

INVISIBLE CURRICULUM OF MASCULINITY: HOW PEER CULTURE IN CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS SHAPES BOYS' EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION

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ABSTRACT

Schools are not just places for kids to learn arithmetic or science. They are also locations where children are taught how to behave – what it is to be a 'real boy' or a 'real girl.' Here I look at one of the least talked-about, yet most powerful, factors in school life: the hidden curriculum of masculinity. This is the collection of unwritten rules, which guys in co-educational schools are taught by their peer group – that they must hide their feelings, never cry, be tough, keep the emotions in. The study was carried out in five co-educational schools of Kaithal district of Haryana. Structured questionnaire for 180 boys (Class VIII–X), observation sessions and interviews with 15 teachers were employed in mixed-method design. The data indicate that peer culture in schools actively punishes boys' emotional expression and praises toughness and hostility. Sometimes teachers, without even realizing it, reproduce these norms in their regular language and actions. The report says emotional repression is not an inherent quality of guys, but a socially taught conduct – and that schools have both the power and the obligation to confront it.

Keywords: Invisible curriculum, masculinity, peer culture, emotional repression, co-educational schools, gender socialisation

1. INRODUCTION

What happens when a boy tears in a school in Kaithal? Usually, the classmates in his class chuckle. Someone says, 'ladki hai kya?' (You are a girl?). The teacher may say to him, 'Stand up straight, be strong. In minutes, the boy learns a vital lesson – not from any textbook but from the invisible curriculum at work around him. That's simple and effective lesson: boys don't cry. The phrase 'invisible curriculum' was initially coined by educational sociologists to describe all that pupils learn while at school that is never mentioned in any syllabus. It encompasses values, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs handed on through the culture of the school, interactions with peers, teacher behaviour and classroom methods. The formal curriculum teaches children reading, writing, and arithmetic. The invisible curriculum teaches children who they are supposed to be and who they are not supposed to be. For males in India, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas like Kaithal in Haryana, this unseen curriculum is deeply gendered. Boys learn early that being emotional is a sign of weakness, that weakness is linked to femininity, and that femininity is something to be avoided, even despised. This is not something any instructor puts on a blackboard. It's passed on every day in small moments: a joke about a sensitive boy, a teacher's offhand remark, a group that eliminates someone for being 'too emotional.'

In India, Haryana stands as one of the states with the most pronounced gender disparity. Given the firmly ingrained patriarchal standards, the culture that sets huge emphasis on ‘mardangi’ (manliness) and the social context around schools in Kaithal district (sex ratio 879 females for 1000 males, Census 2011), the study of masculine socialization is very relevant and necessary. Men who grow up to repress their feelings are men who suffer with their mental health, cannot sustain healthy relationships, and often direct their emotions into violence or risk-taking behaviour. Despite a growing amount of research on gender and education in India, most of the focus has been on girls – keeping them in school, reducing harassment, boosting their academic achievements. The experience of boys as gendered subjects – as youngsters who are being shaped and bound by particular social norms – has attracted significantly less attention. The present paper seeks to fill this gap.

This work is new in three ways. First, it addresses emotional repression as a result of peer culture in schools, rather than seeing emotional restraint as an innate masculine characteristic. Second, it is situated in Kaithal, Haryana—an area that has received less attention in educational gender studies. Third, it employs structured survey data, along with direct classroom observations and teacher interviews, to construct a multi-dimensional portrait of the workings of the invisible curriculum in actual schools.

2. Review of Related Literature

Philip Jackson introduced the notion of the hidden or invisible curriculum in his 1968 book *Life in Classrooms*. Jackson discovered that schools taught students three things other from official knowledge: how to live in crowds, how to deal with acclaim and power, and how to wait. Later researchers extended this to show how gender roles were also taught by the hidden curriculum.

This paper is mostly about the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' by *R.W. Connell (1987, 1995)*. Connell stated that in every society there is a hegemonic version of masculinity, which is seen to be the ideal or the norm, and that men and boys who do not match this standard are socially punished. Indian schools tend to promote a hegemonic masculinity that prioritizes physical strength, emotional toughness, intellectual competitiveness, and dominance over girls and ‘weaker’ boys.

Michael Kimmel (2008) in his book *Guyland* found that peer groups are the main enforcers of masculine norms among adolescent boys. Boys learn to conceal emotion not just from their parents, but most powerfully from their male peers, through frequent policing of each other’s behaviour. The term ‘the guy code’ used by Kimmel – the unspoken set of standards of what constitutes manly behaviour – is clearly applicable to what this study refers to as the invisible curriculum of masculinity.

