

# All Shades of Identity and Respect: Reclaiming the Suppressed Emotions

**Ms. Akshaya Sharma**

Student, Mayo School, Noida

## Abstract

This paper explores public perceptions and subjective experiences related to gender equality, with a specific focus on the delayed justice served to women facing harassment not just physically but mentally and verbally too, the internal suppression of the feelings of the men community and the invisibility of the non-binary and marginalized communities. Data was collected from 25 participants in the form of surveys and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings revealed, on the one hand, a growing awareness among participants of the multifaceted nature of gender inequality and the importance of emotional validation and fair treatment across all identities. On the other hand, the study highlighted the continued presence of stereotypical norms, ad hoc efforts toward inclusion, and the lack of structured support for individuals whose struggles remain socially minimized. These insights underscore the need for a more balanced and inclusive approach to gender justice—one that listens to every voice, not just the loudest or most visible. This is not something that has gained attention in this modern era but is a topic which requires urgent attention, where it's not just a topic to speak about in front of the public but to implement too rather than being silent on the real day.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, emotional suppression, delayed justice, inclusivity, non-binary identities, social awareness.

## 1. Introduction

Gender Equality, a phrase that has echoed with time, something that's not just a word but a whole Pandora's box of mystical feelings and rationalism. Gender equality is the state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by the common riot of gender. It's not only women who are affected by gender inequality—all genders are impacted, including men, trans and gender-diverse people. This in turn impacts children and families, and people of all ages and backgrounds.

While searching up the net for more insights on the Topic, why is it that only protection and giving rights come for the women community? The point is well justified that women are the ones who are primarily targeted and the sole victims of Sexual Harassment and live under the fear of being judged and get hate just because a man got “lured” by her beauty or looks, even if she's innocent and the man is a culprit for having such a down-graded mentality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where every citizen from a gen alpha to the greatest generation speaks about Gender Equality or rather women empowerment, the only difference is that **they only speak about it and not speak up for it.!**

Why doesn't Gender Equality simply mean a human right where “every gender” is treated equally without discriminating against them on any grounds. Why is it that we must specifically talk or search the net

about the suppressed emotions of men and about the recognition that people deserve who turns out to be an LGBTQ supporter or is proudly a part of it now.

According to Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Anna Brown (2022), The American public holds diverse and often conflicting views on transgender rights. While 80% acknowledge discrimination against transgender individuals and 64% support anti-discrimination laws, 60% believe gender is determined by sex assigned at birth, a view that has grown in recent years.

Public opinion is split on societal acceptance: 38% think society has gone too far, 36% believe it hasn't gone far enough, and 25% feel it's been about right. Younger adults (18–29) and Democrats are more likely to support gender diversity and feel more acceptance is needed, whereas older adults and Republicans tend to believe society has gone too far.

Despite partisan divides, half of those who believe gender is fixed at birth still support protections for transgender people. However, many also back restrictions:

- 58% support requiring trans athletes to compete based on birth sex.
- 46% support banning gender-affirming care for minors.
- The public is divided on teaching gender identity in schools and legal actions against parents supporting youth transitions.

Overall, Americans show growing awareness and support for certain rights, but deep divisions remain on how far society should go in accepting and legislating around transgender issues.

India's relationship with gender and sexual identity stands at a crucial crossroads—marked by both symbolic progress and stark structural neglect. While legal victories such as the 2018 decriminalization of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code signaled a move toward greater inclusion, the socio-political ground realities tell a far more complicated story. The past year has seen a troubling rise in custodial violence, detentions, and systemic neglect targeted at queer and transgender individuals. Despite the emergence of spaces like *Garima Greh*, shelter homes established under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for transgender persons, lack of continued funding and unaddressed police harassment have undermined their very purpose. These contradictions reveal a nation still grappling with the genuine inclusion and protection of its gender-diverse citizens.

In 2023, peaceful protests in Chennai for **horizontal reservation**—a demand led by Dalit queer activists—were met with arbitrary arrests and manhandling by the police. This response underscores a deep discomfort within the state apparatus when it comes to intersectional identities, especially those that combine caste, gender, and queerness. Even as the **Marriage Equality petitions** reached the Supreme Court, the government's arguments focused on *public morality* rather than *constitutional rights*, exposing a deep-seated resistance to acknowledging queer unions as legitimate forms of family.

Events surrounding international platforms like the **G20 summit** further revealed the performative nature of state priorities. While Delhi prepared to welcome global dignitaries, transgender persons were reportedly arrested from traffic signals in the name of "security and order," reinforcing exclusion in the face of visibility. In parallel, government apathy toward initiatives like *Garima Greh*—where funding dried up with no explanation—reflects how token gestures are not backed by sustainable support systems. Testimonies from residents reveal poor conditions, lack of basic facilities, and even police intrusion in spaces meant to offer sanctuary.

Moreover, the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**, has come under criticism for imposing significantly lesser penalties for sexual abuse against transgender individuals compared to cisgender women, raising alarming concerns over the unequal valuation of lives under the law. The denial

of equal punitive safeguards clearly communicates a hierarchy of protection, where the dignity and bodily autonomy of transgender individuals are not upheld with the same seriousness.

In this political and societal backdrop, the voices of activists, residents, and community leaders demand not just recognition, but **participation** in shaping policies that affect their lives. The Indian state must confront a pivotal question: **Are queer and transgender persons viewed as full citizens, deserving of rights, safety, and dignity?** Without a shift toward community-led, equity-driven governance and legal reform, true justice will remain elusive.

