



The New Leading Man: eharmony Unpacks Masculinity's Impact on Dating Dynamics In 2024

What it means to be masculine today is broader and more inclusive than ever, but between social stereotypes and expectations for a man to be a knight in shining armour, how does this impact on today's dating world? **In this edition of Dating Diaries, eharmony explores that question with brand new data directly from men (age 18+) and the GenZers and Millennials who date them, including insightful takes and tips from eharmony's relationship experts. *Let's dive in!***

The mixed messages of modern masculinity

Between various dating expectations shared on social media like wanting a [#rodentboyfriend](#) or a [#maninfinance](#), to the pressures from romantic partners to change aspects of themselves or their lives, **men are receiving mixed messages.**

So, what exactly are these messages and the new expectations from the modern man? Well, **18% of UK men have felt pressure from a romantic partner to change how they dress, followed by their attitude (16%).**

Additional things UK men feel pressured by their partner to change

- Emotions 15%
- Friends 14%
- Weight 13%

Things UK men feel pressured to change due to social media:

- Weight 17%
- Fitness 14%
- Attitude 11%

When asked to define masculinity in their own words, the key themes from UK men were strength (both physical and mental), physical traits such as facial hair, and personality traits such as confidence and feeling secure. **Over 4 in 10 (45%) UK men believe protecting loved ones is the main trait of masculinity – this is the top trait for Gen Z (38%), Millennials (39%) and Gen X (49%).** This is followed by **physical strength (39%)** and being a **provider for loved ones (37%).**

These definitions of masculinity have been instilled in men since childhood, with a third (33%) of UK men saying their parents/guardians contributed most towards how they define masculinity throughout their lives. **30% of UK men say athletes** are their current role models for masculinity – this is the top choice for Gen Z (35%) and Millennials (36%).

Conflicting expectations, combined with stereotypes prominent even in 2024 (like being both physically and mentally strong) create challenges for men trying to navigate dating and form authentic connections with romantic partners.



“These conflicting expectations make it tough for men to navigate dating vulnerably. When men face these mixed messages, it can lead to confusion and insecurity, making it challenging to approach relationships with confidence and authenticity. This often results in a lack of vulnerability, preventing genuine connections from developing, or creating barriers and guardedness that hinder the establishment of safety and trust in relationships.”

Todd Baratz LMHC, an eharmony relationship expert

While mixed messages can lead to confusion, surface-level dealbreakers can not only impact male confidence, but also singles’ dating pool options: **The #1 deal breaker for people who date men impacts short kings the most with 43% of Gen Z and 40% of Millennials saying they won’t date a man who is shorter than them.** Laurel House, an eharmony relationship expert, weighs in on why appearance-based dealbreakers can negatively impact your dating pool.

“Daters who are only interested in men who maintain a small spectrum of what’s considered attractive are missing out on the majority of eligible bachelors, and possibly overlooking and dismissing someone who could be their match. By opening and expanding the spectrum of what is attractive, daters are dramatically increasing their options and opportunities for connection, relationships, and love.”


Laurel House, an eharmony relationship expert

According to House, **we should be looking beyond superficial looks and focusing on who someone truly is**, including their personality, priorities, values, lifestyle, and how they treat and make you feel.

House adds: *“What’s interesting is that oftentimes men who have historically been viewed as less attractive because of these superficial physical attributes like height, tend to be more attentive, aware, and purposeful with their partners.”*

Things to consider, according to Laurel House:

When it comes to an enduring relationship, getting what you “need” from your partner will ultimately create a deeper sense of happiness than being with someone who physically aligns with your “type”.

What’s more important? How tall someone is and how they look  How they treat you and make me feel

Should you wait for a leading man?

Men often receive signals that they should take the lead in dating, including planning and paying for dates. And their rise in trending TikTok hashtags like [#feminineenergy](#) and [#tradwives](#), suggests women expect to be chased and financially doted on, reinforcing stereotypical gender roles. **But is waiting for men to take the lead realistic?** Not if you’re keen to have it go somewhere.



UK men are somewhat open to taking the lead when it comes to planning dates (28%), **however, their partners are more inclined to take the lead in the relationship, according to 50% of Gen Z and 46% of Millennial UK daters.**

“Everyone should feel confident to take the first step and initiate a relationship, whether it’s planning a date or double-texting! Both individuals in a relationship share the responsibility of creating a balanced and meaningful connection. Genuine communication and mutual effort from both sides are key to building trust, respect and a strong foundation in any relationship. This is why the first move shouldn’t be gender-specific and you should do what feels natural for you – but don’t be afraid to push yourself out of your comfort zone.