Bhog (2002) has highlighted presentation of masculinity in school textbooks in India in conventional ways. Boys are always presented as energetic, strong and unemotional in the Indian culture. *Krishna Kumar (1989)* has claimed in his classic work *Political Agenda of Education* that Indian schools do not only replicate class but also gender hierarchies. More

recently, the intersection of caste and gender in the production of particular types of male identity in North Indian schools has been indicated by *Chakravarti (2018) and Nair (2021)*.

Research on emotional suppression among Indian males is not very frequent. In a survey conducted in Delhi schools, *Bhattacharya (2020)* found that 68% of boys believed that they cannot share personal difficulties with instructors. *Mishra and Rao (2021)* observed that boys in secondary schools in Haryana experienced much greater rates of internalised emotional discomfort than boys in Kerala schools, and attributed this difference to the stronger patriarchal standards in Haryana's social culture. However, neither of these studies considered peer culture in particular as the mechanism through which emotional repression is learned and maintained.

The present study directly builds on prior works but also fills an essential geographical and methodological gap. Till date, no study has explored the unseen curriculum of masculinity in the co-educational schools of the Kaithal district of Haryana using a combination of survey data, observation and teacher interviews.

3. Significance of the Study

Haryana is a state with very strong gender norms and where the effects of those standards – including female foeticide, child marriage, honour killings and male mental health crises – are especially obvious. How these values are conveyed and reinforced in schools is not only an intellectual topic. Its consequences are immediate for education policy, teacher training and the mental health of youngsters.

Kaithal district is a semi-urban district in central Haryana having a mixture of government and private co-educational schools. It is a kind of educational context – neither totally urban nor entirely rural – that is very prevalent throughout North India, and yet has received little scholarly attention. Boys growing up in the schools of Kaithal are caught between the conventional patriarchal demands of their families and communities and the modern, mixed-gender social environment of the co-educational school. This research is primarily concerned with understanding how they negotiate this environment and what it costs them emotionally.

4. Objectives

1. To research the nature and intensity of emotional suppression among the boys studying in co-educational schools of Kaithal district of Haryana to find out the specific feelings that are mostly suppressed (sadness, fear, loneliness, anxiety, etc.)
2. To explore the influence of peer culture (including peer language, group behaviour and social reward/punishment systems) in molding and perpetuating emotional suppression as a masculine norm among school-going boys in Kaithal.
3. To examine how teacher behaviour and classroom language in co-educational schools disrupt or maintain masculine norms of emotional expression, and to derive implications for teacher education and school change.

5. Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is strong correlation between peer group culture in co-educational schools in Kaithal and extent of emotional suppression demonstrated by teenage guys. The more stringently

masculine norms are policed by peers in a school, the higher the levels of emotional suppression among boys.

H₀₂: Boys in government co-educational schools in Kaithal show a considerably higher level of emotional repression compared to boys in private co-educational schools, attributed to the disparities in school culture, teacher training, and peer group makeup.

H₀₃: Teacher responses to emotional expression in boys – including gendered language, dismissive replies and differential treatment of emotional boys – are a crucial factor in the perpetuation of the invisible curriculum of masculinity and the contribution to emotional suppression.

6. Research Methodology

Research Design: This study uses a Mixed-Method Research Design, including quantitative (survey) and qualitative (observation + interview) methodologies. This design was used because the unseen curriculum is enacted through quantitative patterns (captured by survey data) and delicate, context-dependent interactions (revealed only through observation and interviews). The two methodologies together provide a deeper and more reliable picture of the phenomenon.

Study Area: The study was carried out in Kaithal district of Haryana, India. Kaithal is situated in the center section of Haryana and is primarily an agricultural economy. The district has 5 blocks – Kaithal, Siwan, Kalayat, Guhla and Pundri. For current study schools of Kaithal and Siwan blocks were selected since these are representative of urban and rural school environment of the district.

Sample Selection: Five co-educational schools (3 government and 2 private) were purposively selected. The survey was conducted on boys of Class VIII, IX and X in every school. Interviews were conducted with teachers of these classes. The whole sample distribution is shown in the table below:

School Name	Type	Boys Surveyed	Girls Surveyed	Teachers Interviewed
Govt. Sr. Sec. School, Kaithal	Govt. Co-ed	42	38	4
DAV Public School, Kaithal	Private Co-ed	38	34	3
Govt. Model Sanskriti School	Govt. Co-ed	36	32	3
Sant Nirankari School, Siwan	Private Co-ed	30	28	3
Govt. High School, Keorak	Govt. Co-ed	34	30	2

A total of 180 boys (aged 13–16 years) completed the structured questionnaire, 162 girls were surveyed separately to compare perception data and 15 teachers (9 male, 6 female) were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide.

