

## LAZY, DRUNKEN, PROMISCUOUS, RUDE: WHY THE UK LOVES TO HATE YOUNG WHITE MEN

New poll results suggest white men in their 20s have become the most derided social group in Britain

Young British white men are in trouble, it seems, as they are the most despised group in Britain, according to a series of polls into the public's attitudes to each other. British people expect young white men to get drunk, be lazy, rude and to have several sexual partners. It also appears that young white men are the demographic group least likely to go to university. To be sure, the view that young white men are losing out picks up on real historical shifts. Until the 1960s most white working-class boys expected to learn manual skills from their older peers, often through apprenticeships or on-the-job training. Coalminers, engine drivers, shipbuilders and the like had a heroic resonance which was recognised – sometimes unwillingly – throughout British society. This was a world in which young white men, loyal members of trade unions, could feel self-respect and a sense that they were subordinate to no one.

Over the last 50 years this world has collapsed. Swaths of deindustrialisation have removed vast areas of skilled manual work, with their attendant cultures of respectability and autonomy, leaving young men having to navigate a casual and insecure labour market. Apprenticeship in its old forms virtually collapsed in the 1970s, after which point the only way to learn skills became through formal academic routes, where working-class boys fared relatively badly compared with middle-class kids. In place of white male working-class communities characterised by skill and pride, a new economy of insecure service-sector jobs offers very little in the way of security or self-respect. The young working-class men of today have to learn to play by the rules of the game – and rules not of their own making – if they are to gain employment and make their way in the world. As a result, cultures of shame and redundancy have proliferated in many old industrial areas. This has been compounded by the decline of trade unions and the shift of the Labour party in search of middle-class voters.

Young white men might indeed feel that they have no obvious place in British society. The old bastions of white male working-class culture have been gentrified. In place of the traditional routine of the factory whistle blowing at noon on Saturday, and the men going to football matches at 3 p.m. after lunch in the pub, football has become a modern bastion of the middle and upper classes, characterised by expensive tickets and corporate hospitality. However, there is more to it than this. We should not think that getting to university is a passport to a secure and lucrative career. What matters now is the kind of institution that you attend. In the 1970s, when only 10% of young people went to universities, attendance at any institution was prized and seen to be a marker of social mobility. In an era of mass higher education, with more than 40% of young people going to university, there is huge internal stratification within higher education. It is access to elite universities, especially Oxbridge and the —golden triangle of elite London colleges, that conveys the most advantages. These elite universities continue to be bastions of largely white privilege. Black and ethnic minorities by contrast, especially British-born minorities, are more likely to be concentrated in new universities where there are fewer resources and where graduate prospects, especially for high-level professional and managerial jobs, are considerably worse. Similar issues arise for gender inequality. While women now outnumber men among university students, and while they have succeeded in moving into some highly sought-after professional pathways – such as in law and medicine – they are still very much the minority in some prestigious academic specialisms which lead to well-paid careers – engineering, information technology, economics, and science-based subjects more generally. Although women have improved their position compared with men, there continue to be striking inequalities, especially at the highest levels. When the details of the YouGov poll are examined, a much more complicated picture emerges, and there is ample evidence for the power of racism. The group which the public sees as least honest and most violent is young Pakistani men, with young black Caribbean men, Polish middle-aged men and Muslim men also scoring lower here than young white men. The message is therefore much more

complicated than that young white men form the most marginal group in Britain today.

As the clear boundary between the world of manual working class and non-manual middle class fades, middleincome groups become unsure where they stand. These uncertainties can be mobilised against a variety of groups seen to be beyond the pale and which can therefore be scapegoated to give a sense of reassurance to those who can position themselves in a more positive light. Racism, sexism and classism are alive and kicking in Britain today: as inequality increases, so does the hostile stereotyping and marginalisation of those at the bottom.

