

## Research Article

# Ever the Father: Caring Masculinities Among Older Men in Two Bollywood Films

Senjooti Roy, PhD\*<sup>ORCID</sup> and Liat Ayalon, PhD\*<sup>ORCID</sup>

Louis and Gabi Weisfeld School of Social Work, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.

\*Address correspondence to: Senjooti Roy, PhD, Louis and Gabi Weisfeld School of Social Work, Bar-Ilan University, Building 213, Ramat Gan, Israel 5390002. E-mail: [senjootiroy@gmail.com](mailto:senjootiroy@gmail.com)

Received: February 23, 2022; Editorial Decision Date: August 23, 2022

**Decision Editor:** Ulla Kriebner, MA, PhD

## Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Ideals of masculinity have gradually evolved from dominant traits of “hegemonic masculinity” to a more nurturing concept of “caring masculinity” that recognizes the caregiving roles of men. In this article, we explore the performance of caring masculinities among older men in later life. We do this specifically in the Indian context by analyzing 2 Bollywood films, *Piku* (2015) and *102, Not Out* (2018), which revolve around the lives of 3 widowers aged 70, 75, and 102.

**Research Design and Methods:** We use a directed content analysis approach to examine the performance of caring masculinities in intergenerational (older parent–adult child) relationships.

**Results:** Both films exemplify tenets of caring masculinity as 3 older fathers continue to perform caring roles well into their later years. They also navigate a range of emotions and vulnerabilities that challenge behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity, a mainstay of male role portrayal in Bollywood films. Additionally, the films highlight the complexity and fragility of intergenerational bonds, emphasizing the prevalence of ambivalence rather than pure solidarity or conflict that have traditionally been used to characterize such relationships.

**Discussion and Implications:** The films challenge the notion of older adults, especially older men, as being primarily care recipients as they age. The performance of caring masculinities allows for a reimagining of masculinity performance in society. The portrayal of men aging within nuclear households without spousal and/or intergenerational support encourages viewers to perceive new roles and realities for older men in India.

**Keywords:** Bollywood, Caring masculinities, India, Intergenerational relationships, Older men

Until recently, theories of masculinity rarely involved scholarship on the gender roles performed by older men. Traditionally, gender theories focused on women. Later, theories of masculinity highlighted power hierarchies among men/multiple masculinities (dominant and alternative ways of being male) and between men and women/femininities in patriarchal societal setups (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). Connell’s (1987) novel concept of “hegemonic masculinity” representing beliefs, behaviors, practices, ideolo-

gies, and gender performances of men at their physical and socioeconomic prime was considered aspirational, failing which men could be judged, disempowered, and discriminated against for not being manly enough (Calasanti, 2004). Although a seminal concept in gender literature, “hegemonic masculinity” did not stretch far enough to include older men within its ambit. Over time, terms such as “inclusive” (Anderson, 2010, 2012), “hybrid” (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), and “caring” (Elliott, 2016) masculinity have broadened the confines of “hegemonic masculinity”

and its association with dominance, violence, homophobia, and misogyny.

For a long time, older men were relegated to the sidelines of both gerontological and gender scholarship due to their focus on (a) feminization of aging, and (b) older men being considered misfits within the larger framework of (hegemonic) masculinity (Arber et al., 2003; Thompson, 1994). In the past few decades, however, research on older men's lives has shed light upon issues such as receiving care and performing caregiving roles (Calasanti & King, 2007; Ribeiro et al., 2007); experiences of loss and grief (Bennett, 2007); suffering (Canham, 2009); frailty and loss of physical health (Evans et al., 2011; McVittie & Willock, 2006); declining sexual potency (Sandberg, 2011); loss of professional roles (Glendenning et al., 2017); aging alone (Hughes et al., 2004); and aging as members of the LGBTQ community (Berger, 2013), among others. Such studies have challenged the prescriptive tenets of hegemonic masculinity and redefined "doing gender" for older men (West & Zimmerman, 1987). They have also challenged traditional "male roles" that required men "to cultivate incompetency in all feminine activities," seek and cultivate independent achievements, suppress emotions, and be active, self-contained, dominant, level-headed, aggressive, and self-confident (Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

Gender roles are closely tied to issues of class, sexuality, race, social hierarchy, and cultural norms. The additional element of advancing age further diversifies the experience of individuals. In this study, we explore the portrayal of three older men in two Bollywood comedy-dramas, *Piku* (2015) and *102, Not Out* (2018), to examine how cultural and socioeconomic factors shape the lives of the three middle-class, educated, economically secure, urban-dwelling older Indian men, all of whom play the roles of widowers and involved/interfering fathers. For this, we apply the concept of "caring masculinity" within intergenerational relations to analyze the evolving roles and relationships of older/aging fathers with their adult children within rapidly changing sociocultural norms.

