The Unexpected Shape of Partner Violence
What is expected is not necessarily what is

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Abstract
During winter 2014 Mid Sweden University Sundsvall started a research project that aims to gain a deeper understanding around factors that lead up to how survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) break away from the abuse and aspire to create a new life for themselves, which this study is a part of. Intimate partner violence exists, this much is well known, and the concept of domestic violence continues to be examined with emphasis on different aspects and issues regarding the alarming numbers. However, few studies have examined how society treats the abused when the traditional image of the abuser and the abused differs from what is expected, such as when men are violated by women, or when the abuser holds a respected position in society, both factors that this paper wish to highlight. Semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with three men and four women who have been living in violent heterosexual relationships. Findings reveal that intersections between gender norms and social power highly determine the survivor’s access to assistance and support from society and authorities.

For the purpose and relevance of this paper, the term IPV, (Intimate Partner Abuse), partner abuse and male/female battering will from here be used interchangeably and will use the ‘National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs’ definition, which includes ‘a pattern of behavior where one intimate partner coerces, dominates, or isolates another intimate partner to maintain power and control over the partner and the relationship’ (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2014: 14). In addition to IPV, the term abused, survivor and abuser will be used alternatively, and an overall definition of violence will be explained under the heading ‘Definitions of Violence’ to avoid any concerns with regards to connotations around the expression.
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Introduction

Violence in close relationships, also referred to as Intimate Partner Violence, (IPV) is a significant social problem globally, with intricate intersections between the individual, society and authorities. Some countries exhibit a higher percent of abuse than others and it is also worth mentioning that there are alarmingly high numbers regardless of sexual orientation even though the typical framing of domestic violence is of heterosexual character, where men abuse women (Brown, 2008:457). This paper wishes to acknowledge the seriousness in all types of IPV, but within the frames of this research the focus will remain solely on violence in heterosexual adult relationships, where both men and women are violated. The paper will examine how IPV intersects with gender narratives related to power dynamics and hegemonic masculinities, and how these factors have an effect on how the abused person experience treatment from society when partner abuse is reported. Numerous scholars have focused on different aspects of domestic violence, and the majority of research has focused on why women stay, different phases that lead up to the separation and how women finally leave (e.g. Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Lundgren, 1991; Hydén, 1994; Hydén, 2000). These are all very interesting and important aspects to explore with regards to a widespread social problem, however there are a few gaps with regards to domestic violence that this study wish to address which is IPV through the lens of power and masculinity, both with regards to violated men, and also as a factor that might obstruct the woman’s leaving process and the time after. The paper will discuss these aspects with the focus on how the abused experience treatment from society.

Studies regarding IPV have been more or less a ‘one way street’ with regards to violence in close relationships where men’s violence is rightfully highlighted as a major social problem (Enander & Holmberg, 2008:200). Social status and gender are factors that partner abuse and violence arguably could and should be blind towards in the process of categorizing importance. By exposing these aspects there is a high possibility to reduce the level of shame and increase overall understanding. This study wishes on no level to marginalize the seriousness around men’s violence towards women, but hopes to emphasize intersecting factors that are crucial for understanding IPV on a broader scale. This paper aims to highlight gender expectations around masculinities that might lead to a lack of support and understanding towards men who are
abused by female partners, and that women to a large extent are treated differently depending on the abuser's status in society.

The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) state on their web page regarding violence the following: ‘Everyone that is a victim of violence in close relationships has the right to support and protection from society. Violence of this nature does first and foremost affect women, and the abuser is often a man. Despite the equal treatment principle, both the social services act and society focus on abused women. The aim is to offer protection for victims of gender based violence’ (socialstyrelsen.se). This extract derived from a government agency is promoting high quality health care as long as the victim is a woman.

