

Do Now

Masculinity in focus. What does it mean to be a great man?



Jack is confident, funny, strong-willed and brave. He always sticks up for people if they're picked on and won't tolerate bullies.

'I really fancy him. He's so masculine.' Kali says to her mate, Fay.

'Then why are you dissing him by calling him masculine?' Says Fay.

Discuss: Why does Fay think Kali is dissing Jack? Is she? What does this say about current western ideas about masculinity?



What challenges do young men growing up in western society face in 2025? Give examples if you can.

CLUE: role models

CLUE: feeling lost

CLUE: negativity

Learning outcomes:

Describe what we mean by positive masculine qualities.

Explain what makes the case studies from today great positive male role models.



Masculinity: qualities or attributes generally regarded as characteristic of men.



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We will now find out more about masculinity, what this means in practice and how we can recognise positive masculine characteristics.

THORNDEN THREE READING!
Follow the text when your tutor is reading

Masculinity, qualities and attributes

What do we mean by the term 'masculinity'?

Masculinity is a set of behaviours, characteristics and attributes which are typically associated with what it means to be a man. As such, masculinity is usually seen as largely a social construct, meaning that it isn't entirely derived directly from nature; instead, it's an idea that has been constructed by society. For example - many women may have the qualities we are talking about today in abundance. Masculinity does not equal male.

The definition of masculinity varies according to different cultures, traditions, time periods, geographies, religions, and many other factors. The traits most commonly associated with masculinity in the modern western world include physical strength, fearlessness, dominance, power, competitiveness, toughness and other related characteristics. Sometimes, high socio/financial status, high levels of sex drive and sexual prowess are considered to form part of the wider image of masculinity.

So the idea of masculinity is just all made up by society?

This is where it gets tricky, if we are going to directly equate masculinity as the commonly derived traits of being a biological male, we have to look across many cultures which don't share the societal views we are used to in the modern west, to see what we all have in common. Are there traits which biological males across any culture tend to have in common? Yes, there are. Usually, males are larger than females. Usually, males have deeper voices than females. Usually, males are stronger due to having denser muscle mass. Usually, males are more aggressive, due to higher levels of testosterone. But these are physical attributes, so the character qualities we derive from these will always also have an element of nature (rather than purely nature). They will always have a level of some influence but've been physically that way, but immediately influenced in behaviour by the world.

Is masculinity positive?

a piece of a much larger puzzle, which we'll explore more in gender equality topic - but it's got back to the idea of aggression (testosterone) at the physical level flowing into competitiveness at the societal level.

Nothing is wrong with being competitive. It can motivate you to work hard and achieve for yourself and your family, if we are allowing ourselves to equate masculinity with competitiveness, then yes, competitiveness is positive masculinity. The leaps we have just taken here can also be made with physical strength, toughness and fearlessness (from many men working in dangerous environments in mining and construction, to men going to war to protect their country or victims of war). These are all examples of positive masculinity.

It should go without saying that of course many women go to war and work in dangerous environments too. However, these are still much, much lower in numbers, even in 2022.

So does that mean masculinity is positive? No. Masculinity is neither positive or negative. For example, strength is neither positive or negative. You can use it to punch someone weaker than you or to carry a person out of a burning building. It's what you do with masculinity that counts.



Do straight women tend to like straight typically 'masculine' men?

This very much depends on the women. Straight women tend to love men with positive masculine characteristics. They tend to dislike men with negative masculine characteristics. Recent studies have shown that women like men who naturally have confidence and potential, rather than someone who has not worked to acquire the possible positive outcomes of those attributes themselves. What does that mean? It means women will be attracted to the man who has made their own money, worked hard to gain a great position (or is working to and hasn't yet), rather than the rich third generation guy who has inherited his money due to no work on his own part, or the guy who was given a good job by his mate. Why? Well not just because women tend to make their own money, or they want a man who can do the same, but also those qualities of drive and achievement are the attractive things (and this is often subconscious) NOT usually the money itself. However, there's nothing less classy than a show off and a flashy guy revving his engine with other girls hanging off his arm would be a massive turn off to any woman wanting an actual relationship.

