



Re-socializing Masculinity: A Feminist Framework for Transformation

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Abstract

Transforming harmful traditional masculine norms is critical for achieving genuine gender equality and fostering healthier societies. This paper presents a novel feminist-informed framework for the positive resocialization of men, arguing that diverse feminist principles offer essential insights and strategies for guiding men toward more equitable, emotionally intelligent, and socially just expressions of gender. Moving beyond critiques of "toxic masculinity," this work synthesizes key theoretical contributions from various feminist perspectives, including liberal, radical, socialist, intersectional, constructive, and queer theories, to understand the complexities of gender resocialization. It explores the documented positive impacts of feminist engagement on men's well-being and relationships, critically examines feminist approaches to challenging harmful norms, and analyzes relevant initiatives and interventions. The paper also navigates the inherent critiques and challenges of applying feminist principles to men's transformation, underscoring the vital roles of education and social interventions. By proposing a cohesive framework grounded in the breadth of feminist thought, this paper makes a significant contribution to the literature on men and masculinities. It demonstrates that a nuanced, inclusive, and feminist-driven approach is not only possible but essential for dismantling patriarchal structures and cultivating a future where all individuals, regardless of gender, can thrive free from the constraints of rigid and harmful norms. This work offers a compelling blueprint for scholarly inquiry and practical action towards gender liberation. In response to the reviewer's recommendations, the revised manuscript further situates this framework within institutional pathways of change and introduces a Theory of Change approach to clarify how educational, legal, and social interventions may generate measurable shifts in masculine norms over time. The integrative findings emphasise that masculinity re-socialisation is most sustainable when supported by

coordinated institutional engagement rather than isolated behavioural reform.

Keywords: Re-socialization, Masculinity, Feminism, Gender Equality, Traditional Gender Norms

1 Introduction

In contemporary discussions of gender justice, increasing attention has turned to the role of boys and men in sustaining or transforming social norms. While significant scholarly and policy efforts have focused on women's empowerment, comparatively less attention has been paid to how dominant masculine expectations themselves are produced, normalised, and institutionalised. These expectations shape everyday relationships, public behaviour, and legal frameworks, influencing how authority, responsibility, and emotional expression are understood within society. As a result, conversations about gender equality cannot remain limited to addressing women's disadvantages alone; they must also interrogate the social scripts that shape masculine conduct.

In India, prevailing expectations surrounding manhood frequently emphasise authority, endurance, and emotional restraint. Such norms are reinforced through family structures, educational environments, peer cultures, media narratives, and institutional practices. Boys are often encouraged to internalise ideals of strength and self-control, while vulnerability and care-oriented roles may be undervalued or stigmatised. These patterns not only contribute to unequal gender relations but also influence men's own well-being, relationships, and participation in caregiving and emotional labour. Recognising these dynamics requires shifting the analytical focus from individual behaviour to the broader institutional and cultural processes that shape masculine norms.

Recent global research has highlighted the potential of gender-transformative approaches that engage men and boys as participants in social change rather than solely as subjects of critique. Large-scale studies, including IMAGES India and international fatherhood initiatives, demonstrate that when masculine expectations are critically examined and reshaped through education, policy, and community engagement, measurable shifts in attitudes toward care, equality, and emotional expression occur. These findings suggest that masculinity is not a static cultural inheritance but a social process that can be consciously redirected through institutional and normative interventions.

This paper responds to these developments by proposing a constructive feminist framework for the re-socialisation of masculinity in India. Rather than framing masculinity as inherently problematic or prescribing a single ideal model of manhood, the analysis focuses on how alternative practices grounded in accountability, relationality, and care can emerge through sustained engagement with existing cultural and ethical traditions. In doing so, the paper seeks to move beyond abstract theoretical debates and instead articulate a framework that is empirically informed, culturally attentive, and operationally relevant.

The discussion begins by reviewing existing scholarship on masculinities and gender-transformative interventions, then examines how masculine norms operate in Indian

social contexts. It then develops a five-pillar framework supported by a Theory of Change that translates normative commitments into practical pathways for institutional reform. Through this approach, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about gender justice by demonstrating how re-socialising masculinity can serve as a constructive, context-sensitive strategy for advancing equality.