**Structure of the Paper**

The paper will start with a brief presentation of the relevance of the study before highlighting questions and aim. Then there will be a research background to draw attention to predisposed images of abused individuals, to highlight that IPV exists within relationships outside the heteronormative model before moving on to devoting a paragraph to the definition of violence to clarify the term and the meaning attached to the study. The paper will then highlight earlier research with reference and statistics with relevance to the Swedish context. Next part will cover the methodology before moving on to the theoretical framework used for this study, which are Social Role Theory, Theorizing Gender- the structuralist approach and Hegemonic Masculinities. The theoretical frameworks are selected because of its relevance for an understanding around gendered order and power dynamics, -factors that are central in this paper, and departs from a social constructionist stand. Lastly the paper will move on to findings and results, and this section will tie the arguments together and highlight how the informants personally experience being treated and believed by society and authorities. This research will depart from an inductive stand, hence it has a qualitative approach, and the data have been collected through in-depth interviews with a total of seven informants that include three men and four women, all survivors of domestic violence in adult heterosexual relationships.
Aim & Objectives

The aim of this study has been to draw attention to IPV structures that does not correspond with society's overall understanding around 'abused' and 'abuser' and examine how the survivor personally experience being treated from society when partner abuse is reported. A qualitative approach has been used in an effort to understand the abused person’s personal experience in relation to authorities. This is done in an attempt to achieve increased knowledge around violence that does not correspond with society’s narratives related to gender and power. The overall objective is ‘How does gendered norms and social power determine the IPV survivors’ access to assistance and support’?

Specific objectives are

- How do social categories intersect, and how do these factors combined or separate contribute to differences in how the IPV survivor is treated by authorities and society when the abuse is reported?
- How do the abused women and men themselves describe the experiences in relation to authorities and health care?
- How do power relations and gender norms determine the quality of support and what overall factors contribute to the survivor’s individual experience?

Definition of Violence

The term violence can fall under a range of definitions, and there might be uncertainty around what is considered to be violence and what is not. To avoid any form of misinterpretation or lack of description of the term in this paper, ‘Intimate Partner Violence’ (IPV) or ‘violence/abuse’ will have reference to the following subtypes categorized by Ekbrand (2006)

*Physical Violence;*

Actions directed against the partners body, with or without objects. Throwing things at the partner with the aim of hurting, throwing the partner at things/interior, holding by force or pushing (Ekbrand 2006:16).
Sexual Violence:

Violations of a person’s sexual integrity, involves all exploitation, all levels of sexual coercion and rape (Ekbrand 2006:16).

Psychological violence:

Degrading actions that belittle a person’s behavior or achievements. Blaming or constantly placing guilt or questioning abilities. A controlling behavior that systematically removes the persons belief in own abilities and personal value, prohibit actions such as leave and/or call the police. Prevent a person from having a social network such as friends, colleagues or neighbors, seclude someone from family, demand information about activities, harassment at their house and/or stalking (Ekbrand 2006:16).

Threat

All forms of aggressive behavior that can be perceived as a risk, such as verbal threats, screaming, threatening to hit, sudden aggressive moves. Hints and warnings of approaching violence or possible threats towards the partner or someone close (Ekbrand 2006:16).

Harassment

This involves all forms of terror through phone, mail, letters, to repeatedly evoke new custody disputes, break agreements around custody and/or alimony (Ekbrand 2006:16).

Background

Violence in close relationships are often referred to as domestic violence, partner violence or IPV, and it is rarely specified that it involves heterosexual relationships, even though the majority of earlier research involves men’s violence against women in heterosexual relationships (Nybergh and Cederberg, 2013:3). As sexual orientation is not at all mentioned, reveals that there is a heteronormative attitude within science that automatically assumes that a relationship contains of a woman and a man (Nybergh and Cederberg, 2013:3). The same
attitude is apparent when the relationship is established as heterosexual, as most research includes men’s abuse towards women and rarely considers the opposite. This paper wish on no level to compare women and men’s experience of abuse, and it is of importance to underline that no form of abuse takes a hierarchical order over another. IPV is something that might occur in any relationship regardless of race, class, gender and sexual orientation. With a broader understanding around this, the line between ‘them’ and ‘us’ will be challenged, and confidently some of the narratives on ‘who can be the abused’ and ‘who can be the abuser’ in the eyes of society and its members will change. However, for the relevance of this specific paper, the focus on violence will have a heterosexual lens in a Swedish context.

As highlighted in the introduction, the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) state on the web page that ‘Everyone that is a victim of violence in close relationships has the right to support and protection from society. Violence of this nature does first and foremost affect women, and the abuser is often a man. Despite the equal treatment principle, both the social services act and society focus on abused women. The aim is to offer protection for victims of gender based violence’ (socialstyrelsen.se). This extract derived from a government agency is highly relevant for this study as it shows that the state is promoting high quality health care, as long as the victim is a woman.

