

IN THE FLOW OF CHANGE

# THE 21ST CENTURY MAN IN RUSSIA: HOW TRADITIONAL MASCULINE ROLES ARE TRANSFORMING

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**Traditional gender roles are changing, and men are dealing with the new expectations of masculinity in different ways. However, some things remain unchanged. Gender stereotypes are still embedded in our culture and pervade various spheres of public and private life. In this article, we will try to answer the following question: “What is the man of the 21st century in Russia like?”**

It is often believed in our society that only women suffer from stereotypes. But this is not true. We often hear phrases such as “man should not cry,” “a man should provide for his family,”

“the man is the bread-winner,” or “a real man does not show weakness and does not ask for help.” Males, just like females, are surrounded by stereotypes.

## MEN BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS

The notion of masculinity arises not only from a set of characteristic attributes shared by many men, but also from broader social norms and the overall social environment. The concept of masculinity suggests control and domination of the “stronger” sex over the “weaker” one. This reality manifests itself both in the everyday life of citizens and in the economic, political, and social life of the state.

However, owing to modernizing gender roles, women now have more rights, freedoms and requirements of the opposite sex, while men have

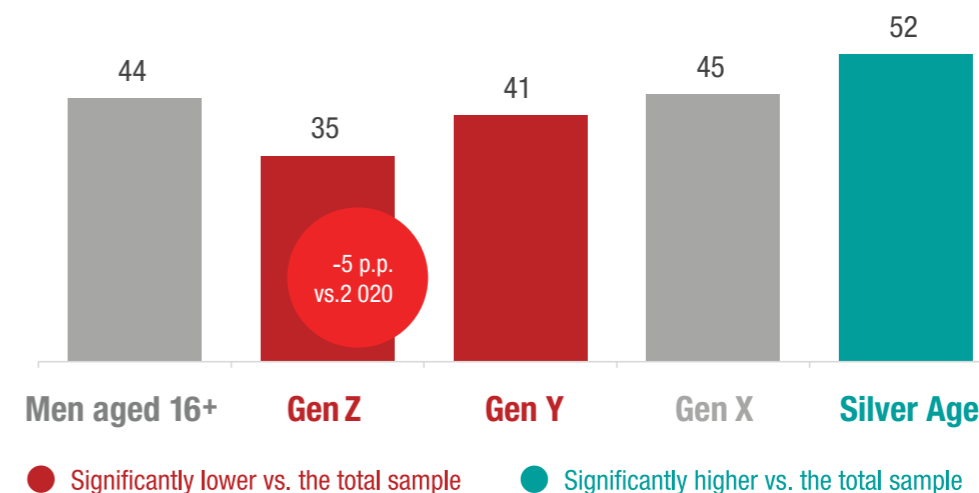
experienced individual and global changes in traditional attitudes to masculinity in this context. German psychologist Stephan Grunewald<sup>1</sup> believes that many men have started identifying themselves in compliance with the expectations of their partner and society, and stopped formulating their own desires and attitudes. Such changes have led to a situation in which a so-called competing or transforming masculinity challenges the traditional perception of man as powerful and dominant, suggesting that he should be perceived primarily as a human being.

Nonetheless, many men are still guided by the traditional masculine norms and male behavioral standards: courage, determination, and the absence of weakness, for example. Almost half of men aged over 16 (44%) believe that men should never cry (Chart 1). Importantly, the most significant reduction in the share of

those who agree that men should never cry over the past year has occurred only among Generation Z. This adherence to social norms of traditional masculinity is not only a reaction to external expectations, but it also represents the prejudices concerned with the behavior of “a real man.”

### Chart 1 **REAL MEN NEVER CRY — NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS**

AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT AMONG MEN AGED 16+ BELONGING TO DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, %



Source: Ipsos. RusIndex study. 2021/H1  
Men aged 16+, cities with 100+ thousand residents

**The modern man finds himself between two competing worlds: the traditional masculine ideal and the modern vision of man as a person with his own interests and characteristics, irrespective of his gender.**

