

# STATE OF AMERICAN MEN 2023

FROM CRISIS AND  
CONFUSION TO HOPE





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## About Equimundo:

Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice has worked internationally and in the US since 2011 to engage men and boys as allies in gender equality, promote healthy manhood, and prevent violence. Equimundo works to achieve gender equality and social justice by transforming intergenerational patterns of harm and promoting patterns of care, empathy and accountability among boys and men throughout their lives.

## About the State of American Men Initiative:

This study is part of a larger initiative to build partnerships around male allyship and healthy masculinities, including diverse groups from media, philanthropy, sports, and the corporate sector, in partnership with Futures Without Violence. Forthcoming plans include a website/portal for greater exchange in the male allyship and healthy masculinities space in the US and a national summit on these topics in 2024.



# Executive Summary: State of American Men 2023

**Men in the US are in trouble.** Many feel that their futures are uncertain and their identities are threatened. But while the current situation is especially acute, this anxiety has always been built into boyhood and manhood. Told to “man up” or “be a real man,” boys and men who inevitably cannot meet the impossible, overlapping standards of toughness, self-sufficiency, dominance, and stoicism have their very identity withheld from them. Masculine norms such as these govern every aspect of men’s and boys’ lives and are woven into family life, schools, sports, and other community spaces. Such norms deprive young men of more caring alternatives, ways to confidently own their identity as caring, emotionally connected, cooperative people. Many feel totally disconnected and retreat to private lives of underachievement, underemployment, and online addiction – and to the pretense that they can go it alone. Some may find solace in misogyny and white supremacy. Certainly, too many men ignore or oppose the necessary action we all need for women’s equality and racial justice. Some men’s anger and their clinging to harmful ideas about manhood are hurting all of us.

**When two-thirds of young men feel that “no one really knows” them, as this study shows, they reveal the fragility of their connections and relationships.** We take that finding for what it is: a call for more honest, more grounded, more connected, and more meaningful lives. We know the results of this study will be troubling for many. Conservative voices may say that we are calling out men, blaming them, or maligning American manhood. But our study is a call for all of us to show compassion to men and to build and

support healthy, connected versions of manhood for the good of all.

**This inaugural State of American Men report, subtitled “From Crisis and Confusion to Hope,” seeks to understand this and other crucial aspects of men’s realities in 2023.** The data presented here come from a January 2023 online questionnaire administered to 2,022 men aged 18 to 45 across the United States, matching the racial, economic, and regional diversity of the US population. Three key issues drove this study: First, against the backdrop of #MeToo and the women’s equality and feminist movements, some men – particularly younger men – are moving backward in their support of gender equality. Second, issues in the lives of boys and men – employment, health, sense of purpose, educational aspirations, mental and emotional well-being, loneliness, and relationship challenges – are creating a state of precarity that makes them vulnerable to the appeal of reactionary movements. Third, the precarity of men from marginalized groups is especially acute.

**Our survey offers new insights into some of the most pressing issues facing American society.** We asked men: How are you doing? How do you feel about your lives and prospects? About your relationships and romantic lives? Your purpose? Where do you turn to process stress or pain? To find guidance and inspiration? Whom do you listen to about manhood? Do you support or oppose gender equality? And how do all these issues intersect? **Men’s answers to these questions coalesce into seven headlines:**

1. **PRECARIOUS MEN: Too many men – especially younger men – are socially disconnected, pessimistic about the future, and turning to online anger.** Younger men represented a distinct group in several areas of analysis and are facing higher rates of depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and a sense of isolation, as seen in the agreement of 65 percent that “no one really knows me well.”
  - 40% of all men show depressive symptoms.
  - 44% of all men had thoughts of suicide in the prior two weeks; younger men show the highest levels of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation.
  - 40% of all men say they trust one or more “men’s rights,” anti-feminist, or pro-violence voices from the manosphere; nearly half of younger men say they trust such voices.
  - Men aged 18 to 23 have the least optimism for their futures and the lowest levels of social support.
  - 65% of men aged 18 to 23 say that “no one really knows me well.”



2. **FEMINIST ALLIES OR FEMINIST OPPONENTS? Many men are ready to be allies even as some show confusion amid modest progress toward gender equality.**

Around half of men oppose or question policies to empower women. More than half agree that men “have it harder than women” in the US today, yet most support abortion rights, and many have taken on actions of allyship at work or with friends. There is no single story of how men respond to or oppose the women’s rights agenda, implying that efforts to engage men as allies must be nuanced, well-studied, and taking the diversity of men’s views and voices into account.

- 53% of men agree that “in America today, men have it harder than women.”
- About a third of all men worry about being accused of abuse after a sexual encounter.
- 47% of men disagree that “feminism has made America a better place.”
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of men think that abortion should be legal in most or all cases, an opinion held at the highest rates by younger men.
- 16% of men say they’ve called out a friend making a hurtful joke about women.

3. **EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING: Online lives provide connection but often supplant offline ones.**

Many men perceive their online lives as more meaningful than their offline ones, with nearly half saying that virtual connections are “more engaging and rewarding” than the rest of their lives. Around one in three young men spent no time in person with someone outside their household in the prior week.

- Nearly half of men (48%) say their online lives are more engaging and rewarding than their offline lives.

- Only 22% of men have three or more people in their local area they feel close to or depend on.
- Almost 30% of younger men reported not spending time with someone outside their household in the past week.
- Six in ten men visit porn sites at least weekly.

4. **LOOKING FOR LOVE: Men seek committed romantic relationships, but many aren’t finding them.** Findings affirm recent reports that younger men are more likely to be single, have fewer sexual partners, or even to be sexless. Overall, the majority in the study couldn’t say they were in a stable relationship that satisfied them.

- 22% of men are either mostly not looking for a relationship or mostly unable to find sexual partners.
- 13% of men report occasional relationships but are looking for something more committed.
- 38% of men report being in a stable relationship and being mostly satisfied.
- 46% of men have ever used a dating app; of these, more were looking for a committed relationship than a casual one.

5. **MIND THE GAP: Low-income, non-university-educated men report the least social support and optimism.** Men without college educations are in especially precarious positions and show up at the bottom in our measures of well-being, including social support and optimism. As “cultural losers of modernization,” they are especially susceptible to the politics of resentment and reaction.

- Men with the lowest education levels have the least social support, purpose in life, and optimism. They’re also most likely to say that “no one really knows me well.”

- Approximately one in six men with a high school education or less reported no social activities whatsoever,
- Men with less than a bachelor’s degree show statistically significant higher rates of reporting they “often think that [they] should spend less time on [their] phone or online,” affirming the reliance on online life.

6. **TRUST NO ONE: Young men have few clear loyalties to any politician, public figure, or public institution. Our data show low trust in public institutions across age and gender groups.** These data are nothing new. What our data call attention to is that this trust is often lowest among younger men, with the exception of public schools (which young men trust slightly more than older men do). It is also telling that neither President Joe Biden nor former President Donald Trump holds close to a majority of men’s trust. These findings tell us we must rise to the challenge and build bridges to young men.

- Young men’s attitudes reflect the general political polarization of the country, with 29% of men across all ages saying they trust Biden compared to 24% of men of all ages who trust Trump.
- More of the youngest men trust online misogynist influencer Andrew Tate (20%) than trust Biden (15%).
- Among public agencies and institutions – from the federal government to police to local schools – trust ratings range from 14% to 31%.



7. **INTO THE MAN BOX\*:** The manosphere and voices of anger are driving more men into harmful manhood and offering life purpose for many men. Amidst the pressures and uncertainties of modern masculinity, misogynist views and practices are alive and well – and in some cases, have become more popular in recent years. Our data show clearly that the version of manhood offering some men meaning and purpose is also the one causing the greatest social harm, pointing to an urgent challenge to inspire more aspirational, connected, equity-seeking, and socially restorative versions of manhood. It also challenges us to hold compassion alongside critique for the realities of men trying to find their place in a changing world. Some restrictive views about manhood are more widely held among young men in 2023 than they were in 2017.

- *Although political views, age, race, and education show statistical links with one's attitudes, these restrictive ideas have not been eradicated for any group of men.*
- *Two-thirds of men feel more praised and accepted when they act manly.*
- *Men who adhere to the Man Box – a set of widely held ideas that men should dominate female partners, not show vulnerability, and use violence to resolve conflicts – show the highest purpose in life, while men with the most progressive views about manhood feel the least purpose in life.*

**So what can we do? Full gender equality requires more connected, more empathic, and more just versions of manhood, versions that already exist all around us.** We can and must ensure that our conversation supports gender equality for women, girls, and nonbinary people while also promoting better lives and healthier manhood for men and boys themselves. In short, boys and men are not all right, and their

discomfort and confusion are associated with their eroding support for gender and racial equity. But there are real signs of hope as well. Large numbers of men are on board with gender equality and healthy ideas of manhood. To build on this, we need a massive narrative shift on the obvious (and many) benefits of allyship for gender equality and racial justice and of healthy, connected versions of manhood. And we need to help men find purpose and aspiration in these conversations.

**We must step into the conversation with deep conviction and compassion, particularly considering the precarious positions of many men who see deep appeal in the Man Box.** This research is just the beginning of a national initiative to drive a conversation about how men must be better allies for full gender equality and racial justice. The initiative will seek to build an alliance across policymakers, workplaces, media, sports, and nonprofit organizations to promote healthy masculinities – for the good of individuals of all gender identities. Alongside this report, **Futures Without Violence**, one of the leading national organizations working to end domestic and sexual violence, and **Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice** will convene a strategic roundtable to draft a national platform for healthy, engaged masculinities. At this roundtable, co-sponsored by Archewell and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, we will generate an action plan to effect change across five key themes: workplace and economic roles, caregiving, mental health, relationships, and allyship.

**With this blueprint in hand, we will carry out human-centered design research to identify community mobilizers to engage men across the political spectrum.** As our research has affirmed, most men are disconnected from conversations about healthy masculinities, even though many want opportunities to consider their own mental health, self-care, and care of others. In this research, we expect to identify spaces both to

encourage these conversations and engage men as allies for gender justice.

**All of these steps are in service to an ambitious goal: building a national platform, information hub, and unified campaign for healthy, connected, allied manhood.** Guided by our research, the recommendations emerging from our strategic roundtable, and insights into reaching men “in the middle,” Equimundo, Futures Without Violence, and other partners will establish a national network for men to champion these issues in their workplaces and communities, supported by a robust media campaign.

**We have long taught men to embrace courage, strength, and bravery, and these are the exact ideals required to pursue a new, uncharted path of positive, healthy, emotionally connected masculinity.** What the present moment calls for is a version of these ideals shorn of any element of dominance, violence, or unearned privilege. We need men to show the courage to walk a path of masculinity different from the harmful one we've inherited, strength in the conviction that a better world for all is a more noble goal than power for only a few, and bravery to build this reality even when – especially when – it means we do not know exactly what lies ahead. The future will only be better because we make it so, together.

\*In using the term “The Man Box” in this way, we are indebted to the pioneering work of Paul Kivel, The Oakland Men's Project, and Tony Porter of A Call To Men.





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# Introduction: Why a “State of American Men”?

The conversation about men and gender equality in the US has become highly politicized, even weaponized, and is often cast as zero-sum. In this contested space, care and resources dedicated to the lives of boys and men can seem like a distraction from the unfinished work related to girls and women. But as Equimundo’s efforts to engage boys and men in support of gender equality have progressed, it has remained clear that men are needed as allies for gender equality just as women and girls are affected by and part of men and boys’ lives and well-being.

On aggregate, men in the US enjoy material privilege compared to women – with more income, more power, and less hands-on care responsibility – even as these averages mask the tremendous diversity among men and among women. To this complex equation, we must also include men’s violence against women in homes, workplaces, and beyond as an example of where men are directly involved in the harm experienced mostly by women and girls and where men must be part of ending and preventing it. And in a moment when basic reproductive and sexual rights for women are being rolled back, we urgently need men on board as allies for women’s and girls’ rights. Full gender equality requires more connected, more just, and more empathic versions of manhood. We can and must ensure that our conversation supports gender justice for women, girls, and nonbinary individuals while also promoting better lives and healthier ideas about manhood for men and boys themselves.


## The Issues Driving This Study

Driving this study were three key issues:

- 1. Against the backdrop of women’s equality and feminist movements, some men are moving backward in their support for gender equality.** As these results and other studies show, there is observable backsliding and backlash. Too many younger men believe feminism has gone too far and hold more conservative, gender-inequitable views than older men. To this equation, some conservative leaders have made pushing back on LGTQIA+ rights – particularly, transgender rights – a rallying cry for their far-right base. For example, after Bud Light recently enlisted a trans influencer to promote its brand, singer Kid Rock posted a video of himself flipping off the brand after destroying several cases of the beer with an automatic rifle. To make further progress on the goals of full equality and human rights for women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, men’s commitment to equality is paramount and cannot be considered a given.
- 2. Intertwined with and underlying this backlash are the issues facing boys and men – employment, health, sense of purpose, educational aspirations, mental and emotional well-being, loneliness, and relationship challenges – that influence their embrace of new family roles, job opportunities, and relationship rules.** The precarious state of some men’s lives, spurred by surprisingly high levels of isolation, puts them at risk of withdrawing
3. **We must pay attention to the persistent racial inequalities that intersect with gender inequalities and with ideas of manhood in the US.** This means looking at the higher rates of incarceration and high school drop-out among men and boys of color, the disproportionate mental health challenges of Native Americans, and the large life expectancy gaps that men of color face compared to their white peers, to name just a few examples.<sup>1</sup> There is no single story about boys and men in the US or about their challenges. The *precarity* – which we use to refer to being highly insecure in their relationships with others and about their future – of some men, particularly those from marginalized groups of color, is especially acute.

further from their families and other relationships, as well as being susceptible to the invitations extended by reactionary movements. There is a veritable industry of online influencers that actively promotes misogyny, homophobia, and white supremacy on sites that draw in younger men, corroding their perspectives and compromising their well-being. Harmful voices are offering a space and purpose for many men, helping them feel good about themselves. Much more is needed to convince men of how these versions of manhood being promoted online often cause real harm and what the benefits are of healthier, connected, caring versions of manhood.





In short, boys and men are not all right. Their discomfort and confusion may be associated with some men's eroding support for gender equality, as well as backlash among some white men in the struggle for racial equity. In calling attention to the state of American men, we are not looking away from ongoing gender inequalities and racial inequity. Indeed, with this conversation and research, we reaffirm our commitment to eliminating all barriers to full equality for girls, women, and individuals of all gender identities. It is abundantly clear that the society we desire will only come about when those of all gender identities are free to develop their full human capacities.

### **Harmful Ideas Persist About Manhood in the US**

A 2017 Equimundo study showed how many young and adult men view manhood in ways that support violence, emotional restrictedness, dominance, and control in their relationships.<sup>2</sup>

**That 2017 study – and this new research – affirms that the *more* a man subscribes to cultural norms about manhood that support emotional repression, self-reliance, dominance, and control, the *less* mentally strong and adaptable he is. Higher rates of depression, anxiety, bullying and sexual harassment of women, and suicidal thoughts are all associated with endorsing the ideals of the “Man Box.”** At a time when the US surgeon

general has declared social disconnection to be at epidemic levels, contributing to both physical and mental problems, the loneliness of men's and women's lives deserves attention.<sup>3</sup>

**The risk of death is greater for men and boys compared to women and girls at every stage of life: childhood and adolescence, adulthood, and old age.<sup>4</sup> Much of this is a result of men's life circumstances – including racial inequities, lack of access to and seeking of health services, and work conditions. But the gender gap in morbidity is also related to the way we**

**raise boys in restricted versions of manhood in America.** These findings affirm that it is not being biologically male that is driving challenges among men in the US. Rather, harm typically results from pressures to conform to restrictive norms related to manhood that intersect with economic injustices, racial inequities, and other factors. These restrictive cultural norms are perpetuated by the numerous institutions that shape ideas about what it is to be male, female, or nonbinary – families, schools, churches, sports, media, military, governmental policies, and workplaces – and are reinforced in the cybersphere by porn, online chatrooms, online influencers, and video games. We list all of these to emphasize that ideas about manhood are about more than individual men. The culturally salient ideas about manhood – the ways we teach boys to be men – and the way individual men internalize these ideas can be healthy or harmful, aspirational or destructive, positive or negative (or in between). But they matter. We must bring individual boys and men into social connection and healthier, equitable ideas about manhood while also working to change the social norms and structures that sustain harmful ideas about manhood and those that drive gender and racial inequity.

### **The Current State of US Men: Precarity, Backlash, and the Weaponization of Manhood**

Economic insecurity, the educational challenges faced by some boys and men, social isolation, harmful online lives, political extremism, and the weaponization of manhood have made it difficult to engage in a necessary conversation about how we raise boys in the US. The determined political push to define “manhood” as white, militaristic, and often gun-owning has attracted a large audience and has been promoted by figures like TV personality Tucker Carlson and controversial influencer Andrew Tate. Groups of aggrieved men like Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), proponents for “men's rights,” and militaristic groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers are all selling a crash course for recovering lost manhood to men who feel undermined and

unmoored – and they're ultimately limiting men's prospects in the process. The levels of gender threat<sup>5</sup> reported by younger men reflect the precarity they feel when traditionally secure pathways are blocked by a globalized, knowledge-based economy that operates with changing rules, inequalities, priorities, and sources of competition. These themes and prior research informed the survey questions for this study.

To include the realities of non-college-educated men, we ensured that group's representation in our sample and looked carefully at their responses. The gender-based achievement gap among boys begins at kindergarten, expands through eighth grade, and persists through high school and postsecondary education, setting up this group of men for increasingly tenuous connections and insecure lives. US employment statistics reflect this precarity: One in three men with only a high school degree is no longer in the labor force at all, and the biggest drop in labor force participation has been among men aged 25 to 34. Across all age groups, men's median hourly wage has fallen steadily since 1970.<sup>6</sup> Not only are the economic prospects of these men highly uncertain, but so are their relationship prospects: They are viewed as less desirable life partners and have experienced a dramatic decline in social status in a single generation, as scholar Richard Reeves and others have analyzed. They also experience more loneliness. According to a 2021 survey, Black and Latino men, younger men, and men with less income experience relatively higher levels of loneliness.<sup>7</sup>

Men and women of color have faced these disparities and educational and career challenges for decades; the recent trend has also affected large numbers of white men. In discussing these issues, we must affirm that the trajectories of white men without college education and men of color without college education are clearly different and diverse.



To give one example, men and boys of color continue to face higher rates of harsh school discipline and incarceration. As another example, these educational and career challenges leave some white men vulnerable to the appeals of reactive and racist forces, as this study finds. Some researchers have used the term “aggrieved entitlement”<sup>8</sup> to describe white men who feel that as greater attention is paid to racial justice and gender equality policies, they have been denied certain benefits and privileges they expected due to being male and white.

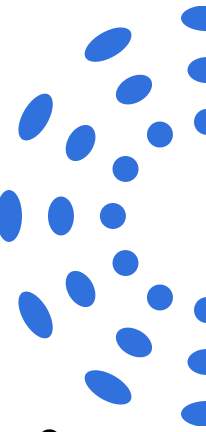
The current state of American men – the mixture of backlash against and endorsement of gender equality, the rise of angry, white supremacist messages online, and the sense of purpose that many men have found in the most harmful versions of manhood – is shaping US electoral outcomes, and in turn, national and local policies in divisive and destructive ways. It is easy to be pessimistic about the state of men and of American manhood. **But we find hope in many young and older men’s desire to be connected, in their awareness of their need for deeper relationships, and in their willingness to discuss their mental health problems and vulnerabilities.** There are also many men who endorse or support gender equality. These findings suggest that pathways to embracing better versions of manhood in America already exist. We also affirm that there is no single story of men in the US. Many men find meaningful relationships, support women’s equality, believe in healthy ideas about manhood, and are devoted, equitable caregivers. In highlighting the harm and risk for American men and manhood, we also see the promise and realities of the many connected, empathic, equity-seeking young and adult men.

