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Indian male voices on gender equality and sexual violence – a qualitative study

Indiska mäns röster om jämställdhet och sexuellt våld - en kvalitativ studie

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Most literature I have used is in Swedish, as can be seen in the list of references. I have translated texts marked * with help from Google Translate, but due to my language skills, mistakes might have sneaked in.

This is not a comparative study, the purpose has not been to compare gender equality or sexual violence in the Indian context with those in Sweden or other countries.

The study is delimitated to gender equality and sexual violence among adults. I did not look specifically into domestic sexual violence, neither into sexual violence towards children.

I have chosen not to account for the caste system, this the interested reader can study elsewhere, same with ample background contexts.
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**Abstract** keywords: gender equality, sexual violence, masculinity, India

This qualitative study aims to explore the status of gender equality and to provide background to the extensive sexual violence in India from the male perspective through the eyes of seven Gujarati men. The brutal rape of a young student, by whole world known as Nirbayha in December 2012 in the Indian capital, was the tragic event that started a mass reaction in India against the extensive sexual violence and has put the whole worlds light on the unequal conditions of men and women in the country. Being sexually abused as a woman is one extreme expression for female subordination in relation to men, accordingly “men´s violence to women” is a most current topic under social work research today. Social constructions and social structures need to be considered when studying sexual violence as well as gender issues.

This thesis is based on a four weeks minor field study in Mandvi in Gujarat, India, where I conducted the interviews. The result is based on answers towards my main research question *How do the interviewed men in Mandvi perceive gender equality, and what do they think of sexual violence?*

The answers clearly show the gendered thinking of the interviewed men. In the analysis I have tried to interpret and understand the data mainly based on the secondary research questions *Are there any perceived connections between sexual violence and gender equality, and if so, how do these look? How do the interviewed men´s perceptions look in relation to earlier research and theoretical frames? What can be done, in a place such as Mandvi on different societal layers (individual, family, society) to prevent sexual violence?* In the analysis I show the data through the mirror of theoretical frameworks and the earlier research, such as social work theory, critical theory, gender theory and contemporary Indian masculinity research.

**Sammanfattning** sökord: jämställdhet, maskulinitet, sexuellt våld, Indien

Denna kvalitativa studie avser att undersöka jämställdhet som bakgrund till det omfattande sexuella våldet i Indien, genom ett manligt perspektiv, utifrån intervjuer med sju män från Mandvi i Gujarat. Den brutala våldtäkten på en student i december 2012 i den Indiska huvudstaden, startade en massreaktion i landet, och satte hela världens ljus på de ojämställda
villkoren kvinnor och män lever under. Detta våld är ett tecken på strukturell kvinnlig underordning, vilket liksom mäns våld mot kvinnor är ett mycket aktuellt forskningsämne.

Resultatet baseras på de svar jag fick runt den primära forskningsfrågan, *hur männen upplever jämställdhet och vad de tänker om sexuellt våld.* I analysen undersöker jag samband däremellan, och diskuterar vad som kan göras på olika samhällsnivåer samt speglar datan genom teorier och tidigare forskning inom socialt arbete, kritisk teori, genusteorier samt samtida indisk maskulinitetsforskning.
Introduction

This bachelor thesis is about gender equality and sexual violence in India, through the perspective of seven Gujarati men. How is the male thinking on these matters going in the contemporary everyday life in the small seaside town Mandvi in Gujarat?

My interest for gender equality in India was awakened by the profound reporting on the many brutal rapes in the country this winter, 2012/13. I will try to find out what lies behind the sexual violence. Are there clues in the gendered inequalities of the society?

This thesis is based on a four weeks minor field study in the town Mandvi in the state of Gujarat, India. Through qualitative interviews I will give voice to seven Gujarati men on the issues of gender equality and sexual violence. Most research on gender equality and sexual violence has been, and is still, conducted from a female perspective but in this study I will add male perspectives to the ongoing discourse.

I will use critical theory, because of its focus on structural rather than personal explanations, as a general theoretical framework, and gender theory specifically, to analyze my data. Pierre Bourdieu argues that androcentric perspectives legitimize the worldwide male dominance (Bourdieu, 1999). This as well as well-established feminist explanations on gendered power relations will be used. As for earlier research, Verma et al. give good introduction to how masculinity and gender-issues are perceived by men in contemporary India. The number of published Indian research on men, masculinity and male perspectives on gender-issues and sexual violence are nor abundant, though. (I have searched on Google Scholar as well as Academic Search Premier” with the search-words “India” + “masculinity”+ “male attitudes + gender” + “men and sexual violence” etc. but not found a lot.) This, in comparison with the massive male domination in the Indian society, talks for the need for more research on these subjects. And, as the British social work- researcher Jeff Hearn says, men´s reproduction of violence is only understandable in the context of men´s broader position in the society, and this needs to be studied from the male perspective (Hearn in Christie, 2006). Also Karlsson and Piuva (2012) say that “men´s violence to women” is a most current topic under social work research today. From what earlier research say, and from the viewpoint of international social work, I would say this is a very important topic of research!
**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how seven Indian men perceive gender equality, and learn what they think of the sexual violence and the many rapes in India.

When the issue of gender equality is discussed it is often done from a female perspective, to give light to the female experience. This will be a contribution to the discourse on gender equality and sexual violence in India from the male perspective, by telling what seven men in the seaside town Mandvi think. I believe that if men are included in the societal discussion and in research not only as potential offenders but also as fellow citizens and stakeholders it will speed up the changes towards a more gender equal society. Hopefully a wider awareness and a deeper knowledge on the matter of gender equality also will help preventing further sexual violence and rapes.

**Research questions**

My main research question is *How do the interviewed men in Mandvi perceive gender equality, and what do they think of sexual violence?*

Secondarily I will answer the questions *Are there any perceived connections between sexual violence and gender equality, and if so, how do these look? How do the interviewed men’s perceptions look in relation to earlier research and theoretical frames? What can be done, in a place such as Mandvi on different societal layers (individual, family, society) to prevent sexual violence?*

I will answer the main research question in the result. In the analysis and in the conclusion I will, as well as analyzing the main question as presented in the result, add reasoning on the secondary questions.

The research questions will form the red thread throughout this work, in choice of overall design, methods and theoretical frameworks.
Background

In December 2012 the young student, by whole world known as Nirbayha, was brutally raped and later died from her injuries. This was the tragic event that started a mass reaction in India against the extensive sexual violence and has put the whole world’s lights on the unequal conditions of men and women in the country.

The public discourse has since then (it started long before, but after December 20 it has got completely other dimensions) been on how to deal with this inequality, and its relation to sexual violence. Some want to target the problems of from the juridical side, by sharpening the laws, and to deal with the infamous corruption in the police and in the courts. Others want to restrict female actions, by dress codes and restrictions on mobility, for their safety, of course. Still others want to ban pornography and alcohol. All these suggestions have supporters in all layers of society, up to the congress. This thesis sides with those who pledge for the need for a new masculinity, for new attitudes towards gender if to solve the big problems of inequality and sexual violence in the country.

The Swedish social work icon Bengt Börjesson (2008) says that understanding gendered inequality is difficult because there are no absolute truths. Some claim that inequality stems from biologic differences, others say socio-cultural constructions cause the imbalance. For the social worker it is critical to be aware of what beliefs she takes with her into the meeting with the client, and how she can act not to confirm and consolidate the prevailing unequal positions. Börjesson refers to Charles Tilly (2000) when he claims that it is very important to discuss the structural conditions that create and maintain the societal inequality. Being abused as a woman is, according to Börjesson, one extreme expression for female subordination in relation to men, and it is a great task for social work to offer support and shelter for the exposed women, but also to offer programs for empowerment where women can get courage to refuse subordination (ibid). Jeff Hearn (in Christie, 2001) agrees, and adds that social work must develop more pro-active approaches to work with men on their violence to women. Further, Hearn says, gendered inequality has to be analyzed as a variable with other social categories, such as ethnicity, class, age and sexuality.