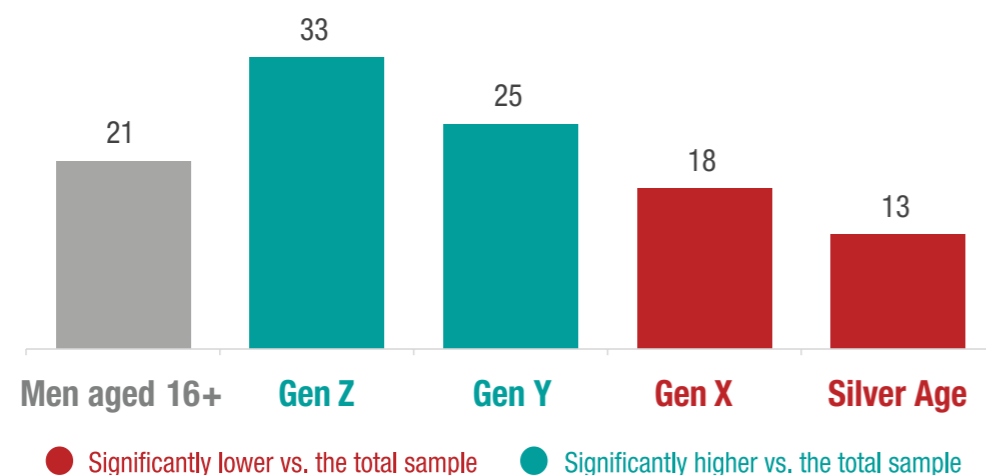
# MEN IN THE GRIP OF CONTRADICTIONS

Let us try to understand the image of a modern Russian man. Today, many men see their masculinity through the lens of society, and strive to meet these expectations. This man is not accustomed to the idea of discovering his own identity, his personal traits, and his needs. The pressure of social expectations together with the absence of new clear reference points in a changing conception of

masculinity feeds a character duality in the modern man. It means that men should take care of themselves, but at the same time stay “masculine”. A study by RusIndex shows that now only one in five men strive to keep up with the latest fashion. This is highest among Generation Z, of whom one in three keep up with the fashion here (Chart 2).

## Chart 2 I TRY TO KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST FASHION IN CLOTHING

AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT AMONG MEN AGED 16+ BELONGING TO DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, %



Source: Ipsos. RusIndex study. 2021/H1  
Men aged 16+, cities with 100+ thousand residents

Many people aged over 25 years encounter the contradiction described here in which one image of man comes into conflict with the other. This results in a situation when modern men live without a clear understanding of their gender identity. Many traditional masculine traits (for example, aggression, domination) are no longer appropriate in today’s world, but new traits have not yet formed. The modern Russian man finds himself in the difficult situation of his traditional views being hybridized, consisting of his own world view, social mindsets, opinions of other people (especially women), and a need to “keep up with the times.”

The traditional male identity gets eroded under this pressure and results in the following dualities:

- **Independence vs. need for approval**  
Men strive to be independent, free, and do what they really want and love to do, but they need approval on the part of women and society.
- **Need for acceptance vs. lack of confidence**  
Men want to be accepted and

loved as they are, but they are not sure that it is possible.

- **Emotionality vs. the frames of traditional mindsets**  
Men are ready to be empathic and express emotions, but often they stay within the framework of the traditional gender mindsets (“head of the family,” “defender”).
- **Looking for new ways to express masculinity**  
It is still important for men to be masculine, but they miss new ways to express masculinity due to the transformation of gender roles and expansion of women’s positions.
- **Resisting the trend towards men’s feminization**  
Men see and realize the process of their gender’s partial “feminization”, especially in the west, but they are not ready to accept it or to follow such a trend.

The described mindsets largely reflect the Russians’ cultural identity (traditionalism, passive behavior, downcast culture) that is undergoing transformation too. Russian man is changing along with them.

# DEVELOPMENT OF MASCULINITY TRENDS

What will happen to Russian men in the future? It is clear that modern men and the masculinity associated with them continue to undergo significant changes. Let us try to highlight several potential directions in which men will be developing and changing along with the emerging trends:

- **Attitudes toward their appearance** The role of self-care is significantly increasing, as it is important to look appealing and well-groomed for self esteem and professional advancement.
- **Their own wishes** Men independently choose their

profession, hobby, interests with minimum regard for the social perception of their choice.

- **Deriving pleasure from life** Men pay attention to their “self”, which is perceived as an important in order to derive pleasure from life.
- **Sharing responsibility** Men will be more deeply engaged in household chores and raising children. The trend toward sharing financial responsibilities will continue while men will preserve the status of “family breadwinner.”

- **Preserving basic masculinity traits**

Despite their transformation, the main associated positive traits (courage, bravery, heroism) will remain relevant to most men.

*“Today man is a combination of several factors – he has to be able to earn money, be a good husband, attentive, devote time to children, look good, always wear stylish and fashionable clothes. The values have*

*changed – now being a simple worker is not prestigious and sometimes even humiliating.”*

*Sergey, 34 years old, Ekaterinburg*

Today, brands have a good opportunity to become a direct participant in the transformation of modern men, helping them cope with uncertainty, and to find their true selves and their own place within the modernizing gender roles and Russian society in general.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The role and status of traditional masculinity is eroding, raising the following question: What does it mean to be a man today? The modern Russian man finds himself in a dual situation: traditional values compete with the current changes in society and gender roles.
- A reorientation of man in the context of the new masculinity can be expected within the next 5-10 years.
- In such a situation, it is important to help men find a new meaning of masculinity by promoting positive men’s values and minimizing the traditional and irrelevant perception of masculinity as dominance.