Importantly, this study did not include a survey with women in the same age group. We know that women in the US face myriad gendered challenges and realities that must be understood alongside and in relation to the realities of men. We rely on and are informed by key research with

women in the US and used that research to drive many of the questions we asked of men.

Also of note, this research is part of a national initiative, in close partnership with Futures Without Violence and others, to organize a national summit on these topics in 2024 and drive a national conversation about how men can be better allies for full gender equality and racial justice, as well as how we can build alliances across policymakers, workplaces, the media, sports, and nonprofit organizations to promote healthy masculinities for the good of women, men, and individuals of all gender identities.

Researchers often end their reports saying we need more research. For Equimundo, this study points directly to action – to redouble our efforts to carry out structural and societal changes calling men and boys into healthier ideas about manhood, into deeper and more interdependent social connections, into empathy, and into true allyship for gender and racial justice.





# Methodology

The data presented in this report come from a 2023 online questionnaire administered to 2,022 men across the United States. Research partner Rep Data recruited respondents from a variety of top-tier research panels, and the sample was constructed to match the diversity of the US population as closely as possible.

The survey was open to all men aged 18 to 45 in the United States.<sup>9</sup> This age range allowed for deeper focus and comparison among younger generations of men who are coming of age, building careers, and attempting to start families. We applied both minimum quotas and maximum limits on respondents according to age, race and ethnicity, education level, region, and sexual orientation in order to most closely match the actual population of the country.

Table 1 demonstrates the rich diversity that exists in our sample. Only one group, non-Hispanic Asian men, is slightly underrepresented compared to their population in the latest US census data. All other age groups, racial and ethnic groups, educational attainment levels, regions, and sexual orientations are represented in close proportion to the latest census data. Our sample was deliberately large enough and stratified to allow for analysis between age groups and to represent the ethnic, economic, and regional diversity of the US.

We sought to provide a snapshot of the lives of men ages 18 to 45 in the US, particularly the quality of their social lives, their experiences of stress and well-being, their online lives, and the extent to which they embrace gender equality and aspire to healthy versions of manhood. The major topics driving this survey were:

- How are men doing?
- How do they feel about their lives and prospects? About their relationships? Their romantic lives? Their sense of purpose?
- Where do they turn to process stress or pain? To find guidance and inspiration?
- Whom do they listen to about manhood? Do they aspire to healthy masculinity – or to its opposite?
- What are their online lives like in regard to dating, pornography, influencers, and social connection?
- Do they support or oppose gender equality?
- And how do all these issues all intersect?

We used a variety of questions to seek answers to these: some developed by Equimundo, some borrowed from other surveys, but all informed by existing research on men, their challenges, their relationship to gender equality, and the crisis of connection. Key indices and scales used in the survey include:

- **Social support**, measured by an abbreviated form of the Duke Social Support Index<sup>10</sup>
- **Purpose in life**, measured by a modified version of the Purpose in Life test<sup>11</sup>
- **Optimism**, measured by an original nine-item barometer in which respondents chose the elements of their lives they expect to be better or worse in ten years
- **Attitudes about masculinity**, measured by a nine-item version of Equimundo's Man Box Scale<sup>12</sup>
- **Trust in the manosphere**, measured by asking respondents who they trust of several figures, sites, and groups known to

- promote restrictive, misogynistic, and/or militant masculinities
- **Trust in other social influences**, measured by asking respondents who they trust of several figures, sites, and groups known to promote positive, pro-social, or feminist policies and masculinities

These indices and scales are presented in Annex 1, along with the average responses to them for the 2,022 respondents.

**Table 1: Sample demographics**

	%	n
<b>Age Group</b>		
18-23	29%	580
24-30	23%	461
31-37	24%	485
38-45	25%	496
<b>Economic Hardship*</b>		
No Hardship	31%	621
Some Hardship	35%	710
Most Hardship	34%	691
<b>Education Level</b>		
High School or Lower	41%	838
Vocational School or Associate's Degree	25%	509
Bachelor's Degree	25%	510
Master's Degree or Higher	8%	165
<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	1%	19
Asian, non-Hispanic	5%	94
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	21%	408
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin	26%	516
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	< 1%	6
White, non-Hispanic	47%	923
Decline/Don't Know	3%	56
<b>Region</b>		
Northeast	20%	400
Midwest	22%	444
South	37%	754
West	21%	424
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Heterosexual or Straight	86%	1735
Gay	6%	110
Bisexual	7%	148
Other	1%	29
<b>Total Sample:</b>		<b>2022</b>

**Left:** Sample demographics presented in six key categories. State of American Men Dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.

\*To measure **economic hardship**, respondents were asked to select any one or more experiences they may have had from the following list: (1) Have you or anyone in your household had to put off medical or dental treatment to make ends meet?; (2) Have you or anyone in your household had to delay paying your rent or making a house payment to make ends meet? (3) Have you or anyone in your household had to cut back on the amount or quality of food you purchase to make ends meet?; and (4) has your household struggled to make ends meet (however you define it)? Respondents who reported none of these four are classified as "no hardship," those who reported one or two are classified as "some hardship," and those who reported three or four are classified as "most hardship."



# HEADLINE 1: PRECARIOUS MEN

Too many men – especially younger men – are socially disconnected, pessimistic about the future, and turning to online anger.





**PRECARIOUS MEN: Too many men – especially younger men – are socially disconnected, pessimistic about the future, and turning to online anger**

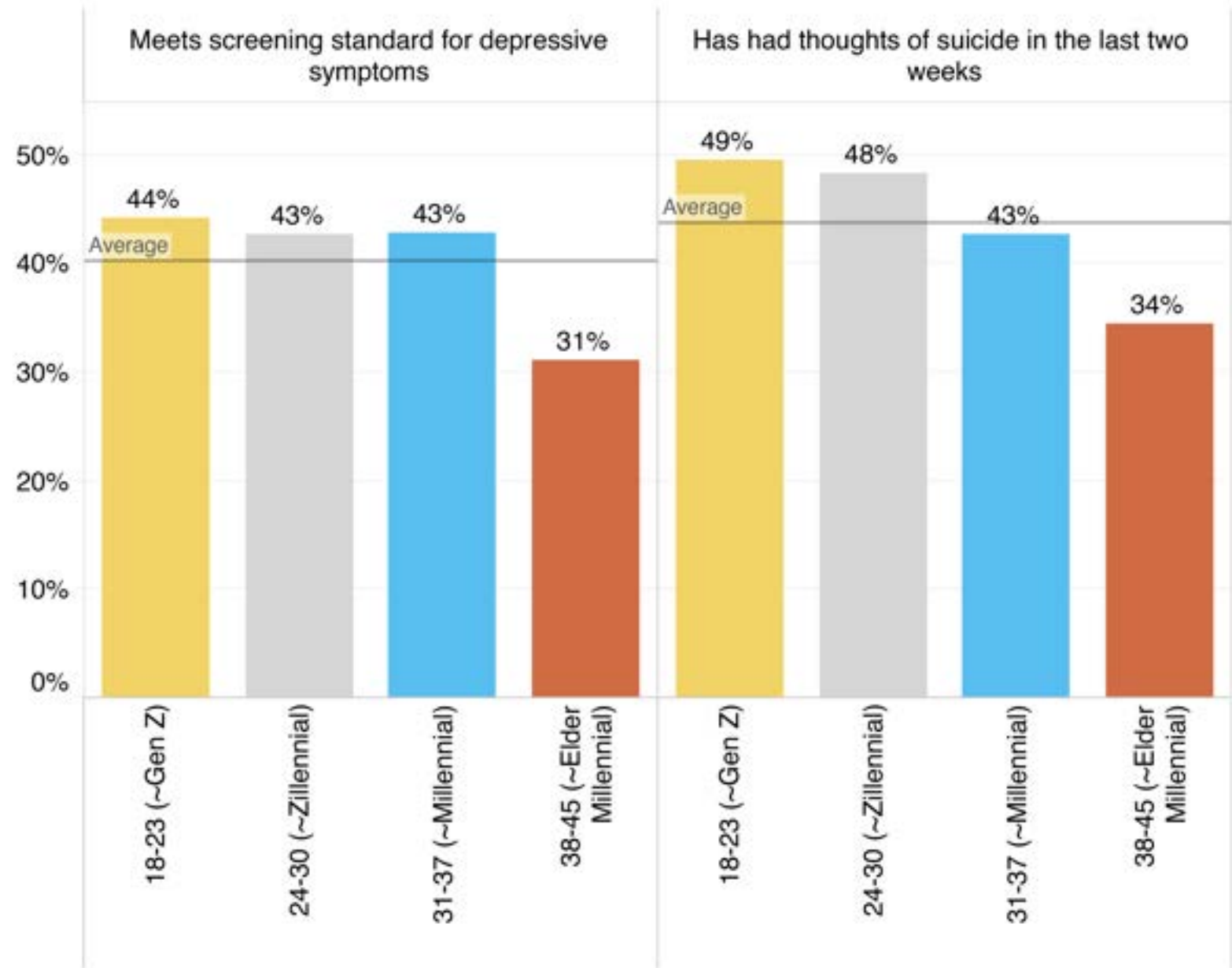
**KEY FINDINGS:**

- 40% of all men show depressive symptoms.
- 44% of all men had thoughts of suicide in the prior two weeks; younger men show the highest levels of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation.
- 40% of all men say they trust one or more “men’s rights,” anti-feminist, or pro-violence voices from the manosphere; nearly half of younger men say they trust such voices.
- Men aged 18 to 23 have the least optimism for their futures and the lowest levels of social support.
- 65% of men aged 18 to 23 say that “no one really knows me well.”

Families, workplaces, schools, communities, relationships, and the internet were all impacted by COVID. Work lives changed radically in ways that are still unfolding, and women and low-income communities were especially affected. Pandemic life brought dramatic changes of its own and accelerated trends that were already underway. Many men and women became increasingly isolated and spent more time online and streaming content. Loneliness seems to be increasing as well.

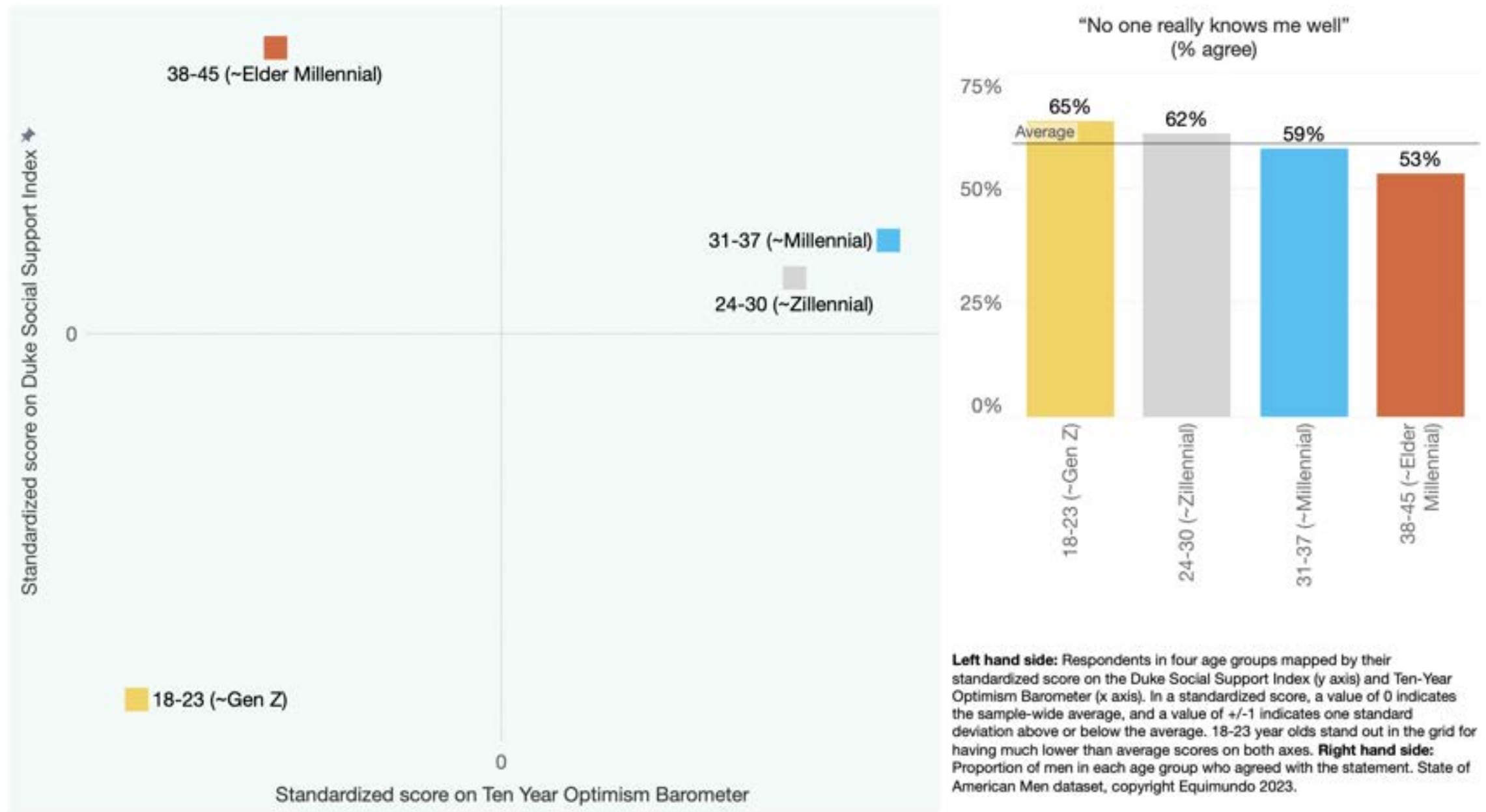
We were especially interested in younger generations, who must adapt to the new social geography created by limited social welfare policies, Title IX, #MeToo, and our unfinished racial reckoning. At a time when manhood itself is highly politicized and weaponized, are younger men better able to resist harmful masculine myths? Are they freer to reinvent what it means to be male, and indeed, to treat gender norms as less important in shaping who they are? Can we believe in generational progress and trust younger men to reach for deeper connections to themselves and their loved ones, more meaningful work and family lives, deeper ties to children and others they care for, and more flexible relationships with their partners?

**Figure 1: The youngest men report the highest levels of emotional distress and mental health problems at a statistically significant level.**

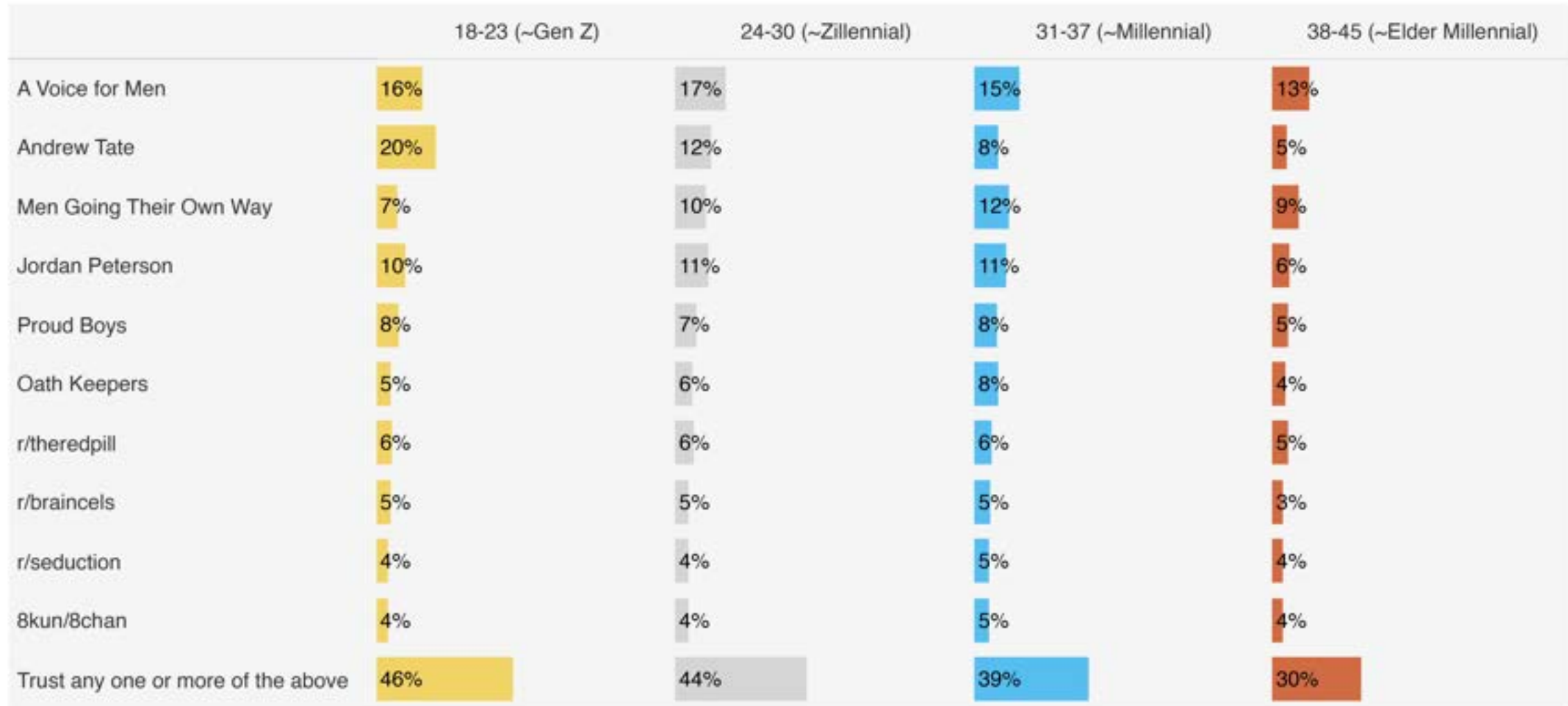


**Left:** Proportion of men in each age group who scored at or above the screening standard on the Patient Health Questionnaire 2 (PHQ-2), a short standard tool used by physicians to determine whether patients need follow up attention for major depressive disorder. **Right:** Proportion of men in each age group who said that they had ever had thoughts of suicide within the last two weeks. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equipundo 2023.

**Figure 2: The youngest men also report the lowest levels of optimism and social support at a statistically significant level. They are also the most likely to report that “no one really knows me well” at a significant level.**



**Figure 3: Figures from the manosphere have a strong influence on young men.**



**Above:** Proportion of men in each age group who say they trust each figure, site, or group associated with the manosphere, followed by a final line indicating the proportion who trust any one or more of these. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equipundo 2023.

**Note:** We selected a list of some of the most known and followed internet forums, public figures, and communities that represent the breadth of the manosphere: incel forums on Reddit (r/theredpill, r/braincels, r/seduction), men's rights websites (A Voice for Men), male separatist communities (Men Going Their Own Way), militant white supremacy groups (Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys), the message board site 8kun/8chan, and anti-feminist public figures (Andrew Tate and psychology professor Jordan Peterson). Though there are internal differences and conflicts within and between the groups, each tends to abide by the red pill "philosophy," or the idea of men swallowing the "red pill" as in *The Matrix* and awakening to feminism's supposed misogyny and brainwashing.

**Our study finds that younger men are a distinct group facing higher rates of depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and a sense of isolation: For example, 65 percent of younger men say that “no one really knows me well.”**

The overall picture is mixed, however, with some positive advances amid dismaying signs of retreat. Our data affirm that younger men are the most likely to report depression, suicidality, fear for their future, and feelings of disconnection.