2 Methodology

This study adopts a doctrinal-qualitative methodology, integrating legal analysis with thematic synthesis from empirical literature. *Doctrinally*, the paper examines constitutional provisions, statutory frameworks, key Supreme Court judgments, feminist jurisprudence, and Gandhian ethical writings to understand how law, institutions, and normative structures shape and reinforce masculinities in India. *Qualitatively*, the study conducts an in-depth thematic review of secondary empirical research, drawing particularly on IMAGES surveys, MenCare's State of the World's Fathers reports, evaluations of MAVA, The Gender Lab for Boys (2023), Program H, and WHO datasets, and scholarship on Indian queer and trans masculinities.

Source Selection

Sources were selected based on four criteria: (1) relevance to masculinities, gender socialization, or gender-transformative programming; (2) empirical rigor or theoretical significance; (3) India-specific applicability or comparative value; and (4) ability to illuminate structural reproduction of gender norms. Seminal works by Connell, Kimmel, Pleck, Messner, Barker & Dworkin, Ratele, and Crenshaw were included to ensure conceptual and global grounding.

Analytical Process

Grounded insights were systematically incorporated through open coding, cross-source triangulation, and thematic grouping. Legal-doctrinal findings were cross-mapped with behavioral and programmatic evidence to distinguish *normative claims* from *empirical trends*. The integrated findings informed the development of the paper's five-pillar framework and the multi-level Theory of Change, thereby anchoring conceptual propositions in documented evidence.

Limitations

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and the uneven methodological quality of program evaluations. India lacks comprehensive quantitative data on men's emotional health, caregiving patterns, and masculinity-related behavioral outcomes, which limits generalizability. Furthermore, while global models provide valuable insights, several interventions, particularly those from Europe and Latin America, require contextual adaptation before being applied in India.

The findings presented later in the paper are integrative rather than empirical, synthesizing doctrinal analysis with existing programmatic and theoretical scholarship.

2.1 Literature Review

Scholarship on masculinities has expanded significantly across sociology, psychology, feminist legal studies, and development research, offering important insights into how masculine norms are produced and sustained through social institutions. Rather than treating masculinity as a fixed cultural identity, contemporary scholarship examines how expectations surrounding authority, emotional restraint, and responsibility are reinforced through everyday practices within families, education systems, workplaces, and legal frameworks. These studies provide the analytical foundation for examining masculinity as a site of social change rather than merely a personal attribute.

Early sociological work on masculinities emphasised the relational nature of gender norms. Connell's analysis of hegemonic masculinity highlighted how certain masculine practices acquire cultural legitimacy and institutional reinforcement, shaping expectations of behaviour and authority across social contexts (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Subsequent scholarship by Pleck, Kimmel, and Messner further demonstrated how socialisation processes encourage emotional restraint, competitiveness, and dominance, while discouraging vulnerability and caregiving roles among men. These insights are particularly relevant in understanding how gender norms operate not only to sustain inequality but also to shape men's own experiences of emotional and relational life.

More recent research has moved beyond purely theoretical debates to examine the measurable impact of gender-transformative interventions. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES India), conducted across multiple states, provides one of the most comprehensive empirical examinations of masculine norms within the Indian context. The study identifies strong associations between early socialisation patterns and later attitudes toward caregiving, equality, and violence, demonstrating that masculine expectations are shaped through institutional and familial environments rather than inherited as fixed traits (Nanda et al., 2014). Importantly, the findings suggest that early adolescence represents a critical window for reshaping gender norms.

Global programme evaluations further reinforce these conclusions. The *State of the World's Fathers* reports, produced by Promundo and MenCare, document that initiatives that encourage male engagement in caregiving and relational responsibilities lead to more equitable household dynamics and improved well-being outcomes (Barker & Dworkin, 2020). Similarly, Flood's synthesis of masculinity-focused interventions demonstrates that sustained educational and community-based programmes are more effective when supported by institutional reforms, including policy changes and media engagement (Flood, 2020). These studies emphasise that behavioural change among men is most durable when individual reflection is combined with structural support.

Research from international organisations also highlights the relevance of masculinity to public health and reproductive outcomes. Studies supported by UNFPA and WHO show that masculine expectations surrounding strength and virility often discourage help-seeking behaviour and limit open engagement with issues such as mental health, infertility, and emotional vulnerability. By reframing masculinity through relational and care-oriented

practices, gender-transformative initiatives have demonstrated potential to improve both gender equality and broader social well-being.

