

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2018, research led by Dr. John Barry, Honorary Lecturer at University College London and co-founder of the Male Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society, and ethically approved by University College London, was conducted. The aim of this academic survey was to identify the values and priorities of American men and the factors which contribute to their emotional, physical and mental health and wellbeing.

In a comprehensive, intimate survey of 5,000 male respondents aged 18-95 spread all across the United States, subjects were asked first to gauge their Positive Mindset Index (PMI) which was determined by asking men about their happiness, confidence, sense of being in control, emotional stability, motivation and optimism.

Respondents were then asked about how satisfied they were with key areas of their lives, such as careers, work/life balance, relationships, money, physicality and mental health. Finally, to ascertain what kind of men they aspired to be, we asked them which core values they truly held dear.

By cross-analyzing all of this rich data, we were able to construct a comprehensive picture of who the most positive American men were: what they did, how and where they lived their lives. On the whole, we discovered that modern American men are doing pretty well – and absolutely stand for something commendably selfless, as opposed to selfish. Forget unattainable celebrity lifestyles or chasing physical perfection: regular, stand-up guys and team players are the happiest men of all.

The values American men most aspired to are those of everyday heroes: fathers, father figures, respectful co-workers, mentors. These are hardworking, loving, friendly men with a social conscience, which is great news for the men, women and children of America.

The report mirrored The Harry's Masculinity Report 2017 conducted in the UK on 2000 British men, but the American report went into even greater depth, asking questions on military service, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, employment status, educational level, and population density.

As such, The Harry's Masculinity Report 2018 stands as the most comprehensive, ethically-approved academic study of American masculinity on record.

PART I: KEY FINDINGS

- The modern American man is a moral man. When asked what characteristics he aspires to, he chooses values that put the needs of others over his own. At the top were – honesty, reliability, dependability, being respectful of others and loyalty. At the bottom was athleticism (having a perfect body), proving the route to genuine contentment is who you are on the inside – not how you look on the outside.
- America's most content men have good job satisfaction, value their health, have a good income, are over age 50 and are married.
- American men are largely happy, with an above average Positive Mindset Index (PMI), and typically have a more positive outlook on life than men in the UK.
- The strongest predictor of a positive mindset in men – by far – is satisfying employment. Hard work is the cornerstone of a contented man that all else is built upon.
- Next is health, and across the board is driven by, in the following order, good grooming, eating well, living longer and exercise.
- Significantly, American men now place more importance on their mental health than their physical health, while appreciating the two are fundamentally intertwined. Older men, especially, are tuned into the needs of their minds, as well as their bodies and souls.
- The third driver of positivity is income, and while it may be true you can't buy happiness, the contentment of providing for others, especially one's family, is a central pillar of American men's sense of positive purpose.
- Men's mental health is also related to connecting with others through sports, and connecting with friends by listening and giving advice.
- Things can only get better! As men mature, their positivity rises and they become more likely to have a healthy and positive outlook on life. The over-50s were the most content group.
- In terms of relationship status, forget the myth of the carefree bachelor. Across the board, married men are the happiest, with this especially being true in the South.
- In terms of sexual orientation, heterosexual and homosexual men (who made up 11% of the sample) scored very similar levels of PMI (3.7 v 3.6). Can we take this as a positive sign that gay men are feeling more self-contentment and pride than in the past generations? However, a note of concern. Some 14 respondents identified as 'non-binary' and 10 as 'female to male transgender.' The mean PMI score of non-binary participants (3.02) and especially female-to-male transgender participants (2.63) spell out significantly lower levels of wellbeing compared to the other participants. These findings have important clinical implications for non-binary and transgender men. These are populations, who, although smaller in number, are more likely to need mental health support.

PART II: WHAT GIVES AMERICAN MEN THE GREATEST SENSE OF WELLBEING?