**Though these differences are statistically significant, nearly half of older men report these struggles, too.** We suspect these results also reflect some men’s new openness about their emotional struggles and greater cultural literacy about mental health challenges. High-profile athletes and prominent US politicians, like Sen. John Fetterman of purple state Pennsylvania, have modeled the courage to share vulnerabilities, and their examples may signify a new era in American manhood. **We interpret these high reports of vulnerability in our data as a sign that some men are more comfortable acknowledging how they feel.**

**It is highly disturbing that nearly half of men aged 18 to 35 regularly contemplate ending their lives.** We know from recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention research that young women also experience this at high rates.<sup>13</sup> This leads us to ask: What forces of despair or inescapable circumstances drive such bleak outlooks? In clinical terms, suicidal thoughts often arise from a constricted sense of possibility. **In our sample, men who held more restrictive ideas about manhood – using our Man Box scale – were more likely to contemplate suicide; the same is true for men with the least social support, holding all other influences constant.** Clearly, harmful ideas about manhood are not the only thing driving some men’s thoughts of suicide; these also likely interact with a world clouded by climate threats, economic precarity, and political pessimism.

**Our data clearly affirm that young men, the group we would expect to feel most optimistic about their lives and to have stepped into new versions of manhood, are the most socially vulnerable.** Instead of being more optimistic than older men, their pessimism, social isolation, and loneliness are more acute. These findings suggest that young men have a highly insecure connection to other people and to their futures – what some have called precarity. When gender theorist Judith Butler characterized precarity as a structural outcome of “failing social and economic networks of support” that exposes people to “injury, violence, and death,”<sup>14</sup> she was not referring to men. But our data reveal that the manhood – and the world – we’ve built for our sons fails to equip the majority of them with adequate relational support and a sense of purpose. Research has established that social isolation increases the risk of mortality by nearly 30 percent, and men predominate in the leading 15 causes of premature mortality.<sup>15</sup>

**When we combine this situation of precarity and mental distress with the finding that nearly half of young men trust in the misogynist voices of the manosphere, the situation becomes particularly troubling (see Figure 3).** It is more than just a spurious association that so many men trust in voices of harm and hate online; it is a deliberate preying on and monetizing of the precarity of millions of men in the US.





# HEADLINE 2: FEMINIST ALLIES OR FEMINIST OPPONENTS?

Many men are ready to be allies even as some show confusion amid modest progress toward gender equality.



## FEMINIST ALLIES OR FEMINIST OPPONENTS?

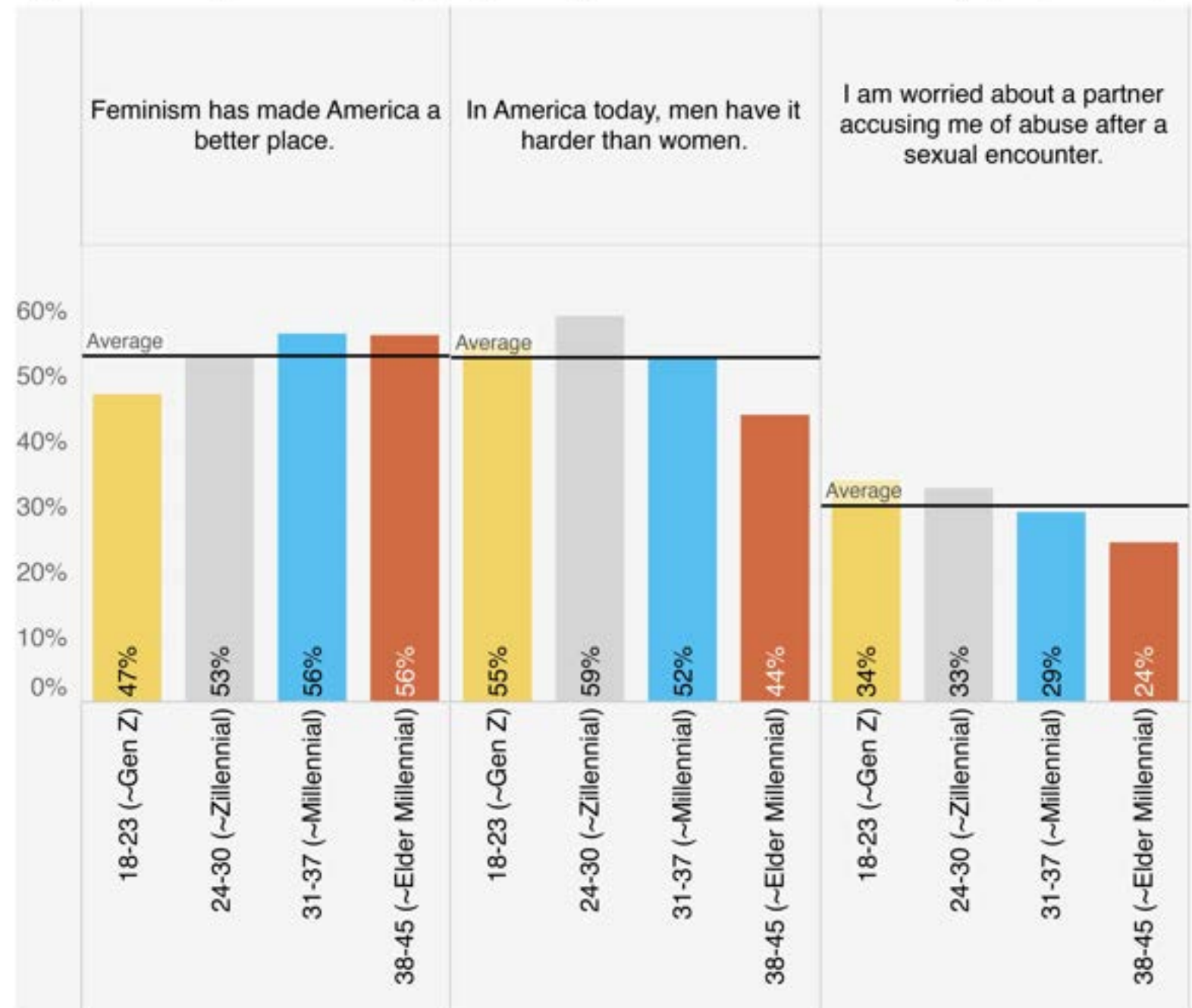
Many men are ready to be allies even as some show confusion amid modest progress toward gender equality

### KEY FINDINGS

- 53% of men agree that “in America today, men have it harder than women.”
- About a third of all men worry about being accused of abuse after a sexual encounter.
- Seven in ten men say speaking their minds could destroy their reputation.
- 47% of men disagree that “feminism has made America a better place.”
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of men think that abortion should be legal in most or all cases, an opinion held at the highest rates by younger men.
- 16% of men say they’ve called out a friend making a hurtful joke about women.
- 21% of men say they’ve given credit to a female colleague for a great idea.

#MeToo, Title IX, and the necessary changes in institutional cultures resulting from greater attention to sexual assault and men’s violence against women have all affected how men see themselves in relation to women’s rights and women’s equality in complex ways. The results from our research indicate that many men are confused in the face of this social upheaval and social advances. Some men are receiving and accepting the messages of – and demand for – respect, equality, and full dignity of women. Others are clearly threatened by these messages, or the online voices of misogyny are helping convince these men that they should feel threatened. Connecting to the theme of precarity, some men – in the face of social disconnection and perceived or real downward mobility – see women’s advancement in a zero-sum game, holding a “replacement theory” view that women’s gains are at the cost of men. We know how much the manosphere echoes and reinforces these messages.

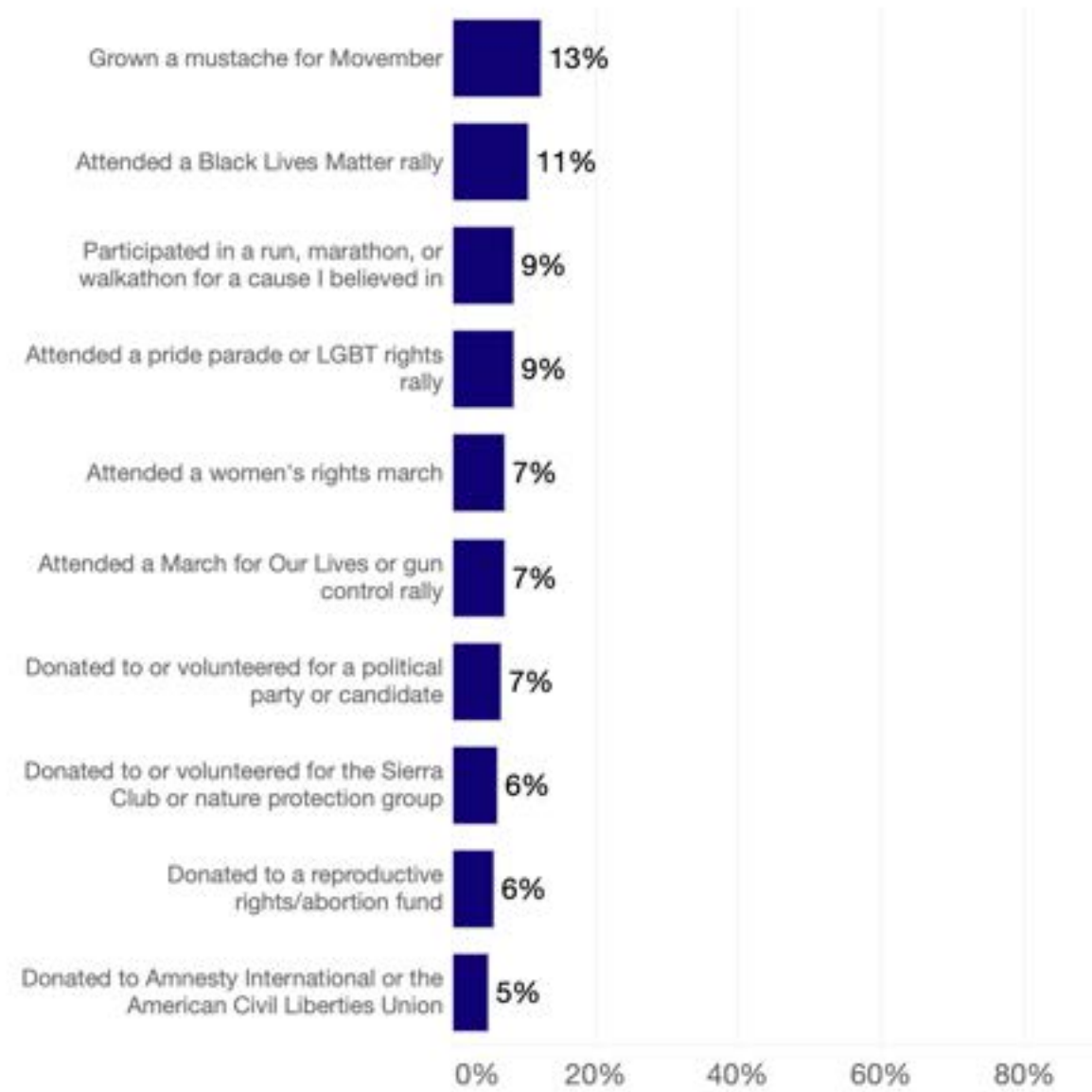
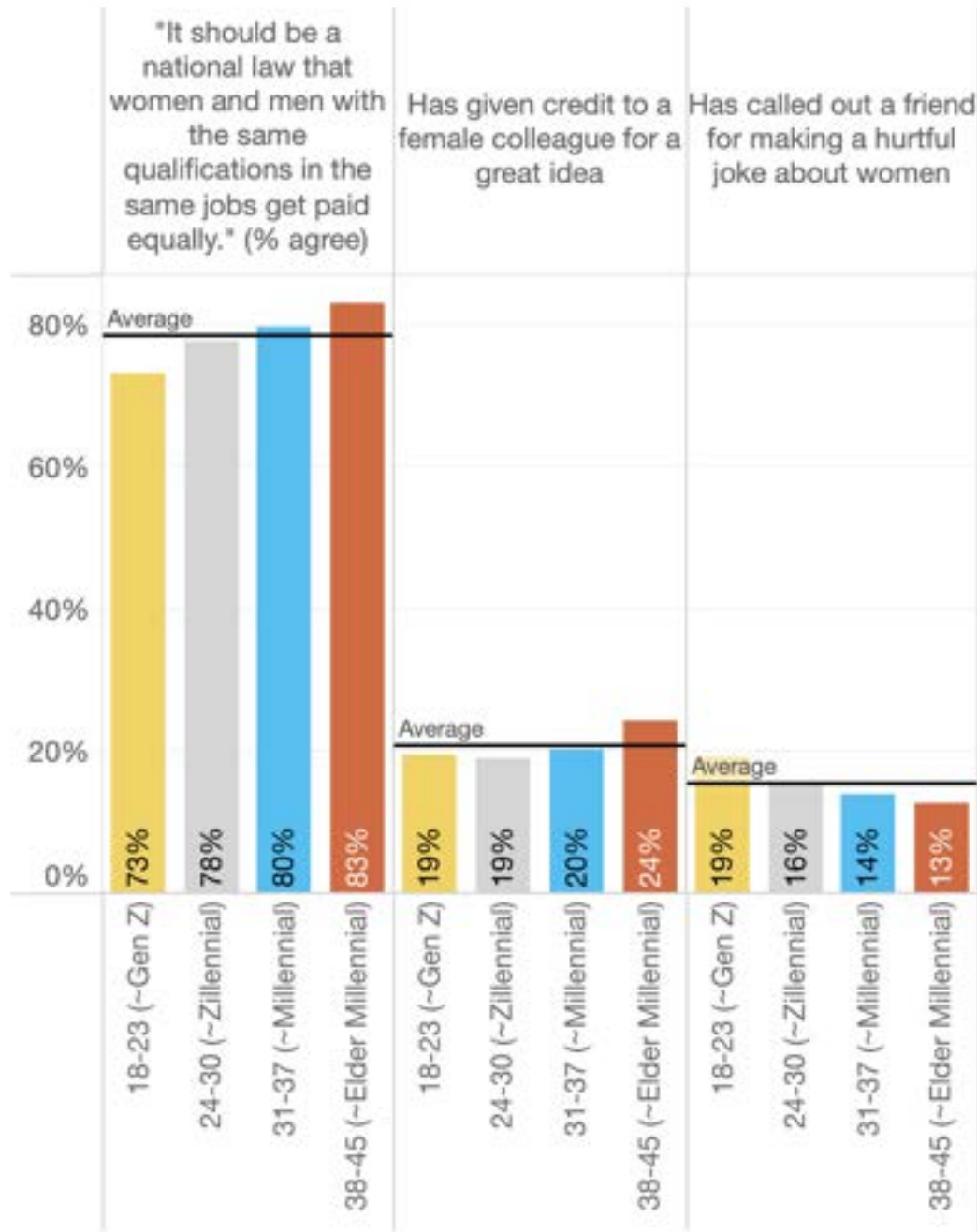
Figure 4: Percentage of men across age groups who agree with statements about feminism, rights, and anxiety



Above: Proportion of men in each age group who agree with certain statements related to feminism and rights. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equipundo 2023.



**Figure 5: Exploring allyship in thought and action**



**Left:** Proportion of men in each age group who agreed with statements or reported doing actions of allyship. **Right:** Proportion of all men who have done each action. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.

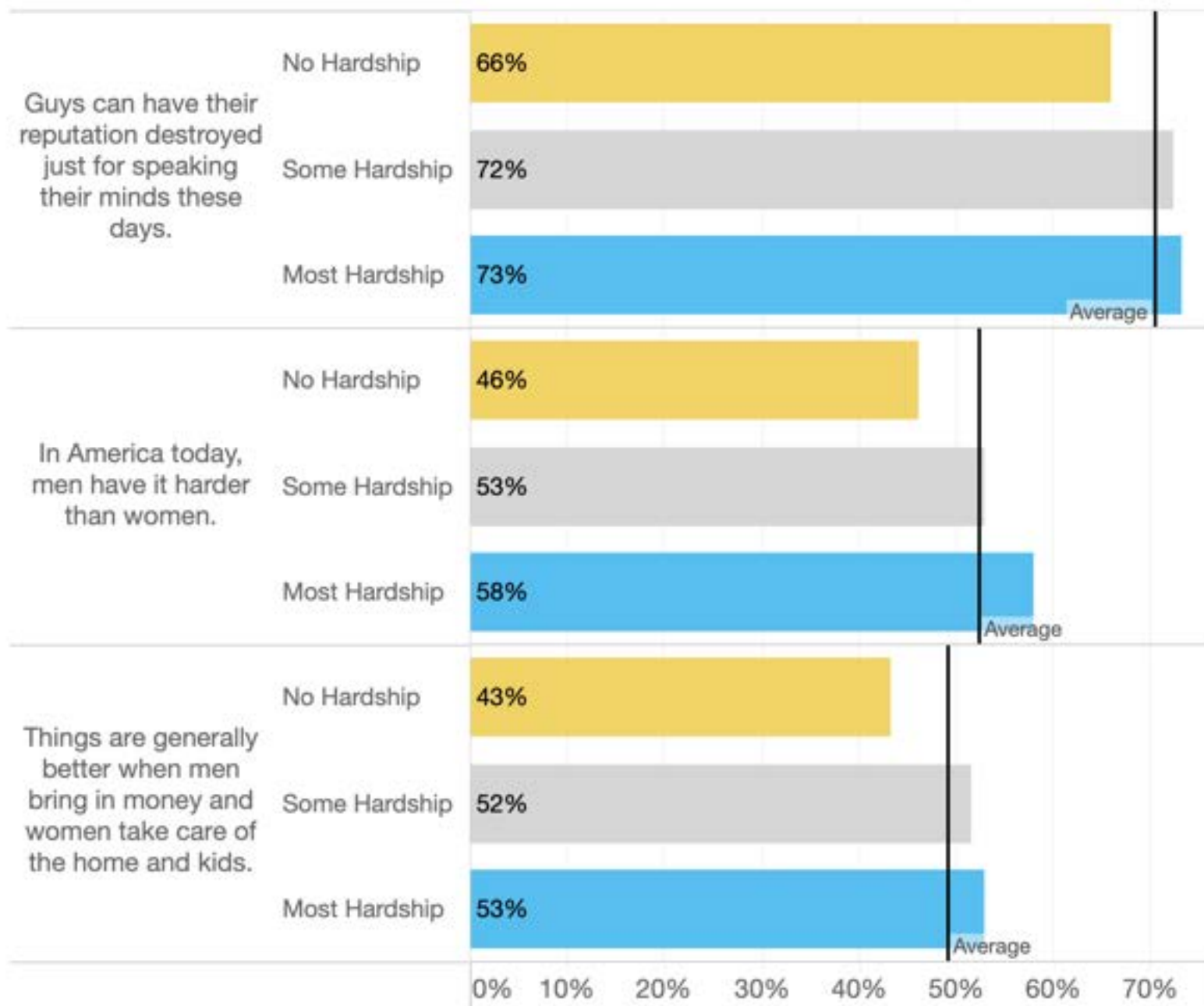
Our research finds no single story that explains how men believe in, react to, or oppose the women’s rights agenda – meaning that efforts to engage men as allies for gender equality must be nuanced, be well-researched, and account for this diversity of men’s views and voices.

Overall, about half of men think feminism has been a net positive for the US, which means that about half think it has not brought positive changes. It is challenging to disentangle how much of this resistance is fueled by a sense of personal threat and how much is a result of men internalizing misogynist messages they see online. It is likely both.