Furthermore, male partner abuse is not at all mentioned in the Government Action Plan, and Social Services Act (Socialtjänstlagen) SFS, chapter 5 provides the following support:

11 § ‘The social welfare committee’s tasks is to promote the victims of crime and their family receive support and help.

The Social Welfare Board shall take particular account of women who are or have been exposed to violence or other abuse by relatives and can be in need of support and help to change their situation.

The social welfare committee is responsible for a child who suffered crime, and also ensure that the child’s family get the support and assistance they need.
The Social Welfare Board must also give special consideration to a child who witnessed violence or other abuse by or against relatives and secure that the child receives the support and the help that the child needs’ (Sveriges Riksdag 2015, authors translation)

This shows that paragraph 11 in Sweden’s Social Services Act states that society includes ‘victims of crime’ but then systematically marginalize the possibility of male abuse in a disturbing taken-for-granted attitude. The fact that male abuse is not at all mentioned in the social services act, and men are excluded from the possibility of victimization within a family situation within the eyes of the government is arguably an indicator of what is expected in the area of domestic violence based on gender expectations and taken-for-granted assumptions.

It is of further importance to highlight that there is no fixed model to describe an abused woman or man, or the individuals’ different situations, there are however some common factors and narratives in IPV that this paper wish to highlight and explore. One is to deconstruct the image and narrative of the abuser as the uneducated male with a drug and/or alcohol problem, and one is to deconstruct the image of the abused, which is the majority of the time, categorized female. While starting this research project it became evident that there are large gaps in research with regards to the concerns raised. This became even more apparent in the search for earlier research, where a clear majority of research focus on women abused by men, and when so, the image and position of the abuser is rarely mentioned which reinforce the predisposed idea of the abuser as a bully, in complete opposite to the image of the well-educated man with a power position in society. While doing web searches for ‘male battering’, different search engines constantly redirected to the opposite: ‘female battering’, ‘male batterers’ or similar. Web searches almost exclusively highlights domestic violence in relation to the male as the abuser and if searching for images on ‘domestic violence’ the larger part consisted of images of battered women, or images of men with a fist in a threatening position. Factors like these, arguably reinforce the narratives that this paper wish to address, factors that make reporting and divorcing a well-educated batterer more difficult, it might undermine the seriousness of the report, and it might make battered men reluctant to seek assistance as they risk being laughed at, belittled or even risk being arrested themselves. These areas seem to be somewhat ignored in the discourse
of IPV, and arguably significantly affects the experience of the abused, as the individuals that do not fit the expected model of abused and abuser stand a risk of being treated differently by health care, authorities and society.

**Earlier Research**

Earlier research tends to primarily focus on men’s violence towards women, and even though there are some studies that focus on male partner abuse there seems to be a gap in women’s abuse towards men, and as mentioned it is a difficult task to find earlier research that does not redirect the search back to men’s abuse towards women. The results available tend to heavily rely on the persistence of search combined to how the question is formulated, and if one search solely over statistics involving conflicts, where psychological abuse is integrated in physical abuse, there is little difference between men and women (Brå, 2009: 6). What is apparent in male and female battering is rather the difference in the type of the violence, where male abuse towards women is often repeated and of a more brutal nature, and female abuse towards men is less brutal, but more often of a psychological nature tending towards harassment (Brå, 2009:7).

Similar numbers presented in a national survey conducted by Brottsförebyggande rådet in 2014 continue to reveal that women and men are equally exposed to IPV but the type of violence differs in the majority of the cases (Frentzel, 2014:7). Approximately 7 % of the participants reported that they have been physically and/or psychologically abused by their partner, (7,0 % of the women, and 6,7 % of the men) and the numbers are fairly equal even when physical and psychological abuse is studied separately (6,8 % of the women and 6,2% of the men reported physiological abuse and 2,2 % of the women and 2,0 % of the men reported physical abuse), however the persistency of the abuse differs, and the numbers reveal that women are more likely to be exposed for repeated violence and abuse (Frentzel, 2014:7).