The gender perspective is relatively new in international academic social work. It was not until the 1990’s that it was established in the Swedish faculties, which was still early compared to most other countries. Therefore it is motivated to use Swedish theory and
research in an international study like this. Lis Bodil Karlsson and Katarina Piuva (2012) say that it is very important that researchers as well as practical social workers have an understanding for how much people’s everyday life are affected by power-relations and control, and that this often is based on gender. Women’s lives are often permeated by these “relations of ruling” (ibid), which make female experiences invisible and silence their voices. These relations are often reinforced by media, social institutions and by academics. Karlsson and Piuva say that “men’s violence to women” is a most current topic under research today (ibid).

In India gendered inequality is a reality in many aspects. From birth until death many Indian women are fed with the belief that their brothers, fathers and husbands have a higher value than themselves because they are men and that they should be given prominence in all areas of life. Joni Seager (2009)* says that boys are better fed than girls, not only because they do harder physical work than girls, but also because girls are considered a waste of economic resources. Emotional investment in girls is also not rarely considered a waste, as they are going to go away to live in someone else’s house and be part of another family when they get married (ibid).

India has a highly skewed sex ratio, due to sex-selective abortion and female infanticide approximately twenty three million females are missing. The biologic norm says 95 girls are born on every 100 boys, but in India the number is 80. This heavy imbalance leads to a rise in trafficking, kidnapping and sexual abuse, as well as other severe social impacts (ibid).

Further, the literacy rates in India clearly show the gendered inequality. When Indian women started to get education, their role in society changed, and they could start to enter the public world, writes Geraldine Forbes (2004). But this was not until men put female education on the political agenda, but even so the liberation of women in the patriarchal society had begun (ibid). Even if the first girl’s schools in India opened as early as around 1850, female education is still a huge problem in the country. Though it is gradually increasing, the female literacy rate in India is far less than that of men. Illiteracy among women is at least fifty percent higher than that of men, and around sixty percent of the total adult female population is illiterate (Seager, 2009)*. Far fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school, and many girls drop out. In urban India, girls are nearly on par with boys in terms of education. However, in rural India girls continue to be less well-educated than boys.
Sexual violence and rape is often used as a “privilege of power” in India, according to Seager (2009)*. This, she says, is a widespread problem in the country, in the police, in healthcare, in homes and in public (ibid). It is impossible to number the sexual assaults, due to unreported cases, but estimations say that the actual incidences are around fifty times as many as those reported. This, she claims, is due to social stigmas on the victim (ibid).

The Indian government has responded to the public demand for action by enhanced laws. The former justice J S Verma, (not to be mistaken for researcher R K Verma), led a commission which looked into violence against women in India, after this winter’s brutal gang-rape in Delhi. The Justice Verma Committee was constituted to recommend amendments to the Criminal Law to provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women. It made recommendations on laws related to rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, child sexual abuse, medical examination of victims, police, electoral and educational reforms. (Justice Verma Committee Report Summary, 2013).

Both Amnesty International and UN claim that the new laws are not enough, though. UN Special Rapporteur Rashida Manjoo who visited India from 22 April to 1 May 2013, said that “The opportunity to establish a substantive and specific equality and non-discrimination rights legislative framework for women, to address de facto inequality and discrimination, and to protect and prevent against all forms of violence against women, was lost.”

The Special Rapporteur noted that the Indian Government had adopted numerous progressive laws and that policies were in place to address the issue of violence against women. But despite positive developments “the unfortunate reality is that the rights of women in India continue to be violated, with impunity as the norm” (UN women and Amnesty International, 2013)
Methods

Qualitative hermeneutic approach
A qualitative hermeneutic approach is according to Ingrid Westlund (in Fejes and Thornberg, 2009) suitable when the researcher wants to interpret, understand and communicate an experience of a certain phenomenon. Hence, this will be the point of departure for this study. It is of major importance that the researcher is aware of her preunderstandings when analyzing her data. Prejudice and preconceptions can affect the interpretation and thus the analysis. But, as Westlund writes, the unique life experiences of each researcher, can together with an open-minded curiosity help her to see phenomena not discovered before, as well as lead her to unexpected findings (ibid).

Methods for data collection
This thesis is based on a four weeks minor field study in Mandvi in Gujarat, India, where I conducted interviews with seven men. Here the ethical considerations for research were taken into account. My approach was qualitative, inductive and explorative, which means that I tried to get closer to a few informants, rather than to a generalizable quantity. I collected the data before I put them in a theoretical framework and my purpose is to explore and understand, rather than come up with absolute truths.

For the interviews I used a semi-structured questionnaire, with questions I considered relevant for the purpose of the study, and relevant to get answers to my research questions. The questions were divided into two parts, the first on gender-equality and the second on sexual violence and rape, public abuse and not domestic. During the interviews it was possible to ask clarifying questions and to add aspects not covered by the questions. After every interview there was in some way a desire for an informal talk on the subject of the interviews, which added priceless value for the researcher. I recorded the interviews as support to written notes. Twice a translator was needed, but was then chosen by the informant.

Sample
To avoid sampling-mistakes the researcher needs a sampling strategy that matches the purpose of the study (Neuman, 2006). As the generalizability generally is low when it comes to qualitative research, and maybe not even is what the researcher aims at (ibid), I decided
that I would not even try to get a representative sample, or to try to generalize my result to a
greater population. Even if I interviewed one hundred men in Mandvi I wouldn´t be able to
generalize the result to the all-India male population.

The seven Mandvian men were chosen from a systematic convenience-sample, by Neuman
described as a legitimate technique for certain qualitative studies, where the aim is other than
a representative sample (ibid). This means that I asked men whom I met in different social
settings where I as a foreign woman also could go, for interviews. I tried to get as varied ages
and social backgrounds as possible to cover most opinions possible. But in the end, those men
who agreed to be interviewed are if not a homogenous group, so not the most disparate. When
I tried for interviews in the poorest areas, even those who spoke English refused. No and a
turned back was the answer a few times. These few cases represent a certain research failure,
and need to be mentioned. How the actual sample affects the result and thus the analysis is
hard to tell, but it is possible that it does affect it, which can be problematic. I have, though,
throughout this work, tried to underline that my conclusions are derived from the data from
the seven interviews, and that I don´t draw general conclusions from it. I don’t know if the
refusals were due to lack of time, interest or ability, or if maybe the tradition not to talk
publically about these issues had more influence there? Anyhow, the seven interviewed men
all have different backgrounds, when it comes to class, age, religion, caste and marital status,
but they also have many things in common, all are Indian men living in Mandvi.

Due to the somewhat sensitive nature of the questions, I tried to explain the content of the
questions really well before the interviews were set, as well as the purpose of the study, to
avoid uneasy withdrawals.

Choice of literature

The data in this study is analyzed by international as well as Swedish academic theoretical
literature. Due to personal as well as logistic circumstances it was not possible to for me to
search for academic bookstores in Mumbai, in the few hours I spent there before going to
Mandvi, and due to sparse time when returning to Sweden I could not use internet based
bookstores either. Therefore this study lacks contemporary Indian theory, which of course
would add invaluable perspectives to the analysis. Some eminent contemporary Indian
research makes up for this, though.
Reliability and Validity

The purpose of this study has been to explore and understand how seven Indian men think of and perceive gendered inequalities in general, and especially what they think of sexual violence and rapes. That is what the questions in the interviews were about, as I wanted as high reliability and validity as possible. According to Neuman (2006), perfect reliability and validity is an ideal for researchers, but this is hardly possible to reach, neither in quantitative nor qualitative approaches. But as the researcher strives towards perfect reliability and validity, she strives towards truthfulness and credibility for her findings (ibid). These concepts can be understood as the equivalences of validity and reliability in qualitative research, and has been guiding lights in my process of research.

Reliability means dependability, and has to do with consistency. Given similar circumstances, the results of a study should be repeated. I have added my questionnaire in the appendix, as well as described my methods, theoretical frameworks and earlier research, so that any following research can repeat this study. Validity means that the idea of the work corresponds with reality, that it is truthful (ibid), and this has been a genuine purpose throughout the whole process of this thesis.

Reliability is necessary for, but is no guarantee for validity. Neuman exemplifies by the scales; you can check your weight many times on a broken scale, and it shoves the same weight every time, which points to high reliability, but when you go to another scale it shows a different weight, so your measurement from the first scale had no validity (ibid).