This research aims to explore such contrasts further by understanding how societal norms across different cultures—including India—shape emotional suppression and identity struggles among LGBTQIA+ individuals, women seeking justice, and men burdened by traditional masculinity. India serves as a striking case study of these dynamics—where legal rhetoric and lived experience often stand in direct opposition. (India Gender Report-2024, Zayan, Saurav Verma and Rituparna Borah from Nazariya: A Queer Feminist Resource Group)

In today's world, when was the last time we didn't judge a man shedding tears or didn't stop ourselves from helping a woman falling into the trap of assault or looking at a gender-neutral person with immense pride and respect!? The answer would show the identity of the person reading it.

## 2. Literature Review

The core of any society's framework hinges on gender equality, yet the discourse predominantly focuses on women's empowerment, frequently overshadowing the suppressed feelings experienced by men and the distinct challenges faced by gender-diverse individuals

Ever since we delved into a hypocritical real world where everyone claims to be against 'Sexual Harassment', 'Body-Shaming', 'Gender Bullying' or even 'Creating Prejudices and Stereotypes', it is those 'we' only, who end up avoiding speaking up for the innocent ones so as not to cause any trouble knocking at our doorstep.

### 2.1 Autonomy on Women Empowerment

"Justice Delayed, Justice Denied" - a phrase that does not only echo in courtrooms but also shows the pain a woman faces when she hides her miseries and suppresses her emotions just because of the fear of not being heard or being called 'characterless' even if she is the victim.

Women empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to access resources, participate in decision-making, and take control of their lives. It is globally acknowledged as a central element in achieving gender equality and sustainable development. Over the years, extensive research has explored this multifaceted concept, highlighting its significance and the barriers that continue to hinder its realization.

Rashmi Rani Agnihotri H.R. and Malipatil, K.S. (2017), in their study "*A Study on Women Empowerment Schemes in India*," underscore the growing prominence of women's empowerment in development and economics. They assert that empowering women is not only crucial for individual progress but also for strengthening families, communities, and nations. Their research broadens the discussion by suggesting that the idea of empowerment can extend beyond women to include other marginalized gender identities, depending on the socio-political context. They argue that full economic participation of women across all sectors is essential to achieving development and sustainability goals.

Kabeer and Mahmud (2004) present a compelling analysis of how economic empowerment can bring about measurable improvements in women's lives, such as increased income, better health and nutrition, and enhanced decision-making power within households. Their findings demonstrate that empowering

women economically can promote broader community well-being by fostering gender equality and minimizing gender-based discrimination.

Earlier, Kabeer (1999) emphasized that having access to material, human, and social resources is a necessary precondition for empowerment. However, she argued that empowerment is only achieved when women can identify, access, and utilize these resources effectively. Building on this, Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002) reinforced the idea that empowerment is both a **means and an end**. For instance, education may serve as a goal and as a pathway to employment or decision-making power. The true measure of empowerment lies in the capabilities gained—such as autonomy, self-efficacy, and the power to make informed choices.

Jamil and Bukhari (2020), in their work “*Intergenerational Comparison of Women Empowerment and its Detriments*,” offer a novel perspective by examining empowerment across generations. Their study found that access to basic education in one generation inspires subsequent generations to aim higher, thereby demonstrating the ripple effect of empowerment. The researchers conclude that empowering one woman can lead to structural changes that benefit entire communities, mitigating poverty and improving social welfare indicators.

Mehra (1997), in her critical work “*Women, Empowerment and Economic Development*,” observes that women are often excluded from policymaking and the benefits of development programs. She highlights the persistent wage disparities between men and women, especially in the informal sector. Mehra notes that early development efforts, especially in the 1950s, were limited by their welfare-centric approach, often failing to bring meaningful change. However, the rise of organizations like SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association) brought attention to the vital economic roles women play. She asserts that economic empowerment must begin with securing employment and ensuring fair wages—both of which are foundational to broader empowerment.

This review of existing literature reveals a shared understanding: empowerment is not solely about access but about transformation—enabling women to reshape their roles, assert their rights, and impact their societies. While progress has been made, significant social, economic, and structural barriers remain. These studies underscore the importance of context-specific, intergenerational, and rights-based approaches in advancing women’s empowerment and achieving sustainable development.

## ***2.2 Autonomy on Men’s Suppressed emotions***

“Manliness means perfect manhood, as womanliness implies perfect womanhood. Manliness is the character of a man as he ought to be, as he was meant to be.” –James Freeman Clarke, American Minister & Author

The discourse on gender equality often centers around the empowerment of women—a necessary and vital pursuit. However, an equally significant yet underexplored dimension involves the emotional suppression and societal expectations imposed on men. Public displays of vulnerability, such as crying, are still largely taboo for men across many cultures. From a youthful age, boys are conditioned to associate emotional expression with weakness, leading to a lifetime of suppressed feelings and internalized pressure. This societal standard not only dehumanizes men but also sets unrealistic expectations—demanding that they be unwaveringly tough, emotionally stoic, and professionally successful, while also being empathetic, kind, and respectful toward the very society that limits their emotional freedom.

Furthermore, many men are denied autonomy in personal choices, including career decisions, due to traditional roles that cast them as primary breadwinners or familial leaders. Their silence is often misinterpreted as indifference when it is a product of deeply entrenched gender norms. This aspect of

gender disparity highlights the urgent need to broaden the lens of gender justice, ensuring that conversations about equality include and validate the emotional and existential struggles of men and all marginalized gender identities.

