Laayak

Checking in on young men and boys in urban India.
This study was commissioned by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies.

**Background to the study**

8 ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

- 6 focus groups were with boys from the age of 14 to 25 years (school to post college)
- 2 focus groups were with post-college girls between 22 and 25 years of age

**PARTICIPANTS**

- Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Delhi
- SEC A and SEC C/D, two distinct parts of the socio-economic spectrum
- Languages known - Hindi/English
  *Non-binary was not a criterion in sample selection

The question asked of these 42 boys and 12 girls was: What does it mean to be a man in India today?

The intention was to understand the anxieties, challenges, and boys' role in relationships.
Summary

No matter what one's economic background, no boy/man is immune to the strict gender norms around masculinity placed on Indian men and boys in today's Indian cities.

The freedom, transgression, and privileges they enjoy come with an unspoken understanding. A boy's success is the ROI that families invest in—the insurance for their old age.

The ideal man is not just a go-getter and winner but also takes care of his family. An achiever who is still tied to his roots.

Society's never-ending scrutiny works as a check so to ensure that boys take their responsibilities seriously. The intention is to prepare the so-called deserving gender for success.

But, if we look closely, expectations are the burden a boy must bear, whether he wants to or not.

While the study gave us many answers, it also raised many essential questions.
Is the freedom that boys enjoy conditional? Do expectations result in anxiety to live up to them? While they enjoy more advantages, does that privilege come with the pressure to perform? Is it time to revisit some of our assumptions about young men and boys?
The world of boys: Responsibility

The world of girls: Restriction
You feel like "chosen one" - aap ko hi karna hai. Even if you have a sister, it is only you who can take care of parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDHOOD</th>
<th>BOYHOOD</th>
<th>ADULTHOOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innocence</td>
<td>Realisation of Responsibility</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>For family issues, we feel like the family (responsibility) is on our shoulders. I am in 10th, and I am small. But I get that feeling as I am maturing. But we can't discuss that with anyone... it is understood aage kya karna hai (what we need to do next).</td>
<td>You feel like chosen one - aap ko hi karna hai. Even if you have a sister, it is only you who can take care of parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mischief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Innocence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing with Friends</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What responsibility looks like

Becoming the ‘Provider’
- Stepping into father's shoes
- Taking care of parents in old age
- Role-model for younger siblings
- Getting younger sister married, brothers settled

Choosing Profession over Passion
- Predictability
- ROI
- Success/ Status

Boundary of Acceptable Emotions
- Display of strength
- Tears are a guarded secret
- Fear, sadness, affection expressed through loud, aggressive behaviour, contempt, stoicism
‘Settle hona’

Material SUCCESS as ROI

Maintaining an honourable image

Or else

Berozgaar
Nikamma
Barbaad
Kaamchor
Naalayak
The path to success is getting **More complicated**

Expansion in employment opportunities, but also a surge in competition

- Not only among boys, but also among girls who are now studying more and scoring much better in exams

The expectations are getting **Much higher**

**Ladki ke laayak banna**
(to be worthy of a girl)

- The confident woman raises the bar
- Looking for someone who is successful, with status and certain lifestyle etc.
Shifting goal posts: A winner at everything he does

**PROVIDE**

The Dutiful Man
Providing for family.
Taking care of everyone's needs.
Uphold Family Honour, Legacy.
Self-sacrificing.
Hard working.

**PROSPERITY**

The Successful Man
Higher social status and in community, neighbourhood.
Great lifestyle.
Competitive.
Winner.
Respected, Envied.

**PRESTIGE**

Status as the ultimate ideal
Highly successful.
Name, fame.
Exceeds expectations.
Admired. Inspirational.
While taking the family along...
Complementing the contradictory pulls

Success and Status

Family and Tradition

Mukesh Ambani as role model
## Reining in the Wild Side

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scrutiny and Judgement</th>
<th>Competitive pressure</th>
<th>Comparison with friends and relatives</th>
<th>Intentions under lens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They comment on hair, dressing and shoes even. Kya jungle ki tarah reh rahe ho.</td>
<td>Any field - ladka hai toh aage rehna chahiye. Otherwise the reaction is - kya sambhalega family ko.</td>
<td>Sharmaji ka beta Tumhari umar waale settle ho gaye hain. Tum kya kar rahe ho.</td>
<td>Humare ghar mein koi bhi galat kaam hota hai, toh naam mujhi pe hota hai. Not possible to have open friendships with girls. Not in public spaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### And discipline by punishment

*Isne kuch galat hi kiya hoga. Isiki galti hogi... bina jaane ladke ko hi daant, maar padti hai...*
Relationships and their Influence
Women in the lives of boys

Nurturing Mother
- Unconditional love
- Protects his human flaws from father, family and society
- However, keeps the pressure alive to be a ‘man’

Unequal Sister
- Aware of their freedom, and lack of privileges for sisters
- Jealousy takes over as girls are pampered and exempt from harsh consequences
Father and Son
Two men in the same boat

Norms around masculinity handed down through generations

- The working father is a shadowy presence in their life
- Initially a relationship of fear and distance
- However, over time, a shift to unsaid understanding
- As the son takes over the responsibility from the father
The gang of boys: bhai, yaar dost

A unique friendship

- Deep empathy and understanding
- Protection - have your back
- Identity defining - shapes beliefs and belonging
Competing to be the ‘most-masculine’ within the group

- Teasing
- Roughhousing
- Beyond teasing, sometimes abuse
- Bullying
  - Body shaming (mota, sukha, gitta, bauna, kalua, chikna)
- Buri sangat
  - Pressurised to conform to group's transgressions - smoking, drinking, stalking or violence
Increasingly conflicted
About their relationship
with the modern, empowered woman

Confident | Ambitious | Independent | Opinionated | Less tolerant of male inadequacies
## Undecided

What to feel about this

<table>
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<tr>
<th>A welcome change</th>
<th>A threat at multiple levels</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Move towards a better society</td>
<td>• Shift in power (that does not benefit men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supportive and supported</td>
<td>• Threat to men, Indian culture and society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Looking forward to a relationship of equals</td>
<td>• Feeling left out as women do well in different walks of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The secret world of Boys
Role Model: The Self-made Man

From Struggler to Successful

- Odds stacked against him
- Hardworking, passionate
- Committed to a goal, focussed
- Admits weaknesses
- Falls, but gets up
- Emerges victorious
Ideal of a Relationship: a ‘jodi’ with a journey

...that stands the test of time

- Childhood Sweetheart/pre-success relationship
- Supports through struggle
- Transformative success
The questions that arise...

Is the freedom that boys enjoy conditional?

Do expectations result in anxiety to live up to them?

While they enjoy more advantages, does that privilege come with the pressure to perform?

Is it time to revisit some of our assumptions about young men and boys?
Thank you