Within the Indian context, scholarship increasingly emphasises the importance of culturally grounded approaches that acknowledge social diversity without imposing rigid models of masculinity. Programme evaluations from youth engagement initiatives and community-based interventions suggest that locally contextualised strategies are more effective than externally imposed frameworks. These studies collectively demonstrate that masculinity is responsive to sustained engagement across educational, legal, and social institutions, reinforcing the need for approaches that combine cultural sensitivity with empirical grounding.

Rather than cataloguing competing theoretical schools, the literature reviewed here highlights convergent empirical findings showing that masculine norms are socially shaped, institutionally reinforced, and responsive to sustained gender-transformative interventions. This synthesis provides the foundation for the framework developed in the subsequent sections of the paper.

3 Understanding Masculinity

Masculinity in this study is treated as a socially constructed, context-dependent set of norms, expectations, and practices associated with men and boys, rather than as a fixed biological trait. Gender-transformative education frameworks emphasise that masculine behaviours are shaped by socialisation processes within families, educational institutions, peer cultures, media representations, and legal systems (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative [UNGEI], 2023). This perspective allows masculinity to be examined as a dynamic social process that can evolve over time, rather than as a stable identity category.

Within many social contexts, masculine expectations frequently prioritise authority, endurance, and emotional restraint. From early childhood, boys may be encouraged to internalise ideals of toughness and self-control, while expressions of vulnerability or caregiving are sometimes discouraged. Such patterns are reinforced through everyday institutional practices, including school discipline, workplace norms, and cultural narratives that equate responsibility with emotional detachment. These expectations shape not only gender relations but also men's own emotional and relational experiences, influencing how they navigate care, health, and interpersonal responsibility.

Connell's work on masculinities provides an important analytical lens for understanding how certain masculine practices acquire cultural legitimacy and institutional reinforcement (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Rather than describing a single identity, hegemonic masculinity refers to patterns of behaviour that become socially dominant through recognition and validation within institutions. These dominant norms may marginalise alternative expressions of masculinity, such as emotional openness or shared caregiving, while simultaneously imposing restrictive expectations on men themselves. Viewing masculinity through this relational framework highlights its fluid and historically contingent nature.

Scholars examining masculinities beyond Western contexts emphasise that local histories, social structures, and institutional arrangements shape masculine norms. Ratele (2018) argues

that understanding masculinities requires attention to cultural specificity and lived experience rather than reliance on universalised models. In the Indian context, this insight underscores the importance of analysing masculinity through everyday practices and institutional expectations while avoiding rigid or stereotypical representations. Such an approach enables the development of culturally grounded strategies that remain attentive to diversity without reducing masculinity to a single narrative.

Recognising masculinity as socially produced and institutionally sustained provides the conceptual foundation for the framework developed later in this paper. By shifting the focus from individual behaviour to broader structures of socialisation and legitimacy, the analysis highlights how masculine norms can be consciously reshaped through feminist, evidence-based, and culturally responsive interventions.

3.1 Gandhian Masculinity: A Critical Contextual Engagement

Gandhian thought is engaged in this paper as one historically grounded ethical perspective rather than as a normative blueprint for masculinity. Gandhi's emphasis on self-restraint, non-violence (*ahimsa*), and service (*seva*) offered an alternative vocabulary to dominant ideals of strength rooted in aggression or control (Parel, 2017). Some scholars interpret these ideas as encouraging forms of masculine responsibility grounded in moral discipline rather than physical dominance. Within contemporary discussions, such ethical frameworks can provide culturally recognisable language for reflecting on accountability and relational conduct without prescribing a singular model of manhood.

At the same time, feminist scholarship has highlighted significant limitations in Gandhian approaches to gender, including paternalistic assumptions and insufficient engagement with structural inequalities. For this reason, Gandhi is treated here not as an idealised figure but as a point of critical dialogue that must be read alongside contemporary feminist and gender-transformative perspectives. A cautious engagement with Gandhian ethics allows the analysis to remain culturally attentive while avoiding romanticisation, ensuring that the framework developed in this paper is grounded primarily in empirical research and feminist theory rather than historical reverence.