Findings from Brå (2009) reveal that survivors of IPV have a lower trust in legal authorities compared to individuals exposed to other forms of violence (Brå, 2009:8). This area also reveals a gender difference, where women state that they have the approximate same trust in authorities regardless of nature, form or circumstances of the violence, while men exposed specifically to IPV have a far more negative attitude and experience with regards to legal
Some research suggests that men are more likely to act violently and be aggressive than women, because men are socialized to value power, dominance and to settle disputes through violence, while women are socialized to be nurturing and caretaking and settle disputes through conflict solving and conversations (Randle & Graham, 2011:100). Other findings suggest that men are mainly abused outside of the home environment by strangers, while women are mainly abused in the home environment by their partner (Frentzel, 2014:20). The reason behind those findings might be that there is very little research done on IPV towards men in heterosexual relationships combined with the stigma around male partner abuse.

As previously presented, earlier research have primarily focused the gender issues on the lived experience of women, how to empower women, expose the social problem and the gender inequalities, and patriarchy have often been targeted as the main cause of IPV (Mc Hugh & Cosgrove, 2004 in Randle & Graham, 2011:98). The same tools that are supporting women can arguably be used in examining the support or lack of such when the abused and the abuser take on an unexpected shape as male partner abuse is not mentioned in the Social Services Act. With regards to the women in this study, the focus is to discuss on how social structures, class, and hegemonic masculinities are all factors that might affect and determine the level of support for abused people. Sokoloff & Dupont (2005) highlights the underlying social structures related to IPV, and offers an insight into how different factors such as heterosexism, ethnocentrism and class intersect with attitudes around violence (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005:39). The scholars highlight systems of power, and argue the importance of recognizing systems of hierarchies and domination that penetrates society (Andersen and Collins, 2001 in Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005:39). What is interesting are the interlocking systems of hegemonic masculinities, class and gender, that might affect how society treats IPV in favor of the abuser.

Lundgren (1991) underlines the importance of understanding the normalization process of violence model. What the normalization theory reveals is that when violence has occurred in a close relationship over time, the boundaries for what is accepted are being constantly stretched and violence becomes a ‘normal’ part of life and the relationship (Lundgren, 1991 in Frentzel, 2014:22). The consequence of this is that not only do the abused adapt to the demands by the
abuser, the adaption will also lead to a gradual change of the lived reality, and the abused will gradually internalize the abusers motives for violence, and demands on how the person should be (Enander and Holmberg, 2008:203). This process affects the abused person’s image of ‘self’, and he/she will gradually start to view the self through the eyes of the abuser. Not only will violence become a normal part of life, the self-esteem will also be damaged and the person might believe that abuse is deserved (Enander and Holmberg, 2008:203). As mentioned, there are different reasons for why an abused has not had the courage to report earlier, it might be due to factors such as shame, fear, and the wrong idea that violence is normal. Considering this, and tie it together with findings that reveal that if the abused feels neglected or perceive the police as arrogant, the person might withdraw the report and remind silent.

**Theoretical framework**

**Hegemonic Masculinities**

as a concept has been used since the late 1980’s in a number of fields in an attempt to study and understand bullying amongst boys, work environments, gender based violence, patterns of crime and so on, in short, hegemonic masculinities have contributed to a broader understanding around relations and representations of different masculinities within different social arenas and geographical positions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:831). This theory is applied in this study to understand both the subordination of women and stigma around masculinities that undermine the seriousness around abused men, and to understand factors that lead to a tendency to protect men with power positions. An increased understanding of how masculinities are constructed, will arguably also lead to an increased understanding of how gender based violence is constructed (Snider,1998:23). Connell (2014) argues that the hegemonic masculinity describes the most respected and desired model and this does not only reinforce the gendered order with subordination of women, it also place other forms of masculinities in subordinate less respected positions, something that again affects how abused men are ‘allowed’ to receive assistance when trapped in IPV (Connell, 2014:8). Earlier research shows that men that have been exposed to IPV often feel that parts of their masculinity have been reduced, and there is often an urge to cover up the partner abuse linked to the deprivation of masculinity, and this differs from women, because they often state that they willingly cover up the abuse, but more
often to protect their partner than due to own shame, and another consequence of hegemonic masculinities is the expected power positions and success linked to patriarchy (Anderson, 2005:857,858).