1. Men at work: the dignity of labor

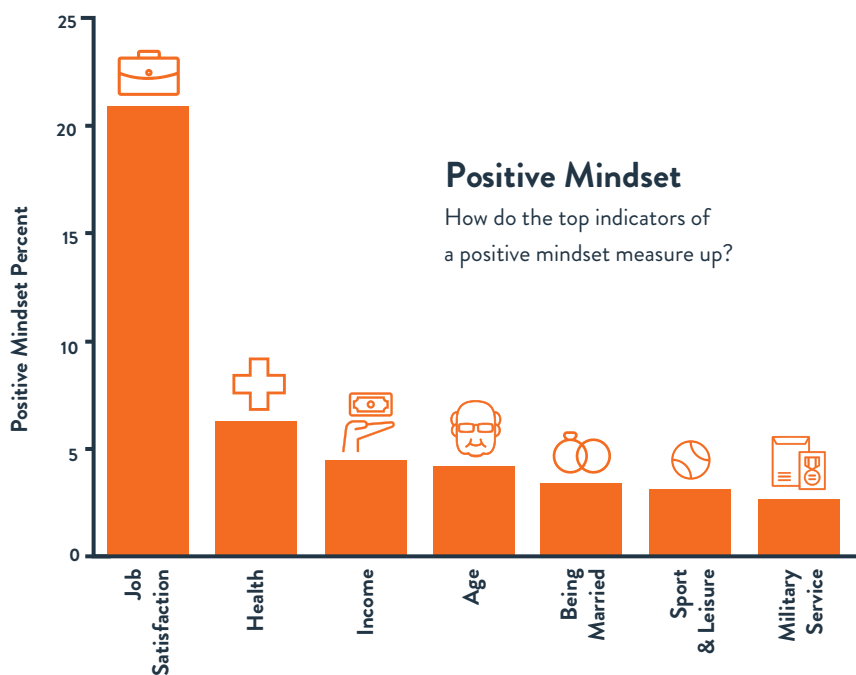
Men at work are men at peace: everything else flows down from satisfying employment. Men who have high job satisfaction are more likely to feel optimistic, happy, motivated, emotionally stable, in control and confident.

Job Satisfaction is by far the strongest predictor of positivity, being around three times higher than the next strongest predictor in every region and across the US overall.

And this isn't primarily about money, rather making an impact on a company's success was the main predictor of job satisfaction.

96.4% of those with the top job satisfaction rating had normal or better levels of mental positivity compared to only 49% who gave the lowest rating for their job satisfaction. It, therefore, stands to reason that getting men into gainful employment is the best route to improving their positive mindset.

This is not "greed is good". It is difficult to conceive of these findings as pathological expressions of greed, workaholism, shallow ambition.



Job satisfaction was also the key predictor of PMI in British men, and both the US and UK findings are presenting us with a picture of men who are passionate about adding value to the workplace, socializing with their workmates and earning a healthy wage.



2. Inner health is key

Health – both physical and mental – was the second highest predictor of positivity across the US (interestingly, in the UK, it was being in a stable relationship: the more committed the man, the happier he typically is). Perhaps surprisingly, grooming – taking care of our appearance - was the strongest driver of positivity.

A breakthrough moment that should afford great hope is the emphasis American men place on their mental health. Across every age group, American men placed greater importance on their mental health than even their physical health. Across all men, 52% said their mental health was “very important” compared to 43% who said the same of their physical health. In the UK, the most open about mental health was the 18-29 group, but in the US it is the over 60s (55.6% deemed mental health very important). This shows great awareness around age-related mental health issues, such as dementia, and shows senior citizens have a commendable openness to mental health that sets a shining example for younger men.



3. Men mature like fine wines

Men get happier as they get older, with men in their 50s at “peak positivity”. We found a clear correlation between age and well-being. This should encourage younger men to relax and the rest of us not to dread old age. According to American men, the future does look rosy! Perhaps we can (and should aim to) help younger men plan for future happiness by learning from happier older men.

This should give great comfort to younger men: the future isn’t something to be feared but relished.