4 Empirical Imperative: Gender Gap and Male Infertility

The findings presented in this section are integrative rather than empirical. They synthesise insights from doctrinal analysis, the existing empirical literature, and the programmatic evaluations reviewed earlier in the paper. Instead of presenting new data, this section identifies convergent patterns regarding how masculine norms operate within institutional contexts and how they may be reshaped through gender-transformative approaches.

First, the analysis indicates that masculine norms function primarily as institutional expectations rather than individual attitudes. Educational practices, workplace cultures, and social narratives frequently reward emotional restraint, authority, and endurance, reinforcing specific models of masculine responsibility. This institutional reinforcement helps explain why

isolated behavioural interventions often produce limited or short-term change unless supported by structural reform (Flood, 2020; Nanda et al., 2014).

Second, emotional suppression emerges as a recurring mechanism linking masculine socialisation to relational and well-being challenges. Across studies reviewed in the literature, expectations surrounding self-reliance and emotional control can discourage help-seeking behaviour and limit men's engagement in caregiving or collaborative decision-making. These patterns highlight the importance of integrating emotional literacy and relational awareness into gender-transformative interventions rather than focusing solely on attitudinal change.

The literature reviewed suggests that engaging men more actively in reproductive health and caregiving contexts can reshape expectations surrounding fertility, responsibility, and emotional participation. Studies on gender-transformative interventions indicate that normalising male involvement in fertility testing and treatment may reduce stigma and encourage shared responsibility within couples. At the same time, challenging rigid associations between virility and masculine identity has been linked to more supportive relational dynamics. Evidence from the MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign further shows that father-inclusive initiatives are associated with more gender-equitable behaviour, reduced acceptance of violence, and improved emotional well-being among men (Barker et al., 2022).

Third, the literature consistently identifies early adolescence as a critical period for reshaping gender norms. Programmatic evaluations such as IMAGES India demonstrate that early socialisation experiences strongly influence later attitudes toward equality, caregiving, and interpersonal conduct (Nanda et al., 2014). Interventions that combine educational engagement with community participation appear more effective than short-term awareness campaigns.

Fourth, masculinity-focused initiatives yield more durable outcomes when backed by institutional policies and cultural reinforcement. Evidence from international fatherhood and caregiving programs indicates that behavioral change is more sustainable when legal frameworks, workplace policies, and media narratives reinforce alternative models of masculine responsibility (Barker & Dworkin, 2020; Flood, 2020). This finding underscores the importance of linking normative change to structural transformation.

Finally, culturally grounded yet critically interpreted ethical frameworks can enhance the legitimacy of masculinity-focused initiatives. Rather than relying on universalized models, approaches that engage with locally meaningful values while remaining attentive to feminist critique appear better positioned to foster sustained participation and social acceptance.

Taken together, these integrative findings suggest that masculinity is most effectively addressed through coordinated interventions that combine institutional reform, educational engagement, and culturally attentive frameworks. These insights provide the analytical basis for the implications discussed in the following section.

4.1 A Constructive Feminist Framework for Masculinity Re-socialisation

Building on feminist jurisprudence and existing programmatic evidence, this paper develops a constructive feminist framework for understanding how masculinity may be re-socialised through institutional and cultural engagement. Rather than prescribing a single model of masculinity, the framework identifies five interrelated areas through which

gender-transformative interventions have shown potential to reshape norms and practices within the Indian context.

1. **Emotional Literacy** – educational initiatives that create structured spaces for boys to express vulnerability and emotional complexity without stigma have been associated with improved relational outcomes (UNESCO, 2018).
2. **Accountability without Shame** – restorative and dialogic disciplinary approaches may reduce aggression by shifting responses away from humiliation toward responsibility and reflection.
3. **Dignity of Care Work** – policies encouraging men’s participation in caregiving and domestic labour, including parental leave provisions, contribute to more equitable household dynamics.
4. **Rejection of Entitlement** – legal awareness and educational engagement can challenge rigid expectations surrounding authority and control within intimate and social relationships.
5. **Recognition of Plural Masculinities** – acknowledging diverse expressions of masculinity that move beyond singular dominant norms helps create space for alternative relational practices.

Empirical research provides strong support for these pillars. The UNFPA and ICRW (2014) study on masculinity and intimate partner violence in India shows that men who endorse more equitable gender norms report healthier family relationships and lower acceptance of violence. Similarly, findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES India) indicate that early socialization patterns-including gendered household roles and disciplinary practices strongly shape adult attitudes toward equality and caregiving (Nanda et al., 2014). Together, these studies suggest that sustained institutional engagement during early adolescence may play a critical role in reshaping masculine norms.