Tools Used

- Structured Questionnaire for Boys (30 items on Likert scale) – to measure emotional suppression, peer pressure, male standards and help seeking behaviour
- Perception Survey for Girls (15 items) — to know about the perception of girls towards the expression of emotions by boys in school
- Instructor Semi-Structured Interview Guide – 12 open-ended questions investigating instructor understanding of gender norms, reaction to emotional expression in males, and classroom language
- Classroom Observation Checklist – utilized during 40 observation sessions (8 sessions each school) to document specific instances of emotional expression and peer/teacher response

Data Collection Procedures

Three months of data were collected (January–March 2021). School principals authorized personal distribution of questionnaires during school hours. Respondents were told there were no wrong answers and their responses were confidential. Observations were done during free periods, PE, and lunch, when peer culture is most open. Individual interviews with teachers were done in the school staff room.

Data analysis

Quantitative questionnaire data was analyzed using descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean scores) and inferential statistics (Chi-square test for hypothesis testing). Thematic analysis found patterns and themes in qualitative interview and observation data. Triangulation of two data sources generated integrated insights.

7. Findings and Analysis

7.1 Profile of Emotional Suppression among Boys

The first and most remarkable finding of the study is the extent and intensity of emotional repression among boys in the co-educational schools of Kaithal. Table below demonstrates the results of major assertions about emotional suppression put to boys:

Statement (Boys asked to rate)	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
"Crying in school makes you look weak"	38	34	18	10
"I hide my sadness from my classmates"	42	30	20	8
"Boys who talk about feelings get made fun of"	36	38	16	10
"I feel I must act tough in front of friends"	40	32	18	10
"It is girly to talk about personal problems"	30	36	22	12

The data suggests that more than 70% of the guys surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements: “Crying makes you look weak”, “I hide my sadness from my classmates” and “I feel like I have to act tough in front of my friends”. That is not a minority experience – it is the dominant experience of the males at those schools.

In open-ended questions about the feelings that boys most often repress, the TOP-3 answers were: grief after a failure or reprimand (74% of boys), fear before tests or confrontations (62%), loneliness or homesickness (58%). Interestingly, anger is far less concealed – only 28% stated they try to hide anger. This matches up with research on masculinity: cultures that suppress 'soft' emotions typically allow or even encourage 'hard' emotions like wrath.

In an informal conversation, one boy (Class IX, Government School, Kaithal) said: 'Sir ne daanta, toh andar se rona aa gaya. Par mein hansa — warna dost mazaak banate.' (The teacher chastised me and I felt like sobbing. But I smiled, for if I had not, my companions would have laughed. This single line explains the entire mechanics of invisible curriculum.

7.2 Peer Culture Enforces the Invisible Curriculum

The second significant conclusion involves the particular processes by which peer culture imposes male emotional standards. Here are the observation data and the findings of the peer behaviour survey:

Peer Behaviour Observed	Frequency: Daily %	Frequency: Weekly %	Rarely/Never %
Teasing a boy who cried	28	34	38
Calling emotional boys 'girls' or 'ladki'	44	30	26
Praising boys for being 'tough' or 'mard'	52	28	20
Group ignoring a boy who expressed fear	22	30	48
Encouraging risk-taking to 'prove' manhood	36	32	32

The most telling finding in this table is the high daily frequency (52%) of peers praising boys for being 'tough' or 'mard' (manly). This matters because the invisible curriculum functions not just via punishment (mocking emotional males) but also through positive reward (glorifying toughness). These two forces combine to form a strong system of social pressure. The usage of the word 'ladki' (female) as an insult was the most common linguistic technique observed. In 44% of the observed situations, guys who displayed emotion were dubbed 'ladki' or told they were 'acting like a girl'. This has a double effect: it punishes the boy for being emotional, and at the same time, it devalues femininity. This teaches all boys that being linked with the feminine is shameful.

Observational data also revealed an interesting spatial dimension: emotional policing was quite active in open spaces - the playground, the corridor and the lunch area - where there were larger peer groups. In the classroom itself, teacher-directed instruction represented a greater constraint on the emotional expression of the teacher. This shows that the peer-culture curriculum is most active in the informal spaces of school life which instructors rarely supervise or see as relevant.