0. Young British white men are in trouble because

- a) the public's opinion about them is not favourable enough.
- b) they are considered too promiscuous and less intelligent.
- c) they are the least respected social group in Britain.

8. Before the 1960s, white working-class men

- a) had gained self-respect through independence from trade unions.
- b) used to criticise their older workmates for their lack of support.
- c) were respected, although reluctantly, for their skills.

9. An emerging economy based on deindustrialisation

- a) has undermined prestige in the working class.
- b) offers some security and self-respect in the service-sector jobs.
- c) prioritises apprenticeship over academic learning.

10. If today's working-class youngsters want to reach the job market, they should

- a) adapt to the new circumstances.
- b) make their own rules and play by them.
- c) overcome their feeling of shame.

11. Young white men may feel displaced because

- a) the football tickets have skyrocketed.
- b) the Labour Party has turned their back on them.
- c) the upper-, middle- and working-class habits have shifted.

12. In today's British society, going to university

- a) has stopped being a sign of social mobility.
- b) is a sign of social prestige.
- c) may guarantee a good job.

13. A growing internal stratification within higher education

- a) grants more privileges to favoured elitist groups.
- b) has caused even more overcrowding at universities.
- c) is the result of elitist college education in the vicinity of London.

14. What most affects one's chances to be professionally successful is

- a) one's racial background.
- b) the ethnic minority one belongs to.
- c) the kind of university one goes to.

15. When compared with men, women

- a) are the majority at British universities.
- b) have achieved equality in most sought-after scientific fields.
- c) have already excelled in well-paid careers.

16. The overall message of the poll is that
- a) any marginalised social group can fall victim to stereotyping.
  - b) racism and ageism are still extremely powerful in Britain.
  - c) young white men are not the most despised social group.

### TASK 1

1 - **Get Carter** At a distance of nearly 40 years, Get Carter has as much value as a piece of social history as it does as a thriller. It seems as if director Mike Hodges has thrown his actors into real life – the faces of the old men in the pubs and betting shops and the revellers at the dancehall take the movie into something akin to cinéma vérité. At the centre of it all is Michael Caine who is aided by an ace supporting cast whose portraits are skilfully drawn, as the playwright John Osborne, an unlikely but wholly convincing gang lord, or the future leading role of soap ops Bryan Mosley, as the unlucky Cliff Brumby.

2 - **The Apartment** The germ of the idea for The Apartment had sat in its director notebook for many years; it is the story of a man rising fast at work, one promotion after another, but the secret of his success is that he loans out his apartment to the company executives for their meetings. It's a sordid little set-up but Wilder keeps the movie galloping along so briskly that we can overlook the unpleasantness at first. Wilder shot the picture in 50 days flat and edited it in under a week. It won five Academy Awards, including best picture, best director and best screenplay. Wilder said it was "the picture [of mine] that has the fewest faults; I consider it my masterpiece".

3 - **Breathless** Breathless was Godard's first feature and a demonstration of his love-hate relationship with Hollywood. It was done from a four-page outline, and features the love between Jean Seberg, an American who sells the New York Herald Tribune on the streets and the fetching Paul Belmondo, a fun loving and existentialist idiot on the run after he shoots a cop. His days are numbered and the film moves like a Charlie Parker solo – so hectic you wonder if the alto sax will live out the next 16 bars.

4 - **Hidden** Hidden opens with a long, static shot of a house on a quiet Paris street. Credits roll. Very little happens. A couple leaves the house and the camera pans after the man. On screen, the film fastforwards and suddenly we realise we have been watching a piece of surveillance on video. The tape has turned up, without explanation, at the house of the couple we saw on screen, and they are watching it with us. The film's chilling dramatic effect and the air of intrigue will have you anxious to find out how things turn out. Difficult but rewarding.