"Caring masculinity," in a shift from "hegemonic masculinity" and its ideas of male dominance and gender inequality, lends primacy to values of care, including positive emotions, relationality, and interdependence (Elliott, 2016). It requires men to actively resist characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity by giving up associated privileges and powers and risking ridicule and social ostracism (Elliott, 2016). Caring masculinity posits masculinity as a nurturing and caregiving role as opposed to a provider/breadwinning role (Hanlon, 2009). However, financial provision may also be considered a form of caregiving and a more socially acceptable and masculine role for fathers. In fact, the characteristics of a "good" father often include the ability and willingness to provide for children. Still, breadwinning lacks the physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects of caregiving activities and, therefore, may not be equated with caregiving (Hanlon, 2009). A notable

difference between hegemonic and caring masculinities is, therefore, that the former lends credence first and foremost to the "provider" or economic role of men, whereas the latter embraces other, more "feminine," ways of caring and providing for children. As such, caring masculinities may be better defined as a broadening or evolution of hegemonic masculinities rather than a complete departure (Hunter et al., 2017).

Caregiving generally occurs in the context of intergenerational relations, which may be broadly categorized as relationships of solidarity, conflict, or ambivalence (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). Intergenerational interactions have long been studied to understand the evolution of roles and expectations between older adults and their adult children in different cultures and will be a useful concept to evaluate the films selected for this study. Today, the older generation (currently in their sixties and seventies), much like the following generation, increasingly finds itself in a "sandwich" role as they engage in "support exchanges" with older parents and adult children. Just as many of them received support from their parents well into midlife, they are now faced with supporting their own adult children as they navigate economic uncertainties, difficulties in finding partners, and spiraling demand for and cost of higher education (Fingerman et al., 2012). At the same time, as they themselves age and experience disease and disability, they seek care from their adult children. Notably, across societies, regardless of age and generation, care work largely falls to a lot of women. In the Indian context, women may spend their entire lives, often to the detriment of their own interests and well-being, catering to the needs of others in the roles of daughter, daughter-in-law, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, or female relative to extended family (Mathias et al., 2019; Ugargol & Bailey, 2018). Therefore, as support exchanges flow in different directions and across multiple generations, intergenerational interactions may simultaneously be emotionally rewarding, burdensome, or a mix of both, reflecting aspects of intergenerational solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence.

Analyzing displays of caring masculinity within older parent–adult child relationships will help highlight how traits of hegemonic masculinity that have been the mainstay of Bollywood films (and reflective of Indian society as a whole) for decades have been challenged and reconfigured in the two films, setting the tone for more inclusive, diverse, and "soft" displays of masculinity in intergenerational contexts.

## Masculinity in Indian Society

Barring a few exceptions, India is a patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal society (Mitra, 2014). The preference for male offspring remains deeply rooted in the local culture; the dominant position of men is firmly entrenched in the social order (Priya et al., 2014). In postcolonial India, sons and men, conditioned by stereotypical notions of gender

and masculinity shaped by British Victorian ideals of militarism, athleticism, and “manliness,” display dominance and aggression toward women and men belonging to minority religions and lower castes and classes, often with scant regard for legal and social repercussions (Anandhi et al., 2002; Dasgupta & Gokulsing, 2013; Murty, 2009). Ideals of “colonial masculinity” (Sinha, 2017) that represented Europeans as “masculine” and therefore deserving of political dominance and non-European natives as “effeminate” subjects incapable of self-governance have trickled down to define gender dynamics driven by “forceful masculinity” (Srivastava, 2015) in modern Indian society. The lasting effects of colonization on the erasure of India’s gender and sexual fluidity of the past have further shaped a gender hierarchy that elevates “manliness” over “womanliness,” and “womanliness” over “effeminate manliness” (Lobo, 2018). Consequently, generally, Indian men are vested with much greater power, authority, influence, and dominance both within as well as outside the home (Priya et al., 2014).

Although British relics of masculinity ideals have influenced gender performance to a large extent, the diversity and heterogeneity of India’s population makes it difficult to ascribe a common set of masculinity norms to all men. Gender performance among Indian males is shaped by various factors such as caste (Anandhi et al., 2002), class (Rogers, 2008), ethnicity (McDuie-Ra, 2013), sexuality (Asthana & Oostvogels, 2001), marriage (preferably with male offspring; Mishra, 2018), rural/urban background (Chowdhry, 2014; Srivastava, 2010), religion (Banerjee, 2012), the use of (gendered) language (Chowdhry, 2015), family traditions (Burgher & Flood, 2019), regional/vernacular sociocultural norms (Chowdhry, 2005), education (Jeffrey et al., 2004), occupation (Nilotpal, 2011), migration (McDuie-Ra, 2013; Rai, 2020), media influence (Srivastava, 2015), nationalist sentiments (Banerjee, 2012), and so on. These factors not only determine equations of gender performance between men and women as well as between men, but also create unique spaces and contexts for masculinity performance in Indian society so that dominant forms of masculinity may differ in different parts of the country (Gopinath & Sundar, 2020). In the last few decades, feminism has gained the limelight, especially in urban India, as more women are educated, employed, and aware of their rights, and more women (and men) are taking a stand against gender and social inequality (Kurian, 2017). While women are tackling gender barriers, men are being challenged for misogynistic and violent displays of “toxic masculinity.” The call for an equitable social order, for sensitivity and thoughtfulness over brash, aggressive, overt male-ness, and the sharing of responsibilities traditionally ascribed to either sex, has “led to confusion over the nature of masculine performance itself” (Dasgupta & Gokulsing, 2013).