Related to this issue, more than half of all men – rising to nearly 60 percent among men aged 24 to 30 – say men have it harder than women in the US today. That may reflect a combination of real challenges in education and social disconnection among some men, as well as the constant messaging from online influencers and politicians who have sought to paint men as the “victims” in gender politics. The fact that men aged 24 to 30 were the most likely to think they have a harder time than women likely reflects the fact that this age group has just entered the workforce and may be facing the changing realities and precariousness of employment head on, which in turn may leave them most susceptible to this view.

The finding that younger men feel the most gender threat may also reflect something else: the growing and necessary attention to women’s full pay, employment, and advancement in workplaces as part of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and affirmative action, a change that has appropriately centered women’s voices and challenges. However, far fewer workplaces have developed nuanced approaches to engaging men as allies or made the case for gender equality’s benefits to all of us and the moral necessity of women’s equality to men.

**Figure 6: As men digest profound changes in families, workplaces, schools, and communities, those with more economic hardship hold some strict ideas more strongly**



**Above:** Proportion of men according to economic hardship category who agree with each statement. For details on the economic hardship measure, please refer to the Methodology section. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



Some men are embracing efforts to create equity for women, but at least half need to be convinced of their role and the imperative of their support. Too often, our efforts related to male allyship in women's empowerment work assume a kind of "all men are the same" approach, that all men have the same resistance or the same support. Clearly, we need more complex allyship strategies.

**About a third of all men worry about being accused of abuse after a sexual encounter, with younger men being the most likely to say this.** That so many men feel unsure about consent, and perhaps have so little communication with sexual partners, affirms the need for frank, ongoing discussions and messages about consent, healthy sexuality, and open and honest communication before and during sexual encounters. For us, it is an indicator of many men's low sexual and relationship literacy. It may also be related to how much pornography younger men in the US consume and how unsure they are that the sexual acts they stream – and often seek to mimic in lived sexual encounters – are, in fact, consensual.

**Seven in ten men report – roughly equally across age groups – that their reputations can be destroyed by speaking their minds.** This finding carries signs of progress while also suggesting perceived gender threat and backlash. The fact that men are concerned about what they say – in workplaces, schools, and other public spaces – is positive. Being held accountable for harmful, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and racist language is a sign of genuine progress toward making shared spaces safe for all individuals. Yet this high percentage of men seemingly worried about the fragility of their reputations also points toward defensiveness. And it suggests that in some settings, we know how to *call men out* for harm committed but need to do a better job of *calling men in* to conversations about what is required for men to be empathic, connected, and equitable coworkers and colleagues.

**We also included questions seeking to assess how much some men already participate in allyship actions – that is, where they show their support for gender equality, racial justice, and healthy masculinity.** Nearly two-thirds of men think that abortion should be legal in most or all cases; this opinion is most common among younger men, which points to mostly untapped allyship opportunities to bring men into the cause of women's reproductive autonomy. Additionally, about 6 percent of men say they have donated to an abortion rights fund. Similarly, men nearly universally support equal pay for women, which suggests low-hanging fruit in terms of bringing more men into the cause of equality. Figure 5 presents some kinds of allyship that men have carried out, including various forms of political or social action. For most of these, younger men are the most likely to say they have participated in various events or acts supporting gender equality, racial justice, healthy masculinity, or LGBTQIA+ rights. About 12 percent of all men have grown a mustache for Movember, for example, and about one in ten have participated in a Black Lives Matter event (15 percent of Black men compared to 10 percent of white men). Fewer than one in ten have participated in an LGBTQIA+ event or rally. Overall, these findings show a relatively low level of men's engagement in progressive political activism. But the fact that younger men are the most likely to have participated in equity-affirming events suggests that more could and should be done to deliberately engage young men as allies across these causes.

**The emerging conclusion is that those of us who promote gender equality have not done a particularly good job of engaging men in general in any kind of concrete action for racial justice, social justice, or gender equality.** Often, gender justice groups are reluctant to engage men because of polarization or preconceived ideas that men are uniformly oppositional to these causes (or that white men are opposed to racial equity). This ambivalence about engaging men in causes they might be likely to support is to our own detriment.

In our necessary calling out of harm on the right, we have often been more reactive than we have been proactive in engaging men in allyship for diverse forms of gender and racial justice and healthy masculinity.



# HEADLINE 3: EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING

Online lives provide connection but often  
supplant offline ones.





**KEY FINDINGS:**

- *Nearly half of men (48%) say their online lives are more engaging and rewarding than their offline lives.*
- *76% say the internet allows them to connect with like-minded people they wouldn't meet otherwise.*
- *Only 22% of men have three or more people in their local area they feel close to or depend on.*
- *Almost 30% of younger men reported not spending time with someone outside their household in the past week.*
- *Six in ten men visit porn sites at least weekly.*
- *About a third of younger men have unsuccessfully attempted to stop viewing porn.*

Previous research has looked at how much time young and adult men are spending online and how much ideas about manhood are being made there. Internet observers like New York University social scientist Jonathan Haidt have asserted that viral dynamics engineered since 2015 have fueled polarization and aggression, and this thesis has special relevance for men needing somewhere to belong. Torqued to promote confirmation bias, search engines and social media “were almost perfectly designed to bring out our most moralistic and least reflective selves,” according to Haidt.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, our concern on finding that so many men in our survey tell of opportunities to expand their networks online well beyond those they create in person. **Despite worries over how much time they spend on apps like YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, nearly half feel these virtual connections are “more engaging and rewarding” than the rest of their lives.** Across all ages, the majority of men spend at least three hours a week on YouTube – and according to *The New York Times*, the recommender algorithm that guides users down personalized paths is responsible for more than 70 percent of all time

spent on the site.<sup>17</sup> The behavioral engineers behind these sites, who have mastered the curation of dopamine experience, would be happy but probably unsurprised by our findings. In short, YouTube is young men’s new “locker room.” The difference is that in real locker rooms, classrooms, workplaces, and peer groups, many men – as we have seen – call each other out for harmful or sexist comments. Too often, YouTube and other online spaces become self-reinforcing, self-referencing echo chambers where sexist, racist, and homophobic language often goes unchecked.

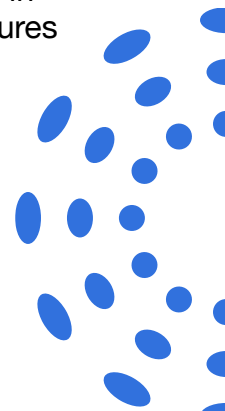
**As men increasingly shape their identities online, they're also finding active belonging in greater digital connectedness: 76 percent of respondents say the internet allows them to connect with like-minded people they wouldn't meet otherwise.** On the one hand, the internet is helping isolated men feel less alone, establishing bonds that make them feel comfortable enough to let their guard down and get close with other men. But certain online communities, such as gaming forums, are often spaces that enable and reward men for performing hypermasculinity and challenging societal expectations of appropriate behavior without supervision.<sup>18</sup> Rather than working through the pain of being sexually rejected, incel forums weaponize the language of vulnerability to lash out at the women they “deserve,” with frightening and violent real-life implications.

The expansion of digital communities begs the question of whether more time online is drawing men away from support networks offline as well. While previous research has found that online and offline spaces complement each other – in that establishing friendships online lends itself to real-world meet-ups<sup>19</sup> – our data suggest some concerning trends to the contrary. **Around one in five men feel there is no one in their local community they can trust or depend on. And almost 30 percent of younger men, ostensibly the group most expected to socialize with peers, said they hadn't spent time with**

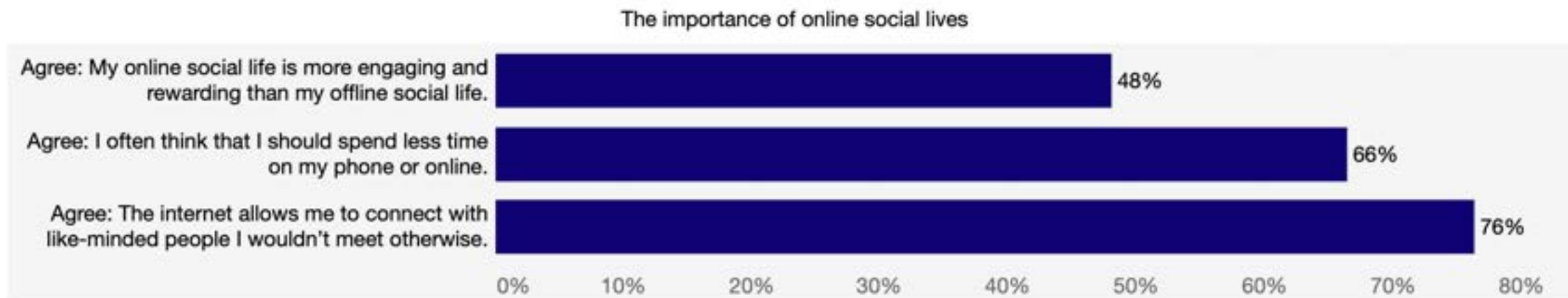
**someone outside their household in the past week. This social isolation means that too many young men are not becoming emotionally and relationally literate.**

Online dating and porn sites are also an integral part of men’s cyberspace. **Younger men seem to be more concerned about porn consumption than Millennials, though at least 60 percent of all ages surveyed visit porn sites at least weekly.** Caution rules, however, as our data suggest that younger men in particular are ambivalent about porn’s role in their lives. **Nearly a third have made attempts to stop and were unsuccessful.** This finding is both encouraging and deeply worrying; it suggests that many young men are aware of the harm in their lives from too much porn use, while it also tells of how powerful porn is in its provision of algorithmically driven, simulated pleasure.

As we’ll see in the next headline, there is a circular relationship between porn use and relationship satisfaction—it is hard to tell which comes first. According to our sample, only a minority of men (about 40 percent) are in committed relationships they are satisfied with. Another group says they are fine with not having a partner and are not looking or prefer occasional hookups. But of special note is the relatively large group of those who are dissatisfied: men who are looking for something better or those who have given up looking altogether. As men in the US contend with their changing roles in the 21st century, failing to address their confusion around healthy relationships could mean they’ll seek pleasure in porn and solace in the narrative of far-right figures promising to upend feminist progress and “restore” men to their proper place.

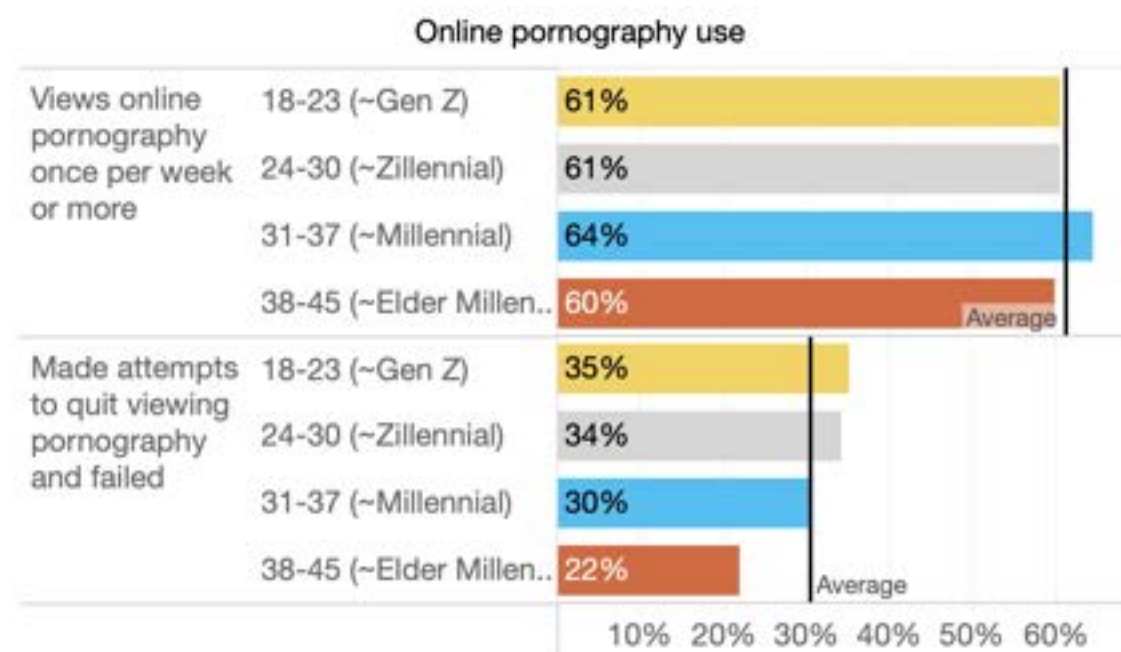


**Figure 7: The new geography of men's social lives, including the importance of online life and the ubiquity of pornography**



Social media use by age group

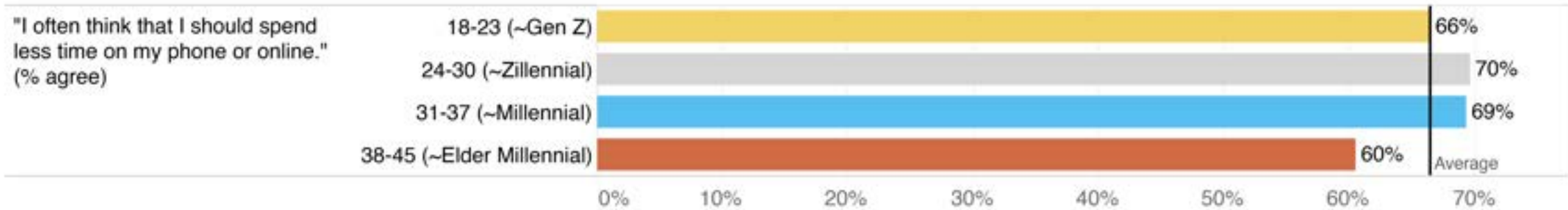
	18-23 (~Gen Z)	24-30 (~Zillennial)	31-37 (~Millennial)	38-45 (~Elder Millennial)	Average
YouTube	52%	48%	55%	54%	52%
Facebook	15%	33%	52%	48%	36%
Instagram	35%	33%	35%	28%	33%
TikTok	36%	26%	27%	23%	28%
Twitter	18%	20%	26%	19%	20%
Snapchat	25%	19%	15%	12%	18%
Reddit	13%	15%	12%	9%	12%
LinkedIn	3%	7%	9%	10%	7%



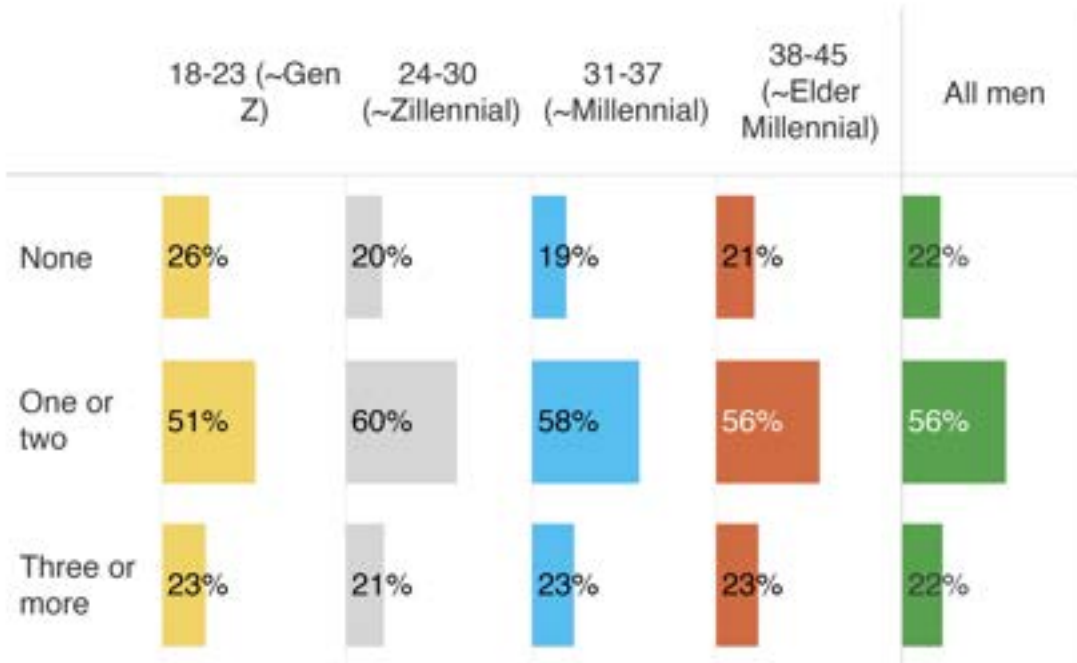
**Top:** Proportion of men who agree with statements about online life. **Bottom left:** Proportion of men in each age category who say they spend at least three hours per week on each site. **Bottom right:** Proportion of men in each age category who report each action. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



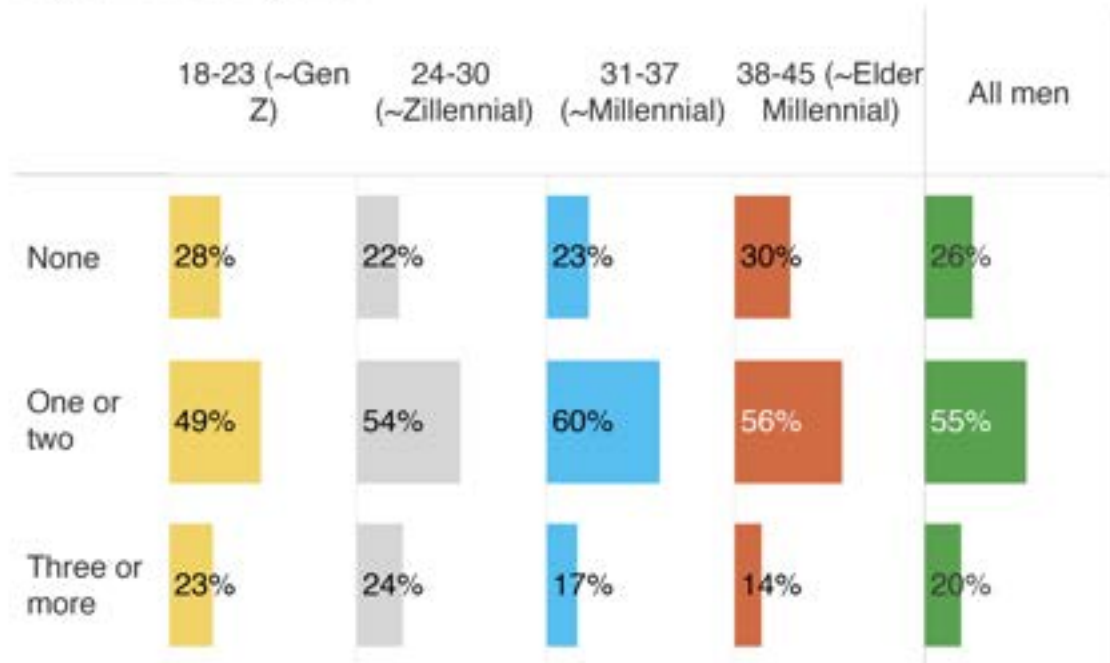
**Figure 8: Rethinking online life and limitations in offline social support**



Other than members of your family, how many **persons** in your local area do you feel you can depend on or feel very close to?



