



OPINION

By Dr Julie Hannan

I'm a psychologist and I'm seeing more men than ever rejecting stereotypical masculinity

I see men who want to feel appreciated for who they are, not what they do or provide

January 21, 2025 11:00 am



This isn't an easy transition for men (Photo: Getty Images)

Fifteen years ago, as a private psychologist, I predominantly saw women in [therapy](#), but now my practice has a fifty-fifty split of men and women aged 35 and older seeking support.

I [increasingly see men](#) dissatisfied with their relationships and careers, wanting more meaningful connections, and longing for a more purposeful life. And I sense that our society is on the verge of a male fight for change, acceptance and freedom from deep-seated societal roles and expectations based on gender.

In her classic 1999 book, *Understanding Men's Passages*, Gail Sheehy wrote that the secret to happiness for men in midlife is connection rather than competition. I couldn't agree more.

In some of my clients, I am seeing traditional masculine norms losing their appeal as men begin to cast off gender stereotypes, [become more in touch with their feelings](#), and want a relationship that allows them to be who they really want to be. I see men struggling to throw off the constraints of their patriarchal upbringing and the social constructs of society that imprison them, having led many to overvalue the masculine aspect of their persona, playing the strong, silent type, the alpha male, focused on their outer world.

Now, some men long to be themselves, looking for a more meaningful, more profound connection with a partner and less superficiality in their lives and wanting to focus more on their inner world. They want to reduce their hours at work and spend more time with their kids. They want to feel valued and appreciated for who they are, not what they do or provide. They want to feel desired and change sexual scripts and traditional gender norms, which suggest they should be more dominant during sexual encounters and initiate sexual activity. They want to be listened to, be seen for the person they are, and want a partner who can embrace these new changes.

This movement away from playing the strong, silent type, the alpha male, starkly contrasts with the promotion of the [manosphere](#) and [misogyny](#) promoted by some US leaders and podcasters.

A problem with gender expectations is that they prescribe how we should be rather than recognising and prioritising who we actually are, which can limit happiness. Bonnie Ware's bestselling book [The Top Five Regrets of the Dying](#) found the top regret was: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me."

READ NEXT



■ VERONICA LEE

I tried to declutter my house - and was

People change throughout life, and cultural norms shift with time. The man who valued strength, status, and power in his twenties may now have a different value system in his forties, fifties and sixties, prioritising family, contribution, love, connection, and compassion.

Analyst Carl Jung's theory of individuation, which is the process of self-discovery and personal development,

surprised at the effect it had on me

[READ MORE](#)

believed that integrating both masculine and feminine qualities within the psyche was crucial for achieving psychological wholes and self-realisation – essentially, becoming all that one can be.

Embracing what has traditionally been associated with “feminine” traits such as compassion, sensitivity, intuition, nurturing, and emotional depth within a man’s psyche can lead to a more balanced and integrated personality.

This isn’t an easy transition for men, and their change can often be met with resistance from partners who did not necessarily sign up for a man in touch with and embracing his feminine side. They don’t necessarily want their partner to change if his role has always been that of the stoic provider. Perhaps it isn’t coincidental that the rates of “grey” divorces are a rising trend, with [divorces](#) in the UK now most common in the [45 to 49 age group](#).

Of course, the same applies to women. Many women are beginning their own transitional journey at midlife. As the kids leave home, many midlife women see a reduction in caring responsibilities and begin to embrace traditional “masculine” traits within their psyche, such as assertiveness, strength, independence, and autonomy.

Women are working in more significant numbers than ever before, with menopausal women now the fastest-growing demographic in the workplace. With an increasing number of strong female role models, women in their forties and fifties are encouraged to have less fear, more ambition, less apology, and more confidence. They are becoming more assertive and more vocal, putting themselves first, lifting weights while balancing their hormones, and striving for a greater work-life balance.

When both masculine and feminine sides of the psyche are embraced, a new connectedness and shared experience can emerge for both genders. Men and women can understand and support each other emotionally and intimately as valued companions.

If these environmental and societal conditions were met, we might see an improvement in mental health and an uptick in midlife men’s happiness, and that would be a wonderful thing. Watch this space.

[Dr Julie Hannan](#) is a chartered psychologist and psychotherapist and the author of [The Midlife Crisis Handbook](#) (Morency; £10.88)