The structure of larger Indian society is faithfully reflected in the microcosm of the traditional family structure. In multigenerational joint families, responsibilities,

decision-making, control, and distribution of resources are determined by age and gender, with the eldest male member retaining power over almost every aspect of family members’ lives, such as education, profession, and marriage alliances (Kashyap, 2004). Although the “joint family” system works well in terms of providing social support, intergenerational caregiving, and a general safety net for all family members, its rigid hierarchical nature has the potential to turn exploitative and limit the aspirations and growth of other family members (Kashyap, 2004). The traditional family system, although still largely operational around the country, is gradually giving way to modern family structures. This change is driven primarily by the shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial and knowledge economy, which necessitate large-scale migration of labor. Consequently, new types of families and living arrangements have become commonplace. These include the nuclear family, female-headed households, single-parent families, live-in relationships, and living apart together partnerships, among others (Narayan et al., 2021; Sonawat, 2001). They also include nonkin relationships in later life for support, care, and socialization (Roy & Ayalon, 2021). Moreover, family decision-making, management of finances, daily chores, and childcare duties are less frequently dictated by gender, although women still bear the greater share of unpaid labor and housework, whereas men embrace the roles of breadwinners and financial managers (Radhakrishnan et al., 2020). In this new sociocultural context, older men continue to command respect as patriarchs of the family, primarily due to the status accorded to their age, but their direct influence on younger generations is becoming considerably limited. This loss of power, irrespective of the chronological age of the man, in a progressively egalitarian setting, continues to challenge patriarchal norms and gender performance in India.

## Masculinity in Bollywood

India’s 183-billion-Indian Rupee (approximately \$2.3bn) film industry is among the largest in the world and Bollywood, the Hindi arm of the industry, leads the country in terms of revenue generation and film production (Basuroy, 2021). Bollywood attracts wide viewership domestically as well as internationally. Consequently, it plays an influential role in the depiction of cultural norms as well as in shaping perspectives about social issues. Male representation in Bollywood has undergone significant transformation in the last several decades. Heroes, villains, patriarchs, and supporting male characters spanning diverse age groups have been portrayed in a manner that both conform to and detract from prevalent notions of masculinity. Whereas “manly” characters typically inspire awe and valorization, “nonmanly” characters invite fun-making and hearty chuckles.

Over time, the “angry young man” image of the Bollywood hero of the 1970s–1980s gave way to the

“creative young man” of the following decades, which in turn led to the “metrosexual male” at the beginning of the 21st century with a focus on physical fitness, grooming, and a globalized, cosmopolitan image to pander to audiences world over (Gehlawat, 2012). At the same time, the focus of films shifted from revenge and violence to love, romance, and family, and ideas of masculinity evolved from the hypermasculine “angry young man” to the “sensitive urban man” in a display of “soft masculinity” (Lobo, 2018; Mehra, 2019). Some recent films (as well as some in the past) have valorized “hyper,” “exaggerated,” and “toxic masculinity”—they have received both popularity and heavy criticism for objectifying women and legitimizing the male gaze in an effort to exert control over the female body and resorting to violence when female interest remains unreciprocated (Lobo, 2018; Mehra, 2019; Raj & Goswami, 2020). Other films have portrayed men as feminists championing the rights of women, highlighting women’s issues, and battling (societal) obstacles that dare to hinder the dreams and aspirations of their daughters, wives, and other female characters. Interestingly, Bollywood films of the last two decades have catered to the female gaze by putting the highly sculpted bodies of male characters on display, an occurrence that was rare in films from the 1960s to the 1990s (Raj & Goswami, 2020), although whether this display is for the benefit of women or the self-image of male actors is debatable. Another notable change in content pertains to a focus on social issues or “movies with a message.” Recent films in this genre have touched upon topics like premature balding, erectile dysfunction, and mental health of men, all of which highlight vulnerability and subvert notions of “manliness.” Overall, however, the majority of films play into the hands of established norms of masculinity where “men do not cry” and must “man up”; they must be driven by rage and vengeance; they must protect others; constantly think of physical intimacy; drink and act recklessly; earn and provide; and take the lead in a relationship (Paul, 2018). Such overt displays of masculinity have also been linked to crimes in real life for normalizing the harassment of women under the guise of courtship and romance, and the denial of agency to women (Mallam, 2019).

## The Present Study

The evolution of Bollywood cinema is a direct response to the demand for content-based films with meaningful storylines, good quality acting, and diverse themes. Consequently, the industry has opened up to experimentation, which in turn has created opportunities for older actors as protagonists and primary characters. This trend is more visible in the case of older men compared to older women who still battle both sexism and ageism in the industry (Beg, 2019). Nevertheless, older, mature characters of substance have found favor with modern audiences, as witnessed by a string of recent films with lead characters over the age of 60 that have been well received by audiences and critics alike (Kashyap, 2018).

This article examines two films, *Piku* (2015) and *102, Not Out* (2018), that revolve around male protagonists aged 70, 75, and 102 years, respectively. The films challenge stereotypes surrounding older men, old age, gender roles, parental responsibilities, and life expectations. They also shed light on the reconfiguration of dominant masculinity performance to caring masculinity traits as one ages and takes on new and unexpected roles in life. Both films provide a potential platform to change narratives surrounding age and aging in current times, redefine masculinity performance, and showcase the fragility and complexity of intergenerational bonds.

