

Laayak

Checking in on young men and boys
in urban India.



Background to the study

This study was commissioned by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies.

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.

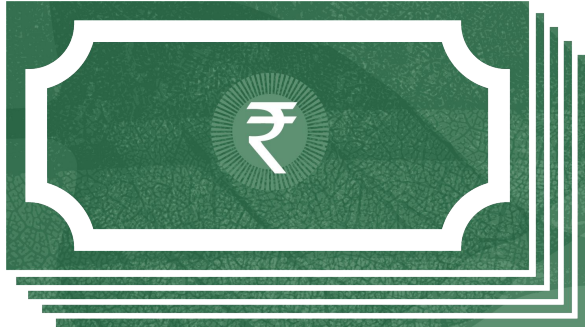
Society's never-ending scrutiny works as a check so to ensure that boys take their responsibilities seriously. The intention is to prepare the so-called deserving gender for success.

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

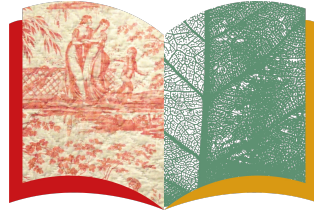
Coming of Age



CHILDHOOD

Innocence

Fun
Freedom
Mischievous
Spontaneous
Happiness
Innocence
Playing with Friends



BOYHOOD

Realisation of
Responsibility

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).



ADULTHOOD

Responsibility

You feel like chosen one - aap ko hi karna hai. Even if you have sister, it is only you who can take care of parents.

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'



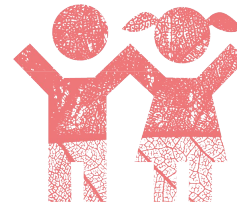
Material SUCCESS
as ROI



Or else



Maintaining an
honourable image

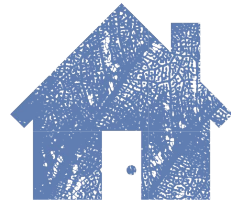


Berozgaar

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 banana
(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

Scrutiny and Judgement

They comment on hair, dressing and shoes even. Kya jungle ki tarah reh rahe ho.

Competitive pressure

Any field - ladka hai toh aage rehna chahiye. Otherwise the reaction is - kya sambhalega family ko.

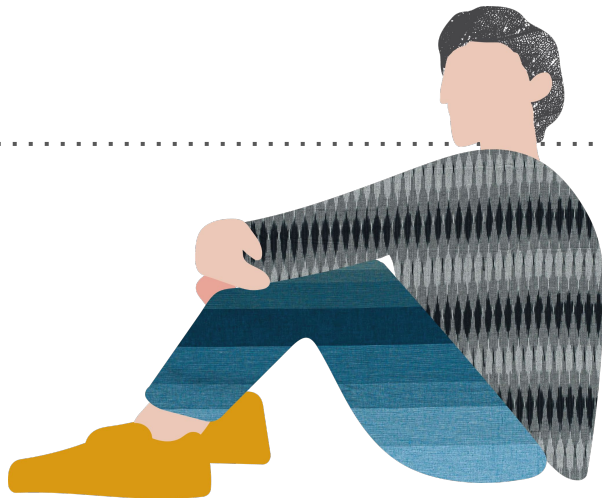
Comparison with friends and relatives

Sharmaji ka beta Tumhari umar waale settle ho gaye hain. Tum kya kar rahe ho.

Intentions under lens

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.



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

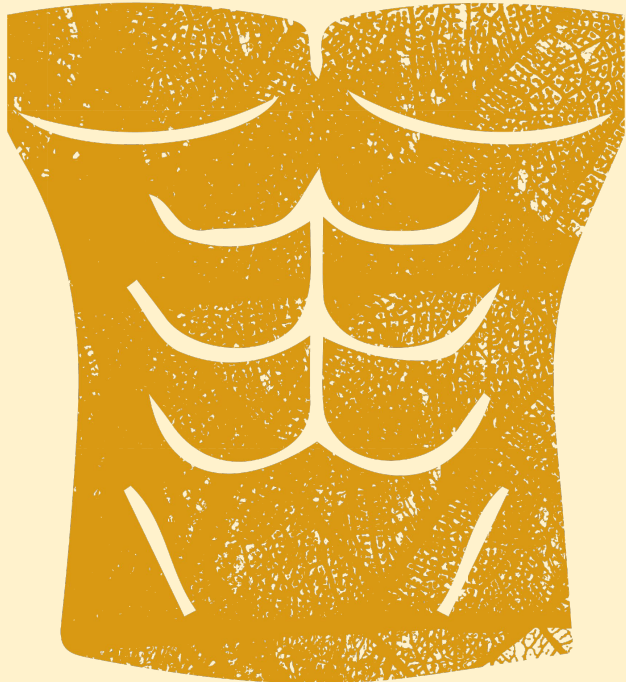
The gang of boys: bhai, yaar dost

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

A welcome change

- Move towards a better society
- Supportive and supported
- Looking forward to a relationship of equals

A threat at multiple levels

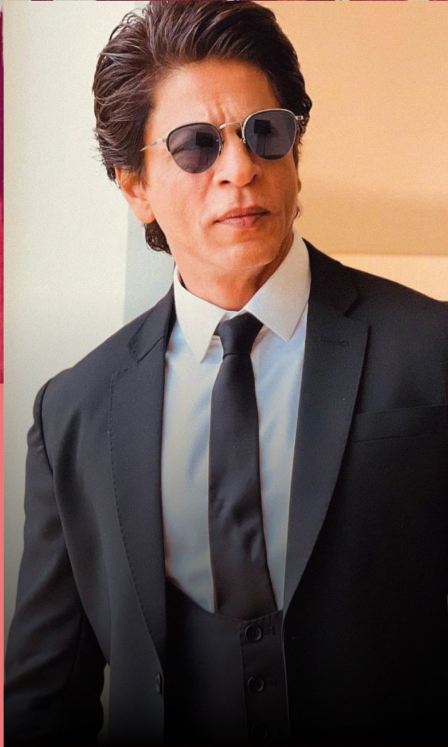
- Shift in power (that does not benefit men)
- Threat to men, Indian culture and society
- Feeling left out as women do well in different walks of life



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