Masculinity norm is a —societal expectation of how a man should think, feel and behave (McDermott et al., 2019). Conformity to masculine norms has been defined as—meeting societal expectations for what constitutes masculinity in one 's public or private life (Mahalik, et al., 2003, p. 3). Some men interpret these norms as requiring them to engage in activity that jeopardizes their physical and mental well-being. Conformity to male norms has been associated with binge drinking and increased sexually aggressive behavior in men (Liu & Iwamoto, 2007). Gender disparity is viewed as a women's issue, something that does not involve men and can be remedied solely by focusing on women. Furthermore, it allows dominant or toxic masculinity to flourish unhindered, masculinity based on simplified norms and understandings of traditionally masculine characteristics such as violence, physical strength, emotion suppression, and devaluation of women (Connell, 2005; Pascoe, 2005). This type of masculinity is considered "toxic" for two reasons. It is harmful to women. It influences sexist and patriarchal behaviors, such as aggressive or violent behavior toward women. Second, toxic masculinity is harmful to men and boys. Men's physical and emotional health, as well as their relationships with women, other men, and children, are hampered by narrow stereotyped expectations.

Emotional suppression, or expressive suppression, refers to the deliberate effort to hide or reduce visible emotional expressions (Gross & Levenson, 1993; Gross & John, 2003). While both men and women experience emotions similarly, societal expectations around gender shape how these emotions are expressed. Women are typically allowed, and even expected, to express emotions such as sadness or fear due to the stereotype of being "sensitive." Men, however, are conditioned to suppress emotional expression—especially emotions like grief or vulnerability—because it conflicts with traditional masculine ideals.

Masculinity theories argue that men are expected to maintain emotional control, often expressed as the "stiff upper lip." For instance, widowed older men face emotional turmoil but often deal with their grief through logical reasoning, emotional restraint, and a sense of responsibility, reflecting societal pressures to maintain masculine composure (Bennett et al., 2007).

In professional settings, men who cry are often judged more harshly—seen as less competent and more emotional—than women who do the same (Fischer et al.). Moreover, emotional expectations vary by gender: men are typically associated with anger, scorn, or disgust, while women are linked to sadness, fear, or joy. These assumptions influence how emotions are perceived in terms of dominance and affiliation (Hess et al., 2007).

These gender patterns emerge early. Even preschool children show awareness of emotional stereotypes, which persist into adulthood (Birnbaum & Croll, 1984; Grossman & Wood, 1993). As social role theory suggests, such emotional behaviors are shaped more by societal roles than by inherent biological differences (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1991).

Importantly, education plays a transformative role in challenging outdated gender ideologies. Modern education promotes inclusivity, critical thinking, and evidence-based perspectives, helping dismantle long-standing myths and stigmas. This generational shift in understanding highlights how evolving educational values can reshape attitudes toward emotional expression and gender roles.

The concept of discourse is complex and multifaceted. Lupton (1998, p. 2) defines discourses as "patterns of words used to describe and explain phenomenon." However, a poststructuralist approach expands on



this by suggesting that discourses do not merely reflect reality, but actively construct knowledge, identity, and experience (Lupton, 1998). Applied to the study of emotion, this perspective emphasizes the role of language in shaping emotional experiences, positioning emotions as inherently social in nature (Burkitt, 2014).

Hearn (1993, p. 148) underscores this by noting that "it is more helpful to see discourses as both producing people assumed to be 'subjects' that are or are not emotional and produced by people assumed to be subjects." Emotions, then, are not automatic reactions but are enacted within specific social contexts. Within this framework, the therapeutic discourse—a set of beliefs and practices that prioritize emotional expression—has permeated everyday life, particularly within intimate relationships (Furedi, 2004; Illouz, 2008).

Defining emotion itself is a challenging task. The term encompasses a broad range of affective experiences, including sentiments, feelings, and moods, both positive and negative, simple, and complex (Gross and Thompson, 2007; Turner and Stets, 2005; Burkitt, 2014). Moving beyond a psychological, individualistic view, sociologists argue that emotions are socially shaped responses to stimuli occurring between individuals rather than residing solely within them (Burkitt, 1997).

Burkitt (2014) highlights the interactional loop of emotional expression and experience mediated by internalized societal expectations. Reflexivity, a core element of this loop, involves not only self-reflection but also the imagined and real perspectives of others (Burkitt, 2012). These expectations become critical in shaping male emotionality, where societal norms dictate that a successful performance of masculinity often requires emotional restraint. Thus, discourses such as "boys don't cry" directly influence how men experience and manage emotions.

Holmes (2015) defines emotional reflexivity as "relationally reflecting and acting on interpretations of our own and others' emotions," noting its significance in navigating evolving gender hierarchies. Within intimate relationships, emotional reflexivity allows men to judge when emotional disclosure is appropriate, navigating ambiguous feeling rules.

Cohen (1990) and Simon and Nath (2004) challenge the stereotype that men are inherently less emotional than women, suggesting instead that men experience emotions equally but express them less due to societal expectations. Craib (1994) provides a theoretical lens, asserting that emotional control is intertwined with social hierarchy. Emotional restraint is perceived as a marker of superiority and a necessary component of credible manhood, particularly in patriarchal societies where control over the self, environment, and others is valorized.

Recent scholarship questions the assumption that men are less emotional, organizing findings into themes of softening masculinity, hybridization, and constructionism (de Boise, 2015; de Boise and Hearn, 2017; Galasinski, 2004; Holmes, 2015; Pease, 2012). De Boise and Hearn (2017) emphasize the need for this body of work to remain critically engaged with gender inequalities, focusing on how male emotionality both reflects and reinforces structural disparities.

Emotional control aligns with Hochschild's (1983) concept of "emotion management," which remains highly valued and is often equated with social competence and power. Hochschild (1979) introduced the concept of "emotion work," defined as efforts to alter the intensity or quality of emotions. This includes suppression—repressing undesired feelings—and evocation—eliciting desired but absent emotions.

The shift from traditional to therapeutic discourses introduces contradictions in emotional expectations. As Hochschild (1979) observed, social change can produce conflicting feeling rules, creating uncertainty about emotional appropriateness. Illouz (2008) characterizes this cultural transition as a "palimpsest," wh-

ere new norms are layered over existing ones, resulting in ambiguity and emotional tension.