Dominant forms of masculinity is not only relevant primarily amongst men, this arguably extends to women also and influences overall attitudes, and this is because all forms of femininity are in relation to the general subordinate position of women in relation to men (Connell 1987: 186-7 in Budgeon 2014: 322). In contrast to the limited access of earlier research regarding abused men, there are a number of sources related to female battering. One of the leading researchers within this field in a Swedish context is sociologist Eva Lundgren. Lundgren (2004) argues that men’s violence against female partners is linked to patriarchy, and the reason for violent actions has mainly to do with an urge to suppress, control and gain masculinity (Lundgren, 2004: 24). Considering this argument, that IPV against women is linked to a form of power and masculinity, hegemonic masculinities could conclusively be applied in relation to women, both in relation to the violence and also in relation to how these attitudes dictate how society treat and understand the abuser. In short, hegemonic masculinities as a concept is arguably highly relevant in understanding environments beyond different forms of masculinities, it is also valuable in direct relation to women as it provides an understanding of gender difference and power dynamics that direct and indirect affect women through sociocultural factors.

Building on sociocultural factors, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) argue that the concept of hegemonic masculinities automatically put non-hegemonic masculinities in a subordinate position, and this is not forced through domination, it is rather a pattern of hegemony (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:846). ‘Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:846). These factors can debatably make a contribution to the understanding around women’s position in relation to dominant masculinities in the eyes of society. What I suggest with this is that the position of hegemonic masculinity, that by nature are high ranked in society, will possibly lead to a respected position that is hard to challenge despite allegations involving abuse. The argument here is to put
emphasis on how dominant forms of masculinity is not only hegemonic and relevant among men, this extends to women and influence overall attitudes, because in a patriarchal society, all forms of femininity are in relation to the general subordinate position of women in relation to men (Connell 1987: 186-7 in Budgeon 2014:322).

**Theorizing Gender – The Structuralist Approach**

It would arguably be appropriate to claim a gender neutral perspective when addressing IPV, as violence as such is a devastating experience regardless of gendered identity on both the abused and the abuser. But to apply a gender neutral perspective would be to deny the actual underlying problems in the topic of the paper, as IPV and society’s respond to IPV is deeply intertwined in gender relations. It is first and foremost important to understand the complex ways in which individuals interact accordingly to ‘rules of gender’. The structuralist approach to gender provides a perspective that calls attention to how gender is a factor that organize ‘social institutions as well as identities, attitudes, and interactions’ (Anderson, 2005:858). The structuralist approach argues that gender is a system of stratification that divides women and men and places them in categories and roles that are uneven (Anderson, 2005:858). There are social structures that often determine and dictate what a proper behavior is, further highlighted through the paragraph discussing social role theory, and these are the same type of structures that inform the heteronormative model and construct gender relations (Anderson, 2005:856). These constructed gender relations do not only lead to a lack of understanding towards individuals who do not conform to the norm, such as men abused by women, -it can also be the opposite way around; gender relations can be both constructed and maintained through the practice of violence (Anderson, 2005:856). This is apparent where masculinity is used to show what a ‘real man’ is, and these relations are often also the reason for why assaulted men avoid reporting an assault due to cultural and gendered assumptions that they should be capable to defend themselves ‘like a man’ (Anderson, 2005:857). If one acknowledges how constructed narratives intersect with how abuse is treated, reported and studied it might also lead to a deconstruction of how abuse is categorized, divided and treated in a hierarchical order and rather be treated as one gender neutral problem categorized as IPV.
International research and findings point in the same direction as national findings, men are less likely to report abuse or seek assistance, and this largely depends on the earlier highlighted factors around the societal gendered assumptions of men as the superior both with regards to physical strength and financial ability (Tsui, Cheung & Leung, 2010:769,780). These assumptions generate an expectation that men should be able to defend themselves and this might further lead to a conflict between their own victimization and the expectations around their masculinity (Tsui, Cheung & Leung, 2010:769,780). Gender roles in society determine who can be the victim, and as long as men are connected to the prescribed ideas around masculinity as the stronger, the more problematic it will be for abused men to have the courage to report, but it will also affect how these men are treated by authorities (Tsui, Cheung & Leung, 2010:769).