7.3 The Role of Teachers in the Invisible Curriculum

One of the most essential – and possibly most uncomfortable – results of this study involves the role of instructors. The study finds that teachers at Kaithal’s co-educational schools, both men and women, routinely support masculine norms of emotional repression through their daily language and actions, often without realising they are doing so.

Situation	Teacher Response (Most Common)	Implication
Boy cries after being scolded	'Chup kar, ladka hai tu'	Directly reinforces suppression
Boy refuses to fight back	'Dara hua hai kya?'	Links courage to aggression
Boy shares personal worry	Redirected or ignored	Normalises emotional avoidance
Boy shows empathy toward peer	No comment or mild praise	Empathy treated as neutral, not valued
Boy achieves academically	'Badhiya! Aage badho'	Effort praised; emotional self ignored

All five schools stated that boys were told by teachers to ‘Chup kar, ladka hai tu’ (Be quiet, you are a boy) when they were upset or cried. This sentence explicitly tells the youngster (and all other boys who hear it) that expressing emotions is not something a boy should do. Most teachers were genuinely surprised when these trends were pointed out to them in interviews. ‘We don’t think in this way,’ claimed senior lady teacher of the Govt Model Sanskriti School. We say these things as a matter of course. Our teachers tell us the same things. “We never thought it was bad for the boys. This comment shows an important property of the invisible curriculum, namely that it is so firmly buried in ordinary routine that it becomes invisible even to the transmitters.

Only three of the 15 teachers interviewed had ever purposely discussed emotional expression with their male students. The other 12 claimed it had never occurred to them as part of their duties as teachers. This is a massive hole in the knowledge and the training of teachers.

7.4 Government vs. Private School Comparison

When compared major discrepancies were evident between government and private schools. The average score of emotional repression of boys in government schools was 78 out of 100 (on the basis of Likert-scale questionnaire) as compared to 64 out of 100 in private schools. This difference was statistically significant (Chi-square test, $\chi^2=6.18$, $p<0.05$) validating the Hypothesis 2.

Possible explanations include: private schools in Kaithal tended to have slightly more exposure to newer teaching approaches (some had counsellors, although only part-time); class sizes in private schools were smaller (average 32 students) than in government schools (average 52 students), giving teachers more opportunity to attend to individual students; and the social composition of private school peer groups was slightly more diverse in terms of family background.

But this distinction should not be pushed too far. A score of 64 out of 100 on an emotional repression scale is a high result, even at private institutions. Masculinity is the invisible curriculum at all five schools. It's a difference of degree, not kind.

7.5 Girls' Perception of Boys' Emotional Expression

A perception poll of 162 girls found something that contradicts typical ideas. Most of the girls, 72 percent, agreed boys showing sadness or anxiety was “perfectly fine” or even “good.” Just 18% indicated they would think poorly of a boy for crying. But when asked what girls would think if they saw boys crying, 65% of boys indicated they would ‘lose respect’ for them.

This mismatch is hugely important. Part of this is boys suppressing feelings, in reaction to an imagined judgment by girls that most girls do not genuinely hold. The invisible curriculum is so potent it doesn't even need genuine social repercussions to work – boys police each other based on expected reactions.

8. Hypothesis Testing — Summary of Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Chi-Square Value	p-value	Result
H ₁	Peer culture significantly shapes emotional suppression in boys	$\chi^2=14.32$	$p<0.01$	Accepted
H ₂	Emotional suppression level is higher in Govt. schools than private	$\chi^2=6.18$	$p<0.05$	Accepted
H ₃	Teacher gender-coded responses reinforce masculine suppression norms	$\chi^2=9.74$	$p<0.01$	Accepted

All the three hypotheses of the study were accepted at 0.05 or 0.01 level of significance. This suggests that the invisible curriculum of masculinity measured through peer culture behaviour and teacher responses is a statistically significant influence on emotional repression in boys in Kaithal's co-educational schools. The results are similar for government and private school samples, although the impact is larger for government institutions.

9. Discussion

The outcomes of this study paint a bleak and disturbing picture: males at co-educational schools in Kaithal, Haryana are being taught on a daily basis that expressing feelings is risky, female and embarrassing. They do not learn it from textbooks, from official courses, but from the constant flow of peer contact that surrounds them – in corridors, playgrounds and classrooms. And they learn this with the unknowing help of teachers whose everyday language promotes such ideas. The unseen curriculum of masculinity in Kaithal's schools is not a local phenomenon. Similar trends are seen in research from all throughout India and the world. But in Haryana, where patriarchal standards are particularly strong, and where the cultural drive toward a certain violent style of masculinity is especially great, the power of this invisible curriculum is particularly great.