Internal validity means that the internal design of the research project is free from errors that could lead to wrong conclusions and external validity decide if you can generalize your findings to a greater setting (ibid). To make generalizations based on the results of the study the researcher is always dependent on the validity of the study. If she doesn’t have validity, she can’t make generalizations (ibid).

I would say that this study holds a high internal validity, that it is free from errors that could lead to wrong conclusions. The data from the interviews shows male attitudes towards gender-equality and sexual violence, as presented in the result. The external validity is rather low, though, which rejects the opportunity to generalize (Neuman, 2005). But as this is not the purpose of this study, it is not a big problem.

In qualitative research, though, Neuman argues, it is often more interesting to talk about authenticity than about absolute truth. This means that the researcher offers a fair, balanced
and honest account of social life, which is true to the people who live it (ibid), and this is what I have strived to do.

**Generalizability**

Generally qualitative approaches have a limited generalizability. This is the case of this study, but as the purpose is not to generalize the result to a greater population, but to explore and understand the thinking of a few, this is not a problem.

**Ethical Considerations**

For the interviews the ethical considerations for research presented by Swedish Vetenskapsrådet were taken into account. Briefly these consist of the requirements of confidentiality, anonymity, consent and of information (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). To focus only on adults prevents from the ethical dilemmas that are connected to research on minors. The eight interviews were based on voluntary participation. They took place in private locations, with no one listening other than invited by the informant, this due to the sometimes sensitive nature of the material. Twice a translator was needed but this was suggested, and the translator was chosen, by the informants. The men were informed of the purpose of the interviews and also that they at any point could stop the interview. The informants were given my contact-details if further questions would arise after the interview, or if they would decide not to participate in the written part of the study. They were also told that their identities would not be exposed to anyone, and that their answers would not be used for any other purpose than this thesis. All names have consequently been changed so that no identity by any circumstance would be revealed.

**Processing of the Data**

After transcribing the interviews I compiled the material into the Result, in a fashion I found relevant for my purpose and my research question. I have focused on answers that clearly show the gendered thinking of the interviewed men, and I have tried to see if and how this affects their attitudes towards sexual violence. I have tried to point out common opinions as well as specific ones. I have left out some data which I considered not relevant for the result. Thereafter, in the analysis, in accordance with the hermeneutic approach, I have tried to
interpret and understand the data and to see it through the mirror of the theoretical frameworks and the earlier research presented in chapter seven. My personal points of view will be presented as a summing up in the conclusions and discussion.

**Discussion on Methodological Problems**

The issue of this thesis, male attitudes on sexual violence and rape and on gender-issues is rather sensitive, and for some informants it was somewhat difficult to talk upfront about this (there will come a discussion on this later with references from the theoretical chapter), but for most it was surprisingly easy to talk.

There were some language-related problems, though. The interviews were conducted in English, which is neither my first language, nor that of my informants. Twice a translator was needed, but this was not a big problem, even if this can be an ethical dilemma. The problem was rather than the language, the sensitive nature of the questions and the inability to put words on these issues, let alone English words, and an unawareness of the meaning of gender and equality. I realized that this was, if not the first time, so one of very few when the men had talked about gendered inequality and sexual violence. In the end this did not affect the original design of the study, though. But it is in itself an interesting result, which points out the need for more information and education on gender-issues.

**Theoretical framework**

As a general theoretical framework I use critical theory to comprehend the problem of inequality and sexual violence in India. This, because I think these phenomena are expressing structural rather than personal deficiencies. To analyze the structures of equality and sexual violence my informants base their statements on, I use universal theories on gender and power-relations. Finally, I present some social work perspectives on the issue to sum up this chapter. To put my research in an Indian framework, I also give two examples of contemporary Indian masculinity research that give male perspectives on gender-issues and on sexual violence, but that awaits in the next chapter..
**Critical theory**

Briefly, according to W. L. Neumann (2006) critical theory can be derived from Marxist theories, but also from Freud’s thinking, as well as from Adorno, Fromm and Bourdieu. Malcolm Payne argues that critical theory is more contemporary than its relative radical theory, which was peaking in the nineteen-seventies (Payne, 2005).

Critical theory’s main points include attempts to change the way societies create problems, as social inequalities and cultural hegemonies (power-relations), and it incorporates feminist and anti-discrimination perspectives. It focuses on structural rather than personal explanations of social problems, but considers people to have capacity for social change, mainly from agency, awareness and education. It asserts people to be able to change, be contradictory and multiple, complex and diverse (ibid). Neumann (2006) agrees, critical theory’s prime purpose is not to study societies, but to change them, by revealing underlying structures of social control, power relations and inequality.

Critical theory is sometimes seen as an ideology rather than a theory as it has a clear political point of view, e.g. it reject and criticize economic liberalism and rationality, and it takes sides with the weaker in society. It wants to challenge the dominant structures and it has a critical perspective towards knowledge, as it asks whose knowledge prevails. Is it the knowledge of the dominant group (Payne, 2005)?

Critics lift the failure to see the individual needs behind the collective solutions that critical theory focus on, as well as the weakness in dealing with emotional problems. As for research, there is criticism for lack of validity due to lacking models of conduct (ibid).

**Gender-theory and male dominance**

Gender-theory is relevant when analyzing unequal power-relations which usually give heavy advantage to men. Gender-theory is a theoretical approach that looks into the dichotomized conceptions of human realms, where reality is understood in opposing dualities, as is the case of femininity and masculinity. Davids and van Driel (2010) claim there is need for a new way to approach and analyze gender in international development, where differences and diversity are considered. They argue that gender needs to be seen as a multidimensional concept rather than universal forms and understood as cross-cut by other social categories like caste, ethnicity, class, race, religion, culture, etc.
Swedish Christian Cullberg (2012) refers to Hirdman (1988) when he asserts that gender-theory is based on three basic logics. The first logic settles that society is based on the principle of segregation, e.g. what is manly is separated from what is womanly. The second adds the principle of hierarchy, e.g. what is perceived as manly is higher valued than what is perceived as womanly. The third logic adds the hetero-normative order, which e.g. give the perception that woman need men to fulfill their emotional and sexual needs, and vice versa.

The well-known feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir was one of the first to talk about the dualistic gender constructions. In her classic The second sex (1949), a detailed analysis of women's oppression, she starts by citing the ancient Greek mathematic Pythagoras; There is a good principle that created the world-order, the light and the man and an evil force that created chaos, darkness and the woman. By this she efficiently put the gender-issues in a historic framework.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1999) means that by evaluating the biologic and physical differences between men and women the socially constructed gender gets its positions. The male sex is considered strong and outward-bound while the female sex is weak and inward-bound etc. This and many other biologic dichotomies are used universally, in all kind of cultures and ages, to make socially constructed gender emerge as natural categories. Simply put, the biologic differences between men and women are used as symbols to legitimize the male domination in society. This powerful androcentric order is perceived as a natural order and attempts to challenge it has traditionally been met by circular causality explanations. E.g. when women are limited to the private sphere, this is explained symbolically to be women´s natural habitat from the pure shape of her sex, inward, which in turn explains why women´s natural place is inside the home. Thus biology explains and justifies the social order, but it is social agreements that decide which biologic differences to point out as critical and which not to, and furthermore, to evaluate these differences. This androcentric order accordingly legitimizes the overall male dominance in all societal aspects (ibid).

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss made an early attempt to analyze the universal presence of labor-division between the sexes, in another classic (1971). Here he claims that the labor-division between the sexes establishes a reciprocal dependency between men and women which is essential for reproduction. When a task in one society is considered to be female it is accordingly forbidden for men, men are thus dependent on having a woman if he wants cooked food, or having his cows milked, and women are similarly dependent on a man
if she wants to be represented in the church (ibid). But as the Swedish feminist theorist Lena Gemzöe says, he did this analysis without any interest in what this mean for women, who consistently are kept away from every high-valued task (Gemzöe, 2008).

**Feminist theory**

Most research on sexual violence and gender-issues, worldwide, has been conducted from a female perspective, with focus on the woman as a victim, and how to give her support and a more equal life-situation. Feminist-theorists have, from the 1970’s onwards, claimed that gendered violence is caused by unequal power-relations and that men as a group use violence to uphold these relations to control women.