Because of society’s understanding that men and women have different behavior with regards to violence, the same behavior will be understood differently if it occurs. Thus, in the occurrence of one violent act that would confirm masculinity within a certain situation will be interpreted in an entirely different manner if the actor is a woman (Anderson, 2005:857). There is arguably no doubt that the physical differences and strengths between men and women often put women at a disadvantage and more at risk than men, but violence is more than a battle between capabilities. Some people are prone to use violence, and others are not, and Anderson (2005) argues that a clearer understanding around this framework and the role expectations linked to gender will also lead to a clearer understanding as to why men’s violence is regarded as of a more serious nature than women’s violence, when violence should be categorized merely as -violence, blind of both gender and sexual orientation. An understanding and acceptance of these roles, and an acceptance of how male battering can be of as serious nature as female battering can possibly also contribute to holding female batterers to a larger extent accountable for violence against male partners (Anderson, 2005:857).

**Social Role Theory**

Attitudes in society are arguably shaped, maintained and reinforced through narratives and beliefs around certain stereotypes, and there are beliefs around occupational positions such as lawyers, teachers, managers and fast food workers, and these stereotypes often also lead to
a categorizing of social groups (Koenig & Eagly 2014:371). These categorizations lead to expectations and the social role theory is a valuable perspective for understanding how behavioral patterns in society are considered and categorized. Social role theory is concerned about relations in which through humans interact, and explain the process of categorization where individuals presume that ‘persons are members of social positions and hold expectations of their own behaviors and those of other persons’ (Biddle, 1986:67). Put differently, role theory explains why members of society behave in a rather predictable manner depending on context, class, gender and such, but it also explains why there are certain expectations linked to certain positions and gender (Biddle, 1986: 68). If one understands these expectations one can arguably also understand the lack of understanding when there is a contradictory circumstance linked to the expected role, such as when a man is violated by a woman, or when a representative of safety, law and order batters wife and children. Role theory inform us how actors have been ‘taught’ certain values, hence it is provided as an explanation to how stereotypes and normative values are created, but as social norms are ever changing and never static it is also worth mentioning that a challenge to these values would possible also open up for a change normative expectations (Biddle, 1986:71).

Carrie Brown, Ph.D. in clinical psychology (2008) argues that research continues to reveal that abuse is highly present in all types of relationships regardless of geographical position and adds on by stating that it is the heterosexist model that actually determines how society treats the problem, something that becomes more evident when the violence does not follow the ‘gendered order’ (Brown, 2008:457). Power dynamics and different relations informs members of society of certain behavioral patterns that lead to an assumption that men are often considered to be the oppressor who is superior both in economic and social power, and also holds the advantage with regards to physical strength, in contrast women are often considered to be the weaker -the oppressed-, who is abused by her male partner (Brown, 2008:458). Narratives like these determine who can be the abused and who can be the abuser that again informs society on whether a man can be abused or not (Walsh, 1996 in Brown, 2008:458). This argument is supported by the absence of abused men in the Social Services Act (Socialtjänstlagen) SFS chapter 5, presented on page 9 in this paper. Another result of these
narratives is that it significantly shapes society’s view and response to violence with regards to battered men (Brown, 2008:457). Wood (2001) adds on to this and emphasizes the danger of assuming that domestic violence is something that happens rarely and only towards and by certain personalities that often are assumed to be a product of an extreme and neurotic personality and relationship (Wood, 2001:240).

**How the Theories Relate to the Topic**

Hegemonic masculinities, the Structuralist approach to theorizing gender and social role theory all departs from how attitudes are shaped, upheld and reinforced through narratives and interactions between individuals, social groups and society. Hegemonic masculinity as a model exists within and in accordance to a preformed framework of gender, and these performances make ‘male power and privilege appear natural and normal rather than socially produced and structured’ (Anderson & Umerson 2001:359). Furthermore, social role theory focuses on categorization of social groups, such as occupational position linked to the possibility of being an abuser (Koenig & Eagly 2014:371). The structuralist approach to gender explains how individuals are organized into groups and who are more or less likely to be an abused and/or an abuser. This approach helps explaining why bigger scale systems have a predisposed idea that women cannot represent brutality, and men cannot represent vulnerability with regards to IPV (Anderson, 2005:858). Consequences around the concept of hegemonic masculinities are the same idea of positions in society that are linked to social role theory and theorizing gender. The image of hegemonic masculinities protect power positions and success linked to patriarchy, which have an effect on both abused men and abused women linked to patriarchy.