## Design and Methods

We selected two recent commercial films, helmed by popular actors, for their central theme of depicting caring masculinities within intergenerational relationships. Films are recognized as tools for socialization; they have the potential to impact large audiences and initiate/change conversations and narratives around social topics as content and images are known to form, alter, challenge, and reinforce stereotypes (Aslam, 2012; Rajapandian et al., 2022; Trivedi, 2021). Both films were well received by audiences. According to reviews on platforms like Google, IMDb, and Rotten Tomatoes, the films were appreciated for being family entertainers, for handling unusual topics, for the commendable performances of the actors, the depiction of father–child bonds, the nostalgia evoked by the cinematography, the social messages of the films, and the quotidian, mundane circumstances of the characters as opposed to the traditional Bollywood fare of larger-than-life heroes, action, romance, and song-and-dance routines. Gender/masculinity performance was not discussed explicitly in the audience’s reviews. This study, therefore, adds a new perspective through which the films may be viewed.

We analyzed the films guided by the directed content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Directed content analysis allows for the exploration and expansion of an existing theoretical framework, especially when research on a topic is limited. It is helpful for the application of conceptual categories to new contexts. Directed content analysis is generally applied to textual data; however, we used it for film analysis (rather than formal film analysis methods) as we aimed to focus solely on the theme of caring masculinities in intergenerational relationships rather than nuances of film execution and/or technical analysis of filmmaking for which film analysis methods would be better suited. The directed content analysis approach allowed us to apply the emerging concept of “caring masculinities” in a novel way.

We watched each film twice. The first viewing was aimed toward gaining a preliminary understanding of plot structure, character interaction, storyline, cultural context, and narrative elements. The first viewing helped us to explore predetermined categories for analysis. These included: (a) the physical appearances of characters, including the use of



prosthetics; (b) displays of various emotional states such as joviality, peevishness, dejection, joy, fear, and satisfaction; (c) familial and social aspects that shaped the characters' daily lives and interactions; (d) sociocultural context within which the characters were placed; (e) the personal narrative of each character; (f) the geographical location of significant events; (g) the primary message of each film; (h) moments or issues that stood out to the researchers; (i) information that could not be included in the previous eight categories; and (j) reception of films by audiences. These broad categories supported the creation of two primary themes before the second viewing. These were: (a) masculinity performance in older ages, with special attention towards displays of "caring masculinity," and (b) the aging experiences of the characters, especially within intergenerational relations and interactions. In the second viewing, we paid particular attention to aspects that allowed for the exploration of the two themes. In the third stage, we compared the two films to identify similarities and differences pertaining to the characters and their circumstances. Finally, we took into account the sociocultural context within which the stories unfolded in order to perform a more holistic evaluation of the films. The four-stage analysis of the films enabled us to evaluate them against appropriate literature. This analysis, along with a description of the films, is presented as [Online Supplementary Material](#).

## Discussion

This study was aimed at exploring the concept of caring masculinities among older men, with a specific focus on intergenerational relationships. Two Bollywood films were selected for this purpose. The films were selected for their content as well as for their large viewership. Bollywood actors are well-known and received around the world; veteran actors like Amitabh Bachchan and the late Rishi Kapoor, the protagonists of the films, have also amassed the goodwill of audiences for decades. The content of the films provides a timely platform for the discussion of caring masculinities in intergenerational relationships.

The films selected for this study, *Piku* and *102, Not Out*, address a series of struggles and challenges facing the characters. These include challenges associated with aging bodies and minds, parental responsibilities that do not necessarily end once a child becomes an adult, the desire to achieve goals/settle affairs in the face of dwindling time, and the evolution of parent-child relationships. Chief amongst these is the exploration of the older parent-adult child relationship, which may be best analyzed using the concept of "caring masculinities."

"Caring masculinities" allows us to revisit the roles of men as fathers and carers in society, especially at advanced ages. As people live longer and intergenerational support becomes necessary to navigate life challenges, older men may increasingly find themselves providing emotional or physical support to younger generations just as they may

receive help with health care and daily needs from the latter. Therefore, older men may become both care providers and care recipients as they age rather than solely care recipients as commonly expected in society. On the other hand, as displayed in the films, well-intentioned care toward adult children may be misinterpreted as interference. Older fathers may also deliberately try to exert control over the affairs of their adult children. Traditionally, providing physical and emotional care to members of the family has been perceived as a feminine act and, therefore, a feminized and subordinated role (Hanlon, 2012). However, in the absence of loving and compassionate mother figures in the films, the responsibility is undertaken by the fathers, albeit in different ways.

In *Piku*, Bhaskor is an ill-tempered man who clashes with everybody around him as he is lonely and in need of a listening ear. The constrained time and availability of his daughter, even though she takes great pains to meet his needs, make him accuse her of treating him like a "burden." However, he is fiercely protective of her and her rights as an independent woman. He wants to ensure that she is not trapped into gendered roles of cooking, cleaning, and looking after a husband, and therefore makes efforts to scare away potential partners. Even though Piku is in her thirties, Bhaskor, often to the annoyance of his daughter and everyone else, makes her love life his business. In the process, he comes across as a rude, gruff, selfish, and interfering father. Underlying this rough exterior, however, is his fear for the loss of his daughter's freedom and independence as he does not want her to emulate her aunt and other women who conform to all societal expectations of gendered roles while sacrificing their own dreams. Bhaskor believes that women who sacrifice their dreams to avoid overshadowing their husbands have a "low IQ" problem.