4. Men in stable relationships

Being married was the fifth highest determinant of positivity in American men, showing men who are married have greater well-being than others. Interestingly, in the UK it was the second most important factor in British men’s happiness. Married men are the most positive, closely followed by those who are going steady or cohabiting. Single men are the least happy, worse than divorcees or even widows.



5. Friendship: the importance of buddies

Men who value friendship, family and sports and leisure have greater wellbeing. Sports – especially team sports – provide key benefits including, in order, socializing, feeling healthy and competition.

Among the factors which were relatively unimportant to men were: winning; developing an attractive physique or ‘being skillful.’ As the old cliché would have it, it really isn’t the winning, it’s the taking part that counts.

This isn't just about feeling healthy and fit, but also competing, being a team player and being sociable. When asked for details, the men who talked of health and fitness in this context specified not only the benefits to their own physical health but also to their mental health, alongside the importance of staying fit and healthy for the sake of their children and families.

The social side of sports – playing in/for a team, the banter and perhaps even a cold beverage afterward – is three times more important to men than having a good body. Team players, not vain loners, are happiest.

6. Other noteworthy findings



Military Service

It's official: the Harry's Masculinity Report shows that being a member of the US's armed forces – both past or present – is related to a higher Positive Mindset Index.

Men currently on active duty have the highest PMI, and even those on active duty in past but not now have higher PMI than those with no service history.

Our sample included men with various amounts of experience of military service. Some 22% of our respondents had previously served active duty (1,045 men); 2% (94 men) were currently on duty and 3.6% had undergone basic training. Some 3,863 had never served in the US or other Armed Forces.

Overall, military service was the seventh highest predictor of PMI, proving military service is a significant determinant of positivity. It's especially valued in the Midwest, where it ranks sixth as a predictor of PMI.



Political Leanings: Republicans are more positive

Belonging to any political tribe gives a PMI boost. Men who voted Republican were generally more positive than Democrats. Voting Republican was the 11th highest determinant of positivity – higher than education level. While you'd expect men supporting a reigning President to be more positive, might this indicate that Democrat men are feeling the blues of the Trump administration? Overall, Republican voters have highest PMI, followed by Democrats, then Independents. All have better PMI than those who say no party represents them. Presumably, the latter feel a bit disenfranchised, which cannot be good for PMI.