Sayer (2011) frames vulnerability as a dual concept, linking it to agency—both are interconnected, as vulnerability can prompt or inhibit action. Jamieson (1998) notes that the advocacy for emotional disclosure as a marker of well-being is a recent development. While expectations of disclosure are shaped by the therapeutic discourse, the act of disclosing emotion—especially for men—is complicated by intersecting factors such as gender, class, and age (Criab, 1994; Seidler, 1997).

Vulnerability, as linked with emotional disclosure, interacts with the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995) and structural inequalities (Bourdieu, 2001; Burkitt, 1997; Craib, 1994; Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Pease, 2012; Seidler, 1997). Emotional control thus remains a central element of masculine identity, representing both a form of power and a site of tension within evolving gender norms. This paper examines how men navigate emotional disclosure in intimate relationships and how this navigation both reflects and shapes gendered power dynamics.

The Indian Society is a patriarchal social system. Men dominate and hold powerful positions across all fields and sectors. The role of women in society is marginalized, limiting their access to education, and jobs and even voicing their own opinions. This acts as a major deterrent when it comes to crimes being reported by women, which encourages the perpetrators to commit more crimes against them. Social stigma and dogma prevented Indian women from reporting crimes committed against them. (Sharath Kumar Nair, 2019)

### ***2.3 Autonomy on the Acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community***

Over the past decade, public attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in the different regions have shifted significantly. These changes have not gone unnoticed within the LGBT community, where individuals report an increased sense of acceptance and optimism about the future. Despite this progress, many LGBT adults continue to experience discrimination and believe that full social acceptance has not yet been achieved.

According to a comprehensive survey by the Pew Research Center, only 19% of LGBT adults believe there is currently "a lot" of social acceptance of LGBT individuals in the United States. A majority (59%) believe there is "some" acceptance, while 21% perceive only "a little." Notably, bisexual individuals are more likely than gay men or lesbians to say there is limited acceptance, with 28% of bisexuals holding this view compared to 15% of gay men and 16% of lesbians. Age also influences perception: 23% of LGBT adults aged 45 and older say there is a lot of acceptance, versus just 16% among those under 45. When asked about acceptance of specific subgroups within the LGBT community, respondents indicated that bisexual women and lesbians are perceived as more accepted than gay men, bisexual men, or transgender people. One in four respondents reported high acceptance for lesbians, while only 15% said the same for gay men. Approximately one-third viewed bisexual women as widely accepted, compared to only 8% for bisexual men. Transgender individuals were seen as the least accepted, with 59% of respondents stating there is only a little acceptance and 21% indicating none.

Despite growing acceptance, discrimination remains a significant concern. Over half of LGBT adults (53%) report experiencing discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This discrimination ranges from receiving poor service in public venues to facing verbal and physical abuse. LGBT adults attribute growing societal acceptance to increased visibility and personal familiarity. Seventy percent believe that simply knowing someone who is LGBT has significantly contributed to more accepting attitudes. Additionally, high-profile public figures—both LGBT (67%) and non-LGBT (66%)—are seen as instrumental in advancing acceptance. Media representation and family structures also play a

role. About half (49%) say LGBT characters in television and film contribute positively, while 57% note that LGBT individuals raising families help foster broader social acceptance. However, fewer view LGBT pride events as highly impactful: only 28% say these events help a lot, and 21% believe they have no positive effect.

Demographic factors influence these views. Non-white LGBT adults and younger individuals are more likely to see pride events as helpful, with 36% of non-whites and 33% of adults under 45 saying these events help a lot, compared to 24% of whites and 22% of older adults. Those without a college degree are also more likely to view pride events positively (34%) compared to college graduates (16%). The LGBT community overwhelmingly believes that societal acceptance has increased. A striking 92% report that society is more accepting now than a decade ago, with 52% saying it is "a lot" more accepting. Gay men and lesbians tend to be more optimistic than bisexuals—66% of gay men and 57% of lesbians say acceptance has significantly improved, compared to 41% of bisexuals.

Expectations for the future are similarly hopeful. Another 92% of LGBT adults believe society will become even more accepting over the next 10 years. Of these, 65% predict a lot more acceptance. Gay men (71%) and lesbians (76%) again express more optimism than bisexuals (58%). White respondents (69%) are also more optimistic than non-whites (58%).

While attitudes toward LGBT individuals in the United States have shifted significantly in a positive direction, full social acceptance remains elusive. Many in the LGBT community continue to face discrimination, and perceptions of acceptance vary based on sexual orientation, age, race, and education level. Nevertheless, increased visibility, advocacy from public figures, and growing familiarity with LGBT individuals are driving progress. The LGBT community remains hopeful, with most anticipating a future marked by greater inclusion and equality.

Global and regional social surveys have played a critical role in documenting public attitudes toward various segments of the LGBT population and related policies. These surveys, while not without limitations, offer valuable insights. Individual surveys provide snapshots of public acceptance, while longitudinal surveys reveal how attitudes have evolved over time within specific countries. Importantly, public opinion polls and social surveys give voice directly to the general population, rather than relying solely on interpretations by advocates, celebrities, or politicians. As such, they often serve as more accurate indicators of prevailing social sentiment and the everyday realities of acceptance or discrimination experienced by LGBT individuals. Cultural norms surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity are widely recognized as key factors influencing structural stigma (Herek, 2007; Pescosolido et al., 2008).

Surveys also contribute to the analysis of legal and policy reforms. Research indicates that shifts in public attitudes frequently precede greater inclusion of LGBT individuals in policymaking and political representation (Flores, 2015; Reynolds, 2013). Consequently, understanding how these attitudes form and change over time is essential for supporting expanded social, economic, and political inclusion of LGBT people.