Lena Gemzöe (2008) claims that all presence of sexual violence towards women are expressions of the general female subordination. She also asserts that sexual violence cannot be understood isolated from economic and social structures. Gemzöe refers to Andrea Dworkin (1981) when she says that pornography expresses the same ideology (male supremacy) that is the source of the female oppression in all areas. She continues by claiming that there is a relation between consumption of pornography and rapes because pornography is the theory on which rapes are the practice (Gemzöe 2008). Jane Freedman (2003) agrees with Gemzöe, that pornography is an expression for male power and dominance, but points out that the feminist-movement´s position here is not that of total agreement, there are feminists that mean pornography can be understood as a manifest of women´s free sexuality, as well as freedom of speech. Brownmiller (1977) claims that sexual violence and especially rape, or threats of sexual violence and rape, are used by men as a means of power, by which men control women, and thus safeguard the androcentric order. The fear of sexual violence keeps women subordinated is society, which benefits all men, even those who would not themselves commit sexual violence. Brownmiller argues that rapes should not be seen just as individual aggressions but that they must be understood as manifestations of the male supremacy in the social systems. She means that it is not a question of biology, but of socially constructed beliefs in what manhood is, where strength, aggression, power etc. are favored attributes (Brownmiller in Freedman, 2003).

**Masculinity theory**
In the wake of feminism there is the masculinity theory, which aims to give a more nuanced and complex picture of men and manhood, without idealizing men or ignoring gendered inequality. This is a rather new academic field, e.g. in Sweden the first professorship in masculinity-research was established in 2005 (Johansson, 2005.)

The American researcher into masculinity Connell (1996) agrees that the androcentric power is a prerequisite for sexual violence, and says that these mechanisms need to be explored thoroughly. Connell claims that since understanding that gender is not an isolated phenomenon, but that it interacts with other social structures such as class, ethnicity etc., research has begun to distinguish multiple masculinities, and deals with how these different masculinities are linked to other social structures.

As Cullberg and Hirdman above, Connell sees society as segregated into different spheres which are between themselves and mutually hierarchal. He uses the concept “hegemonic masculinity” to describe the predominant type of masculinity that men look up to but only rarely embody. This concept is not to be understood as a static, but its construction varies over time and cultural contexts. The hegemonic man, or “real man”, features strengths in the physical as well as in the mental spheres. This hegemonic masculinity ensures the societal male dominance and female subordination by the assertion of male authority which is underpinned by violence (ibid).

Johansson (2005) means that from the lack of critical studies on men, a simplistic image has been established and we now only know a one-dimensional stereotype, which apart from oppressing women also oppress men who don’t fit in the framework (e.g. men from other ethnic groups, or men other than heterosexuals). The stereotype is very powerful, as it bodes in both political and juridical arenas as well as in private settings (ibid).

Research has been conducted on the relation between the idealized image of manhood, and aspects of life such as emotions and relations, and this indicates that these aspects get reduced at the expense of various forms of physical disciplining, and an emotional mutilation as a result (Johansson, 2000).

**Social work theory**

A gendered perspective is essential when examining the field of social work, on all analytical layers, from personal problems to structural issues (Cullberg et al, 2005).

Lately more research is conducted with focus on men and what makes men violent to women, says the British social work-researcher Jeff Hearn. He argues that there is an urgent
need to focus critically on men and men’s power and the social problem of men’s violence towards women. But as he puts it, much remains in spelling out the implications of feminist and critical studies on men, as he argues for the development of more pro-active approaches by social workers working with men on their violence (Hearn in Christie, 2001).

I will now reconnect to my background chapter and the Swedish social work-icon Bengt Börjesson (2008). He underlines that for the social worker it is critical to be aware of what beliefs she takes with her into the meeting with the client, and how she can act not to confirm and consolidate the prevailing unequal positions. Being abused as a woman is, according to Börjesson, one extreme expression for female subordination in relation to men, and it is one great task for social work to offer support and shelter for the exposed women, but also to offer programs for empowerment where women can get courage to refuse subordination. Börjesson refers to Charles Tilly (2000) when he claims that it is very important to discuss the structural conditions that create and maintains the societal inequality (ibid).

Börjesson also refers to Jean Paul Sartre (1943), when he discusses human responsibility. In every life-situation the conscious human is a choosing creature. The moral consequence of choice is responsibility, to the world and to ourselves (ibid).

Lis Bodil Karlsson and Katarina Piuva (2012) said, also referred to in the background chapter, that it is very important for researchers as well as for practical social workers to have an understanding for how much people’s everyday life are affected by power-relations and control, and that this often is based on gender. They claim that women’s lives often are permeated by these “relations of ruling” (ibid), which make female experiences invisible and silence their voices. These relations are often reinforced by media, social institutions and by academics. Karlsson and Piuva say that “men’s violence to women” is a most current topic under social work research today (ibid).

To properly understand the complexity of gender structures, it is essential to look beyond the individual context and examine the surrounding social structures, but also the symbolic dimensions as this manifests e.g. in language. Every dimension gives in itself answers, but only if analyzed together it is worthwhile to talk about lasting solutions to the problems connected to the gendered structures (ibid).
Earlier research

Indian studies on masculinity

It is evident that gender socialization and constructing of masculinity have a powerful influence on sexuality in India, says Ravi K Verma and Vaishali Sharma Mahendra (2004). Challenging traditional views of masculinity and femininity is essential to promote sexual health and to reduce inequality for both men and women. Verma and Mahendra claim that the sharp demarcation of gender-roles and the double standard of sexual behavior lead to inequality and sexual violence towards women, as well as unhealthy risk-taking for men (ibid).

Likewise, they assert that social expectations on women to submit to male authority are harmful for women’s sexual health, as well as for their human rights. This result in unwanted early marriages and unplanned pregnancies as well as domestic and public sexual violence. Women cannot initiate a talk, even with her husband about contraception or reproduction, as all sexuality-matters are in the male domain. In line with this is seeking information or sexual health service often not an option for women, if she don’t want to have a “reputation” (ibid).

Ravi K Verma and Vaishali Sharma Mahendra begin their article on constructions of masculinity in India, by naming some reasons why research on masculinity is so eagerly needed. Many female fetuses are being aborted, there is a high rate of female infanticide, high maternal mortality, increasing evidence of violence against woman. This is but a few strong pointers that highlight the need to examine the social framework that defines the manner in which masculinities are constructed and male dominance manifested.

Verma and Mahendra say that boys and girls in India grow up in a male or female world, with little or no contact with the opposite sex, and no education on sexuality. From this, they say, appropriate gender-relations cannot grow. For boys, these circumstances lead to misdirected masculinity, characterized by male sexual dominance, unequal gender attitudes and behavior. As adolescents, Indian boys enjoy increasing freedom and autonomy, which often are used to prove manhood and masculinity. Boys are expected and often encouraged to be sexually active. Sexual experience is essential to be considered a “man” in India, they claim. Girls, on the other hand, get stricter rules the older they get. Parents curtail their
mobility, take them out of school, and closely monitor their interactions with males. There is a twofold reason for this confinement, firstly, to keep girls out of the public arena, both for their safety and to protect family honor, and secondly, to prepare the girl for the domestic work that awaits them when they marry. This, Verma and Mahendra say, is clearly measurable by boys and girls differing amount of leisure (ibid).

Boys are taught to be strong active leaders as this is the role that awaits them as head of the family. Brothers get the task to control their sisters, a task they later easily transfer on woman in general. Equally stereotype, girls are taught to be beautiful, obedient and not to challenge subordination and discrimination (ibid).

Verma and Mahendra refer to psychosocial studies when they claim that Indian families inculcate gender-roles when they give different tasks to boys and girls. Boys nearly always get to do the outside tasks, and girls the inside the house-tasks (ibid).

Language is another important factor when gender-roles are constructed, Verma and Mahendra claim. Language underpins the understanding of what “real” men or woman can or should do and is important as social marker. The concept of a “real man” manifests itself as good looks, strong physics, hetero-sexuality, The “real” man should be courageous, confident and command respect, as well as be able to provide for his family. Violent sexual behavior is another attribute for the “real” man. Sexual weakness for men is considered very bad as this is thought to cause women to go to someone else for sex, which would be very shaming for the first man, as well as bad for family honor. One tactic to conform young men to the Indian society’s expectations of male behavior is to imply that these who do not are homosexual. Homophobia leads to “real” men staying far away from “feminine” behavior such as caring for others, doing household chores, or being cautious about health, road-safety etc.(ibid).