In stark contrast to Bhaskor's gruffness, Dattatreya, the 102-year-old father of 75-year-old Babulal, is ever joyful and an eternal optimist. Both Dattatreya and Babulal are fathers but experience fatherhood in disparate ways. Babulal, the complete antithesis of his father, is perpetually dejected and focused on a single objective—to be reunited with his estranged son. Dattatreya, who is aware of his own imminent death due to a terminal health condition, is also focused on a single goal, which is to make Babulal happy. In time, although Babulal's life begins to change for the better due to his father's interference, he finds the motivation to take purposeful action only when he learns of his father's terminal illness and grapples with the understanding that he will be completely alone for the first time in 75 years. This dawning realization prompts him to evaluate his life, prioritize his independent emotional goals, and bond closer with his father, his constant companion of 75 years.

In an apt display of "caring masculinities," all three fathers embrace nonrestrictive gender norms by drawing attention to the physical and emotional vulnerabilities of old age and evolving older parent-adult child relationships. Although the characters hold positions of authority within

their homes and in society by virtue of age, gender, and predominant sociocultural norms, they are not portrayed as strong, stoic men, seemingly unaffected by the trials and tribulations of life. Similarly, they are not above providing emotional care or undertaking small household chores that are traditionally associated with females (the more demanding household tasks such as cooking and cleaning are undertaken by domestic help). Instead, the characters navigate a range of emotional landscapes befitting their circumstances—they are unapologetically happy or morose or cantankerous; they are each allowed to explore their emotions, display their strengths and vulnerabilities, and choose the role that they wish to embody. In neither film do the male characters devolve into “lesser men” due to their age or display of caring masculinities. On the contrary, in both films, the adult children, Piku and Babulal, are conscious of the potential impact of losing the protective shelter of their fathers’ towering presence in their lives.

The performance of caring masculinities in the films is made possible by the close intergenerational bonds shared between the fathers and their adult children. Intergenerational bonds, especially within families, are typically characterized by ambivalence—the coexistence of positive and negative experiences, expectations, and emotions (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). In the films, although members of both generations reside together in the same households and share deep bonds of love, care, and familial duty, conflicts flare up easily. In *Piku*, Bhaskor does not respect his daughter’s boundaries, puts himself and his obsession with his bowel movements ahead of everyone and everything else, and is unbothered by the souring of relationships with relatives and neighbors. In *102, Not Out*, Babulal, who is content to dwell in misery and pine for his son, is constantly annoyed by his father’s antics and unrelenting efforts to draw him out of his despondent mood. Both Piku and Babulal consider their fathers to be overbearing and regularly express irritation and frustrated resignation. However, both draw emotional sustenance from their fathers, who provide meaning, purpose, and structure to the lives of their adult children.

An important consideration in the film is the socio-cultural context within which the films unfold. It is now increasingly common for people in India to have fewer children, reside in nuclear households, for children to migrate, and for older adults to care for themselves with part- or full-time assistance of domestic help (Roy & Ayalon, 2021). In time, these changes are bound to further increase the physical distance between generations, creating a larger deficit of family carers. Employing paid carers, however, has financial implications for which many older adults may not be prepared. Therefore, unlike the characters in the films who do not lack for resources, many older men in India may have to fend for themselves through illness and/or disability due to a lack of income security and government safety nets.

The prospect of aging (alone) in a nuclear family set-up, sometimes without spousal and/or intergenerational care and support, is a relatively new phenomenon in India, where

aging at home amidst family members of different generations has traditionally been the norm. This gradual change in family setups is also reflected in media representation of society. For example, an analysis of print advertisements before and after 2000 found that older adults are being depicted less frequently with people of other ages, whereas traditionally, advertisements involving different age groups have featured joint families/households (Devi & Samanta, 2019). It is commonly agreed that older adults fare better when they live in their own homes among their own possessions in a familiar community with strong social networks (Wiles et al., 2012). However, for older Indian men, the prospect of aging alone at home, even though it may be a familiar environment, may engender doubts and insecurities that they may or may not be able to articulate and handle, as it has been found that older men experiencing bereavement may feel unable to process their grief, adjust to anxiety about the future, and express sadness over the loss of roles of provider and sexual partner lest their emotions interfere with the expectation of emotional control and stoicism (Bennett, 2007). Consequently, they may negotiate their emotions, speech, and behaviors in ways that allow them to preserve their sense of manhood even if such measures fail to provide comfort and solace at a time of crisis (Bennett, 2007). Moreover, many older men may not have the skills to care for themselves, especially with respect to cooking, housekeeping, and other domestic tasks, which may lead to feelings of incompetence, frustration, and loneliness. Therefore, the experience of aging alone among this population merits further examination.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the narratives of the two films using the emerging concept of “caring masculinities” in older parent–adult child relationships. As Bollywood cinema is dominated by portrayals of “hegemonic masculinity,” films that seek to expand the concept of masculinity performance deserve greater attention, especially at a time when gender roles are being debated and reconfigured everywhere. That the films revolve around the lives of older men adds diversity to an otherwise youth-centric film industry. Additionally, the success of the films is also reflective of the evolving tastes of the audience, many of whom may know of older men in similar situations.