Choosing between a man with less money but more drive and ambition or a man with more money and less drive and ambition, women will usually go for the former. Physically? Women prefer men who smile.

Overall, a man's positively masculine personality, his confidence, his sense of doing the right thing, sticking up for the underdog, being competitive but not mean and being tough and working hard to achieve, are the things which will also help him to go far - with women and with life.

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Masculinity, Qualities and Attributes What do we mean by ‘masculinity’?

Masculinity refers to behaviours, traits, and attributes typically associated with being male, though many women share these qualities. Masculinity is not the same as being male. Its definition changes across cultures, traditions, religions, and eras. In modern Western contexts, masculinity is often linked with physical strength, fearlessness, dominance, competitiveness, toughness, and sometimes status, sexual drive, or prowess.

Is masculinity just made up by society?

Not entirely. Across most cultures, males are generally larger, stronger, have deeper voices, and higher testosterone levels, which can influence aggression. These physical differences are innate, but how they translate into behaviour is shaped by society and upbringing. Is masculinity positive? Masculinity itself is neither good nor bad; it's how those traits are used. For example, aggression might drive healthy competition, which can lead to personal or professional success, but it can also lead to harm



Positive masculinity includes using strength, competitiveness, and courage for constructive purposes—like excelling at work, protecting others, or contributing in demanding jobs such as construction or military service.

The same traits can be destructive if misapplied.

Do straight women prefer typically ‘masculine’ men?

Preferences vary, but many value positive masculine traits—confidence, drive, integrity, and resilience—over superficial displays like wealth or bravado. Studies show women are often drawn to men with ambition and self-made achievements rather than inherited privilege. They also prefer kindness, humour, and authenticity—traits that suggest stable, positive masculinity.

Ultimately, masculinity isn’t defined by wealth or bravado but by how someone channels their strengths and character in positive ways.

Some researchers say there are 4 main masculine virtues.

There are explanations around our masculine male figure below. Let's think of more examples as a class.



Courage

Putting his own health or safety at risk to save another person.

E.g. Sticking up for others against bullies.

Strength

Helping others, a cause or community using his natural physical or emotional strength.

E.g. Staying emotionally calm in a crisis, to help others suffering.



Mastery

Training, practicing or studying until he is the best he can be at his career or chosen field.

E.g. Turning up every day to football training.

Honour

Keeping his promises.

E.g. Not cheating on partners.

Case Study Name:	How does he display courage? Explain in full	How does he display mastery? Explain in full	How does he display strength? Explain in full	How does he display honour? Explain in full

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There are so many fantastic role models for us to aspire to be like from the world of masculinity.

Today we're going to look at just a few.

PAIRED TASK

You have been given a pack of six case studies. Read each one and in your pairs complete your table.





Need Support? You're Not Alone

If anything in today's lesson has affected you, or you want to talk to someone, there is help available.

Mental Health & Low Mood

YoungMinds – <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>
Kooth – <https://www.kooth.com>
Mind – <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Talk to Someone

Your Tutor or Head of Year – We're here to help.
Wellbeing Team and School Nurse
Report a Concern on Satchel
Safeguarding Team with the Purple lanyards

Healthy Lifestyle

NHS Every Mind Matters – <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters>
Change4Life – <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

Apps That Can Help

Calm – For mindfulness and sleep.
Headspace – Meditation and stress relief.
Clear Fear – Manage anxiety (designed for young people).
MeeTwo – Anonymously talk to other teens, moderated by experts.

Eating Concerns

Beat Eating Disorders –
<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk>
NHS Live Well – Eating Disorders –
<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/eating-disorders/>

How do you report something you are concerned about?

- It is important to us that all of you feel safe, happy and belong at Thornden.
- We also know that sometimes it is not as easy as simply telling a member of staff
- It could be:
 - A friend you are worried about
 - Someone being unkind to you
 - Something you have heard and think we should know



How can you report anything you are worried about?

- Speak to a member of staff or parent / carer
- Visit the Well Being Den or Head of Year area
- On Satchel each week you will be sent a link to a form to share any worries you have
- On our school website homepage there is a 'Report a Concern' link.
- In the Student Bulletin there is a 'Report a Concern' link
- On all school desktops there is a 'Report a Concern' logo to click and report anything