These three approaches arguably highly intersect, and show how interactions between individuals determine that some groups are protected at the cost of groups that function outside of the expected model. These theories are further tied together in narrative theory as this point of departure allows for an understanding around how agents in society make sense of the world by turning communication into meaning which becomes reality (Johansson, 2005:85).
Methodology

There is little doubt that the level of reported cases towards women is significantly higher than reported cases about male abuse, something that statistics, earlier research and search engines give clear and easily accessed information about. The process of finding informants to this study has also revealed the uneven access to informants depending on gender as searches had to be adjusted to increased intensity to find abused men compared to abused women, something that will be developed further in this section.

Research Approach

The study departs from a social constructionist stand with a narrative approach and a qualitative research method. A social constructionist approach is of value because it departs from how constructed understandings of the world, and meanings attached to it are developed through interaction with other social actors and seen as central to human activities (Lock and Strong, 2010:6). Qualitative method was chosen for this study in an attempt to understand the research question from the position of the informant, to listen to their personal experiences, situations and feelings, and study how different factors such as gender and power interconnect with the experiences provided by the informants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013:7). Qualitative method has been of further value for this study as it allows for personal meetings where words and expressions can be applied to the data to provide a richer description of the study at hand and opens up for a better understanding around the meanings and experiences that are connected to the stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013:7). The use of qualitative data has allowed for this research design to emerge during the process, and although the interview questions have been created and the informants selected with an attempt to understand IPV from the position of the insider, this approach has encouraged the informants to expand on their stories and the research to expand to areas not originally considered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013:7).

The reason for why the paper departs form a social constructionist stand combined with the qualitative research method is because of the connection between them, and the interest to challenge taken for granted assumptions in society that develops through the shared stories in
interaction. The narrative theory and method in this research is intertwined not only by the informant and the researcher though the qualitative research method, but also with regards to society and the agent, something that will be explained further on page 23 under the heading ‘Analysis of Data – Narrative Method’

**Informants and Survey Implementation**

The informants have partly been selected and provided for this study through Kampanj R, and partly by the researcher. Kampanj R is an organization that was established in 2013 by Anna Källdén who is specialized within communications and also has personal experience of violence. Källdén originally founded an organization called ‘slagfärdiga’ where all members have a history of being abused, and Källdén soon realized the importance and potential value in applying individuals own experience and developed Kampanj R as an extension to ‘slagfärdiga’. The main aim is to work against violence by working for good relationships, by using the knowledge provided by individuals with firsthand experience. The study includes a total of seven people, three men and four women, all survivors of IPV in heterosexual relationships in a Swedish context. Informants have been carefully selected through relevance for the study and interviews have been implemented in Stockholm, Sundsvall and Östersund something that has required travelling for both the researcher and informants as all interviews have been done in person. The different locations for the interviews have been selected with concern for respect and integrity for the informant.

The informants provided through Kampanj R have been informed about the option to freely participate through the established network ‘slagfärdiga’ and if there was an interest to partake in this study, the informants contacted Karin Jarnkvist, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Mid Sweden University who has been the coordinator of the informants provided by Kampanj R, and Jarnkvist has also located suitable private conversation rooms for interviews conducted in Stockholm. The informants selected by the researcher have been through personal contacts with links to relevant network. The informant has been introduced to the project firstly through the contact, and if participation was of interest a meeting was arranged first and foremost with considerations for the informant.
Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of informants and form of abuse. All names are aliases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Physical abuse</th>
<th>Psychological abuse</th>
<th>Abused children</th>
<th>Abuser holds higher education/power position</th>
<th>Abuser have shared or full custody of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Grown up children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anja</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pia</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontus</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lars</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mona* was married for 20 years with a very powerful man holding a position highly respected in society. They have two children together, today both adults. The abuse started within the first year during pregnancy. She left the relationship approximately 16 years ago.

*Tina* lived with her abuser for 10 years, and she was about to leave by the time she fell pregnant with the one child they have together. The abuse started psychologically before they moved in together, and developed to be physical abuse shortly afterwards. She left the relationship approximately 8 years ago.

*Anja* lived with her abuser for 9 years, they have 3 children together and the abuse started when the first child was newly born, approximately one year after they met. She left the relationship approximately 6 years ago.

*Pia* lived with her abuser for 2 years. The abuse started early and was first of a psychological nature and developed to be physical during pregnancy. She left the relationship approximately 6 years ago.
Adam lived together with his abuser for 2 years. The abuse started with a psychological nature immediately after they moved in together, and became physical within the first month after that. He left the relationship approximately 2 years ago.