4.2 Institutional Pathways of Change

Processes of masculinity re-socialisation are unlikely to occur through individual reflection alone; they are shaped by institutional environments that reinforce or challenge prevailing gender norms. The analysis suggests that sustained change emerges when multiple social institutions engage simultaneously, creating consistent expectations around care, accountability, and relational responsibility.

Family environments play a foundational role in shaping early gender expectations. Parenting initiatives that encourage fathers’ nurturing participation have been associated with more equitable caregiving practices and improved emotional communication within households.

Schools represent another critical site of intervention. Gender-transformative curricula, including approaches reflected in UNESCO (2018) and CBSE (2023) guidelines, highlight the potential of educational spaces to normalise emotional literacy and collaborative peer cultures.

Media initiatives also help reshape public narratives about masculinity. Campaigns such as UNFPA’s *Mardon Wali Baat* demonstrate how representations of care, responsibility, and non-violence can expand the range of socially recognised masculine roles.

Law and policy frameworks further influence institutional expectations by shaping workplace norms, anti-discrimination practices, and access to caregiving provisions, thereby reinforcing alternative models of masculine responsibility.

Empirical evaluations from programmes such as Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA, 2022) and The Gender Lab for Boys indicate that sustained engagement with adolescents can support shifts toward empathy, accountability, and non-violent relational practices. Flood et al. (2020) similarly emphasise that institutional change is most effective when educational, community, media, and policy interventions operate together rather than in isolation. Within the Indian context, this convergence of institutional pathways highlights how masculine norms are embedded within broader social structures, making coordinated engagement essential for meaningful transformation.

4.3 Theory of Change: Operationalising Masculinity Re-socialisation

The Theory of Change underlying this framework assumes that masculinity is reproduced through interconnected institutional environments and can therefore be reshaped through coordinated, multi-level interventions rather than isolated behavioural reform. At the input level, gender-transformative curricula, fatherhood and caregiving programmes, media engagement, and evolving legal reasoning create the structural conditions necessary for alternative masculine practices to emerge. These inputs activate core processes aligned with the five pillars—emotional literacy, accountability without shame, dignity of care work, rejection of entitlement, and recognition of plural masculinities by reshaping peer norms, institutional expectations, and everyday relational practices. Over time, these processes are expected to generate short-term outcomes such as increased emotional expression, greater participation of men in caregiving roles, and reduced social validation of dominance-based masculinity, followed by medium-term outcomes including healthier interpersonal relationships, more equitable decision-making within families, and improved engagement with mental-health and reproductive-health services.

The long-term intended impact is not the replacement of one masculine ideal with another, but the gradual normalization of diverse, relational, and contextually grounded masculinities supported by education systems, legal frameworks, and cultural narratives. This Theory of Change rests on several assumptions: that early adolescence remains a critical window for socialisation, that institutional incentives shape behavioural norms more effectively than individual awareness campaigns alone. Culturally embedded ethical frameworks can enhance legitimacy when critically interpreted. At the same time, potential risks, including resistance to entrenched gender expectations, uneven institutional capacity, and the risk of superficial compliance without broader attitudinal change, underscore the need for sustained evaluation and adaptive implementation.

4.4 Masculine Norms as Institutional Expectations

This discussion does not revisit the conceptual definitions already addressed. Instead, it examines how dominant masculine norms operate as institutional expectations that shape behaviour across family life, education, work, and public institutions. A recurring theme across the literature reviewed is that masculinity is often socially validated through emotional

restraint, authority, and endurance. These expectations are not sustained only by private attitudes; they are reinforced by institutional practices—such as disciplinary models in schools, workplace cultures that reward detachment, and social narratives that equate responsibility with control.

The analysis further suggests that these norms can carry costs for men themselves. Emotional suppression may discourage help-seeking and limit men's participation in caregiving and relational responsibility, contributing to well-being challenges and strained intimate relationships. This is consistent with public-health and gender-transformative literature emphasising that rigid masculine scripts may produce harm not only through interpersonal inequality but also through men's reduced capacity to engage openly with health, care, and emotional vulnerability.