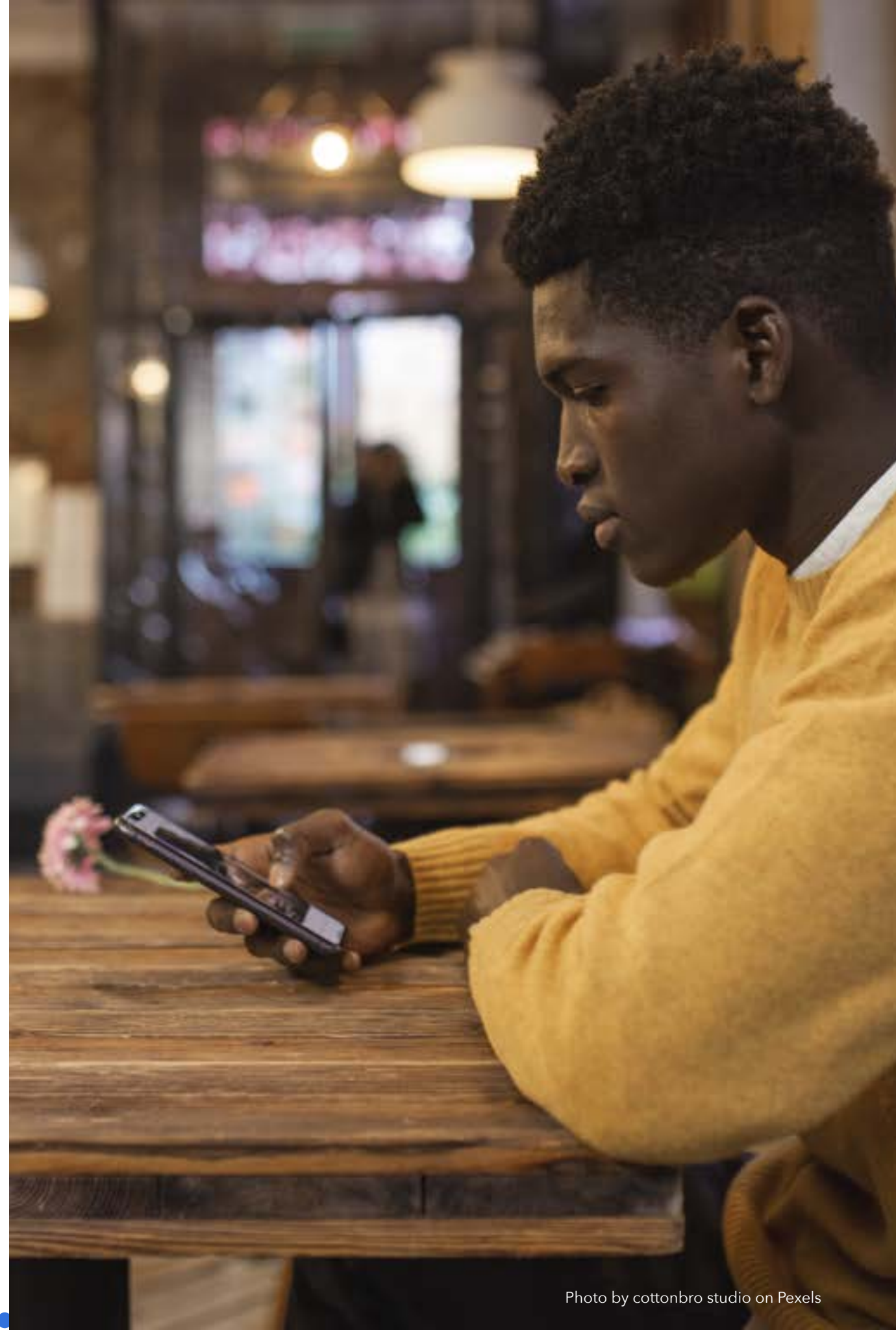
How many **times** during the past week did you spend time with someone who does not live with you, that is, you went to see them or they came to visit you or you went out together?



**Top:** Proportion of men in each age group who agree with the statement. **Bottom left:** Proportion of men in each age group who reported this number of persons. **Bottom right:** Proportion of men in each age group who reported this number of times. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.

# HEADLINE 4: LOOKING FOR LOVE

Most men seek committed relationships, but many aren't finding them.





**KEY FINDINGS:**

- *22% of men are either mostly not looking for a relationship or mostly unable to find sexual partners.*
- *13% of men report occasional relationships but are looking for something more committed.*
- *38% of men report being in a stable relationship and being mostly satisfied.*
- *46% of men have ever used a dating app; of these, more were looking for a committed relationship than a casual one.*
- *About one in five men who use these apps say it's mainly to make friends.*
- *Men report being generally sexually satisfied – though it may be difficult to admit if they aren't.*

Recent reports from the General Social Survey and the National Survey of Family Growth find that members of younger generations, particularly young men, are more likely to be single, have fewer sexual partners, and even be sexless.<sup>20</sup>

**Almost two-thirds of the men aged 18 to 23 in our sample say they're not in stable relationships, and over a quarter say they are mostly not looking or able to find partners.**

These findings are consistent with the General Social Survey, which found 30 percent of men had no sex in the previous year.<sup>21</sup> The University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future survey also found a marked drop in sexual partners among young adult men, with abstinence rates rising dramatically by 2020, to nearly 25 percent.<sup>22</sup> Unmarried men are the men most likely to be sexless. And the men most likely to be without an intimate partner are generally less educated, unemployed, and still living with parents, which may make them less attractive in the dating "market."<sup>23</sup>

Several theories have been put forth to explain what's being called the "sex recession." For one,

more men are evidently turning away from partnered sex altogether and retreating to porn and masturbation; weekly masturbation among men doubled from 1992 to 2014. There's also been a generational shift in the age of onset for partnered sex and a more general decline in romantic relationships in adolescence.<sup>24</sup>

Some see a silver lining in this decline of partnered sex: the growing rejection of bad sex and especially of porn-steeped sexual imaginings. The pandemic also seems to have changed how social media is being used. One in five men we surveyed says they use a dating app mainly to seek out platonic relationships. Apps can take some of the worry and vulnerability out of making friends, as they make it easier to read others' intentions. In 2021, the average time spent on Bumble's BFF mode—which allows users to match for friendship—saw a 44 percent rise in women searching for new friends and a 83 percent rise in men.<sup>25</sup> Apps fill a gap in men's lives, as the pandemic forced them to use tools at their disposal for authentic connection.

**Overall, our survey findings about relationships are mixed: A sizable minority of men report having committed, satisfactory relationships. At the same time, many men in the youngest group – around three in ten – say they are unable to find partners or have stopped looking for an intimate relationship.** That represents a potentially large group of men to be targeted by incel groups, gaming groups, and misogynist streamers, and it represents a group we should pay attention to – offering more discussion about what healthy, pleasurable relationships can be and about male sexuality. The culture wars raging over discussing sex and sexuality in the classroom do not bode well for advancing these discussions in schools, but we clearly cannot give up.

These findings are particularly troubling considering what they may mean for quality of life and happiness for so many men who are not finding meaningful relationships. The longest-ever

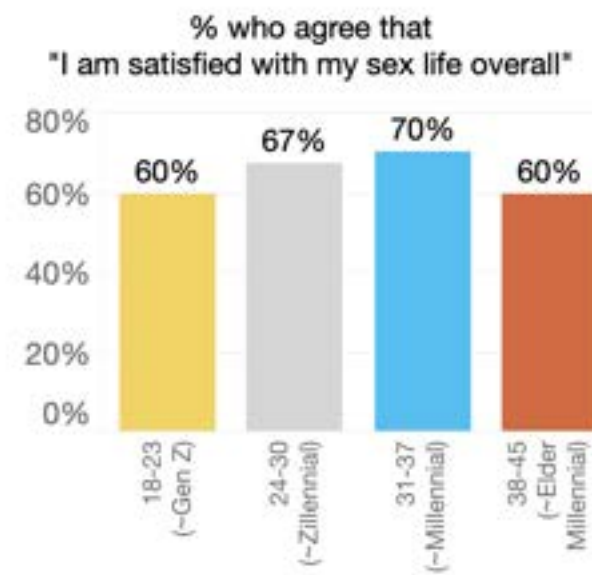
longitudinal study on happiness – the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which assessed men's lives over more than 80 years – found that relationship quality was the largest predictor of happiness and that relationship quality, in turn, had a huge impact on physical health, mental health, and longevity.<sup>26</sup>

**It is harder to make sense of the large numbers of men – nearly two-thirds across all ages – who told us they are satisfied with their sex lives.** The explanation seems to lie in the large numbers of men who use dating apps not to find a romantic partner but for casual sex. Presumably, apps work well for that purpose and allow men who aren't satisfied with their relationship status to nonetheless experience some measure of connection and release. Older men show slightly higher rates of sexual satisfaction, which also coincides with the ages at which more men are in stable relationships. Gay and bisexual men had slightly lower rates of satisfaction with their sex lives, higher rates of using dating apps, and lower rates of satisfaction in using dating apps.



**Figure 9: Relationship status and satisfaction**

	18-23 (~Gen Z)	24-30 (~Zillennial)	31-37 (~Millennial)	38-45 (~Elder Millennial)	All men
I'm in a stable, committed relationship and mostly satisfied.	37%	44%	46%	46%	43%
I'm mostly not looking for a relationship right now.	30%	20%	11%	19%	20%
I'm in a stable, committed relationship, but not as satisfied as I would like.	10%	8%	11%	12%	10%
I'm mostly in occasional relationships/hook-ups, but seeking something more committed.	6%	9%	11%	8%	9%
I mostly have occasional relationships/hook-ups, and I'm satisfied with that.	3%	7%	8%	4%	6%
I'm mostly unable to find sexual partners.	8%	5%	6%	4%	6%
I'm in a stable relationship, and I have other partners (without telling my main partner).	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%
I'm in a stable relationship, and we're open about having other partners.	3%	3%	5%	3%	3%



**46% of survey respondents have ever used a dating app such as Hinge, Bumble, Tinder, or Grindr**

**Out of these options, which was your primary goal (when using a dating app)?**

	Long-term, serious relationship	Casual Sex	Making friends	No defined goal	Short-term relationship
18-23 (~Gen Z)	34%	28%	18%	14%	6%
24-30 (~Zillennial)	38%	35%	12%	9%	6%
31-37 (~Millennial)	32%	33%	20%	11%	4%
38-45 (~Elder Millennial)	31%	30%	19%	15%	7%
All men	34%	31%	17%	12%	6%

**Top:** Proportion of men across age categories who chose each description of their relationship status. **Bottom left:** Proportion of men in each age group who agreed with the statement, "I am satisfied with my sex life overall." **Bottom right:** Proportion of men in each age group who reported various primary goals when using dating apps, restricted only to men who had ever used such an app. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



# HEADLINE 5: MIND THE GAP

Low-income, non-university-educated men report the least social support and optimism.



**MIND THE GAP: Low-income, non-university-educated men report the least social support and optimism**

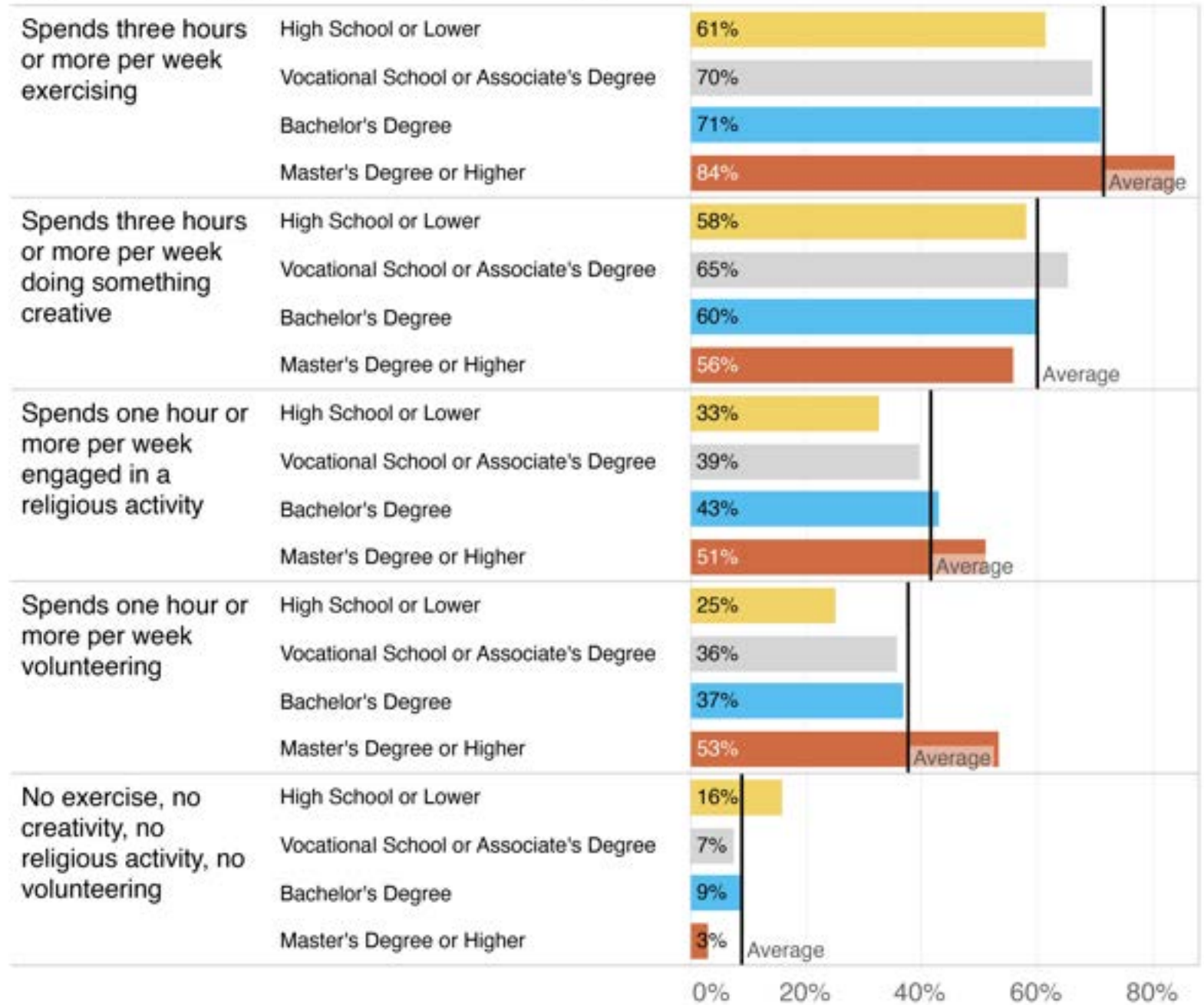
**KEY FINDINGS:**

- Men with the lowest education levels have the least social support, purpose in life, and optimism. They're also most likely to say that "no one really knows me well."
- Approximately one in six men with a high school education or less reported no social activities whatsoever,
- Men without a bachelor's degree show statistically significant higher rates of reporting they "often think that [they] should spend less time on [their] phone or online," affirming the reliance on online life.

**We found that men with a high school education or less show up at the bottom of many measures of well-being. They report the least social support and optimism of any group in our sample. In many ways, this group of men has truly been left behind by an educational system and economy that have failed to adapt to the changing realities of American youth.**

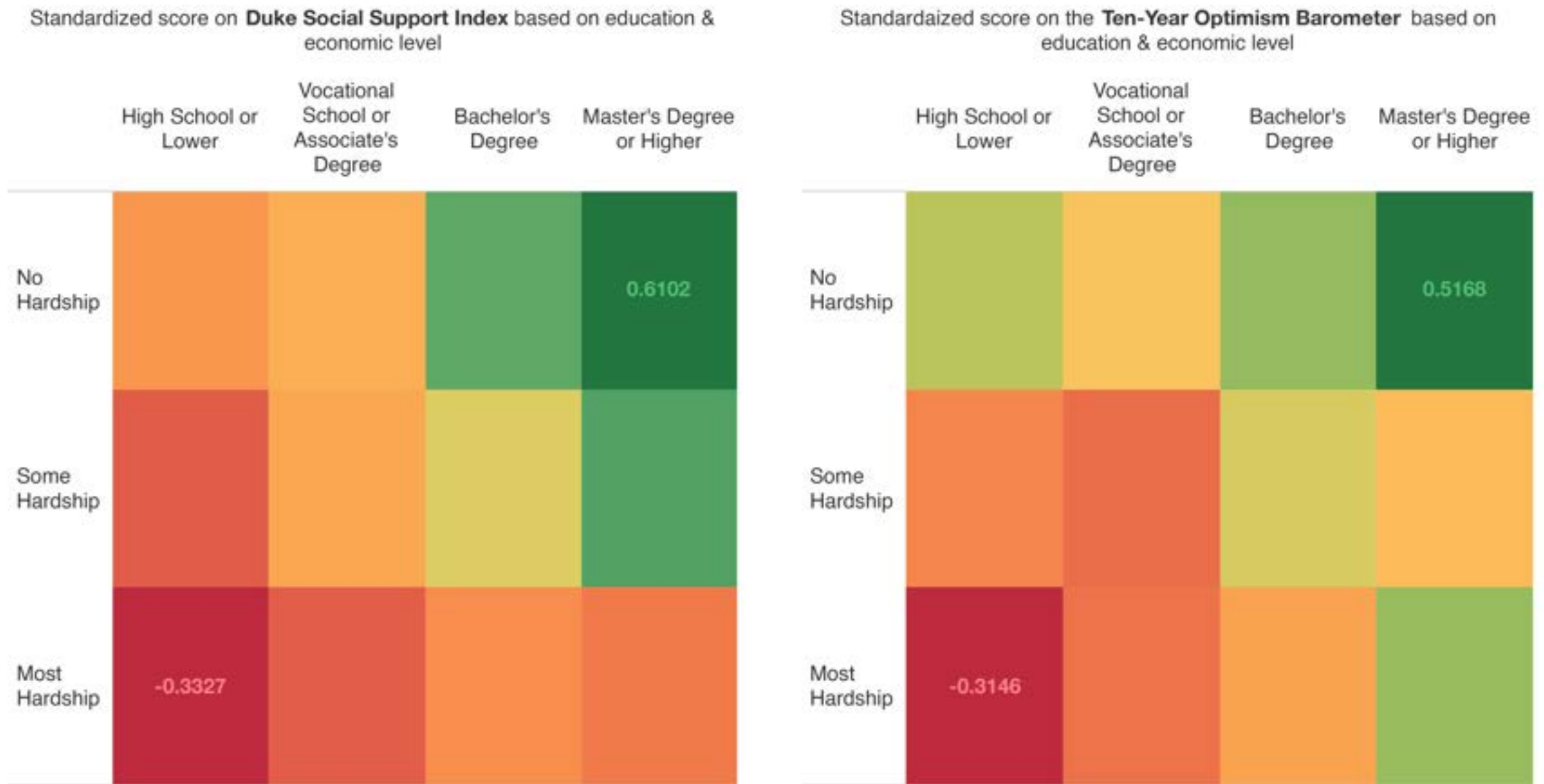
This finding should be a resounding wake-up call for better secondary and tertiary education policies, as well as for jobs that provide dignity and fulfillment for all – people of all genders and ethnicities. The terrible isolation of out-of-work and less-educated men also underscores the need to draw men out of lives of despair and solitude in order to engage them as allies. Too often, in a zero-sum calculus, men facing educational and employment challenges are portrayed as competing for resources with equal pay for women. We affirm again that we must address both struggles. Our research also finds striking parallels between the most vulnerable men – those with less education, weak employment prospects, increased despair, higher susceptibility to the manosphere, and lower prospects for achieving meaningful relationships – and the millions of women in similarly precarious circumstances.

**Figure 10: Men's engagement in community activities, by education level**



**Above:** Proportion of men of each academic attainment level who reported various social and community activities. The bottom row represents the proportions in each group who did not report any of the four included activities. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.