As films harbor the ability to reflect, influence, and shape thought processes, it is important to analyze contemporary offerings, especially mainstream cinema, that rest on the shoulders of widely popular actors with large fan followings. Watching older characters take center stage in a largely youth-driven culture drives home the message that older adults cannot be relegated to the fringes of society and that issues surrounding population aging merit recognition, discussion, and greater visibility. At the same time, the films address evolving intergenerational relationships, especially the dimension of intergenerational ambivalence, rather than the “love–hate” duality (Lüscher & Pillemer,

1998) of pure filial love and devotion (solidarity) or extreme stress and abuse (conflict), an occurrence that may strike a chord with viewers.

The analysis of the two films can, therefore, help expand existing literature on the portrayal of older adults in media as well as age and masculinity performance among older men in India. The films can encourage younger generations to emulate characteristics of “caring masculinity” over the brash aggressiveness of “hegemonic masculinity”. They can help to redefine the concept of “care” as performed by men by highlighting nonbreadwinning/“nonproductive” roles, especially in retirement. Additionally, the films challenge ageist stereotypes about older men as being solely care recipients, as opposed to older women who may be expected to continue to provide care at advanced ages. Finally, the films anticipate future challenges facing India with regard to intergenerational reciprocity, family caregiving, male widowhood, social isolation, loneliness, and the overall status of older men in nuclear families, issues that could make good subjects for future films. Overall, the films add to the field of gerontology by exploring the diversity of aging experiences among older men, highlighting the demographic challenges and opportunities tied to a massive aging population, and refocusing the gerontological lens to examine the lives of older men within evolving sociocultural contexts.

## Supplementary Material

Supplementary data are available at *The Gerontologist* online.

## Funding

This study was supported by a grant from the Ministry of Science and Technology of Israel as part of GENDER-NET Plus and the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 741874.

## Conflict of Interest

None declared.

## Acknowledgment

The data used for our study comprises two commercial Bollywood films, both of which are available to the public through video streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Our study did not require to be preregistered as it involves content analysis of films.

## References

- Anandhi, S., Jeyaranjan, J., & Krishnan, R. (2002). Work, caste and competing masculinities: Notes from a Tamil village. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(43), 4397–4406. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4412773>. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2002/43/review-womens-studies-review-issues-specials/work-caste-and-competing-masculinities>
- Anderson, E. (2010). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. Routledge.
- Anderson, E. (2012). Shifting masculinities in Anglo-American countries. *Masculinities and Social Change*, 1(1), 40–60. doi:10.4471/mcs.2012.03
- Arber, S., Davidson, K., & Ginn, J. (2003). *Gender and ageing: Changing roles and relationships*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Aslam, E. H. (2012). Motion pictures as an agent of socialization: A comparative content analysis of demography of population on Indian silver screen and reported crime news in Pakistan (1976 to 2006). *Business Review*, 7(2), 23–50. doi:10.54784/1990-6587.1202
- Asthana, S., & Oostvogels, R. (2001). The social construction of male “homosexuality” in India: Implications for HIV transmission and prevention. *Social Science and Medicine*, 52(5), 707–721. doi:10.1016/s0277-9536(00)00167-2
- Banerjee, S. (2012). *Make me a man!: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*. Suny Press.
- Basuroy, T. (2021). Film industry in India—Statistics and facts. *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/topics/2140/film-industry-in-india/>
- Beg, H. (2019). Why does Bollywood hate “older” women so much? *The Quint*. <https://www.thequint.com/neon/hot-take/bollywood-sexist-ageist-representation#read-more>
- Bennett, K. M. (2007). “No sissy stuff”: Towards a theory of masculinity and emotional expression in older widowed men. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21(4), 347–356. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2007.05.002
- Berger, R. (2013). *Gay and gray: The older homosexual man*. Routledge.
- Bridges, T., & Pascoe, C. J. (2014). Hybrid masculinities: New directions in the sociology of men and masculinities. *Sociology Compass*, 8(3), 246–258. doi:10.1111/soc4.12134
- Burgher, I., & Flood, M. (2019). “Why are you carrying him? Where is the mother?”: Male caregiving and the remaking of fatherhood and masculinity in Mizoram, Northeast India. *NORMA*, 14(4), 206–222. doi:10.1080/18902138.2019.1642576
- Calasanti, T. (2004). Feminist gerontology and old men. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 59(6), S305–S314. doi:10.1093/geronb/59.6.s305
- Calasanti, T., & King, N. (2007). Taking “women’s work” “like a man”: Husbands’ experiences of care work. *Gerontologist*, 47(4), 516–527. doi:10.1093/geront/47.4.516
- Canham, S. L. (2009). The interaction of masculinity and control and its impact on the experience of suffering for an older man. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 23(2), 90–96. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2008.12.003
- Chowdhry, P. (2005). Crisis of masculinity in Haryana: The unmarried, the unemployed and the aged. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(49), 5189–5198. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2005/49/special-articles/crisis-masculinity-haryana.html>
- Chowdhry, P. (2014). Masculine spaces: Rural male culture in North India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(47), 41–49. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2014/47/special-articles/masculine-spaces.html>
- Chowdhry, P. (2015). Popular perceptions of masculinity in rural North Indian oral traditions. *Asian Ethnology*, 74(1), 5–36. doi:10.18874/ae.74.1.02
- Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics*. Stanford University Press.

- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society, 19*(6), 829–859. doi:10.1177/0891243205278639
- Dasgupta, R., & Gokulsing, K. M. (2013). Introduction: Perceptions of masculinity and challenges to the Indian male. In R. Dasgupta & K. M. Gokulsing (Eds.), *Masculinity and its challenges in India: Essays on changing perceptions* (pp. 5–26). McFarland.
- Devi, A., & Samanta, T. (2019). Media and age-coded representations of later life: An analysis of selected print advertisements of English-language magazines in India. *Journal of Women and Aging, 31*(6), 513–539. doi:10.1080/08952841.2018.1521655
- Elliott, K. (2016). Caring masculinities: Theorizing an emerging concept. *Men and Masculinities, 19*(3), 240–259. doi:10.1177/1097184x15576203
- Evans, J., Frank, B., Oliffe, J. L., & Gregory, D. (2011). Health, illness, men and masculinities (HIMM): A theoretical framework for understanding men and their health. *Journal of Men's Health, 8*(1), 7–15. doi:10.1016/j.jomh.2010.09.227
- Fingerman, K. L., Pillemer, K. A., Silverstein, M., & Suiitor, J. J. (2012). The baby boomers' intergenerational relationships. *Gerontologist, 52*(2), 199–209. doi:10.1093/geront/gnr139
- Gehlawat, A. (2012). "Aadat se Majboor"/"helpless by habit": Metrosexual masculinity in contemporary Bollywood. *Studies in South Asian Film and Media, 4*(1), 61–79. doi:10.1386/safm.4.1.61\_1
- Glendenning, J., Quéniart, A., & Charpentier, M. (2017). Men's attitudes to aging: Threatened, performed, and negotiated masculinity. *International Journal of Gender Studies, 6*(11), 126–153. [https://chairevieillessement.uqam.ca/fichier/document/ag-international\\_journal\\_of\\_gender\\_studies.2017.pdf](https://chairevieillessement.uqam.ca/fichier/document/ag-international_journal_of_gender_studies.2017.pdf)
- Gopinath, P. & Sundar, P. (2020). Introduction: Masculinities. *South Asian Popular Culture, 18*(1), 1–10. doi:10.1080/14746689.2020.1736819
- Hanlon, N. (2009). Caregiving masculinities: An exploratory analysis. In K. Lynch, J. Baker, & M. Lyons (Eds.), *Affective equality* (pp. 180–198). Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9780230245082\_10
- Hanlon, N. (2012). *Masculinities, care and equality: Identity and nurture in men's lives*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687
- Hughes, G., Bennett, K. M., & Hetherington, M. M. (2004). Old and alone: Barriers to healthy eating in older men living on their own. *Appetite, 43*(3), 269–276. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2004.06.002
- Hunter, S. C., Riggs, D. W., & Augoustinos, M. (2017). Hegemonic masculinity versus a caring masculinity: Implications for understanding primary caregiving fathers. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 11*(3), e12307. doi:10.1111/spc3.12307
- Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, R., & Jeffery, P. (2004). Degrees without freedom: The impact of formal education on Dalit young men in north India. *Development and Change, 35*(5), 963–986. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7660.2004.00388.x
- Kashyap, A. (2018). Age is becoming just a number in Hindi cinema. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/thread/arts-culture-society/age-becoming-just-a-number-in-hindi-cinema/article24451001.ece>
- Kashyap, L. (2004). The impact of modernization on Indian families: The counselling challenge. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 26*(4), 341–350. doi:10.1007/s10447-004-0169-7
- Kurian, A. (2017). Decolonizing the body: Theoretical imaginings on the fourth wave feminism in India. In S. Jha & A. Kurian (Eds.), *New feminisms in South Asia* (pp. 15–41). Routledge.
- Lobo, A. G. (2018). *Constructions of masculinity in Bollywood promotional content* (Doctoral dissertation). Syracuse University.
- Lüscher, K., & Pillemer, K. (1998). Intergenerational ambivalence: A new approach to the study of parent-child relations in later life. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60*(2), 413–425. doi:10.2307/353858
- Mallam, S. K. R. (2019). Sexual harassment as courtship: Performing hegemonic masculinity in contemporary Telugu cinema. *Journal of Creative Communications, 14*(2), 118–131. doi:10.1177/0973258619848626
- Mathias, K., Kermode, M., San Sebastian, M., Davar, B., & Goicolea, I. (2019). An asymmetric burden: Experiences of men and women as caregivers of people with psycho-social disabilities in rural North India. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 56*(1), 76–102. doi:10.1177/1363461518792728
- McDuaire-Ra, D. (2013). Being a tribal man from the North-East: Migration, morality, and masculinity. *South Asian History and Culture, 4*(2), 250–265. doi:10.1080/19472498.2013.768867
- McVittie, C., & Willock, J. (2006). "You can't fight windmills": How older men do health, ill health, and masculinities. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(6), 788–801. doi:10.1177/1049732306288453
- Mehra, M. (2019). The many masculinities in Bollywood: 1960s to the present. *Feminism in India*. <https://feminisminindia.com/2019/10/16/many-masculinities-bollywood-60s-present/>
- Mishra, P. (2018). Being "bare branches": Demographic imbalance, marriage exclusion and masculinity in north India. In: S. Srinivasan & S. Li (Eds.), *Scarce women and surplus men in China and India* (pp. 25–46). Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-63275-9\_2
- Mitra, A. (2014). Son preference in India: Implications for gender development. *Journal of Economic Issues, 48*(4), 1021–1037. doi:10.2753/JEI0021-3624480408
- Murty, M. (2009). Representing Hindutva: Nation, religion and masculinity in Indian popular cinema, 1990 to 2003. *Popular Communication, 7*(4), 267–281. doi:10.1080/15405700903211898
- Narayan, C. L., Narayan, M., & Deepanshu, M. (2021). Live-in relationships in India—Legal and psychological implications. *Journal of Psychosexual Health, 3*(1), 18–23. doi:10.1177/2631831820974585
- Nilotpal, K. (2011). *Egoism, anomie and masculinity: Suicide in rural South India (Andhra Pradesh)* (Doctoral dissertation). London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Paul, S. (2018). Stereotypical characterization of men in Bollywood cinema: A study on gender performativity. In *Conference: Moving beyond the margin: The politics of exclusion and assimilation*. Central University of Rajasthan.
- Priya, N., Abhishek, G., Ravi, V., Aarushi, K., Nizamuddin, K., Dhanashri B., Boyle, S., & Sanjay, K. (2014). *Study on masculinity, intimate partner violence and son preference in India*. International Center for Research on Women.
- Radhakrishnan, V., Sen, S., & Singaravelu, N. (2020). 92% Indian women take part in unpaid domestic work; only 27% men do