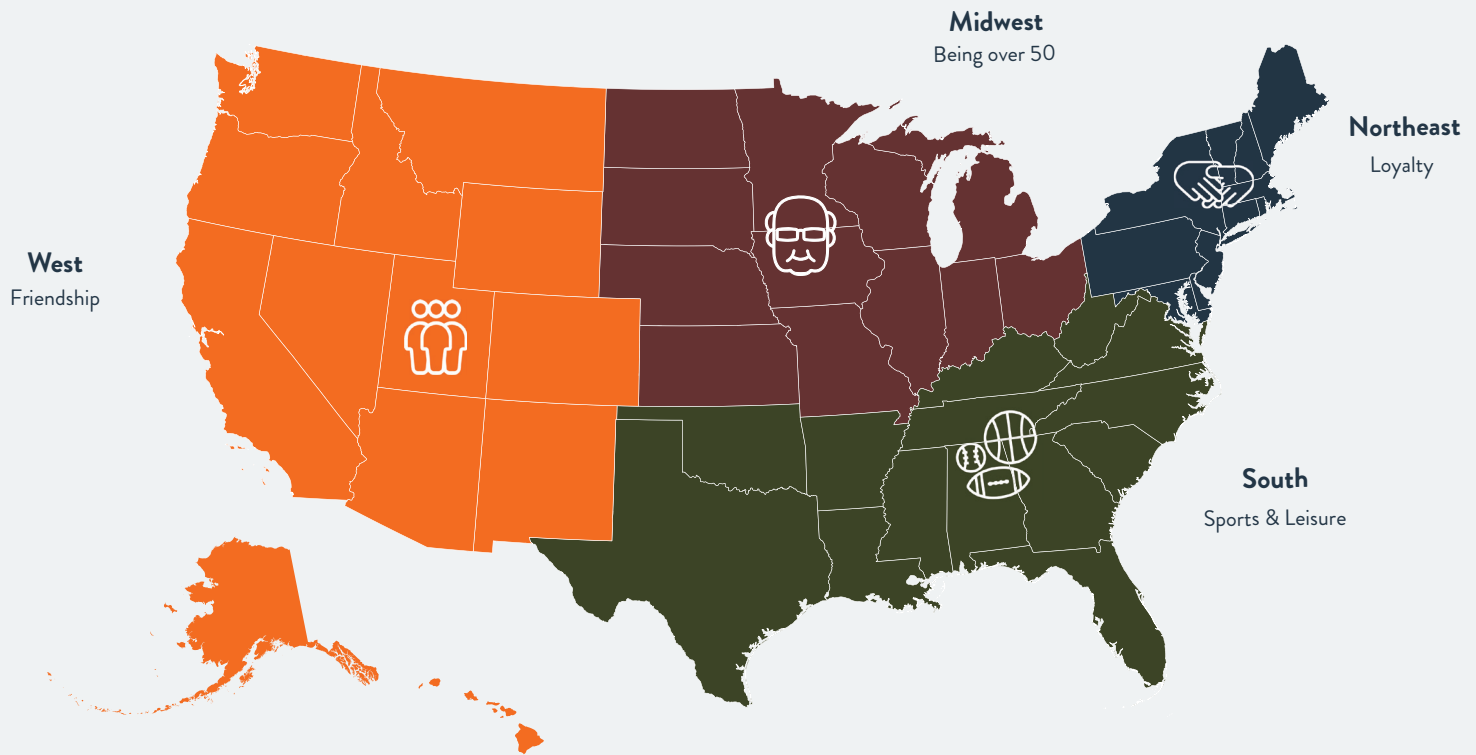


Ethnicity & sexuality

Differing ethnicities or sexualities appeared to have no discernible impact on wellbeing in American men. There was no statistical evidence to point to white, heterosexual men being significantly more positive than any other demographic, although being white correlated to increased wealth.

Regional Values

How did men's top values vary by region?



PART III: REGIONAL VARIANCES

While positivity was typically standard across the US, there were some interesting variances that should give food for thought. Our data was split into “all US” and then four regions, namely Northeast; Midwest; West and South, and multi-variant analysis offered up some fascinating differences.

- Being married was a significant predictor of PMI in the South, but not elsewhere
- Friendship was a strong predictor in the West but not elsewhere
- Being aged over 50 was a significant predictor in the West and especially the Midwest
- Sports & leisure was a significant predictor in the South, borderline in the Northeast, but not elsewhere
- Good pay varied in importance widely across the regions, from the top in the Northeast to fourth in the Midwest
- Chat with co-workers was a significant predictor in three of the four regions, and a non-significant predictor in the West
- In health, grooming was the highest predictor of PMI in the Northeast and West. “Living longer” mattered most in the Midwest, as did “exercise” in the South
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, educational level was the highest determinant of salary in every US region, followed by being married, then being in full-time employment
- In the Northeast, Midwest and South, “being white” was the fifth highest predictor of income, but did not feature in the South or West

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

How can policy-makers, public services, charities and frontline professionals apply the findings of this research?