Despite the utility of public opinion data, there are significant limitations, particularly in terms of global, cross-national, and longitudinal comparisons. Few existing surveys provide robust, consistent data across countries or over extended periods. One of the main challenges is the lack of standardization: public opinion surveys employ many questions. A recent review identified 67 distinct survey questions used to assess public attitudes toward LGBT people (Encarnación, 2014). These include questions regarding the acceptability of homosexuals in public office, perceived discrimination in the workplace, personal



relationships with gay or transgender individuals, beliefs about the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity, and opinions on same-sex marriage or neighborhood desirability.

Further complicating comparisons is the diverse nature of the issues surveyed. For instance, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey asks about both specific policy preferences—such as support for same-sex marriage—and broader moral judgments, such as whether homosexual behavior should be accepted. The variability in question wording and focus makes it difficult to synthesize findings across surveys or to track consistent trends globally.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Research question

This study employs a qualitative, cross-cultural approach to explore how cultural and societal norms influence the suppression or expression of emotions and identities among three distinct but interconnected groups: LGBT individuals, women seeking delayed justice, and men confronting traditional expectations of masculinity. The central research question guiding this inquiry is:

**"What is the take of different individuals upon shaping the suppression or expression of emotions and identities among LGBT individuals, women seeking delayed justice, and men navigating traditional expectations of masculinity?"**

To address this question, the research draws on a combination of:

- **Comparative literature review** of academic journals, policy reports, and case studies from various regions including North America, South Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Europe.
- **Narrative analysis** of lived experiences, personal testimonies, and media representations to understand emotional suppression and societal responses.
- **Thematic coding** of qualitative data, identifying recurring themes such as stigma, resistance, silence, resilience, and institutional delays in justice.
- **Intersectional framework** to examine how identity markers—such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class—interact within different socio-political and cultural environments.

The objective is not only to highlight shared patterns of emotional suppression but also to uncover culturally specific ways in which individuals navigate their identities and push against restrictive norms. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of systemic influences and personal agency across diverse contexts.

#### 3.2 Participants

This research drew upon the responses of **25 participants** from a range of **cultural backgrounds, age groups, gender identities and completely different mindset**, providing a broad perspective on the influence of cultural and societal norms on emotional expression and identity. The participants were between the ages of **16 and 65**, allowing the study to capture generational shifts in attitudes and firsthand experiences related to the suppression or expression of emotions.

The participants reflected diverse perspectives on masculinity, justice, identity, and societal expectations. All participants were from regions and with varied opinions on the categories of Women's late justice, Men's Suppressed emotions and the identity of the other community. In a course of around 20 questions, participants tried to answer not just quantitative queries but also certain W Questions too.

#### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

To explore how cultural and societal norms across different countries influence the suppression or expression of emotions and identities among LGBT individuals, women seeking delayed justice, and men

navigating traditional expectations of masculinity, this research employed a mixed-methods approach. Data was collected through a structured survey distributed to 25 participants representing diverse cultural, social, and age backgrounds. The participants ranged from 16 to 65, allowing the study to account for generational differences in perceptions and experiences.

The survey included approximately 20 questions, combining both **quantitative** items (e.g., Likert scale ratings) and **qualitative** open-ended questions designed to elicit personal reflections and deeper insights. The questions focused on five key themes: the suppression of men's emotions, delayed or biased justice for women, the inclusion of all gender identities, overall views on gender equality, and societal influence on identity expression.

Participants were selected based on their willingness to share honest and thoughtful responses and were from a variety of regions, ensuring cross-cultural representation. Their responses provided a multidimensional view of the ways traditional norms affect emotional and identity expression differently across genders and cultural contexts.

For the **quantitative data**, responses were coded and analyzed using basic descriptive statistics to identify trends and measure levels of agreement or disagreement across different demographics. The **qualitative data** was subjected to thematic analysis. This process involved coding recurring phrases and sentiments, categorizing them into themes, and interpreting the underlying meaning behind participant perspectives.

Key themes that emerged included:

- The internalization of emotional restraint in men due to societal expectations of masculinity.
- Frustration and disillusionment among women facing delayed justice systems, despite legal frameworks.
- The ongoing marginalization of non-binary and transgender individuals and a call for broader recognition of gender diversity.
- A consensus is that true gender equality must be inclusive and balanced across all identities, not limited to binary constructs.

This combination of statistical trends and narrative depth enabled the research to construct a nuanced understanding of how cultural and societal pressures manifest in individuals lived experiences and shape the broader discourse on identity and emotion.

### **The Questions that were asked were as follows:**

1. Society discourages men from openly expressing emotions like sadness or vulnerability.
2. Men who show emotions are often judged or seen as weak.
3. There is a lack of mental health support and safe spaces for men to discuss emotional struggles.
4. Gender equality should also include addressing how men are affected by traditional gender roles.
5. Women often face delays or dismissal when seeking justice in harassment or abuse cases. Laws are in place, but enforcement for women's rights and safety is often inadequate.
6. Media and society sometimes downplay or sensationalize cases of violence against women.
7. Justice systems should be more sensitive and responsive to women's experiences.
8. I feel comfortable interacting with people of diverse gender identities.
9. Non-binary and transgender people face significant discrimination and exclusion.
10. Gender equality should mean fairness for all genders—not prioritizing one over another.
11. Public discussions on gender issues often focus too much on one gender and ignore others.
12. I believe current gender equality efforts need to be more inclusive and balanced.
13. What does gender equality mean to you personally?

14. What areas do you think are most neglected in gender equality discussions?
15. How can society do better in supporting people of all gender identities?