A third source in the construction of gender-roles is media. Verma and Mahendra claim that media perpetuate sexual and gender stereotypes as well as inequality. In the absence of inter-gender interaction, or unvalued information, young men derive their script for gender-roles and sexuality from films that often present this in a context of male power, female subordination and violence. Hence the responsibility is heavy on media when it comes to changing the distorted attitudes that prevails (ibid).

In their empirical study, conducted in Mumbai 2003, Verma and Mahendra asked young men how they asserted their masculinity. Many frankly told about frequent actions aimed at
women or homosexual men, such as shouting verbal comments, whistling, touching, actions commonly referred to as “Eve-teasing”. The young men in the study did not perceive this as harassment but only as “fun”, and a way to prove their masculinity. Actions were often directed towards woman who seemed to question their masculinity. Daring and confident behavior was perceived as instrumental for attracting girls, as well as establishing a position within the peer-group (ibid).

The young men in the study also acknowledged that violent behavior was considered “masculine” and thus “good” (ibid).

The young men in the study named different sources that influenced the construction of their masculinity and sexuality. Prominent were peer talking, pornographic films, and peeping at others having sex (ibid).

Verma and Mahendra say that some parts in the conception of the gender-roles are more fundamental, and thus harder to change (unfortunately they don’t give any examples). But a large part of the attitudes that constitute these roles are more easily changed, by social, cultural and contextual factors. Here they name the heavy influence of media, and assert that it is possible to affect changes in the social norms, attitudes and actions.

They claim that systematic information and education on gender issues as well as attitudinal and behavior change is needed to stop the down going spiral, to establish equality and social justice for women. It is essential to create a new “youth-culture” in India that builds on positive behavior, and equal values and acts. Here, teachers and schools have a big responsibility. The underlying socio-cultural structures that hinder men´s involvement in family and household chores also need to be properly examined, and changed. Finally, Verma and Mahendra claim, India need to recognize every ones sexuality as a normal, human trait, and stop treating sexuality as a shameful taboo that can’t be talked openly about (ibid).

Based on this first study, Ravi K Verma, Julie Pulerwitz, Vaishali Mahendra, Gary Barker P Fulpagare, SK Singh and Sujata Khandekar (2006) conducted a pilot project in Mumbai, 2005-06 on the links between gender-roles, masculinity, sexuality and sexual health. The six months project consisted of gender-based workshops for 126 young men aged 15 to 24 years. All participants lived in Mumbai and represented various socio-economic backgrounds. In the project qualitative interviews, observations as well as role-playing and evaluating-scales were used (ibid).
It was often the first time the young men talked to others about these subjects. At the starting point of the project the young men manifested normative and traditional concepts of gender-roles, characterized by male dominance and female submission:

“*My friends challenged me. They said if you are a Real Man then engage that girl [to get her to have sex] within eight days.*”

“*During one of the festivals, all the boys were sitting together and had their bottle with them. They tried to force me to drink but I refused. So all the boys began teasing me: “You are a ‘gud’ (feminine boy). This put me off. I drank four glasses of raw liquor. It was so strong that I was unconscious for days.”*

An ideal woman was defined as one who does not respond to men's sexual advances and is therefore marriageable. In particular, women raising the idea of condom use or carrying condoms were seen negatively. “A woman who carries a condom and asks for a condom is corrupt.” Such girls are considered promiscuous and deserving of sexual harassment and coercion (ibid).

As the project went on the young men showed a significant shift in attitudes as well as behavior, and a decrease in support for unequal gender-norms and sexual harassment. The work-shops included critical thinking on gender-norms, role-playing and attempts to create a “new masculinity”, based on responsibility, caring and respect for one’s partner as well as for women in general. The results of the project suggest that addressing gender equality and behavior change targeted at young men can be very successful, in line with both quantitative and qualitative findings (ibid). But as the researchers point out, well-developed facilitation skills are of key importance. Sufficient training for the work-shop leaders, and other peers, on gender-related issues, on encouraging young men to speak about sensitive and often taboo subjects is crucial. The researchers say that this kind of projects has certain challenges, such as the need for qualified and well-trained facilitators. It would require the training of trainers to work with a variety of groups, such as teachers and youth workers as well as peer leaders to work with young men. Yet, this type of intervention, with its critical discussions and reflections, can be adapted and implemented almost anywhere and is relatively inexpensive. Furthermore, the promising findings from this study indicate that addressing these issues in the Indian context is both relevant and important for gender relations and it benefit both young women and men. The authors claim that openly discussing these topics should form part of universal sexuality education in India and elsewhere (ibid).
Contextualizing Mandvi

Before presenting the result I will give a brief introduction to the setting of the field-study. Mandvi is a small coastal city in Kutch district in the Indian state of Gujarat. The city has a more than four hundred year old ship building industry that still manufactures small ships. Mandvi has a population of about 45,000 people, mainly different hindu groups but also some muslim groups as well as a small jain population. All these religious groups are divided into casts, which still are relevant social categories, even if the importance of cast is declining, in Mandvi as in all India. Living area and marriage are examples of where cast is still important in Mandvi. The city was severely affected by the 2001 Gujarat Earthquake. (Wikipedia, 2013-05-07). After this the region has received both stately and federal support, with new technological industries as well as an awakening tourism.

Result

As mentioned before, Bengt Börjesson (2008) underlines that for the social worker it is critical to be aware of what beliefs she takes with her into the meeting with the client, and how she can act not to confirm and consolidate the prevailing unequal positions. This was a guiding light, along with the ethical considerations for researchers, presented in chapter six, when I met the seven men for interviews.

In this chapter I will present the data from the interviews, and in the following chapter I will analyze this through the theoretical frameworks and earlier research presented in chapter seven and eight, and thereafter I will comment on the result and the analysis in the conclusions chapter.

Here I will answer my main research question, how do the interviewed men in Mandvi perceive gender equality, and what do they think of sexual violence? This will be further processed in the analysis, as well as in the concluding discussion, together with my secondary research questions.
Of the seven men I interviewed, three were Hindu, two were Muslim and two were Jain. Their ages spanned from 18 to 61, (18, 19, 19, 36, 39, 44 and 61). Three of the men were college students, one English tutor, two were running family businesses and one was a retired seaman. Two needed translations, from English to Gujarati/ Hindi.

To gather data to answer my research questions I used a questionnaire of printed questions divided into two parts. The first part was on personal thoughts on gender equality, which was generally not difficult to answer, but worth noting was that the oldest man, aged 61, needed multiple explaining on the meaning of gender-equality, also in his native language. It was for him a new concept. The younger men had come across the concept of gender-equality before, and were aware of the meaning.

Part one

I started by asking how the men interpreted gender-equality, and got a range of answers. Both should be happy, happy wife is happy husband (61). Men and women have equal, but different chances in life, was answer from two men (36 and 39. Three men (18, 19 and 61) said that they consider women to be the highest creation of God, and that they respect women most. Two of the men (19 and 44) said that gender-equality should be the norm, but that this is far from completed even if the change has started.

All of the men indicated in some way that they consider themselves to be pro gender-equality. But how this was manifested varied. Five men said that they had the same childhood conditions as their sisters, or cousin if they didn’t have a sister, when it came to freedom and amount of helping in the house. But it was still the sister that had more chores, and thus less free time, when the men started to examine their memories. One man (44) said my sisters did not have freedom, but I had. Nowadays it is very different, my daughter has the same freedom as my son. Another man (19) also said that he has had freedom, but not his sister. She is 15 years old now and she can’t study more, even if she wants to, our father says no. She is cleverer than I am, and it is a big shame. I go to college, and to the market when I like, and she has to stay home to help. In our group (muslim) it is like this. Boys get to study much, but not girls.