Dr Lalitaa Suglani, an eharmony relationship expert

When it comes to paying the bill, UK men are first to put their card down. **Only 29% of Gen Zs who date men are open to paying for a first date.**

Men are hesitant to talk about mental health struggles

While UK men listed **mental health as the top struggle they face (20%), less than a third (24%) of UK men are open to having conversations about mental health.** Meanwhile, 69% of Gen Z and 69% of Millennials who date men say it’s important for men to know that emotional intimacy is just as important as physical.

The struggles worrying UK men right now:

- Mental Health 20%
- Finances 14%
- Physical Health 14%

“While there are many reasons men struggle with mental health, it’s no secret that today’s dating environment is difficult to navigate, often impacting self-confidence and emotions. The pressure of constant scrolling is intensified by society’s narrow perceptions of masculinity, which can box men into rigid roles and expectations. Talking to friends, family members, partners and even professionals is one way to break down these supposed barriers and understand that masculinity doesn’t have to be rigid – it can take many forms. There is flexibility in masculinity based on what men truly want for themselves and what their partners desire from them.”

Dr Lalitaa Suglani, an eharmony relationship expert



According to Dr Lalitaa: When men embrace communication → they can better understand and redefine their perception of masculinity = which leads to opportunities to be vulnerable, express their emotions, and find mutual support in relationships.

This empowers men to break free from stereotypes, which opens up space to create more authentic, fulfilling connections with their partners. This also allows growing relationships to be rooted in genuine understanding and shared values. And for the men struggling to prioritise their mental health and self-care, Todd Baratz LMHC, an eharmony relationship expert shares a helpful perspective.

“Being open about your mental health not only strengthens your bond with your partner but is also an essential act of self-care. The better we care for ourselves, the better we can care for others. When men embrace emotional vulnerability, it fosters trust and intimacy, allowing both partners to feel understood and supported. This openness creates a safe space for both individuals to share their struggles and triumphs, ultimately leading to a deeper, more meaningful relationship.”

Todd Baratz LMHC, an eharmony relationship expert

A one man show...in the bedroom

When it comes to the bedroom, UK men are insecure. Specifically, they are self-conscious about their performance. The ability to give their partner an orgasm makes men the most self-conscious (27%), followed by their own personal sex drive (21%).

What makes UK men self-conscious during sex?

- Ability to give their partner an orgasm (27%)
- Sex Drive (21%)
- Stamina (21%)

So how can men put these insecurities to bed and make more room for mutual pleasure for themselves and prospective partners? **An open dialogue with current or future partners might be the answer.**

“Sexual insecurities and anxieties are common, often stemming from a culture that has historically been reserved about discussing sex – especially with Britain’s tendency towards emotional restraint. It’s essential to address these feelings by communicating openly and honestly with your partner. Men can enhance physical intimacy and build self-confidence by embracing vulnerability in the bedroom. This openness not only improves the sexual experience but also deepens the relationship, creating trust and mutual understanding.”

Dr Lalitaa Suglani, an eharmony relationship expert

When it comes to the bedroom, people who date men want them to:



- **Understand their sexual health:** 53% of Gen Z and 44% of Millennials think it's important for men to understand sexual health.
- **Prioritise foreplay:** 41% of Gen Z and 38% of Millennials want men to understand that they need foreplay.
- **Be more fluid when it comes to positions in the bedroom:** 34% of Gen Zers want men to understand that they don't want to always bottom or top during physical intimacy.

So, whether you date men or identify as one, unpacking perceptions about masculinity can help us navigate how we approach dating and the mixed messages we all face:

- **Shoot your shot:** No matter who you are, making the first move shouldn't be gender-specific.
- **Embrace the short king:** Don't let physical appearance "shorten" your dating pool!
- **Get talking:** Opening up and being vulnerable, expressing yourself, and finding mutual support in relationships can help with the struggles men are facing today
- **Communication leads to confidence:** In and outside of the bedroom, talking is key!

About eharmony

eharmony celebrates the passions, quirks and vulnerabilities that make us who we are, helping daters find relationships based on authentic self-expression and acceptance. We have and continue to help millions of daters find someone they can be themselves with – someone who gets them.

eharmony is headquartered in Los Angeles, and operates in the UK, US, Canada and Australia. For more information, visit www.eharmony.co.uk, download the app on iOS and Android, and follow @eharmonyUK on social platforms.

Methodology: Dating Diaries: The New Leading Man report was commissioned by eharmony and conducted by Harris Interactive. It was fielded online between July 4th and July 10th, 2024 and surveyed over 1,000 participants. Participants qualified if they were aged 18+ and were men or dating/in relationships with men. Results were weighted to be nationally representative.