- so. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/data/92pc-indian-women-take-part-in-unpaid-domestic-work-only-27pc-men-do-so/article32729100.ece>
- Rai, P. (2020). Seasonal masculinities: Seasonal labor migration and masculinities in rural western India. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 27(2), 261–280. doi:10.1080/0966369x.2019.1640188
- Raj, A., & Goswami, M. P. (2020). “Is Macho the in-thing?” Effects of the representation of masculinity in Bollywood cinema on youngsters. *Global Media Journal*, 12(1), 1–24. <http://gmj.manipal.edu/issues/june2020/5%20is%20is%20macho%20the%20in-thing.pdf>
- Rajapandian, R., Iyyanar, S., Arumugam, S., & Bala Krishnan, M. C. (2022). Herstories in contemporary Indian films. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 81(1), 41–52. doi:10.1111/ajes.12437
- Ribeiro, O., Paúl, C., & Nogueira, C. (2007). Real men, real husbands: Caregiving and masculinities in later life. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21(4), 302–313. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2007.05.005
- Rogers, M. (2008). Modernity, “authenticity,” and ambivalence: Subaltern masculinities on a South Indian college campus. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14(1), 79–95. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00479.x
- Roy, S., & Ayalon, L. (2021). “Goodness and kindness”: Long-distance caregiving through volunteers during the COVID-19 lockdown in India. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 76(7), e281–e289. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbaa187
- Sandberg, L. (2011). *Getting intimate: A feminist analysis of old age, masculinity and sexuality* (Vol. 527). Linköping University Electronic Press.
- Sinha, M. (2017). Colonial masculinity: The “manly Englishman” and the “effeminate Bengali” in the late nineteenth century. In *Colonial masculinity*. Manchester University Press.
- Sonawat, R. (2001). Understanding families in India: A reflection of societal changes. *Psicologia*, 17, 177–186. doi:10.1590/s0102-37722001000200010
- Srivastava, S. (2010). Fragmentary pleasures: Masculinity, urban spaces, and commodity politics in Delhi. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16(4), 835–852. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9655.2010.01656.x
- Srivastava, S. (2015). Modi-masculinity: Media, manhood, and “traditions” in a time of consumerism. *Television and New Media*, 16(4), 331–338. doi:10.1177/1527476415575498
- Thompson, E. H. (Ed.). (1994). *Older men’s lives* (Vol. 6). Sage. doi:10.4135/9781452243474
- Thompson, E. H., & Pleck, J. H. (1986). The structure of male role norms. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 29(5), 531–543. doi:10.1177/000276486029005003
- Trivedi, G. (2021). Representation of gender and female sexuality: An analysis of selected “controversial” Hindi films of the 21st century. *Global Media Journal*, 19(41), 252. <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/representation-of-gender-and-female-sexuality-an-analysis-of-selected-controversial-hindi-films-of-the-21st-century.pdf>
- Ugargol, A. P., & Bailey, A. (2018). Family caregiving for older adults: Gendered roles and caregiver burden in emigrant households of Kerala, India. *Asian Population Studies*, 14(2), 194–210. doi:10.1080/17441730.2017.1412593
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender and Society*, 1(2), 125–151. doi:10.1177/0891243287001002002
- Wiles, J. L., Leibing, A., Guberman, N., Reeve, J., & Allen, R. E. (2012). The meaning of “aging in place” to older people. *Gerontologist*, 52(3), 357–366. doi:10.1093/geront/gnr098