**Figure 11: Social support and optimism at the intersection of education and economic hardship**



**Left:** The grid organizes all respondents into one of twelve categories based on their level of educational achievement (columns) and economic hardship (rows). The color of each cell is then tied to the average standardized social support score for that group, using a spectrum where red is the lowest score of all groups and green is the highest. In a standardized score, a value of 0 indicates the sample-wide average, and a value of +/-1 indicates one standard deviation above or below the average. **Right:** In this grid, the standardized score indicated by the color spectrum is for the optimism measure. In both grids, the intersection of higher education and greater economic comfort is linked with higher scores, and vice versa. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



As we consider policies to support the most economically insecure groups in our society, we must offer policies that account for the gendered vulnerabilities of both women and men. Analyses of these issues in the US have found that suicidal ideation, substance use, and the underlying drivers of so-called “deaths of despair” are also high among women with no college education, but are more fatal for some groups of men.<sup>27</sup> The point here is that any policies and programs seeking to support the most vulnerable men must also support and understand the relationships with vulnerable women.

What has created this state of precarity among men with lower education levels and limited job prospects? Reeling from globalized markets, business models that push down worker wages for higher shareholder profit, and related production shifts, not to mention the Great Recession, many American workers saw their incomes fall. But most groups recovered by 2014 and have since reached household income levels exceeding their parents’; 2021 incomes for Millennials were historically high.<sup>28</sup> Black and Latino Millennials jumped well ahead of where their parents had been.<sup>29</sup> But the average incomes of two groups have actually fallen: men and non-college-educated people, across all ethnic groups.<sup>30</sup>

Men with no post-secondary education have seen an especially acute drop in work, pay, and status, across all ethnic groups, weighing down average incomes for all men. One of the more dramatic signs of how these men are doing is their labor force participation: researchers have noted particularly steep drops among men of prime working age, to the point that men who are not in the labor force, or not actively seeking employment, outnumber men who are unemployed by four to one.<sup>31</sup>

Why aren’t these men working? A fundamental answer may lie in their diminished status in our post-NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) economy. In Barbara Ehrenreich’s

terms, a “fear of falling” and threatened further losses of esteem and respect contribute to their dropping out of a labor market they see as rigged against them. These “cultural losers of modernization,” in the words of another political theorist, are especially susceptible to the politics of resentment and reaction. The reigning meritocracy breeds their sense of being left behind.<sup>32</sup>

**What are non-working men doing compared to working men? Our data tell us that, of all the groups, they are the ones most often alone.**

More than double the proportion of men in this group (versus working men) do not exercise, attend religious services, volunteer, or do something creative. Analyses of the American Time Use Survey indicate they are primarily online – gaming and using social media and probably porn. Internet use among men aged 21 to 30 increased by 60 percent from 2004 to 2017. Among this group of non-workers, white men fare worse than men of color and women, reporting worse health and higher levels of pain (for which 50 percent use opioid medication).<sup>33</sup>

Much has been written recently about out-of-work men by writers ranging from Richard Reeves<sup>34</sup> to Nicholas Eberstadt,<sup>35</sup> in addition to numerous accounts of out-of-work men themselves. Research finds a combination of factors at play, some about men’s individual choices but most pointing to larger structural issues in the workplace and the economy.

The reluctance of more and more men to accept low-paying jobs reflects their growing resistance to employment that offers few or no benefits, low pay, and little autonomy or fulfillment. Such jobs do not afford anyone the stability to support families, commit to relationships, or make other life plans. Nor do they provide social capital or respect. Downwardly mobile, non-college-educated white men share this social experience with men of color who have long faced chronic under- and unemployment due to racist legacies

of incarceration and discrimination. Sociologist William Julius Wilson described what happened to the men in Black-majority communities who were out of work: their inability to form families, high rates of incarceration, and substance abuse.<sup>36</sup> Loss of work means much more than having little income.



# HEADLINE 6: TRUST NO ONE

Young men have few clear loyalties to any politician, public figure, or public institution.





**TRUST NO ONE:** Young men have few clear loyalties to any politician, public figure, or public institution

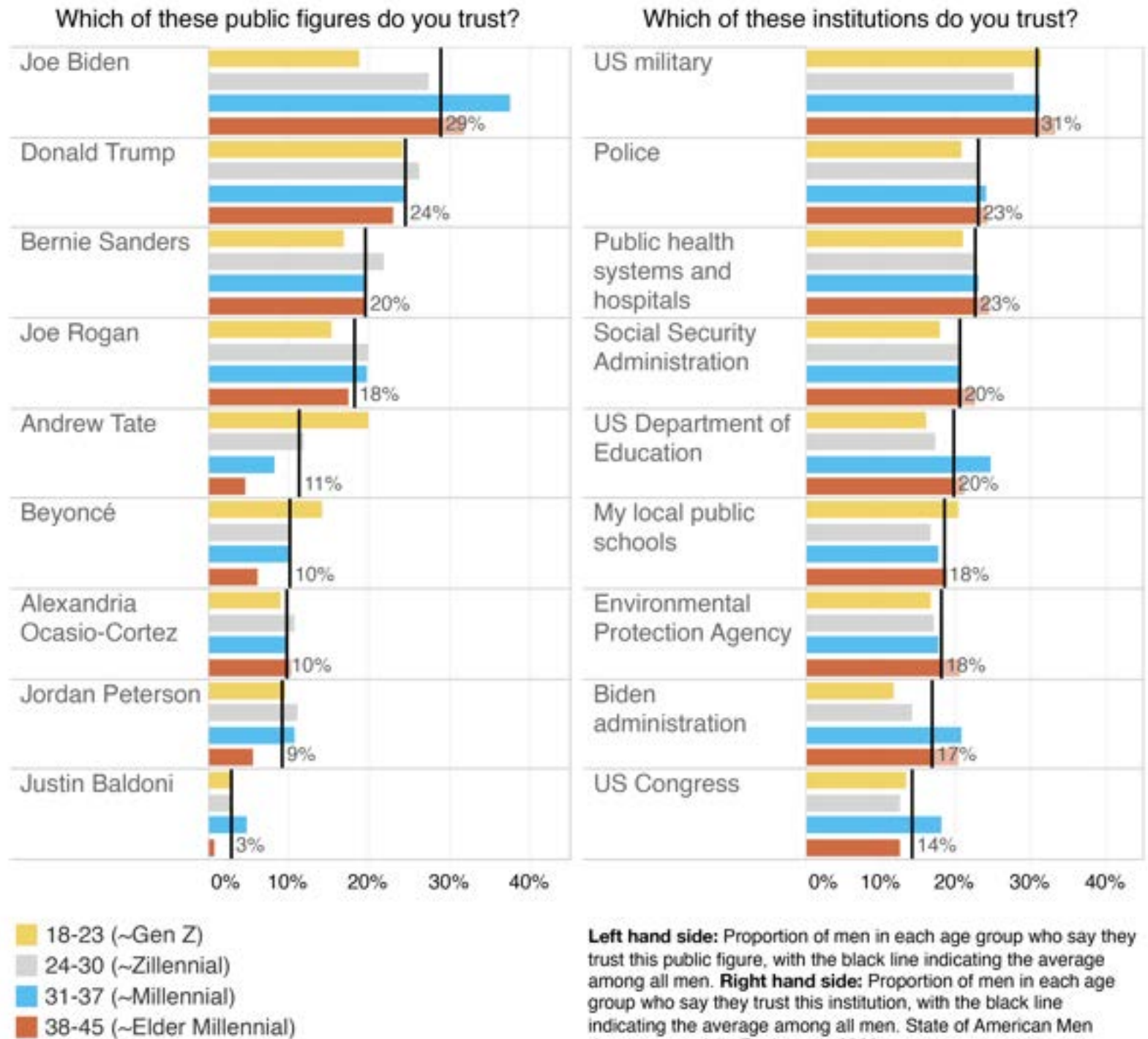
**KEY FINDINGS:**

- Young men’s attitudes reflect the general political polarization of the country, with 29% of men across all ages saying they trust President Joe Biden compared to 24% of men of all ages who trust former President Donald Trump.
- More of the youngest men trust online misogynist influencer Andrew Tate (20%) than trust Biden (15%).
- Among public agencies and institutions – from the federal government to police to local schools – trust ratings range from 14% to 23%.
- The US military holds the most trust with men, with 31% saying they trust it.

Low trust in public institutions is common across age and gender groups in the US. These data are nothing new. What our data call attention to is that this trust is often lowest among younger men, with the exception of public schools, which young men trust slightly more than older men do. It is also telling that neither Biden nor Trump holds close to a majority of men’s trust. And perhaps the most striking finding is that among the youngest men, Andrew Tate (20 percent) is trusted more often than President Biden (15 percent).

Taken as a whole, these findings suggest large percentages of men – particularly younger men – trust no one in the public sphere. This also means that there is huge space for testing approaches, campaigns, and outreach to bring men into conversations about healthier manhood, gender equality, and racial justice. Hiding in plain sight within the fray of polarized politics, there is a large swath of “men in the middle,” a situation that cries out for clearer leadership and stronger, forward-looking direction for men’s lives. The right wing has found the power of online influencers and algorithms to capture more of this market. The challenge is to those of us who seek to promote healthy, connected, empathic, and equity-seeking versions of manhood.

**Figure 12: Low trust in political leaders and institutions.**



**Left hand side:** Proportion of men in each age group who say they trust this public figure, with the black line indicating the average among all men. **Right hand side:** Proportion of men in each age group who say they trust this institution, with the black line indicating the average among all men. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



# HEADLINE 7: INTO THE MAN BOX

The manosphere and voices of anger are driving more men into harmful manhood and offering life purpose for many men.



**INTO THE MAN BOX: The manosphere and voices of anger are driving more men into harmful manhood and offering life purpose for many men**

**KEY FINDINGS**

- Some restrictive views about manhood are more widely held among young men in 2023 than they were in 2017.
- Although political views, age, race, and education show statistical links with one's attitudes, these restrictive ideas have not been eradicated for any group of men.
- Two-thirds of men feel more praised and accepted when they act manly.
- Men who adhere to the Man Box show the highest purpose in life, while men with the most progressive views about manhood feel the least purpose in life.

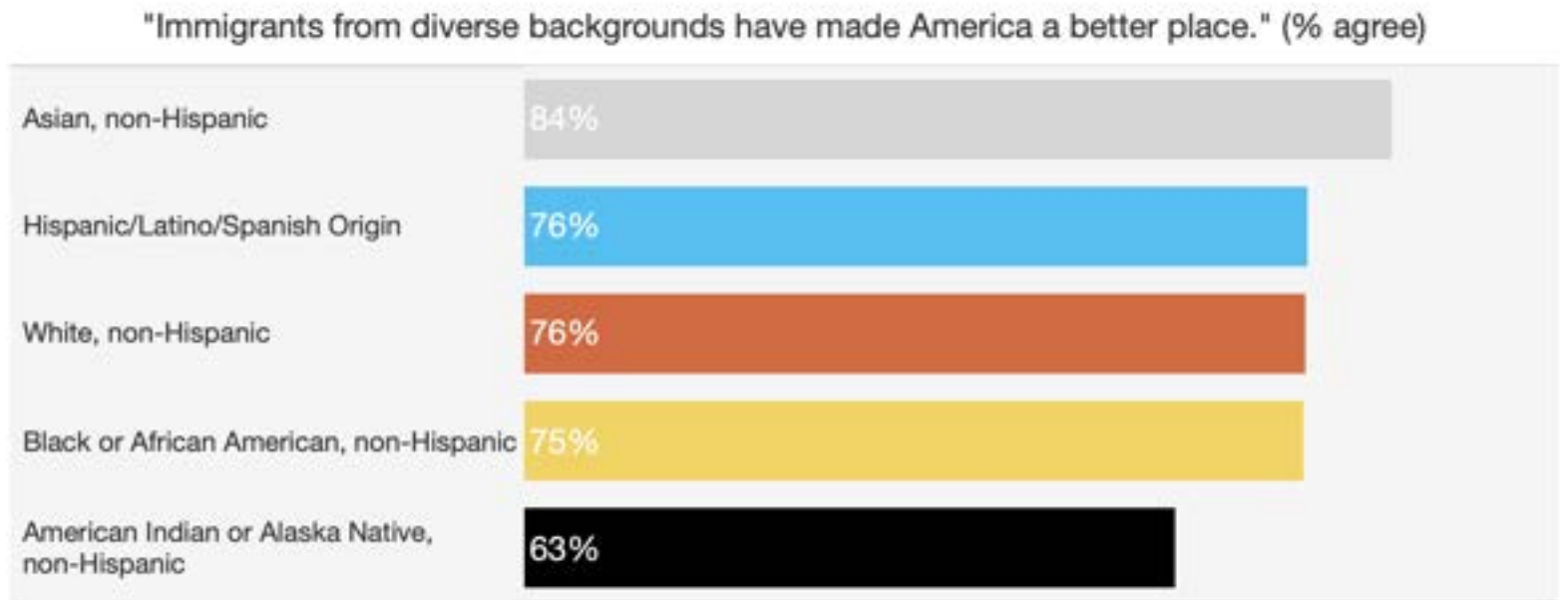
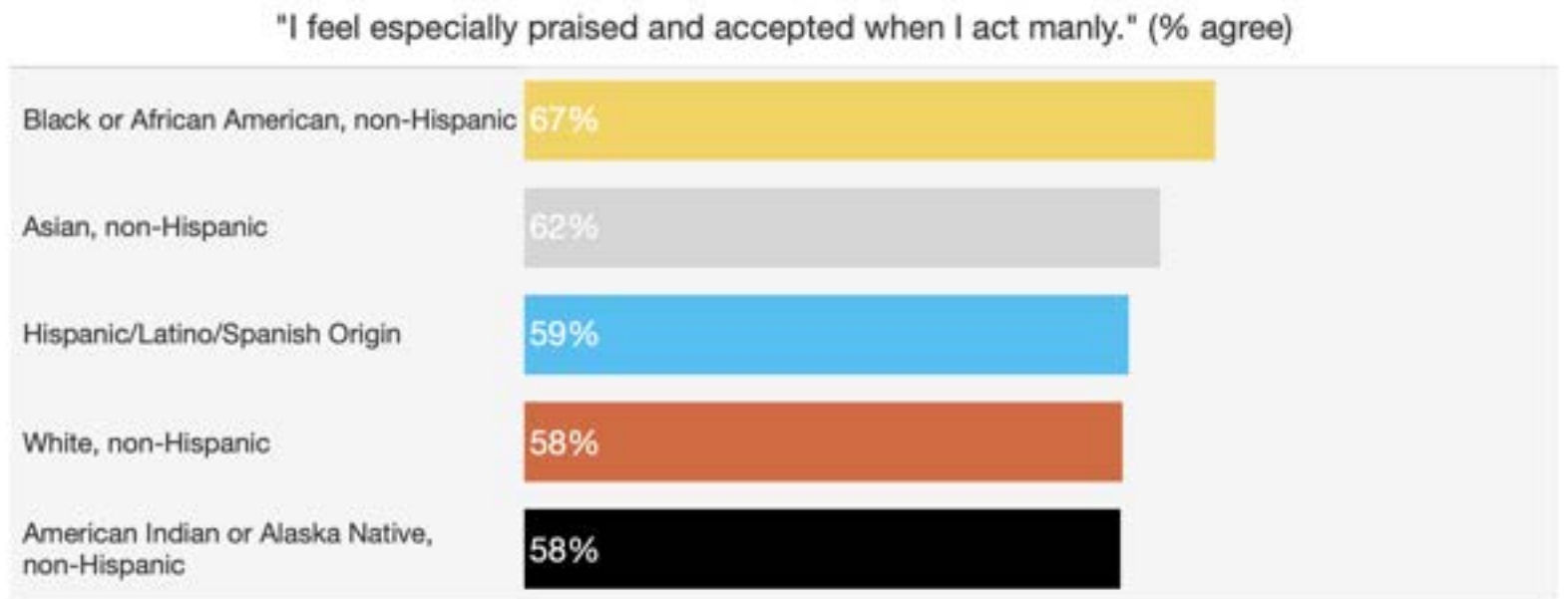
**Restrictive ideas about gender and masculinity are at the root of many devastating, costly social ills.**

In 2017, Equimundo carried out a multicountry study called the Man Box, looking at young men's adherence to a restrictive, dominance-driven view of manhood. That study concluded that the young men who believed most strongly in restrictive manhood were also those mostly likely to report suicidal ideation, depressive symptoms, bullying, sexual harassment, binge drinking, and traffic accidents, all at statistically significant levels.<sup>37</sup>

**Worryingly, the 2023 State of American Men data show that these harmful ideas may be becoming more, not less, popular in recent years.** Looking only at men the same age as the 2017 study (18 to 30), we find that respondents are even *more* likely to agree with certain restrictive ideas about masculinity in 2023:

- 51 percent agree that "if a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is all the time" compared to 46 percent in 2017.

**Figure 13: Men feel more accepted when they "act manly." This anxiety/pressure is strongest among Black men, reflecting both "hypervulnerability" and a "cool pose" posture.**



**Above:** Proportion of men in each race/ethnicity group who agree with the statement. Groups are sorted in order from the group with the highest average agreement to the lowest. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



- 41 percent agree that “a man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage” compared to 34 percent in 2017.
- 36 percent agree that “a gay guy is not a ‘real man’” compared to 29 percent in 2017.<sup>38</sup>

As in 2017, the 2023 study found statistically significant associations between adhering to these ideas and numerous indicators of harm. The unfortunate conclusion is that the Man Box is alive and well, perhaps even more powerful and causing even more harm than it was some years back.

**Which men are more likely to show restrictive norms related to manhood? Men who describe themselves as politically conservative were more likely to adhere to the Man Box as were men with more economic hardship and men with less education.** Black men were also the most likely to agree with Man Box statements compared to other groups, although this finding requires nuanced interpretation. This finding is consistent with other researchers and activists who have described the complex interplay of class, race, and gender that Black men face. Indeed, many authors have described how Black men have been subject to historical threats and violence from police, white-majority workplaces, racist exclusion from social spaces, and unjust incarceration, and they may adhere to hypermasculine ideas as a way to survive. Scholar Howard C. Stevenson refers to these interacting factors among Black men and boys as “hypervulnerability” and affirms that among the negative outcomes or reactions are harmful and abusive relationships styles and risk-taking versions of manhood.<sup>39</sup> For Black men and boys who perceive themselves as under attack in a racist society, many may deploy this “cool pose” version of manhood, which includes showing dominance and physical and emotional strength as a way to mitigate the harm of racism.<sup>40</sup>

**It is important to affirm that adhering to the Man Box happens *socially*, not only in the heart of an individual man.** The 2017 study found that men who were more in the Man Box frequently felt their parents, society, and female partners believed in, and expected them to adhere to, the norms expressed in the Man Box. In our new data, nearly two-thirds of men say they “feel especially praised and accepted when [they] act manly,” with Black men reporting the highest levels of agreement. We emphasize this finding to affirm how much social norms about manhood and harmful ideas about manhood are not just in men’s heads – they are made, remade, changed, and constructed daily in men’s interactions with others in households, online spaces, peer groups, schools, workplaces, the media, and interactions with women and girls.

We also emphasize these norms and their association with negative outcomes because it can be too easy to avoid the heated debate that arises when we dare to question ideas about manhood in the US. The ubiquity of the term “toxic masculinity” continues to anger many men – who rightly don’t want to be seen as toxic or think of themselves that way. Our use of the term “Man Box” is meant to emphasize how these ideas harm men, and all of us, and how men are socialized into them. As we look at solutions for achieving gender equality, ending men’s violence against women and other men, and promoting better life outcomes for men and boys, we must indict some aspects of American manhood. At the same time, we must hold deep compassion and empathy for all men as individuals worthy of dignity and respect. **In calling out harmful manhood, we must also affirm that how we make harmful ideas of manhood in the US is not a question of individual men; it is about our collectively taught ideas of manhood.**

**Finally, our research reveals a tremendously inconvenient truth: Men who hold the most restrictive, traditional views of manhood show the strongest sense of purpose in life.** This finding affirms that viewing manhood as rugged, individualistic, in charge, and using violence to resolve conflicts offers millions of men simple meaning and easy-to-use life instructions. Indeed, this traditional view of manhood offers a worldview that is often more palatable than the confusion, constant self-reflection, and necessary accountability that come with holding more equitable, connected, empathetic views about manhood.