On the question if the men think women should enter the male, public domains, and work outside, everyone agreed, mostly with emphasis Of course, it is necessary for our country
They talked about the freedom women would get and the better money – for the family. But one man (61), retired seaman, pointed out that in his business, it wouldn’t be appropriate for women. *Sea life is only for men. Women can’t stay away that long, eight to nine months on the sea is too long for a lady, her family would miss her. But on the official side it might be ok, big titles could be for ladies, they only stay away for two to three months.* Two men (44) and (36) said that of course women should enter the male domain, but first they have to complete their household-work, after that they can surely go out to work.

On the question if men should enter the female domain, the men got more uneasy. *I don’t think men can handle this,* said two men (36) and (61). *I can’t cook, or cooking is not men’s work,* said five men, (18, 36, 39, 44 and 61). One of them (36) also said, *my friends don’t cook either. Maybe someone would think we are not real men if we do women’s work. But I help taking care of the children, and I help cleaning,* said two men, (36 and 44). The youngest men (18, 19 and 19) also all agreed to help taking care of children, when they later get them. *After a man is free from his main work he can help in the house, but the man is responsible to earn money for the family,* said one man (44).

All men were thus positive towards women working outside, and saw mostly advantages in this, as long as the women first completed the household work. This would gain both the woman herself, the family and the society, said two men (19, 61). But the men all saw difficulties in men entering the female domain. Three men (18, 19 and 61) said they thought the societal divisions are mostly good, and four men (19, 36, 39 and 44) said they think they are mostly bad.

On the question what the men thought was the origin of the gendered divisions in society, the answers varied. Religion (36), family traditions (18, 19 and 61), society/culture (19, 39 and 44). One man (19) said that for the new generation family traditions and social norms are not as important anymore.

My family is my biggest responsibility, was the answer on male responsibilities. To make my family happy (18, 36, 39 and 61), work and earn money to my family (19), give my children a good future (19, 44). All men said a woman have the same responsibility, but as one man (19) said, each one in different ways.

Marrying a woman with higher education than himself, was not seen as a problem for the men, they all preferred educated women. One man (19) said he would like his future wife to
be well educated, but alas this was not possible as he was already engaged to a girl aged 15 who no longer went to school. On my question he said that she could maybe take up her studies later, when they were married. Another man (44) said that sometimes if a woman with high education marries into a family that wants her to stay home to take care of the household, her education is a waste of her time, effort and money.

What did the men think they could do themselves for a more gender-equal society? *I will learn to cook*, answered one man (36) without hesitation. My daughters shall study, said three men (18, 19 and 36). *There should be more education and information in the society about these things, about gender and equality*, said four men (18, 19, 36 and 44). This should be in schools and in social groups for adults.

**Part two**

The second part of the interviews consisted of questions related to personal thoughts on sexual violence and the many reported rapes in India

First several of the men were a bit startled by the subject, but this eased away when they realized I was not going to ask intimate questions, and still their answers were both personal and straightforward.

Everyone had heard about the gang-rape in New Delhi in December, and they all condemned it in heated words. *It is a shame on India, said three men (18, 36 and 44), a shame on all men. They (the offenders) should be hanged for everybody to see*, was a common remark, by five men (18, 19, 36, 61). *The offenders should have the injection, be made impotent*, said two men (19 and 36). Two men (39, 44) said that women’s safety must get priority.

What did the men consider causing the sexual violence? Media, TV and internet (19, 36, 39 and 61) alcohol (18, 19, 36 and 44) female style of dressing, fashion, short dresses (19, 36, 39 and 61), society, (18, 19, 39 and 44) One man (18) said that he *think that girls in big cities get too much freedom, there should be limits for girls, they should not go out in the night, for their safety. There should be more limits for boys, too*, he added after some thinking. *Parents should put up these limits. And maybe stricter laws, but no one follows the laws so maybe that is no use*, he was reasoning. One man (61) suggested that women should not have mobile telephones 24 hours, but only when they needed to go to the market to confirm their location,
this would prevent their involvement with “other men”. One man (19) said that maybe bhurkas are good, men get attracted by all kind of short dresses, and if he is drunk he don’t know what he is doing.

The men put the blame for sexual violence and rapes on both men and women. All the seven men (18, 19, 19, 36, 39, 44 and 61) saw that men are main responsible for the abuse, but five of the men said that both men and women are responsible (19, 19, 36, 39 and 61). Women should not dress in short dresses or tight clothes, these five men claimed. Two of them (19 and 61) also said that women should not go outside in the night. Only two men did not put any blame on the woman-victim (18 and 44). One man (36) said that the main fault is that of the society, from how it treats these things, and from lack of information.

They suggested several means to prevent sexual violence and rapes in the Indian society. A stricter cencur of films (19, 36 and 39), banning of alcohol (36), stricter laws/follow existing laws (18, 19, 36 and 61), harsher punishment (36, 39 and 61), more respect to women (18 and 19), parents should be stricter (18), dealing with the corruption in the police and law system (19, 39 and 44) education and information (19, 36, 39 and 44).

The seven men all argued for harsh punishment for the offenders of sexual crimes, and especially for gang-rapists. For gang-rapists they suggest death-penalty (18, 36, 39 and 61), handed over to mob (18), sterilization (19, 36), one man (36) said that if you are impotent you are not a man in India, you are nobody. That would be an appropriate punishment. One man (44) suggested lifetime sentence, with mental treatment for gang-rapists. For other rapes the men suggested five to seven years in jail (19, 19, 39 and 61). One man (18) said every rapist should be hanged.

All seven men say that sexual violence and rapes happens everywhere, in the house, in public places, in big cities and small villages. But not here, not in my group was a common remark. It is more common in poor areas (19, 19 and 39) or, it is more common in big cities (18 and 61). One man (36), said though, it also happens here. Yesterday one woman was raped here, it was on local TV. The man was drunk and raped a related woman outside. If he is proved guilty he will be put in jail, but I don’t think it will be more than two-three, maybe five months.

Finally, the men answered whether they consider sexual crimes a private or a social problem. It is a private problem for women said one man (61). It is a social problem (19, 19,
36, 39 and 44). One of them (36) suggested that *if women would enter leading positions in media it would be good. Maybe a different attitude would come about then.* One man (18) said *it is both a private and a social problem.*

**Analysis**

As mentioned before, this study holds a hermeneutic, interpretative approach. This means that I have interpreted and tried to understand my findings, without being colored by my preunderstanding, but that my analysis has been made from a unique perspective, based on my life experiences, such as is the case for every interpretative qualitative researcher (Westlund in Fejes and Thornberg, 2009).

One point of departure in this study has been that gender needs to be seen as a multidimensional concept rather than universal forms and understood as cross-cut by other social categories like caste, ethnicity, class, race, religion, culture, etc. Davids and van Driel (2010) claim there is need for a new way to approach and analyze gender in international development, where such differences and diversity are considered.

I use critical theory, as presented in chapter seven as a general theoretical framework to comprehend the problem of inequality and sexual violence in India. This, because I think these phenomena are expressing structural rather than personal deficiencies. I will also attempt to use critical theory to tie up the threads of this analysis. To analyze the structures of equality and sexual violence my informants base their statements on, I use universal theories on gender and power-relations. To understand the contextual framework, I use the earlier research by Verma et al. to mirror my data. And finally, I look at my findings in the light of contemporary social work.

In this chapter I will answer my secondary research questions, *Are there any perceived connections between sexual violence and gender equality, and if so, how do these look? How do the interviewed men’s perceptions look in relation to earlier research and theoretical frames? What can be done, in a place such as Mandvi on different societal layers (individual, family, society) to prevent sexual violence?*

**Part one**
The Mandvian society is at a first glance that of modern lifestyles, with one shining glass-front office building after the other popping up, but when you take a closer look, the society is just as traditional as ever. The principles of gendered segregation, hierarchy and heteronormativity, mentioned in the theoretical chapter (de Beauvoir, 2002; Brownmiller, 1977; Connell, 1996; Hirdman, 1988; Gemzöe, 2008; Johansson, 2000, 2005 etc) are prevailing unchallenged. The male domination and female subordination, which gender-theory studies, can easily be seen here.