#### 4. Discussions

The results of the survey affirm the considerable influence of cultural and societal norms in shaping the emotional lives and identity experiences of individuals across gender groups. A striking consensus emerged around the idea that **men are socially discouraged from expressing vulnerability**, with most participants agreeing that **men who show emotions are often perceived as weak**. This reinforces the persistence of rigid masculine ideals that equate emotional restraint with strength. Furthermore, participants acknowledged the **lack of mental health support and safe spaces for men**, revealing a systemic gap that continues to neglect men's psychological well-being. These insights point to the need for a broader and more inclusive definition of gender equality—one that **considers the emotional burden placed on men by traditional gender expectations**.

Similarly, the responses to questions regarding women's justice revealed a widespread perception of **delayed or inadequate legal responses to harassment and abuse cases**. Although laws exist, participants expressed skepticism about their **effective enforcement**. Many agreed that **media and societal narratives either trivialize or sensationalize cases of violence against women**, undermining the seriousness of such issues. There was fanatical support for **making justice systems more sensitive to women lived realities**, highlighting the disconnect between policy and practice.

The exploration of gender identity inclusion reflected an evolving understanding among participants. A majority indicated that they **felt comfortable interacting with individuals of diverse gender identities**, reflecting progress in social awareness. However, there was also broad acknowledgment of the **continued discrimination and exclusion faced by non-binary and transgender individuals**. Participants pointed out that **gender equality discussions still largely focus on binary gender experiences**, often neglecting non-binary voices.

Importantly, when asked open-ended questions such as “**What does gender equality mean to you?**” and “**Which areas are most neglected in current gender equality discourse?**” respondents consistently emphasized the **need for a more holistic, intersectional approach**. Many noted that **true equality must go beyond legal rights to include emotional, social, and psychological recognition of all genders**, including men and gender-diverse individuals.

A brief from the responses received from the survey are:

**Question. What does gender equality mean to you personally?**

The participants overwhelmingly perceive **gender equality** as the principle of providing **equal rights, respect, and opportunities to all genders**, not limited to a specific group such as women or men. Many emphasized that gender equality should not translate into **favoritism toward one gender**, but rather aim to dismantle all forms of gender-based discrimination. A recurring sentiment was that **gender equality should begin at both societal and interpersonal levels**—in homes, workplaces, and legal systems—by ensuring that no individual feels lesser due to their gender identity.

Contrasting views highlighted how **society often misconstrues gender equality as women-centric**, ignoring the emotional burdens placed on men or the structural exclusion faced by non-binary and LGBTQ+ individuals. Several participants expressed concern over the **narrow definition of masculinity**, which discourages men from being emotionally expressive, while others reflected on how women are often **overlooked in decision-making processes** within households and face **safety issues** in public and

private spaces. There was a shared belief that **equality must extend beyond binary genders** and be inclusive of all identities—cisgender, transgender, non-binary, disabled, and elderly—so that **diversity becomes a strength rather than a basis for exclusion**.

Many emphasized the need for **respect and safety** as foundational elements, along with **freedom of self-expression** and the **elimination of gender-based violence**. Some also underlined the difference between **external challenges faced by women** (like underrepresentation or harassment) and the **internal emotional suppression experienced by men**, suggesting a dual-layered societal failure that affects all genders differently but deeply. Ultimately, gender equality was described as **a balance—one that recognizes the uniqueness of each identity while ensuring fairness and dignity for all**, rooted not just in policy but in everyday interaction and cultural mindset.

**Question. How can society do better in supporting people of all gender identities?**

Participants articulated a collective vision for a society that is **inclusive, respectful, and empathetic toward all gender identities**. A dominant theme was the **importance of inclusive education**—one that goes beyond textbooks to actively promote understanding, acceptance, and **gender sensitivity from an early age**. Respondents stressed that **normalizing diverse gender identities**, rather than treating them as “different” or “abnormal,” is key to fostering true equality. This includes the **use of inclusive language**, **amplifying diverse voices**, and creating **safe spaces** in homes, schools, workplaces, and public institutions where people of all genders feel seen and heard.

Many believe that society must **go beyond token gestures** and symbolic representation to implement **concrete legal protections and anti-discrimination laws**, ensuring equal opportunities in employment, education, and healthcare. Several participants emphasized that **legal reforms** must also be backed by **genuine social change**, such as **challenging stereotypes**, **breaking down gender roles**, and removing deep-seated biases in attitudes and practices.

Some pointed out that gender support must also be **intersectional acknowledging** the **additional burdens** faced by women balancing work and caregiving, or the **emotional toll** on individuals experiencing discrimination, especially within marginalized communities. There was a call for **equitable treatment**, including **fair wages**, **mental health support**, and **recognition of emotional and physical labor**, particularly during menstruation or caregiving duties.

Other responses highlighted the **role of public dialogue and activism**—from **awareness campaigns, rallies, and posters**, to **encouraging conversations in everyday settings**. Participants urged society to **listen without judgment**, treat individuals as **humans first**, and move away from **tokenism** or **partiality** toward real, lived equality.

Some more candid views called for society to **speak less if uninformed**, **respect people's choices without condescension**, and **replace criticism with compassion**. The necessity for **empathy**, **daily practice of respect**, and **addressing discrimination not just in extreme cases but in everyday life** was reiterated across responses.

Ultimately, the consensus was clear: **genuine support for all gender identities** must be rooted in **acceptance**, **legal safeguards**, **open-mindedness**, and **shared responsibility**. Equality is not achieved through slogans or isolated reforms—it requires a **cultural transformation** that recognizes the **human dignity of every individual**, irrespective of how they identify.