**As we look for strategies to engage men, we must acknowledge that stepping into male allyship and healthy masculinity is an unknown, frightening, and confusing place for many men, and it may not bring status or identity in their social spaces.** This finding is perhaps the most disturbing in our study. It suggests how much we must do as proponents of healthy masculinity to support younger and older men in the journey toward healthier ideas about manhood and into awareness about gender power and harmful masculine and racist norms. Bringing men – and those around men – to believe in and affirm healthy, aspirational ideas about manhood is challenging work. Too often, those on the progressive side assume the argument is self-evident. These data show how much, and how long, we will keep needing to make the argument.

Indeed, being in a state of constant critical awareness of how we were raised, and the potentially harmful ideas in deeply held beliefs that are held up by those around us, is a tiring, confusing, and uncomfortable place to be. Hypermasculine views offer clarity and simplicity, and they frequently serve as a balm for individuals who perceive their status or their livelihoods are under threat or declining – even while it places a burden on society and impedes social progress.

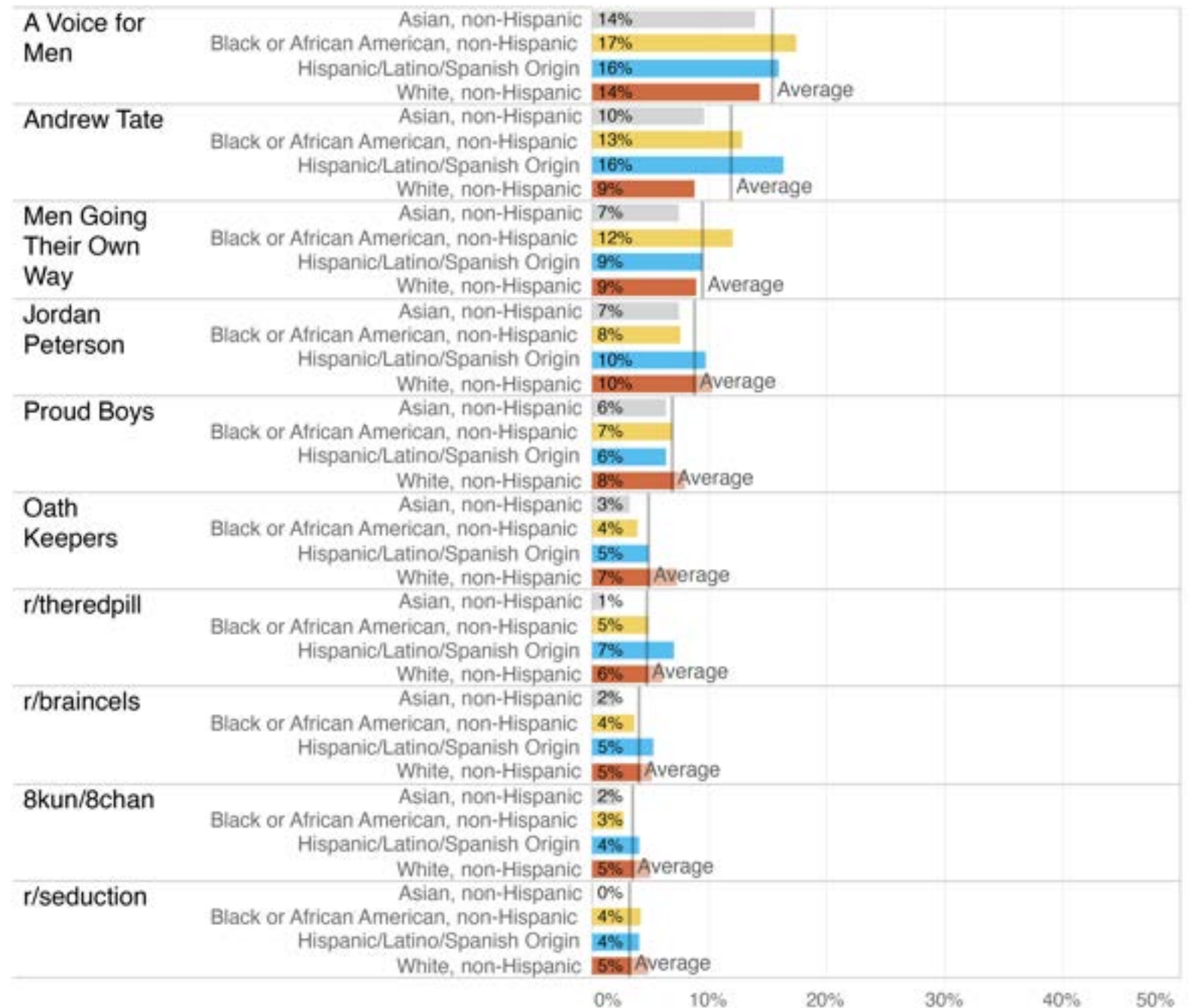


When such views are then reinforced by the manosphere, they become algorithmically charged in a perfect storm of self-reinforcing resentment, anger, and isolation.

In affirming the power and purpose of the Man Box, we must also find the optimism to act. It may be that “membership” with hateful, misogynist groups offers a balm to some young men in the present, but over the course of a lifetime – into middle age, parenthood, and other caregiving roles – these men come to see the harm as they learn how to care and are cared for.

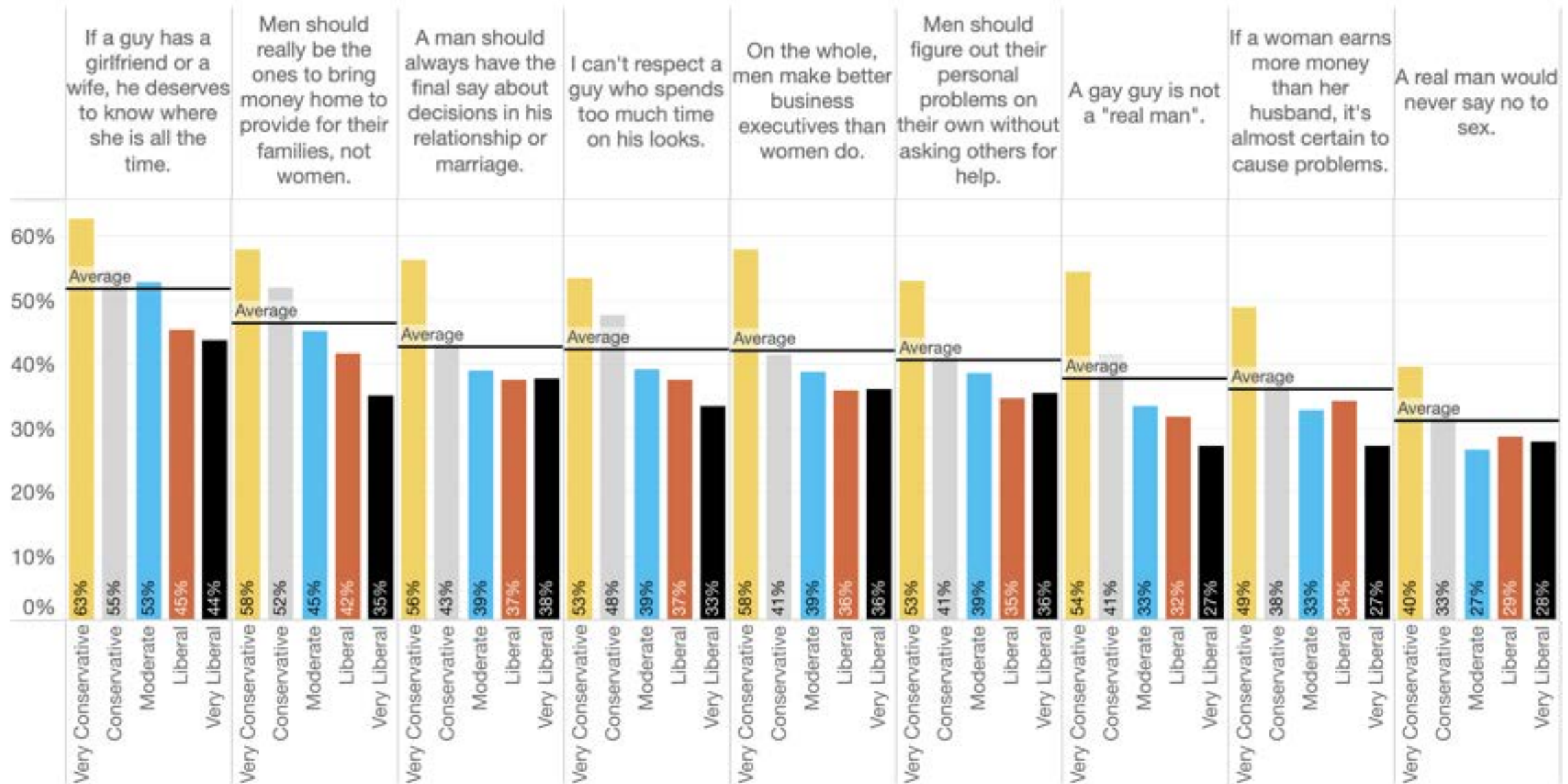
It may also be that some young men come to see how the purpose found in harmful manhood is ephemeral, giving a short-term dopamine burst but ultimately hurting themselves and others. In concluding that the Man Box offers purpose in life, we also see it for how fragile it is and how much men of all kinds break out of it every day as they embrace lives of connection and emotional honesty.

**Figure 14: Men of different races/ethnicities seem to align with different manosphere influences.**



**Above:** Proportion of men according to race/ethnicity who report that they trust each manosphere influence. See note on Figure 3 for information on these influences. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.

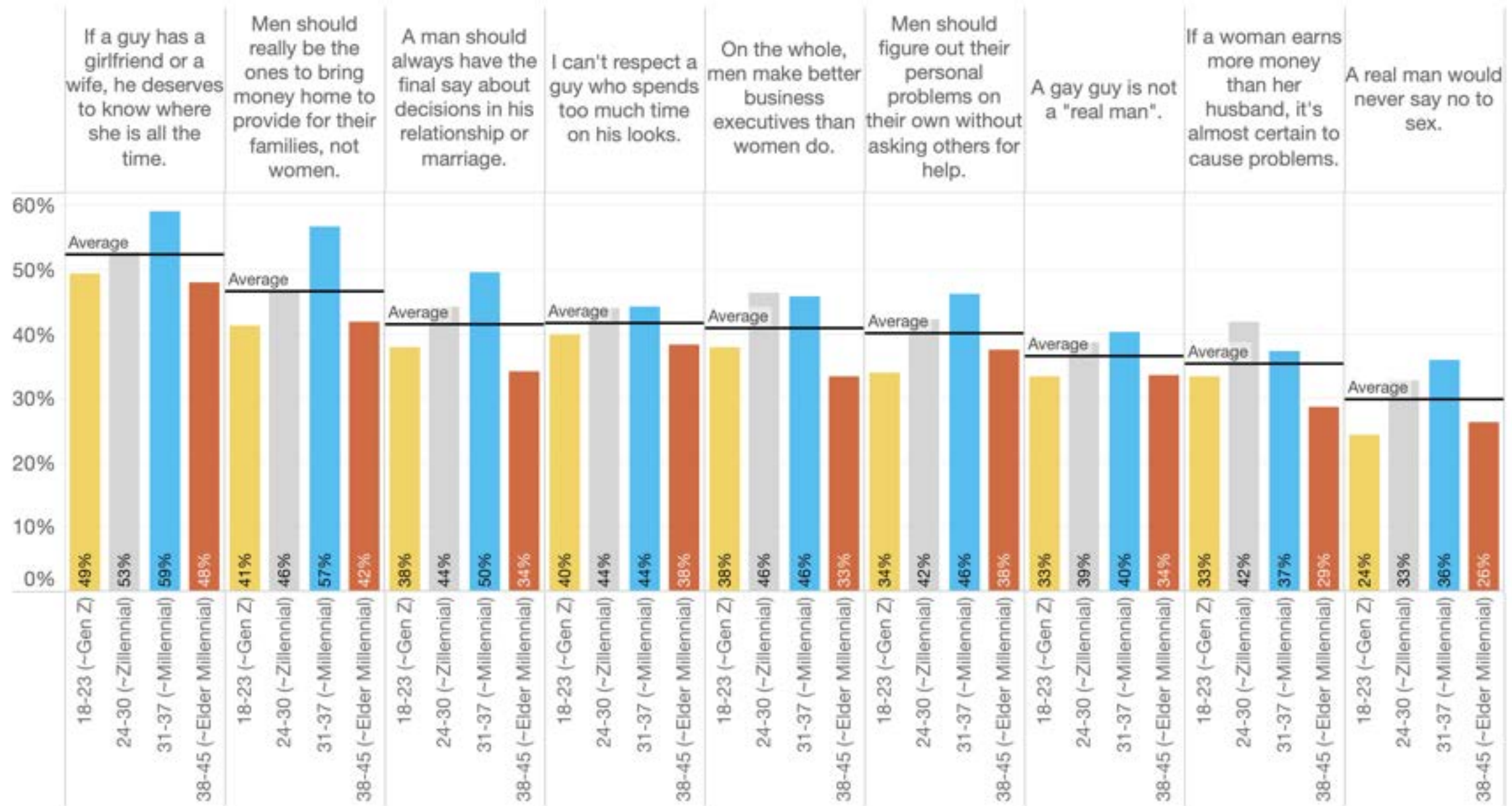
**Figure 15: Polarized but patriarchal: Restrictive ideas about masculinity are mainstream among conservative respondents, but also embraced by one-quarter or more of men describing themselves as very liberal.**



**Above:** Proportion of men in each self-identified political group who agree with the statements. Statements are ordered from the most commonly supported overall on the left to the least commonly supported on the right. The black line represents the average among all men. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equipundo 2023.



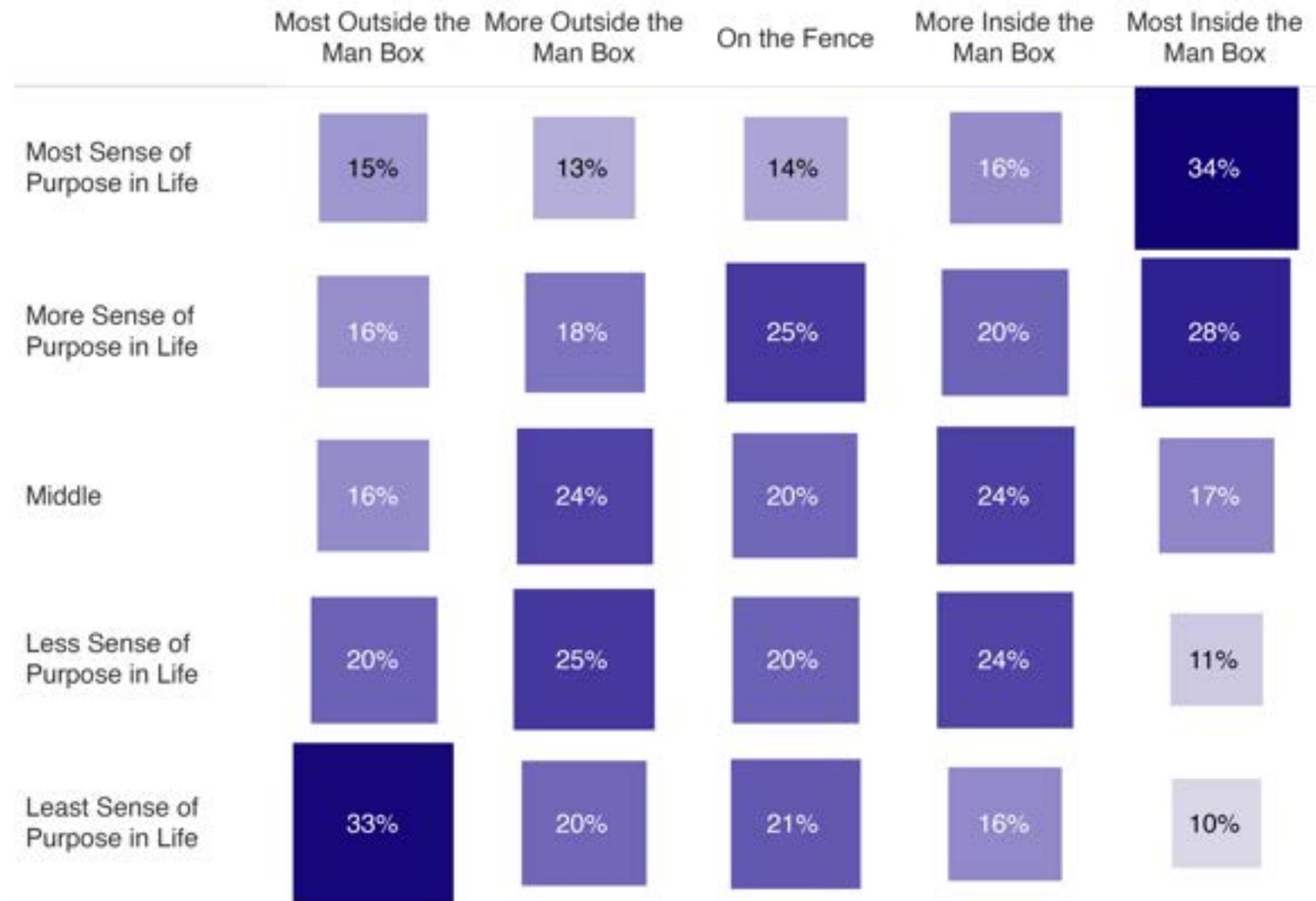
**Figure 16: Restrictive ideas about gender are common in all age groups but seem particularly popular among men aged 24 to 37.**



**Above:** Proportion of men in each age group who agree with the listed statement. Statements are ordered from the most commonly supported overall on the left to the least commonly supported on the right. The black line represents the average among all men. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



**Figure 17: Using the Man Box Scale and Purpose in Life test, we find a very strong association: The men with the most restrictive views of masculinity also show the greatest sense of purpose in life.**



**Above:** Each column in the grid comprises 20% of the sample, organized by their scores on the Man Box Scale. Those with the most restrictive attitudes are in the farthest right hand column, "Most Inside the Man Box", and those with the most equitable attitudes are in the farthest left hand column. These respondents are then organized into where they fell on the Purpose in Life test, again falling into one of five equally sized groups. The displayed numbers represent the proportion of men in this Man Box category (column) who showed a certain level of purpose (row). Each column sums to 100%. State of American Men dataset, copyright Equimundo 2023.



# Conclusions: Finding Hope Amid Crisis and Confusion

Men in the US are in trouble – and that trouble affects us all. Many feel their lives are precarious, their futures uncertain, their identities threatened. But while the situation is especially acute now, precarity has always been built into boyhood and manhood. No man can live up to the idealized views of manhood we too often raise boys with. In response to masculine norms that govern every aspect of men’s and boys’ lives – and are woven into family life, schools, sports, and other community spaces – many young men are only tenuously connected in caring relationships and caring notions of manhood. Many more feel totally disconnected and have retreated into private lives of underachievement, underemployment, online addiction, and the pretense that they can go it alone. Many of those also find solace in misogyny and white supremacy. The Man Box is never a healthy or happy place for boys or men. When two-thirds of young men agree in our survey that “no one really knows me,” they reveal the thinness of their connections and relationships. We take that finding for what it is: a cry for more honest, more grounded, more connected, and more meaningful lives.