Still all of the men in the interviews indicated in some way that they consider themselves to be pro gender-equality. And this is where it starts to get interesting. On my questions it was easy for the seven men to answer that they consider women to be the highest creation, and yes, men and women should have equal chances in life, all the men in some different words expressed. But on the following questions the men still expressed traditional opinions such as that women have the responsibility for the home, and that men have the responsibility to work and earn money. This is an example of the deeply rooted worldwide androcentric constructions Bourdieu (1999) talks about, which explains women’s natural habitat to be the private sphere, and how this limits women to the home, and efficiently let men out of the domestic burdens, as well as preserving the hierarchal segregation between the sexes (ibid).

The men said that they can maybe “help” in the home, but if the woman/mother/wife wants to work outside, she must first take care of the domestic work. This puts a classic double burden on the women, and is not very equal. Those men who were positive towards women working outside mentioned the more money this would bring to the family, not to the woman herself, so she would not gain more personal freedom from the outside job, not in economic terms anyway.

Interesting was also what the men thought they could do at home “to help”. Cleaning and taking care of children were ok for those who would “help”, but not cooking. This is a very clear example of the labor-division between the sexes that the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1971) talks about. When a task in one society is considered to be female it is accordingly forbidden for men, men are thus dependent on having a woman if he wants cooked food. One of the men I interviewed said I don’t cook, and my friends don’t cook either. Maybe someone would think we are not real men if we do women’s work. This suggests that “real men” carefully must consider what they do, if they want to be considered “real men”. What is manly is what is not womanly, in line with the dichotomized, dualistic thinking, presented in the theoretical chapter. It is possible to draw the conclusion, that the
men in Mandvi unconsciously reproduce the pattern with aspects of homophobia and division of labor, which guarantees reproduction as mentioned by Lévi-Strauss (1971).

A “real man” in Mandvi has a lot in common with the “hegemonic man” described by Connell (1996), as well as with the men in Mumbai featuring in the studies by Verma et al (2006). A “real man” must take care not to overstep the invisible but clear line that separates male from female duties, actions, and unwritten laws. Or he will risk his male position, in accordance with what is presented in the theoretical chapter, and worse, he will risk being considered homosexual, something very bad in India (Verma et al 2006). In this light it is interesting to look at the suggested punishment for rapists, sterilization. This I will discuss later, though.

When very young in contemporary Mandvi, boys and girls have the same kind of childhood, both are mostly playing at home, or in the neighborhood. The differences become more visible for the teenagers. The men said that they were brought up the same way as their sisters but it was still the sister who had had more chores, and thus less free time. As children or teenagers the men didn’t have any chores, only maybe sometimes they would get something from the market, but after school they were free, spending their time with friends outside, whereas their sisters usually had duties in the house.

The conditions for girls in Mandvi vary, the daughter of the 44 year old man has freedom to go out, he said, she do not have to do many chores in the home, and she is going to apply to architects college in the autumn. This girl is not alone, most teenager girls in Mandvi are like her. But in another part of town many girls, as the sister and the fiancé of the 19 year old man, have to leave school when they are fifteen, and are limited to the home while waiting to get married.

This is a tragically clear example of the traditional androcentric thinking that prevails in Mandvi and where the male dominance is absolute. My father said no. This father obviously has the opinion that the female habitat is the closed private sphere, as mirrored by the theories in chapter seven, whereas males, my informant, the brother, can enjoy the public world, college and market. And that he as father and head of the family has unquestioned power is obvious.

According to Verma et al (2006) this is parallel with what the men in Mumbai experienced, and what they talk about as the Indian tradition to let boys foster themselves into manhood in their peer-groups, whereas girls get a stricter control the older they get, in the pretext of domestic duties, and this is how the families reproduce the stereotype gender-roles.

Before continuing I will comment on the statement from the retired seaman. Not because of its obvious dichotomized views of work, but because it is a good example of how these
opinions are expressed. He said that in his business, it wouldn’t be appropriate for women. Sea life is only for men. Women can’t stay away that long, eight to nine months on the sea is to long for a lady, her family would miss her. The man was somewhat aware of the politically incorrect in openly suggesting that women are not strong enough, mentally or physically, for sea life but could not say this. Or that seamen, “real men”, wants to keep this world to themselves, without female interruption. Instead he says her family would miss her. Why would a man’s family not miss him? Or is it the work-force of the women he refers to that would be missed?

The men said that men and women have the same main responsibility, and that this was to make their family happy. But only one mentioned that this responsibility looks very different for men and women. This point at an unawareness of the traditional style of dividing labor, as Lévi-Strauss (1971) told us about. Men make the family happy from outside, by paid work while women do it from inside, by cooking, cleaning and caring. This suggests an idea that the divisions of labor are taken for natural laws, that it can’t be otherwise. It is perceived the same when a woman cleans and cooks as when a man goes to his office or workshop. The men did not seem to value this, but not to question it either. For the men it is quite natural that they work outside and women inside. The androcentric, socially constructed order (Bourdieu, 1999) is perceived as a natural order and as time has gone by, this has become the unquestioned reality. Further, this practice is, according to feminist theory, a structural means to keep women subordinated, and men superior (for example Gemzöe, 2008).

On the question what the men thought was the origin of the gendered divisions in society, the answers varied, religion, family traditions, society/culture. One man said that for the new generation family traditions and social norms are not as important anymore. So, if we go back to what critical theory has to say about social consistency, there is good hope for the better when it comes to patriarchal social norms. Mentioned before, critical theory’s main points include attempts to change the way societies create problems, as social inequalities and cultural hegemonies. As Payne (2005) says, critical theory considers people to have capacity for social change, mainly from agency, awareness and education.

And what did the men think they could do themselves for a more gender-equal society? I will learn to cook, answered one man without hesitation. This is a greater promise than it first seems, as it crosses several critical barriers. Firstly, that of the male-female division of labor, secondly, that of taboo tasks and thirdly the “real-man” and homophobia-taboo. This promise
also suggests that people can change the social norms, if only they are aware of them. *My daughters shall study*, said three men. *There should be more education and information in the society about these things, about gender and equality*, said four men. This indicates that the men are aware that something is skewed in their society, and that they would like this to change.

**Part two**

All seven men said that sexual violence and rapes happens everywhere, in the house, in public places, in big cities and small villages. But not here, not in my group. This suggests an awareness of the magnitude of the problem, but also a denial, and un urge to put the blame on others. According to Verma et al. (2004) sexual matters are not openly talked about in India, and this denial is, I would say, un effect of this taboo. This is, of course, also the reason why the men were uneasy when starting the interview, but I tried to be as cautious as possible and still ask relevant questions, and I think the men felt comfortable as we went on.

When I asked about the gang-rape in Delhi last December, I got massive reactions of condemnation, all the men got agitated and wanted to express their disgust and suggested as cruel punishments as possible. This is a common reaction, the newspapers and the internet are full of this. There can be a link to the idealizing of violent behavior, that Verma et al. (2004) talk about. But I would like to ask if this is not in line with the denial, caused by the taboo on talking about sexual matters (ibid) and the urge to put the blame on others? Of course the offenders should have strict punishments, I agree. What I mean is that the spontaneous reaction, suggest a denial and an attitude that sexual violence and rapes are only performed in other places, by others, and those others deserve public hanging or being killed by the mob. If the men would realize that these crimes also could, and do, happen in their own group, maybe they would suggest other, less inhuman punishments.

In Mandvi, as in all India, it is, as mentioned before, very important to be a “real man”. This is what boys learn from early childhood (Verma et al. 2004). In this light it is easy to see why sterilization is perceived as the harshest of punishments, suitable for rapists. *You are nobody if you are impotent, you are nothing*, said one of my informants. Sexuality, or whatever it is, is obviously the means both to prove masculinity and to tell the world that you are someone.
Interesting enough, the men suggested many different causes behind the sexual violence, but no one openly mentioned male attitudes, peer-pressure or male sexuality as presented by Verma et al. (2006), or suggested by the feminist theorists (such as Dworkin, 1981; Freedman, 2003) earlier in this work. If this was due to unconsciousness, uneasiness to talk to me or denial, I can’t know, but one conclusion from this is that these subjects, as well as gender-issues in common, urgently need to be more talked about, in Mandvi, as elsewhere.