What does this mean in practice for the boys involved? Repeated research in psychology and public health has shown an association between persistent emotional repression and greater

rates of depression, anxiety, substance addiction and suicide thoughts among men. The suicide rate among men in Haryana is well above the national average. The causes are many, but the pattern of emotional suppression that starts in school is probably certainly a contributing element.

It is especially significant that boys misunderstand girls' attitudes, in part by suppressing feelings on the basis of a perceived judgment by females that does not really exist. This means that one of the fundamental mechanisms of the invisible curriculum is the production and maintenance of the false social ideas. Boys think they will lose status and respect from girls if they display emotion. But statistics reveals that girls are mostly accepting of emotional expression. This shows that open and honest conversations in schools between boys and girls regarding the expression of emotion could be a powerful strategy in combating these mistaken notions.

The most tangible finding of the research may be the role of teachers. While the deep cultural norms of the wider community are difficult to change fast, teacher behavior in classrooms can be directly addressed through pre-service and in-service teacher education courses. Teachers who understand the invisible curriculum can use different words, respond differently to emotional expression in boys and establish classroom conditions that are truly emotionally safe for all students – not just girls.

10. Suggestions

Schools and Teachers

1. Teacher training programmes in Haryana should incorporate a specific section on gender and emotional intelligence that would allow teachers to identify how their everyday language constructs or deconstructs the normative masculine emotionality.
2. Schools should institute planned 'circle time' or classroom discussion sessions where all kids, boys and girls equally, are encouraged to express and share their thoughts in a safe, guided atmosphere.
- 3 Schools must have and execute a clear anti-bullying policy that expressly covers emotional policing – calling guys 'girls' or otherwise insulting them for expressing feelings.
4. School counsellors (where available) should be trained in gender-sensitive counselling, and should also conduct regular group sessions for boys only on emotional literacy and healthy expression.

For the Education Policy

1. The Haryana State Education Department should review the NCERT and SCERT curriculum and supplementary materials to identify and delete terminology that stereotypes emotional expression as gender-specific.
2. The NCF standards on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) should be more actively implemented in Haryana schools with gender sensitive adaptations to the distinctive cultural setting of the state.

3. District-level education officers in Kaithal should periodically undertake gender audits of schools – looking not only at enrolment data but also at classroom culture, teacher language and peer dynamics.

Research in the future

1. Longitudinal studies are needed to track boys from Class VI to Class XII to understand how emotional suppression progresses during the crucial adolescent years and which school-based interventions are most successful in reducing it.
2. The study should be reproduced in other districts of Haryana (especially Rewari, Jhajjar and Mahendragarh, which have even more significant gender skewed sex ratios) to evaluate whether Kaithal's findings are typical of the broader state pattern.

11. Conclusion

When a boy in a Kaithal school swallows his tears, wears a smile and labels himself stupid for feeling sad, that's not a natural response. That is learned behavior. It's something that has been taught to him, lesson by lesson, interaction by interaction, by the invisible curriculum of masculinity that surrounds him every day in school.

This article has proven that peer culture in co-educational schools of Kaithal, Haryana is a potent teacher of emotional suppression. It awards toughness, punishes softness, and polices boys' emotional lives with the language of gender. Teachers reinforce these teachings with their responses and words (sometimes unknowingly). The upshot is a generation of boys who have learned to split off from their own emotional lives — boys who will grow to be men who struggle to sustain healthy relationships, manage mental health difficulties, and live fully human lives. This is not a problem for boys just. It's a problem for families, for communities, for society. Men who have been taught to suppress emotions and to express them only through violence are more likely to perpetrate gender-based violence, be emotionally absent partners and parents, and perpetuate the cycle of patriarchal harm that already so deeply marks Haryana's social landscape.

The good news is that the unseen curriculum can be brought to light. If teachers, students, and school officials can recognize the patterns that our research has established, they have a choice about whether to duplicate them or modify them. Schools that build real emotional safe spaces for boys – where vulnerability equals honesty, not weakness, and asking for help is bold, not humiliating – can begin to rewrite the curriculum of masculinity for the better. The boys of Kaithal's schools deserve schools that treat them as fully human. This research is a step closer to making that possible.

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