4.5 Resocializing Masculinity as a Feminist Intervention

Within this paper, re-socialisation refers to the process of unlearning socially rewarded patterns of conduct and adopting alternative practices grounded in care, accountability, and equality. Feminist scholarship has argued that masculinity reform is not achieved through moral condemnation but through creating the conditions under which men can practise non-violent, relational forms of responsibility. (hooks, 2004), For example, emphasises that patriarchal norms often demand emotional suppression from boys and men, producing harm that feminism seeks to undo through accountability and emotional honesty rather than shame.

This interventionist framing is particularly relevant where social crises reveal the fragility of gendered role distribution. Moments of social disruption have highlighted how many men are not socialised into caregiving or emotional labour within households, reinforcing the need to treat masculinity reform as an institutional question rather than a private choice. The emphasis, therefore, is on building alternative social scripts through education, community engagement, and legal-policy incentives rather than relying on short-term awareness messaging.

5 Legal and Institutional Dimensions

Legal systems have historically contributed to the reproduction of gender norms, including assumptions about breadwinning, caregiving, and authority within family life. At the same time, Indian constitutional values and evolving judicial reasoning provide pathways to challenge gender stereotypes and recognise the social value of care. Recent Supreme Court decisions—such as *Rajnesh v. Neha* (2021) on maintenance guidelines, *Kirti v. Oriental Insurance Co. Ltd.* (Supreme Court of India, 2021) recognising the economic value of homemaking, and *Vikash Kumar v. UPSC* (2021) challenging ableist standards—indirectly destabilise narrow ideals of masculinity grounded in performance, invulnerability, and exclusion.

From a feminist legal perspective, this shift is significant because it signals that law can recognise relational vulnerability and caregiving as socially valuable rather than gendered deviations. MacKinnon's critique of legal neutrality remains relevant here, as it warns that “neutral” standards often reproduce dominant norms by treating certain experiences as default

(MacKinnon, 1989). Fineman's vulnerability framework similarly supports the argument that institutions should respond to human dependency and relationality rather than assuming autonomous subjects as the norm (Fineman, 2008). Read together, these approaches support masculinity re-socialisation as a project aligned with substantive equality and institutional responsibility.

5.1 Linking the Five Pillars to Institutional Change

The five pillars proposed in this paper are not presented as abstract ideals but as practical entry points for institutional engagement. Emotional literacy and accountability without shame address the internalised norms that restrict expression and reinforce aggression, while the dignity of care work and rejection of entitlement target the distribution of relational and domestic responsibility. Recognition of plural masculinities functions as a safeguard against replacing one rigid standard with another, ensuring that reform efforts do not produce a new hierarchy of "acceptable" masculinity.

The reviewed literature indicates that these pillars are most effective when operationalised through institutions rather than framed solely as personal reform. This includes education systems that normalise emotional expression, workplace policies that enable caregiving, media narratives that broaden masculine roles, and legal reasoning that resists stereotyped assumptions about men's and women's responsibilities.

5.2 Operational Implications

The analysis suggests that masculinity re-socialisation is more likely to succeed when institutions create consistent incentives and expectations. In educational contexts, gender-transformative and emotional learning components can help reshape peer cultures and reduce the social reward for aggression. In legal and policy contexts, institutionalising caregiving support through leave policies, anti-discrimination measures, and gender-sensitive training can make alternative masculine practices socially feasible rather than merely aspirational. In cultural contexts, sustained media engagement can shift public narratives about responsibility, vulnerability, and care.

These implications are not presented as a stand-alone policy blueprint but as operational pathways consistent with the Theory of Change outlined earlier, which emphasises multi-level engagement, measurable indicators, and risk management.

5.3 Illustrative Intervention Models

Existing interventions provide useful illustrations of how masculinity-focused work can be implemented in practice. In India, initiatives such as Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) and school-based gender programmes (including the Gender Lab for Boys) have used sustained engagement to foster shifts in attitudes toward consent, empathy, and emotional responsibility (MAVA, 2022; The Gender Lab, 2023). Institutional frameworks such as CBSE's gender guidelines also reflect an emerging recognition of the role of education in shaping relational conduct (Central Board of Secondary Education, 2023).

