

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

The Problem with Men

Many boys and young men are floundering in school, work, and relationships. What's gone wrong?

Source: TheWeek.com

How are boys and men struggling?

Young men are falling behind women in nearly every area of life. In academic performance, boys lag well behind girls in elementary school, high school, and college, where female undergraduates now outnumber their male peers roughly 2 to 1. That ratio was about even in the early 1980s. Most men have seen their real wages fall over the past four decades, and a growing share of young men are dropping out of the workforce. They have fewer friends than women and are three times as likely to suffer “deaths of despair” from alcohol or drugs, or by suicide. In a post-#MeToo world where the word “masculinity” is frequently preceded by “toxic,” experts say young men often encounter two competing narratives: one from the Right telling them to become a hyper-macho caricature, modeled by President Trump and manosphere influencers, and another from the Left implying they should keep quiet because they’re so privileged. “This is not a zero-sum game,” said New York University business professor Scott Galloway. “Women still face huge challenges, but we can also acknowledge our young men are struggling.”

When does the trouble start?

At a very young age. Boys enter kindergarten behind girls in terms of academic preparedness and in behavioral skills, such as the ability to socialize and regulate emotions. That gender gap continues throughout school: Girls score better on reading and writing tests—they are almost a full grade ahead of boys by ninth grade—and earn higher GPAs. Boys, meanwhile, are roughly twice as likely to be diagnosed with ADHD and twice as likely to be suspended; they also drop out at higher rates than their female classmates. Researchers believe some of this disparity could be a result of the increasing emphasis on academics and testing in the earliest years of education, which may make the learning experience harder for boys, who mature later than girls. Educators and policymakers have also spent several decades focused on correcting historical gender inequalities that held back girls. But some experts worry that educational excellence itself is now “coded” as female, discouraging boys.

What happens after school?

The decline of traditionally male-dominated industries such as manufacturing have hit men’s pay and employment potential. Inflation-adjusted wages for men dropped 3% from 1979 to 2019, while those of women—who earn 81 cents for every dollar earned by men—rose nearly 29%. And of the 1.2 million new jobs added between February 2024 and February 2026, about two-thirds went to women. That pattern is likely to be replicated in future jobs reports as sectors with large shares of women workers, such as health care and social services, continue to expand while male-heavy sectors like construction and tech either shrink or stagnate. Faced with these difficulties, a growing number of young men are simply giving up on employment. Today, nearly 1 in 9 prime-age men are neither working nor looking for work, and about 1 in 5 men ages 25 to 34 still live with their parents, compared with 1 in 10 women in that demographic.

Does this affect men's mental health?

It's causing a crisis of loneliness. Men ages 18 to 30 spent 18% more time alone in 2023 than in 2019—an average of 6.6 nonsleeping hours—according to time-use surveys by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's 22% more alone time than same-age women. "The more that you're sitting on the couch," said Gary Barker, head of progressive gender-equality group Equimundo, "your social network gets narrower and then you don't have the social capital or the skills to step into a job." In an Equimundo poll, almost two-thirds of men ages 18 to 30 said nobody knew them well; a quarter hadn't seen anyone outside their home in the past week. Dan and Joana Moreno of Miami have seen this crisis play out in their family. Their daughter finished business school and got engaged in 2024; that year, their three adult sons were all single and still living at home. Middle son Daniel, 27, dropped out of college in 2019. "Nothing is really stopping me," he said. "It's just myself, standing in my own way."

Where does that aimlessness lead?

Experts believe it's to blame for a sharp increase in the suicide rate among men ages 25 to 34, which climbed 30% from 2010 to 2023. Social isolation, said psychologist Matthew Nock, means men are "less likely to reach out for care [and] less well connected to others." Feelings of isolation and a lack of purpose are also pushing young men toward the manosphere, a loose network of online communities and misogynist influencers such as the hugely popular Andrew Tate—who with his brother, Tristan, is fighting extradition to the U.K. on charges of rape and sex trafficking—that promote male dominance and blame men's woes on a "feminized" society. "These spaces are really taking advantage of those insecurities and a need for validation," said Kalliopi Mingeirou of U.N. Women.

Can young men get back on track?

Many experts note that the gender gap in academic achievement can be addressed, as shown by the fact that girls have caught up in math with boys in recent years. "So we could help boys catch up in reading," said Sean Reardon, a professor at the Stanford Graduate School of Education. "We just haven't organized society and schools yet to do that." Richard Reeves, head of the nonpartisan American Institute for Boys and Men, argues for boys to start kindergarten at age 6 rather than 5, so they're better cognitively matched with girls, and for more men to be encouraged to enter more-heavily female professions, such as nursing and teaching. "It is not that men have fewer opportunities," he said. "It is that they are not taking them." Reeves adds that it's in all of society's interest to help lift up boys and young men. "A world of floundering men," he says, "is unlikely to be a world of flourishing women."

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about the struggles of young boys and men? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.