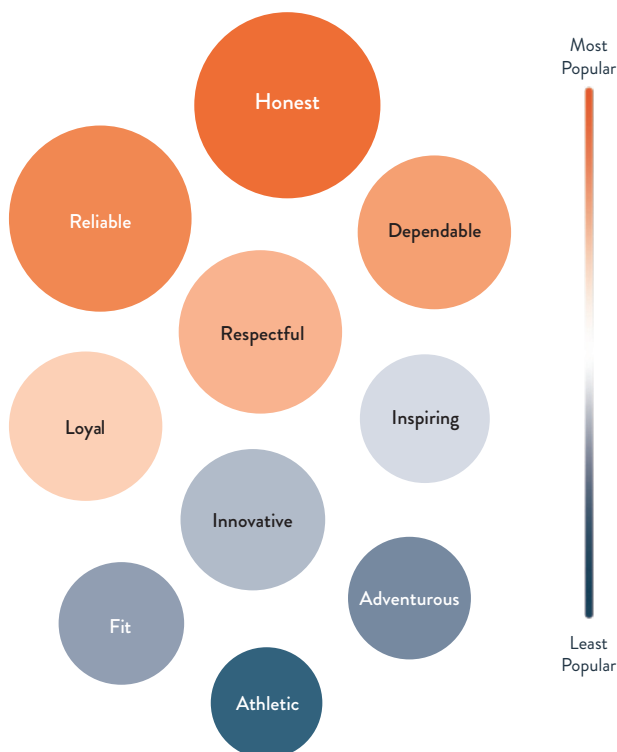
Across our research findings, the strongest single finding – by a factor of three – is that the happiest men are those who are happiest at work. This is not primarily about wealth, but a sense of making a difference, being part of something bigger and more meaningful.

The characteristics which mean the most to American men in 2018 are moral values, such as honesty and dependability, rather than physical traits such as a perfect body, showing that true contentment comes from within.

The lifestyle which is most effective at keeping American men happy, healthy and mentally robust is a combination of meaningful work that allows men to protect and provide for others, good health through a combination of good grooming (the exterior) and healthy diet and team sports (the interior), plus leisure and solid friendships that lay the bedrock of a healthy social life. A winning Team America is made up of men who are team players.

Values

Which values did men aspire to live up to in their daily lives?



Men get happier as they get older. This is an aspirational message that can provide all men hope. With wisdom and experience comes stability and inner contentment (and a loving partner is a vital part of that).

What's truly inspiring is that American men understand the importance of their mental health, even above physical health. They are ready to talk, and they want to improve their happiness.

Here, we need to talk to men on their own terms, in safe spaces that work for them. Might it be time to listen to men in a different way?

Finally, in terms of sexuality, while it is heartening to see that gay men and heterosexual men are broadly aligned in terms of their positive mental wellbeing, Harry's data paints a more worrying picture around trans men and those who identify as non-binary. These communities are in need of our special care, support and understanding.

PART V: MALE WELLBEING: SEVEN MAGNIFICENT PATHS TO INCREASED POSITIVITY

1. Get men into fulfilling work

Across our research, by far the strongest finding was the importance of rewarding, secure employment to men's health and wellbeing. Job satisfaction and the dignity of labor fulfills men's desire to provide and protect. At the same time as noting that job satisfaction improves happiness, we should note the reverse: joblessness erodes the effectiveness of every significant protective factor and makes it harder for men to sustain a healthy, happy lifestyle. Offering hope to these men is the most compelling clarion call of all, be it in the form of policy makers encouraging or incentivizing employers into socially deprived areas, or on an individual/community level by utilizing social networks, friends and the women in struggling men's lives, who can lean in and be of assistance. Give a man a job he finds satisfying and you give him not only hope, but sometimes even a reason to live.

2. Health: Looking good and feeling good

Healthy men are happy men, but this is not about being a slave to a punishing or narcissistic physical routine, rather a more holistic approach to self-improvement. That journey begins in the morning – and the route to positivity could be literally looking at men in the mirror. In the category of health, good grooming was the highest predictor of PMI, proving good grooming isn't about shallow vanity, rather it actually helps make men feel good about themselves. It's beyond skin-deep.

Clinically, it is important to remember that a lack of grooming can sometimes be an indicator of low mood. The findings of this survey should highlight to therapists that a change in the grooming of their client might be a proxy measure of their mental positivity. Likewise, encouraging men to take care of their appearance might give them a psychological boost. Furthermore, healthy food and exercise, especially in a team/social environment, all add to this. Combine these factors and you have a template for elevated mood: the proof is in Harry's data.

3. Support relationships and families

For every age group, being in a relationship (married, cohabiting, or going steady) made men happier compared to being single. This was true of parents and non-parents, although men with children are happiest of all. Men who lose contact with their children after a relationship breakdown are particularly vulnerable to poor mental health and even suicide. Supporting mediation services and the work of charities is essential for men's wellbeing.