The men mentioned the impact from media, though, as causing sexual violence. In this hermeneutic analysis I take the freedom to interpret “media” as sexualized images of women, such as in commercials, and pornographic scenes and films. Even if this was not spelled out, (due to the cultural taboo of speaking out these matters?) I am sure this is what the men meant. This thinking is in line with Andrea Dworkin (1981) when she claims that there is a relation between consumption of pornography and sexual violence because pornography is the theory on which sexual violence is the practice. Jane Freedman (2003) agrees that pornography must be understood as an expression for male power and dominance.

In this light it is obvious that media has a big responsibility on how gender-norms are constructed. Karlsson and Piuva (2012) claim that women’s lives often are permeated by “relations of ruling”, and that these relations are often reinforced by media. Or as Verma et al. (2004) put it, media perpetuate sexual and gender stereotypes as well as inequality. In the absence of inter-gender interaction, or unvalued information, young men derive their script for gender-roles and sexuality from films that often present this in a context of male power, female subordination and violence.

Most of the seven men asserted that women are partly responsible for sexual harassment due to what clothes they wear, or what hour they are outside. I would say this shows the androcentric thinking that prevails in the unconscious of the men. But it also gives a hint of what the men think about moral and human behavior. Do men not have the moral responsibility for their actions? Börjesson (2008) refers to Jean Paul Sartre (1943), when he discusses human responsibility. In every life-situation the conscious human is a choosing creature. The moral consequence of choice is responsibility, to the world and to ourselves (ibid).

If men don’t take their responsibility, women will continue to get the blame for being sexually harassed and raped, from how they dress, and from where they go. This is one tricky paradox for women. Women are expected to be forward, modern and to contribute to the
expansion of the society, expressed by the men in terms like of course women should work outside, it is necessary for our country. But when women try to do this in comfortable jeans and go home from work after dark they are free targets for the old fashioned, skewed attitudes.

Sexual violence is a social problem in the sense of the overall male dominance that prevails and sets the social structures in the Indian as well as in other societies, as pointed out several times in the theoretical chapter, but it is a private problem when it comes to the effects, the suffering of the women. Therefore it is critical that sexual violence, as well as gender issues in common is targeted from both sides, both as social and private problems (Karlsson and Piuva, 2012).

A change in attitudes and in behavior, in Mandvi and everywhere is possible according to the perspectives of critical theory (Payne, 2005). Critical theory’s main points include attempts to change the way societies create problems, as social inequalities and cultural hegemonies and wants to challenge the dominant structures, as pointed out before. Critical theory considers people to have capacity for social change, mainly from agency, awareness and education. It asserts people to be able to change, be contradictory and multiple, complex and diverse (ibid).

Börjesson (2008) refers to Charles Tilly (2000) when he claims that it is very important to discuss the structural conditions that create and maintain the societal inequality. This is where practical social work can come to assist the process of change that waits at the doorstep in Mandvi. Jeff Hearn (in Christie, 2001) agrees, and adds that social work must develop more pro-active approaches to work with men on their violence to women, maybe in line with the workshops that Verma et al. (2006) set up in Mumbai?

**Conclusions and discussion**
Singling out India or other third world countries as rape-cultures is unfair and shows the neo-colonial face of the west. Sexual violence and rapes occur at too high rates, unfortunately, everywhere. Statistics show, though, that in countries with a more developed gender-equality these crimes are less extensive (Seagar, 2009).

The seven men I interviewed were all positive to gender-equality, and wanted to appear as gender-equals. But to my understanding, to my interpretations, from how they talked about
this and from how they expressed gender-equality, their understanding of the concept is a bit skewed. Talking and acting is not quite consistent.

I would say that the androcentric norms that put the male first and the female last are very well rooted in Mandvi, as it is in the rest of India and everywhere. The social constructions are perceived as natural laws, as mentioned in the theoretical chapter, and make people blind to social skews like gendered inequality. Multiple studies indicate, though, that from education and awareness the situation can change. Kerala in the south of India is a good example of how access to education corresponds with equality, not only that of gender but also for ethnic-, sexual-, class-, age etc. minorities. The studies by Verma et al. (2004, 2006) clearly show what impact awareness and education have on the attitudes and behavior of men, and this is where the change towards a more gender-equal society, with less sexual violence has to start, in Mandvi and elsewhere.

In the beginning of the result I pointed out that I realized that this was, if not the first time, so one of very few when the men had talked about gendered inequality and sexual violence. This suggests a need for more information and education on gender-issues, as well as reformed societal attitudes towards these subjects, on every societal layer, individual, family and greater society. The seven men were unaccustomed to talk about gender issues and sexual violence, and in accordance with those theories that say that if you don’t have the language to express your emotions, you get emotionally numb, less empathetic (Johansson 2000) I believe that it is very important for men as well as women to have the ability to talk about gender issues as well as express emotional sentiments. In India, as elsewhere, this is regarded as a taboo or belonging to the female world, and thus something men should stay away from.

Finally, I would like to suggest that to be gender-equals, the seven men should not only worship women as the highest creation, but they should also share women’s burdens, which would be practical equality, and not just a socially desirable answer! The men in Mandvi might need if not studies of practical existential moral philosophy, then maybe workshops such as suggested by Verma et al. (2006) with focus on altered attitudes towards gender issues! And if a few men start cooking and publicly stand up for this, maybe the well-rooted taboo will finally loosen its grip, and start a chain reaction where men and women can share every responsibility. If the gendered divisions in the society are, as suggested by the referred theories in chapter seven, causing the extensive sexual violence, then this would be a good starting point for an equal society with less sexual violence! The task for social work, schools
and the whole society is immense, but not undoable! A change is possible, as critical theory points out (Payne, 2005 and Neuman, 2006)!

I have now described how the seven men perceive gender equality, and what they think of sexual violence, and how these perceptions can be understood in relation to earlier research and theoretical frameworks and what the connections between these issues look like. And I have suggested what could be done in a place such as Mandvi, on different societal layers (individual, family, society) to prevent sexual violence.

**Suggestions for coming research**
As Karlsson and Piuva (2012) say “men’s violence to women” is a most current topic under research today, but when I started this work, I did not find very much on the topic from India. What I found was accounts of female experiences of gendered issues and sexual violence, but as I have pointed out earlier I believe that if men are included in the societal discussion and in research not only as potential offenders but also as fellow citizens and stakeholders it will speed up the changes towards a more gender equal society. Therefore I suggest more research on gender issues with male perspectives, in Indian contexts as well as other. Also, more research on how masculinity is constructed and manifested, and what consequences this get. More research on homophobia, causes and consequences, in India is also needed!

A more practical study could be what impact cooking lessons for Indian men would have on their attitudes, on their family life and on their society.

And finally, in line with Karlsson and Piuva (2012) I would also like to suggest more research on what make men violent to women, on individual as well as on structural layers.
References
Material marked * is translated in this work by myself.

**Downloaded material**


Appendix/ Questionnaire

Age                   Name
Occupation
Social background

This interview guide is part of a study which will constitute a bachelor thesis in social work. Responsible is Hanna Alexandersson, Swedish student of Social Work. All partaking is voluntary and anonymous. Questions are divided into two groups;

1. Personal thoughts on gender equality
2. Personal thoughts on sexual violence and the many reported rapes in India

Part 1

1. What is gender equality for you?
2. Can you see differences in how you were brought up compared to your sister? What differences are there now?
3. Do you think both sexes can/should have the same kind of freedom, power, and opportunities in life?
4. Do you think women can/should enter the male domains?
5. Do you think men can/should enter the female domains
6. What problems do you see in this?
7. What advantages?
8. Do you think the division into separate domains in good or bad for
   a. men b. women c. family d. society?
9. What do you think is the origin of the social differences between men and women?
10. As a man/father what is your main responsibility?
11. Could a woman/wife have the same responsibility? Why/why not?
12. Could you marry a higher educated woman then yourself?
13. How could you contribute to make India a more gender equal society?

Part 2

1. Did you hear about the gang rape in Delhi this winter? What do you think about this?
2. What do you think causes the sexual violence and rapes in India?
3. Who is to blame for the sexual violence and rapes in India?
4. What could be done to prevent sexual violence and rapes?
5. What penalty should the offender take?
6. Where do sexual violence and rapes happen?
7. Is sexual violence and rape a social or a private problem?