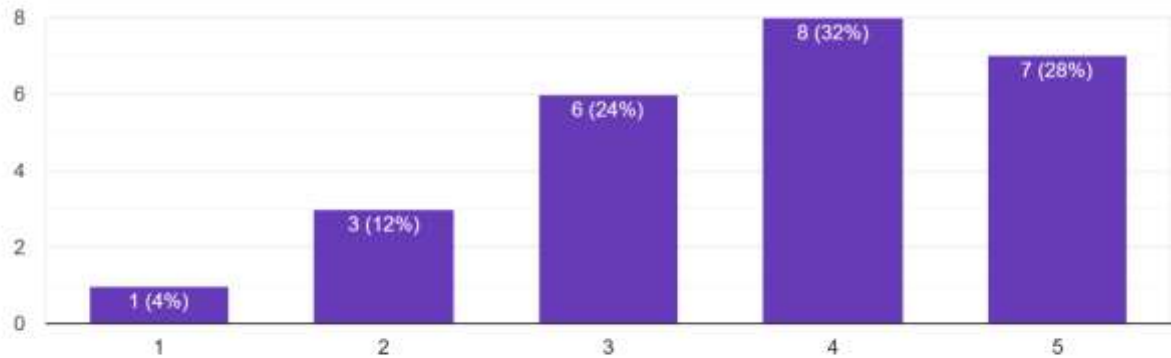
Some Graphs from qualitative responses are as follows:

1-Strongly Disagree

5-Strongly Agree

There is a lack of mental health support and safe spaces for men to discuss emotional struggles.

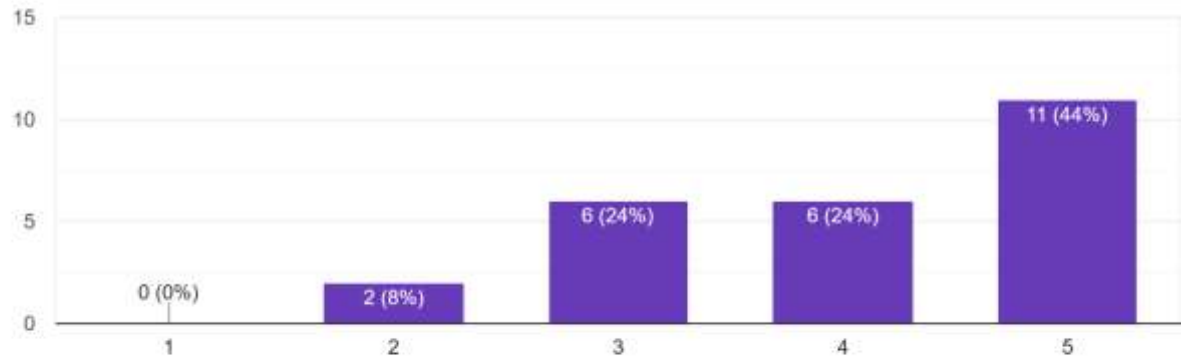
25 responses





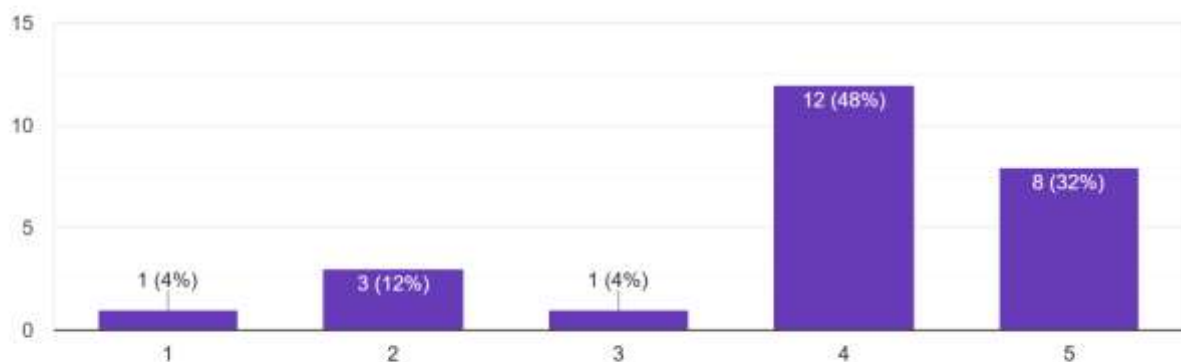
I feel comfortable interacting with people of diverse gender identities.

25 responses



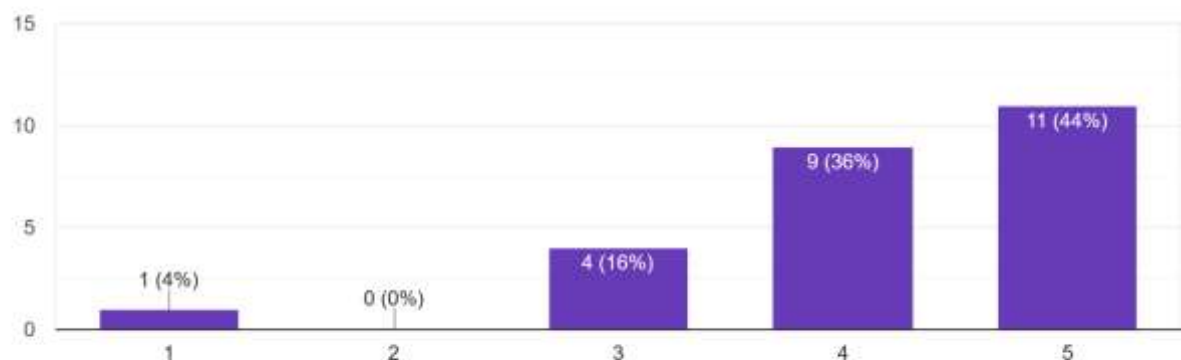
Public discussions on gender issues often focus too much on one gender and ignore others.

