). Identifying, affirming, and building upon male strengths: The positive psychology/positive masculinity model of psychotherapy with boys and men. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 47(3), 276-287.

# TOXIC MASCULINITY

Since 2006 “toxic masculinity” has been widely adopted as a pejorative term for stereotypical male behaviour deemed to be harmful to women, society and to men themselves.

Examples of toxic masculinity include inappropriate or offensive behaviour such as unwelcome displays of dominance, status, power, ambition, physicality or aggression (including predatory sexual behaviour), hyper-competitiveness, over-assertiveness, irresponsible risk-taking, misogyny, intolerance towards diversity, emotional repression, extreme self-reliance and over-confidence. Such behaviour may be conscious and deliberate, or the result of unconscious bias. Some research shows that when men have their masculinity or manhood challenged, they are more likely to engage in *more* stereotypically toxic male behaviour. Overall, toxic masculinity may be seen a form of *hypermasculinity*, the exaggeration of stereotyped behaviour believed to be masculine.



TOXIC MALE BIOHAZARD

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# SOFT MASCULINITY

In response to toxic and precarious masculinity, attempts are being made to reconstruct, recast and promote masculinity in a new softer form. Soft masculinity blurs the lines between masculinity and femininity, integrating characteristics more often associated with femininity. These includes emotional sensitivity and expressivity, empathy, compassion, openness, intimacy, co-dependence, understanding, vulnerability and self-expression. Physically, soft masculinity can manifest itself through a softer male physique; slighter, more boyish, and more androgynous (e.g. as personified by global K-pop stars and the on-trend East Asian male aesthetic).

Soft masculinity, characterised by an anti-macho mindset, also co-opts ideals from both the 1980s "new man" who rejects sexist attitudes and traditional gender roles, and from the 1990s "metrosexual" with their interest in fashion, personal care, cosmetics, grooming and appearance. Promoted by fashion, beauty and toy industries through gender-neutral, gender-fluid and genderless products, colours and codes, soft masculinity proposes a new masculinity that is more in touch with its feminine side.



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# POSITIVE MASCULINITY

As an alternative to soft masculinity, a new masculinity is emerging that has been dubbed “positive masculinity”. Rather than emasculate, neuter, feminise or undo masculinity, positive masculinity seeks to champion positive human traits associated with masculinity. These include strength, courage, bravery, valour, heroism, loyalty, self-reliance, fraternity, risk-taking and resilience, and importantly “generative fatherhood” (caring, leading, mentoring). In this way, rather than pathologising masculinity and viewing manhood as problematic or deficient, positive masculinity focuses on human strengths associated with masculinity.

Researched by positive psychologists (positive psychology is the science of wellbeing), this new positive vision of masculinity involves broadening and building adaptive, healthy, and prosocial traits associated with masculinity. These traits may be organised around a central insight from positive psychology that human wellbeing - male and female - depends on the satisfaction of three fundamental needs; Autonomy, Relatedness and Competence (the ARC of happiness). By identifying positive male-typical examples of autonomy, relatedness and competence, positive masculinity seeks to recast masculinity not as a toxic problem, but as a positive strength.

MALE  
AUTONOMY

MALE  
RELATEDNESS

MALE  
COMPETENCE



# CONCLUSION

## INSIGHTS FOR INNOVATION AND MARKETING

**1 Focus on masculinities, not masculinity.** To appeal to men and their manhood, brands should be sensitive to local variations in how masculinity is constructed and enacted. There is no uniform or monolithic standard of masculinity, rather there are multiple masculinities that vary by market and by subculture.

**4 Play with emotions.** Use the insight that men tend to express themselves and their emotions through play and humour to integrate emotional appeal into your value proposition.

**2 Make strength stronger.** Core to many masculinities is the idea of strength. Broaden and build what strength and strengths mean beyond physical strength to include a range of positive character strengths such as courage, heroism, and bravery.

**5 Fight toxic masculinity.** For purpose-led innovation and marketing, seize the opportunity to develop products, services and messages that take a stand against toxic masculinity and its consequences, including gender disparity.

**3 Help men 'man up'.** Help men discover the new rules of masculinity and manhood with positive heroes, actions and role models in a world where masculinity and manhood is precarious, ambiguous and fluid.

**6 Be more human.** Consider de-gendering innovation and marketing in an increasingly gender-fluid world. Rather than appeal to gendered stereotypes, focus instead on human universals, such as the need to experience autonomy, relatedness and competence.

# TAKE THE TEST

## HOW STRESSED ARE YOU ABOUT YOUR MASCULINITY?

This is a version of the revised Masculine Gender Role Stress scale (MGRS-R)

**Directions:** Please rate the following items according to how stressful the situation would be for you. Give each item your own rating on a scale from 0 (not stressful) to 5 (extremely stressful). Then total your scores. The higher the score, the higher your stress level (a recent average score was 134)

1. Feeling that you are not in good physical condition \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Telling a romantic partner that you love her/him \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Being outperformed at work by a woman \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Having to ask for directions when you are lost \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Being unemployed \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Not being able to find a sexual partner \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Having a female boss \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Having your lover say that s/he is not satisfied \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Letting a woman take control of the situation \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Not having enough money \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Being perceived by someone as gay \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Telling someone that you feel hurt by what they said \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Being in a relationship with someone who makes more money than you \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Working with people who seem more ambitious than you \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Finding you lack skills to succeed \_\_\_\_\_.
16. Losing in a sports competition \_\_\_\_\_.
17. Admitting that you are afraid of something \_\_\_\_\_.
18. Being with a girlfriend who is more successful than you \_\_\_\_\_.
19. Talking with a feminist \_\_\_\_\_.
20. Being unable to perform sexually \_\_\_\_\_.
21. Being perceived as having feminine traits \_\_\_\_\_.
22. Having your friends see you cry \_\_\_\_\_.
23. Being outperformed in a game by a female friend \_\_\_\_\_.
24. Having people say that you are indecisive \_\_\_\_\_.
25. Being too tired for sex when your lover initiates it \_\_\_\_\_.
26. Appearing less athletic than a friend \_\_\_\_\_.
27. Talking with a woman who is crying \_\_\_\_\_.
28. Needing others to support you financially \_\_\_\_\_.
29. Having others say that you are too emotional \_\_\_\_\_.
30. Being unable to become sexually aroused when you want \_\_\_\_\_.
31. Being compared unfavourably to men \_\_\_\_\_.
32. Comforting a male friend who is upset \_\_\_\_\_.
33. Admitting to your friends that you sew \_\_\_\_\_.
34. Working with people who are brighter than you are \_\_\_\_\_.
35. Getting passed over for a promotion or prize \_\_\_\_\_.
36. Knowing you cannot hold your liquor as well as others \_\_\_\_\_.
37. Having your male friend put his arm around your shoulder \_\_\_\_\_.
38. Being with a romantic partner who is much taller than you \_\_\_\_\_.
39. Staying at home to support someone who is sick \_\_\_\_\_.
40. Getting fired from your job \_\_\_\_\_.

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# CONTACT

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## We get guys!

If you want to know what the changing face of masculinity means for your brand, we'd love to hear from you.

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