4. Embrace aging

With so much media emphasis placed on the power of youth, it was extremely gratifying to discover that men in their 50s are the happiest of all. Harry's findings smash the cliché of the "mid-life crisis". Instead, a man's mid-life looks to be his happiest life. A public awareness campaign around this would be most welcomed.

5. Support Sports

Americans who value sports & leisure have a more positive mindset. Men's mental health and wellbeing soar when physical health improves. In particular, men seem to benefit most from more sociable team sports. Providing facilities for these activities, and promoting their benefits to men of all ages would have extensive and far-reaching benefits, well beyond physical health and fitness. This is particularly true for individual men who are struggling with their mental health. We would encourage policymakers to encourage men to stay fit and well for the sake of their families and setting a good example to their children than they are about their own fitness or physique.

6. Promote the positivity of military service

While we hear much discourse about the negative aspects of military service on men's mental wellbeing – with suicide and PTSD never far from the headlines, especially after tragedies such as the recent Thousand Oaks mass shooting in California – the Harry's Masculinity Report points to clear evidence that military service lifts men's Positive Mindset Index. This fits perfectly with our broader findings that being part of something bigger that matters beyond the individual – “not self but country,” or “band of brothers” sentiment – is entirely in keeping with increased male positivity. It appears the residual pride, values, appearance, structure, self-worth, and patriotism reside long after active service ends. There seems to be evidence that the US forces can “build better men” – and perhaps this could be the basis of an armed forces recruitment/advertising campaign? Conversely, we know that former servicemen can often experience mental health difficulties associated with their lived experiences. This can later be exacerbated to a point where their sense of masculinity means they “bottle up” their feelings or self-medicate with alcohol or substance abuse. These are the men we need to reach out to, and say “it's strong to talk, to take mastery and control over your destiny”. Here, other servicemen are the mental health role models they are most likely to listen to: strong men like them. All of that said, the findings regarding PMI and military service are intriguing and deserve further research in order to fully understand this phenomenon.

7. Engage with men as they are, and as they want to be

When service providers seek to engage men, whether in health, education, community, voluntary activities or any other front of social policy, there is often a temptation to address either the problems men have, at best, or the problems men cause, at worst. Our findings strongly suggest that the values which men aspire to most are traditional, moral frameworks. Men want to think of themselves as honest, reliable, dependable and fair-minded and it is perhaps those traits which agencies should emphasize when they wish to earn the trust and co-operation of male service users. Much previous research into masculinity has negatively focused on the problems men cause, often through the nefarious concept of “toxic masculinity”. This has never been more so than in this post-#MeToo landscape and after every mass shooting or domestic terrorist incident.

Lately, the dialogue has expanded to include the problems men have: such as the male suicide epidemic, depression, anxiety and addiction, while offering scant few solutions.

But Harry's wanted to progress this dialogue forward, by flipping the telescope and focusing on what gives men a positive outlook.

We wanted to find out which American men were the most positive and content, then look at the core values and behavioral attributes that nurture these men's mental wellbeing.

Next, we want to utilize these findings to formulate a roadmap to men's contentment that could help others and help shape government policy around issues that affect men.

What we found was that the overriding majority of American men aren't "in crisis". Rather, they aspire to be decent; they want to work, provide and nurture; they want to be loving, sharing partners and caring friends, and take care of their health and appearance.

Crucially, American men are ready to open up about their mental health which we should see as a real opportunity to help tackle male suicide in particular. Maybe it's that when we see men playing/watching sports, or staying late at work, or not talking about their feelings like women do, that we see only one side of them and miss the rest. It could also be that men are too modest to show off how they really feel, and our survey has provided a rare insight into that aspect of the male psyche.

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Access the full US report on the Male Psychology Network here: <https://malepsychology.org.uk/research-library/>

Find the 2017 UK report on the Male Psychology Network here:

<https://www.malepsychology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Harrys-Masculinity-Report.pdf>