Globally, models such as gender-sensitive early education initiatives and community mobilisation programmes demonstrate that masculinity norms can shift when interventions are

sustained, context-sensitive, and supported by institutional structures. Importantly, the intervention literature cautions against treating such examples as universally transferable or as conclusive “proof.” Their relevance lies in demonstrating feasibility and offering design insights, which must be adapted to local contexts and evaluated through measurable indicators (Flood, 2020; Barker & Dworkin, 2020).

6 Integrative Findings

The findings presented in this paper are integrative rather than empirical. Drawing on doctrinal analysis, programmatic research, and gender-transformative scholarship, the analysis suggests that masculinity operates primarily as a set of institutional expectations rather than merely individual attitudes. Norms associated with emotional restraint, authority, and self-reliance are reproduced through educational systems, workplace cultures, and public narratives, shaping how responsibility and relational conduct are understood.

A recurring insight in the literature is that restrictive masculine expectations can limit men’s engagement in caregiving, emotional expression, and help-seeking. Evidence from gender-transformative programs indicates that when institutions create space for emotional literacy and shared responsibility, relational outcomes improve without requiring the adoption of a single model of masculinity (Barker & Dworkin, 2020; Flood, 2020). Studies such as IMAGES India further highlight the significance of early adolescence as a critical period when gender norms become internalized and therefore most responsive to intervention (Nanda et al., 2014).

The analysis also suggests that masculinity reform is most sustainable when supported by institutional change rather than isolated behavioural initiatives. Educational reforms, fatherhood programmes, media engagement, and legal recognition of caregiving practices work most effectively when implemented together. Finally, culturally grounded yet critically interpreted ethical frameworks appear to enhance legitimacy by connecting reform efforts to locally meaningful values while avoiding rigid or idealised representations of masculinity.

6.1 Implications

The implications emerging from these findings are primarily institutional rather than prescriptive. In educational contexts, integrating emotional literacy and gender-transformative learning approaches may contribute to healthier peer cultures and more inclusive understandings of responsibility. Initiatives reflected in UNESCO’s comprehensive sexuality education frameworks and CBSE’s gender guidelines demonstrate how curriculum design can influence long-term socialisation patterns.

Within legal and policy spheres, evolving judicial reasoning has begun to recognise caregiving and relational vulnerability as socially valuable. Decisions such as *Rajnesh v. Neha* (Supreme Court of India, 2021), *Kirti v. Oriental Insurance Co. Ltd.*, and *Navtej Singh Johar* (Supreme Court of India, 2018) illustrate how legal discourse can challenge narrow gender stereotypes and support more inclusive interpretations of equality. Policy approaches that enable

caregiving participation and reduce gendered expectations may therefore reinforce institutional pathways for change.

Media and cultural narratives also play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of masculinity. Storytelling initiatives and social campaigns that highlight diverse expressions of responsibility and care can expand the range of socially recognised masculine roles without imposing a single normative ideal. At the institutional level, training within educational, judicial, and community settings may help reduce implicit bias and encourage more relational forms of leadership.

Importantly, these implications are not presented as a policy blueprint but as analytical pathways derived from the Theory of Change outlined earlier. Their relevance lies in illustrating how institutional engagement can create enabling environments for the re-socialisation of masculinity over time.

7 Conclusion

This paper has examined masculinity not as a fixed identity but as a set of socially reinforced expectations shaped through institutional and cultural processes. By bringing together feminist legal analysis, empirical programme evaluations, and institutional perspectives, the study highlights how masculinity reform can be understood as a constructive and context-sensitive project rather than a moral critique of men themselves.

The findings suggest that rigid masculine norms are sustained through socialisation practices that reward emotional restraint and authority while undervaluing care and relational responsibility. However, the analysis also demonstrates that these norms are neither inevitable nor immutable. Evidence from educational initiatives, fatherhood programmes, and evolving legal reasoning indicates that masculinity can be reshaped when institutional structures support alternative practices.

Rather than proposing a single model of manhood, this research emphasises the importance of plural, contextually grounded approaches that remain attentive to cultural meaning while being informed by feminist scholarship and empirical evidence. Future research may further explore how masculinity-focused interventions can be evaluated through measurable indicators, ensuring that theoretical insights translate into sustained institutional change.

In this way, re-socialising masculinity emerges not as an abstract aspiration but as an ongoing process embedded within education, law, media, and community engagement—one that contributes to broader efforts toward equality, relational well-being, and inclusive social development.

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