**We must also be worried about young men’s ability to form meaningful, loving relationships.** At the most intimate levels of their human development, where male sexuality is too often defined by essentialist tropes and a pornography industry that capitalizes on their confusion, boys and men need help. Dating apps offer frustration for some young men and the promise of meaningful connection for others. Some dating apps are making good-faith efforts to promote healthy, consensual relationships and thinking deliberately about these issues. We can and must invest in greater sexual and relationship literacy for

young men. This includes engaging them in discussions about consent and communication, as well as approaching male sexuality in ways that do not demonize young men or essentialize them as having uncontrollable sexual urges. Nor should we promote narrow ideas of what healthy, caring relationships should be.


**Most troubling is the finding that men who hold rigid, restrictive, harmful ideas about manhood report feeling the most purpose in life.** But this finding is unsurprising. For some men, holding on to power, to a belief in one’s superiority, to trusted versions of manhood that have existed for centuries is the easiest way to get by. When these views are repeated by online purveyors and pushed into hyperdrive by algorithms that create insular bubbles of online life, it should not be surprising how much such ideas capture the hearts and minds of many young and disconnected men. It would be easy to come away from this conclusion, and these findings overall, thinking that the future of manhood is bleak and that efforts to engage men and boys as allies for gender equality, racial justice, and their own well-being are time and money wasted. Men on the extreme side of misogyny and angry manhood are not easily reachable and can be hard to take. We come away challenged to find solutions.

**But there are real signs of hope as well. Large numbers of men are on board with gender equality and healthy ideas of manhood.** Perhaps more importantly, there is a large group of “men in the middle” who are skeptical generally, perhaps to a fault, and yet manage to resist the appeals of the manosphere. We suspect that the erosion of trust in general, which social scientists like

Jonathan Haidt consider a byproduct of the viral dynamics of internet life, has this silver lining: Many men are unconvinced by hyperbole and mere anger as ways to live their lives and find purpose. In our results, as Figure 3 and Figure 12 (from headline 5) show, only a minority of men are fooled by the misogynists and supremacists. But it is also true that their trust in public leaders and institutions is low. These are the men we need to reach – and urgently.

**We need a massive narrative shift and a major marketing push on the many obvious benefits of allyship for gender equality and racial justice and of healthy, connected versions of manhood.** In sum, we need a new manosphere, one that guides young men toward positive ideas of manhood while providing connection and a sense of purpose. We must step into the conversation and the narrative shift with deep compassion, particularly considering the precarious positions of many men who see deep appeal in the Man Box. Absolutely, men who have caused harm must be held accountable and restored to healthy civic participation. Many who add their votes and their likes and clicks to purveyors of online harm must likewise be challenged. But we must do so with deep compassion and, most of all, with a deep understanding of why so many are gravitating to traditional, harmful views of manhood.

For their sake, and all of ours, we must redefine bravery as the willingness to go into our uncertain future with courage, knowing that it will be better all around – for each and every individual, for the world, and for loved ones.



We need to paint a much clearer, “certain” picture of the more gender-equal future ahead and make sure to describe how that future will benefit everyone: girls and women, men and boys, people of all genders – not to mention our planet.

### **Recommendations for Policymakers, Parents, and Educators**

There are few obvious or easy solutions to this perfect storm of economic inequality, isolation, educational decline, political polarization, regressive versions of manhood, and ubiquity of online anger. We support the initiative announced by US Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy to build social infrastructure: “school-based programs that teach children about building healthy relationships, workplace design that fosters social connection, and community programs that bring people together.”<sup>41</sup> For us, the solutions start here. They must be structural and long term, and they require multiple partners:

- **Build a bigger tent for engaging men and boys.** Our data show how few existing progressive social movements have engaged young men in large numbers, particularly outside urban areas. As the US is a diverse country, it would be unlikely for any single progressive force to speak to a majority of young men. But young men’s low levels of participation in any of these movements suggest more needs to be done to understand, motivate, and engage young men in open dialogue on how and where they can be allies, listening and incorporating their needs as well.
- **Start early by guiding parents in supporting boys to be connected, caring, and equitable.** Parents are necessary allies in working with sons and daughters from an early age to mitigate online harm and call their sons off of the internet and into offline relational literacy. [Equimundo’s Global Boyhood Initiative](#) provides ideas on how parents can have meaningful conversations

with their young sons, particularly on the harm their sons may be streaming online. The key to these parent-son conversations: staying in the room, listening, and asking critical questions but not criticizing. In short: relate first, critique second.<sup>42</sup>

- **Establish relational teaching as a cornerstone of education.** Schools, school districts, state education departments, colleges, and companies are at the epicenter of our culture wars. In this polarized moment, American ideals of equity and equality are being caricatured as manifestations of critical race theory, and the realities of gender fluidity and sexual identity are being dismissed as “gender ideology.” School systems and educators everywhere feel as if they are on the front lines. But teachers’ role in relational teaching models, in which their connection with their students mediates these students’ ability to meaningfully participate in learning, must be taken to heart and scaled up. The motto drafted by several schools for boys can serve as a guiding mantra for all schools: every boy and man, known and loved.<sup>43</sup> Research conducted by Equimundo, Pew, and others affirms just how much parents – whether politically conservative, progressive, or in the middle – are concerned about their sons, even more so than their daughters.<sup>44</sup> Evidence tells us that teacher-led discussions about healthy relationships and healthy manhood, particularly discussions with boys and girls together, show a positive impact. Educators from all communities should be able to come together in a shared commitment to the next generations.
- **Expand models and platforms that include health services and health professionals to support and invite men in and accept their vulnerabilities.** From the increased social acceptability of men in

acknowledging mental health needs to the power of voices like [Movember](#) in calling attention to men’s health, we have templates and approaches for making health services more inviting and better attuned to men’s diverse and intersectional health needs. Even as society makes mental health services more accessible, many men will resist this medical orientation. We must build into family and community life, throughout boyhood, an acknowledgment of the inescapable human need to be heard.

- **Encourage brands to use their voice for promoting healthy, aspirational views of manhood.** Some brands are also doing this; some have backed away because of real, justified fears of backlash. We need brave brands willing to use their reach to build social purpose into their advertising in order to model and turn up the volume on why and how healthy, connected manhood matters. Several brands have seen the positive response when they do so.
- **Engage workplace and corporate leadership in true male allyship in their diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.** Too often, such programs for engaging men are one-offs and lack clear, measurable outcomes. But they show promise when they’re long enough, structural enough, and provide clear guides and expectations on how men can be allies for gender equality and healthy masculinities. As in educational processes, many leaders in this space (including Saliha Bava and Mark Green) have promoted the concept of the “relational workplace” in bringing men into such initiatives.<sup>45</sup> Research from David Smith and Brad Johnson finds that when men are engaged thoughtfully in gender-inclusion programs,



96 percent of women in those organizations affirm progress in gender equality compared to only 30 percent of women in organizations that have not implemented male engagement programs.<sup>46</sup>

- **Expand efforts to involve sports coaches and other voices who influence boys.** [Futures Without Violence](#) and other organizations, including [InSideOut](#) and [Mentors in Violence Prevention](#), have long engaged coaches and sports as a space to engage boys and men. The multiple positive results from such work merit large scale-up.
- **Review and implement employment policies that acknowledge the needs of socially disconnected young men.** Much has been written about the expansion of jobs that do not require a university education, but such policies are often piecemeal. Any approach to make such jobs meaningful requires an expansion of basic labor rights and worker welfare, from higher minimum wages to guaranteed parental leave to guaranteed health insurance and job training. Such approaches will also likely need to provide psychosocial support and include deliberate relational learning for young men, helping them acquire skills and find trust in offline spaces. [The MenCare initiative](#) and scholar [Richard Reeves have called for policies](#) that also call men into care professions, a growing area of economies around the world and yet generally underpaid and predominantly women.
- **Engage the media, including the online gaming space and the internet in general, as allies for healthy masculinity.** Online services and the video game industry must be held accountable for their role in fostering or allowing harmful voices

to proliferate. They also must be allies in creating solutions, presenting stories and spaces for healthy manhood to counter the steady stream of violent manhood that too often prevails.

- **Provide guidance for parents, youth, educators, and the porn industry itself in discussions about porn.** With the onslaught of explicit content online and rates of exposure to pornography at increasingly younger ages<sup>47</sup>, both youth and educators need practical guidance on how to navigate the evolving digital landscape. Porn literacy and media literacy approaches build off of longstanding educational frameworks to help us become more critical consumers of the media we are exposed to. Parents should work to build trust with their children about porn and sexuality by keeping conversations two-sided, rather than starting from a place of judging natural curiosity. Equipping young people with the skills to critically examine online content has far-reaching benefits – but first takes adults in the room to open up space for these conversations to occur without shame or retribution.

**With all these approaches, we must focus on the most vulnerable people and the multiple disadvantages they face.** It is essential to care about the needs of those left most behind by educational, vocational, and social changes and affected by incarceration. Racial equity and economic justice must be part of the conversation on healthy masculinity.

**Finally, we must trust and empower young men to find and define pathways to healthy manhood, in dialogue with young women.** Ultimately, we find hope from young men themselves. Our results affirm that they are often aware they are spending too much time online and making attempts to limit pornography use in search of more meaningful relationships. It is this

awareness from the voices of young men themselves that must be central in driving change. The boys are not all right, but at least they know it – and it is up to all of us to support them to create the conditions possible for achieving male allyship and the full promise of healthy, connected, empathic manhood.

**As seen in our findings, men need support to step into the discomfort and confusion that is required to embrace and live healthier, connected versions of manhood.** The findings here affirm that norms about manhood – the cultural and individual meanings given to manhood – must be part of all these recommendations. Believing in and following harmful ideas of manhood matter and cause harm and, thus, must be made part of the solutions. This requires engaging men to move toward something not yet invented or at least still seen as rarefied, something we might call modern, aspirational manhood (taking a cue from author Don McPherson).<sup>48</sup> This aspirational manhood is urgently needed for men themselves and for gender equality.

Our eyes are wide open about the power of backlash voices. Such voices are too loud in the lives of younger men, drowning out more encouraging, forward-looking messages. These voices offer false claims to a group in desperate need of hope for the future and purpose. Often accompanied by blame and anger, the messages of backlash reach unsettled hearts, particularly of those men struggling to establish a secure place for themselves. We can and must put out word that each and every man is needed, by those they care about most, for the world to be a place of justice, equity, and equality. Men need a much clearer, prouder message about what it means to be strong and whole, about the historic goodness of women, men, and individuals of all genders, and about young men's necessary role in our changing society.



**Annex 1: Key Indices and Scales Used in the Questionnaire,  
Along With Responses**



### Duke Social Support Index (Average score per item, 1 to 3, where higher equals more/most often)

How often do you feel useful to your family and friends (people important to you)?	2.19
How often do you feel you have a definite role (place) in your family and among your friends?	2.19
How often do you know what is going on with your family and friends?	2.17
How often does it seem that your family and friends (people who are important to you) understand you?	2.12
When you are talking with your family and friends, how often do you feel you are being listened to?	2.11
How often can you talk about your deepest problems with at least some of your family and friends?	2.05

### Modified Purpose In Life Test (Average score 0 to 7 on each prompt)

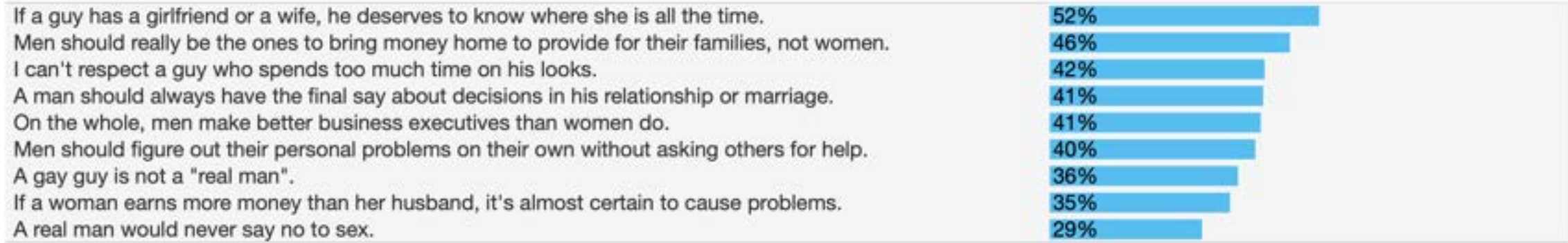
My personal existence is: without meaning or purpose (0) to (7) full of meaning and purpose.	5.01
When I think about my own life: I often ask myself why I exist (0) to (7) I always find reasons to live.	5.01
My life is: outside my control (0) to (7) in my hands and under control.	4.94
Facing my daily tasks is: a boring and painful experience (0) to (7) a source of pleasure and satisfaction.	4.69
To me, life feels: routine (0) to (7) exciting.	4.50
In terms of reaching my life goals: I haven't made any progress (0) to (7) I have achieved them completely.	4.45

### Ten-Year Optimism Barometer (% who say this aspect of life will be better in ten years)

My apartment, house, or living situation	83%
My family life	82%
My romantic life	79%
My job opportunities	78%
My social life	78%
My faith life	74%
My economic security	73%
My community	71%
My country	60%



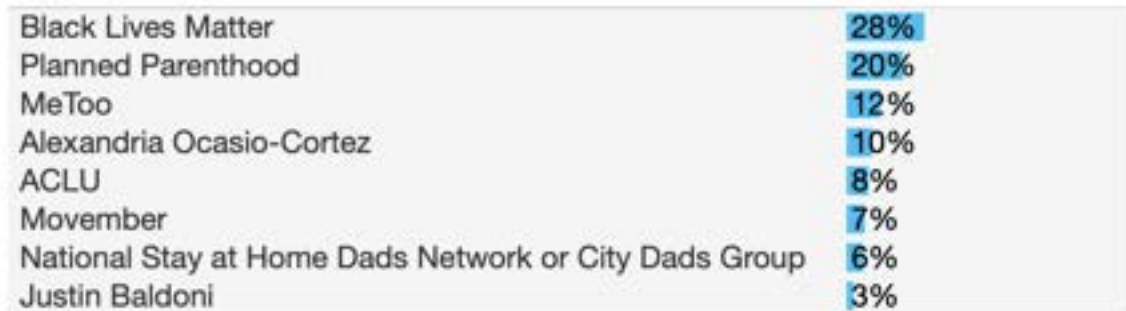
### Man Box Scale (% who agree or strongly agree with each restrictive attitude statement)



### Figures, Groups, and Sites of the Manosphere (% who trust this figure, group, or site)



### Additional Figures, Groups, and Sites (% who trust this figure, group, or site)





# **Annex 2: Relevant Statistics on Men in the US**



**Men die earlier, represent the majority of suicides and drug overdose deaths, and are less likely to receive mental health services.**

- Life expectancy in the United States (in years, as of 2021):  
Men: 73      Women: 79<sup>49</sup>
- Proportion of deaths by suicide in the US that are men: 4 in 5
- Ethnic group with the highest suicide rate: Native American or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic<sup>50</sup>
- Rate that lesbian, gay, or bisexual young people attempt suicide compared to heterosexual young people: 400%<sup>51</sup>
- Number of men who died by drug overdose in 2021: 74,301. Of women: 32,398
- Among men, the ethnic group most likely to die from a drug overdose: Non-Hispanic Native American<sup>52</sup>
- Percentage of women who have a serious mental illness: 7%. Of men: 4%
- Percentage of women who received services for a serious mental illness compared to men: 68% versus 61%<sup>53</sup>

**Boys are less likely to graduate high school and finish college.**

- Percentage of women aged 25 to 34 who currently have a bachelor's degree: 41%. Of men aged 25 to 34: 32%

- Percentage of people aged 25 to 34 who had a bachelor's degree in 1970: 12% of women versus 20% of men<sup>54</sup>
- Percentage of girls who graduated from high school in 2018: 88%. Of boys: 82%
- Ethnic groups with the lowest percentage of boys graduating: Black and Hispanic<sup>55</sup>

**Men are more likely to own guns and are the vast majority of mass shooters.**

- Percentage of men who own guns: 43%. Of women: 22%
- Group most likely to own guns: white men<sup>56</sup>
- Of 142 mass shootings carried out since 1982, number carried out by men: 138<sup>57</sup>

**Young men are less likely to have close friends and more likely to be single.**

- Percentage of women who have told their friends they loved them in the past week: 49%. Of men: 25%<sup>58</sup>
- Percentage of young men aged 18 to 29 who are single: 51%. Of young women: 32%<sup>59</sup>

**Men spend more time gaming online and viewing pornography.**

- Of 189 million gamers, the proportion who are male: 59%
- Average daily time spent on gaming by men: 41 minutes. By women: 26 minutes<sup>60</sup>

- Proportion of men who accessed pornography in the past month: 92%. Of women: 60%<sup>61</sup>

**Black men are far more likely to be incarcerated.**

- Proportion of adult white men who are currently incarcerated: 1 in 106. Adult Black men: 1 in 15<sup>62</sup>

**In focusing on men and boys, we must acknowledge that gender equality has not been achieved for women and girls.**

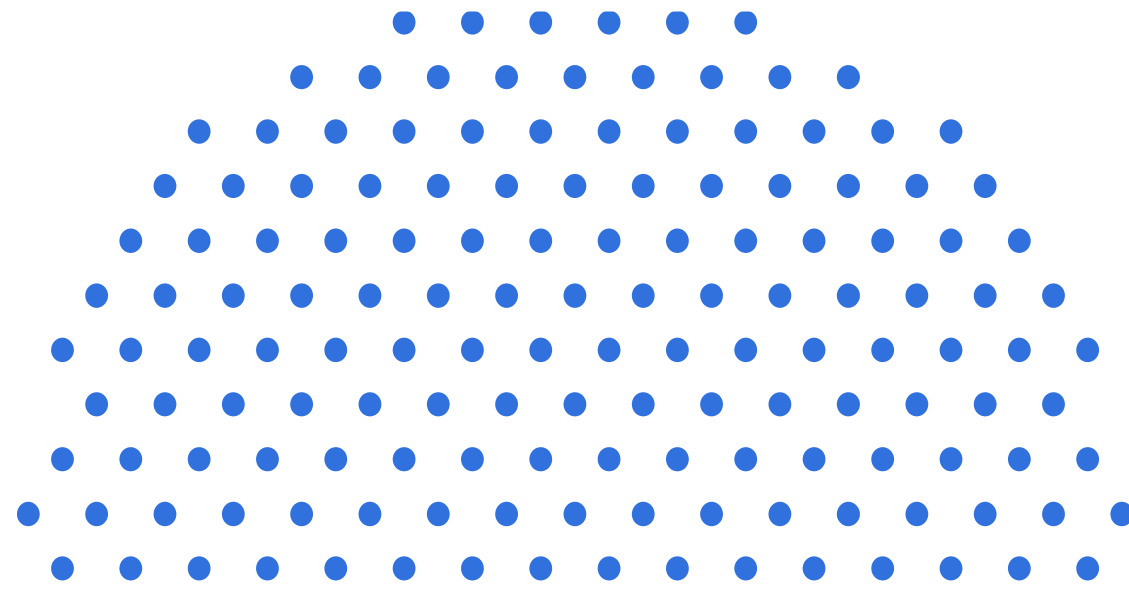
- Percentage that women earned compared to men in 2022: 82%. In 2002: 80%<sup>63</sup>
- Percentage of women who say a major reason for the wage gap is how employers treat women: 61%. Of men: 37%<sup>64</sup>
- Percentage of women who think that when it comes to gender equality, we have not come far enough: 64%. Of men: 49%<sup>65</sup>
- Additional daily hours of unpaid care work that women carry out compared to men: 2.1<sup>66</sup>







# Endnotes



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