25 responses



Women often face delays or dismissal when seeking justice in harassment or abuse cases

25 responses



Several participants also stressed the importance of **education, inclusive policies, and media representation** as tools to foster greater understanding and acceptance. There was a shared belief that **society must actively dismantle stereotypes** and provide platforms for all gender identities to share their stories and experiences.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this research reveal that while progress has been made in some areas of gender equality, **deep-rooted cultural norms continue to limit emotional expression and equitable treatment**, particularly for men, women seeking justice, and gender-diverse individuals. The suppression of men's emotions, the systemic delays in justice for women, and the exclusion of non-binary and transgender voices are not isolated issues—they are interconnected manifestations of **a broader vision, which currently is a utopian one but if given importance, can lead to a mankind that embrace's emotional and identity diversity**.

As such, efforts toward gender equality must adopt a more **inclusive, culturally sensitive, and intersectional framework**. This includes addressing **emotional repression as a gendered issue**, ensuring **timely and effective justice for women**, and **amplifying underrepresented gender identities** in public discourse and policy. Only then can the vision of "All Shades of Identity and Respect" be truly realized, reclaiming the suppressed emotions and overlooked voices across all gender experiences.

## 6. References

1. Agnihotri, R. R., & Malipatil, K. S. (2017). A Study on Women Empowerment Schemes in India. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 19(1), 1-20.
2. Bennett, K. M., & et al. (2007). The Role of Emotional Control in Grief: A Study of Older Widowed Men. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21(3), 215-227.
3. Birnbaum, D., & Croll, P. (1984). Gender Differences in Emotional Expression: A Study of Preschool Children. *Child Development*, 55(3), 1030-1035.
4. Burkitt, I. (1997). Emotional Reflexivity: A Sociological Perspective. *Sociology*, 31(1), 1-20.
5. Burkitt, I. (2014). *Emotions and Social Relations*. London: Sage Publications.
6. Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
7. Connell, R. W. (2005). A Very Short Introduction to Masculinities. *Masculinities*, 3(1), 1-12.
8. Criab, S. (1994). The Emotional Control of Men: A Sociological Perspective. *Sociological Review*, 42(2), 123-145.
9. de Boise, S. (2015). The Softening of Masculinity: A Study of Changing Gender Norms. *Men and Masculinities*, 18(3), 345-367.
10. de Boise, S., & Hearn, J. (2017). Masculinity and Emotionality: A Critical Review. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(3), 1-15.
11. Duncombe, J., & Marsden, D. (1993). Love and Intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion Work. *Sociology*, 27(2), 221-241.
12. Eagly, A. H. (1987). Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation. *Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates*.
13. Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (1991). The Origins of Sex Differences in Human Behavior: Evolved Dispositions versus Social Roles. *American Psychologist*, 46(4), 408-418.

14. Fischer, A. H., & et al. (n.d.). Gender Differences in Emotional Expression: A Study of Professional Settings. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*.
15. Flores, A. (2015). Public Attitudes and LGBT Inclusion in Policy Making. *Journal of Public Policy*, 35(2), 1-20.
16. Furedi, F. (2004). *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*. London: Routledge.
17. Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual Differences in Emotion Regulation: Development of a Scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(2), 348-362.
18. Gross, J. J., & Levenson, R. W. (1993). Emotional Regulation in Couples: The Role of Gender. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(4), 1010-1021.
19. Hearn, J. (1993). The Social Construction of Masculinity: A Critical Review. *Sociology*, 27(2), 147-164.
20. Hochschild, A. R. (1979). *Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(3), 551-575.
21. Illouz, E. (2008). *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
22. Jamieson, L. (1998). Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies. *Sociology*, 32(3), 477-493.
23. Jamil, R., & Bukhari, S. (2020). Intergenerational Comparison of Women Empowerment and its Detriments. *International Journal of Gender Studies*, 5(1), 45-60.
24. Kabeer, N., & Mahmud, S. (2004). Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal. *Gender and Development*, 12(1), 13-24.
25. Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-464.
26. Liu, W. M., & Iwamoto, D. (2007). Masculinity and Binge Drinking: The Role of Masculine Norms in Alcohol Use. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 8(1), 1-10.
27. Lupton, D. (1998). *The Emotional Self: Personal, Moral, and Cultural Dimensions of Emotional Life*. London: Sage Publications.
28. Mahalik, J. R., Burns, S. M., & Syzdek, M. (2007). Masculinity and perceived normative health behaviors as predictors of men's health behaviors. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64(11), 2201-2209.
29. Malhotra, A., Schuler, S. R., & Boender, C. (2002). Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development. *World Bank*.
30. Mehra, R. (1997). Women, Empowerment and Economic Development. *Journal of Development Studies*, 34(3), 1-20.
31. Parker, K., Horowitz, J. M., & Brown, A. (2022). The American Public's Views on Transgender Rights. *Pew Research Center*.
32. Pascoe, C. J. (2005). *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
33. Pescosolido, B. A., & et al. (2008). The Role of Public Attitudes in the Stigmatization of Mental Illness. *Social Science & Medicine*, 67(5), 1-10.
34. Reynolds, A. (2013). Public Attitudes and LGBT Representation in Politics. *Journal of Political Science*, 41(2), 1-20.
35. Sayer, A. (2011). Vulnerability and Agency: A Sociological Perspective. *Sociology*, 45(3), 1-15.
36. Seidler, Z. (1997). The Social Construction of Masculinity: A Critical Review. *Men and Masculinities*, 1(1), 1-20.

37. Sharath Kumar Nair. (2019). The Role of Women in Indian Society: A Sociological Perspective. *Indian Journal of Sociology*, 57(2), 1-20.
38. Turner, J. H., & Stets, J. E. (2005). *The Sociology of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
39. Zayan, S., Verma, S., & Borah, R. (2024). India Gender Report. *Nazariya: A Queer Feminist Resource Group*.