5 - **Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind** Boy meets girl. They fall in love. Girl gets fed up with boy. Girl erases all memories of boy from her mind in a dubious brain-zapping procedure. Boy finds out and does the same. This is a romantic movie, Charlie Kaufman-style that charts the side of love that movies usually turn a blind eye to: the dreadful moments that accompany a split-up. Love Actually, it ain't. Joel Barish is a withdrawn, greyish man, played with uncharacteristic restraint by Jim Carrey, while Kate Winslet plays the free-spirited, reckless and prone to dying her hair blue, Clementine Kruczynski. They are skilfully guided by the hand of the resourceful French director Michael Gondry, who proved the perfect match to Kaufman's freewheeling script.

THIS WEEK'S FILMS ON TV Task 1: Which statement is true for each film 1-5?

- A It brings to life an often neglected reality
- B It is considered a personal achievement
- C It is nail biting till the end
- D It may come across as trying too hard to make central characters convincing
- E Its actors had been recommended to the director
- F Its rhythm echoes its title
- G Its secondary characters come across realistically

Which film ...?

- A features someone who later played bigger parts
- B features someone who rose up the ladder quickly
- C is considered challenging but worthwhile
- D opens with a lot of action
- E portrays a character who shows a carefree attitude towards life
- F was based on a brief draft G was originally a book or a play

## TASK 2

Read the sentences and write True if the information can be found in the text, False if the information says the opposite to the text or Not given if the information cannot be found in the text.

1. Wasfia wanted to play with the foreign child's hula hoop. ....
  2. Some of Wasfia's childhood friends secretly rode bikes. ....
  3. Wasfia hula-hooped her way up each mountain. ....
  4. There has been little effort made to help girls and women in Bangladesh until now. ....
- The writer believes that the people of Bangladesh are proud of Wasfia's achievements. ....
6. Wasfia learned to climb in Bangladesh.

### Two remarkable people

#### Keeping an eye on the health of our seas

You might be forgiven for thinking that Lewis Pugh is somewhat out of his mind, particularly since he once swam in water so cold at the North Pole that the cells in his fingers burst. The extreme swimmer then went on to almost drown while swimming in a glacial lake on Mount Everest because of the thin air, and more recently has become the first person to swim long distances across seven seas including the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Black Sea. His motive is crystal clear: to draw the attention of politicians and leaders to the degradation of the environment, particularly our oceans, before it is too late. Lewis would like to see the number of marine protected areas in the world increase from 3 per cent to 10 per cent in an attempt to reverse the damage caused by human activity such as overfishing, polluting and littering. During his expeditions, Lewis has witnessed this environmental destruction first-hand. He's swum over coral reefs bleached by the increase in water temperature, and observed underwater deserts beneath the shallow waters of the Red Sea, devoid of life and strewn with plastic. Pugh believes that nature can recover if it is given space to do so, but the clock is ticking. If we don't start looking after our seas, we may soon have an unsolvable problem on our hands.



#### Hula-hooping for human rights

Wasfia Nazreen first came across a hula hoop as a young girl, when she saw a foreign child who was visiting her native Bangladesh playing with one. Wasfia reluctantly stood by and watched, as in her country it was believed that girls should not play with hula hoops or ride bikes. Now Wasfia is one of the few people in the world to have climbed the Seven Summits, including Everest and Kilimanjaro, and the first to have hula-hooped on each peak. Her reason for doing so: to empower women and girls in a country which discourages them from doing sport. Wasfia has dedicated her life to supporting human rights and has witnessed numerous international humanitarian projects in her homeland to educate and train women and girls, but once too often they have been left with nothing when such projects have stopped running. Wasfia saw that Bangladesh needed to stand up for itself and so she brought together two of her passions, mountaineering and human rights, in order to try and change attitudes towards women in her country. She originally took up climbing while working on humanitarian campaigns in Tibet and Nepal, as in a coastal, primarily flat country like Bangladesh most people have never set eyes on a mountain. Her campaign seems to be doing the trick as fellow countrymen and women are sitting up and taking notice along with the rest of the world.