Pontus lived together with his abuser for 2 years, and the physical abuse started immediately. He left the relationship approximately 1.5 years ago.

Lars lived together with his abuser for 5 years. They have 1 child together that Lars lost custody of many years ago. The abuse was never physical, but started with a psychological nature within the first year. He left the relationship approximately 15 years ago.

Data Collecting Methods

The collecting of data has been conducted through in-depth interviews in an attempt to understand the research question from the position of the informant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013: 17). The interviews have departed from a set of questions developed by Jarnkvist, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Mid Sweden University, and the interviews have been of a semi-structured character. There has been openness for the interview to allow for additional narratives and directions that are relevant for the overall understanding and in order to respect the interviewee and the need for expression, i.e. the interviews have had structure with flexibility. The length of the interviews has ranged from 70-120 minutes with an average length of 90 minutes. All of the interviews have been conducted in private conversation rooms, some at the disposition through the project, and some close to the informant’s workplace to facilitate their participation. All places have been carefully selected with concern for respect and integrity of the informant.

The research questions developed for Kampanj R has framed the interviews, and began by asking the informant for a brief presentation and background such as age, occupation, education, previous relationships and current life situation. The following questions then shifted focus to the relationship that was of relevance for the study, and revolved around how the informant and
the abuser first met and then how the two established the relationship. The following step of the interview was to establish the nature of the violence, and this phase involved feelings around what happened, realization or lack of realization around being abused, denial, support or lack of support from family and friends. This phase included the IPV survivors experience around attitudes held by authorities, medical professionals and/or social services when abuse was reported.

The next phase focused on how the abused managed to leave the relationship, what factors and circumstances contributed to the realization that he/she needed to leave, and how and if the persons social network have been of importance. The final phase of the interview then focused solely on how the individuals personal experience is with regards to how society have offered help and support or lack of thereof, and what could have been done differently to receive a better outcome and meet requirements that support the abused. All of the interviews have been audio recorded, transcribed in detail, analyzed and then translated into English (Interview sheet attachment #3, page 46).

I have been aware of reflexivity and possible interpretations as a result of positionality, and personal beliefs and positions have been considered through the entire process to avoid biases. The overall experience of the interviews has been positive and successful and at times the informant has become highly personal and emotional, something that the interview has allowed for to respect the informants need for expression. There have been some intersecting elements of counseling, where the informant have asked for direct help to overcome anxiety and self-blame, and at this stage I have in an respectful manner been clear both about my own capabilities and also the aim and reason for the conversation.

**Analysis of Data – Narrative Method**

The chosen method for the study is narrative method as I have valued this to be the best suited model due to its ability to make human experience meaningful, and to turn actions, feelings and thoughts into a form of organized puzzle (Johansson, 2005:85). Another reason for
why narrative method has been a natural choice for this study is because narratives linked to class and gender serves as a large part of the problems highlighted, and the reason for why society is treating individuals that does not fit the expected model differently than those who apply to the norm, has to a large extent to do with those narratives. Johansson (2005) highlights that a narrative can be viewed as a way of organizing events and actions and reasons for actions, and it is argued that our thoughts, actions and attitudes are highly influenced by narratives, something that this study will highlight (Johansson, 2005:85).

Furthermore, knowledge is according to the feminist philosopher Donna Haraway (1988) socially situated and constantly reproduced and produced in different ‘social, political, cultural and linguistic contexts’ (Haraway 1988 in Johnsson 2005:26, my translation). What this indicates is that the way the world and society is understood by its agents today is ever changing and never static, meanings and categorization can reform and be reestablished (Johansson, 2005:26, my translation). As narratives and life stories work as knowledge in society, then maybe the content in this paper can be part of challenging the dominating narratives by voicing other forms of knowledge.

Processing, analyzing and collecting of data have been done parallel to each other, and has developed during the study that has been ongoing since November 2014 (Kvale & Torhell 1997:171). After the interviews was finished, the process of transcribing contributed to a large extent to the understanding of the content. Transcriptions have taken roughly about 70 hours and made me come very close to the stories and its content. After finished transcriptions, I read them all through several times and highlighted parts that I thought stood out in relevance to my focus. I felt that the computer and the smaller scale documents could not be interpreted in contrast or in relevance to each other, so I used a method that gave me a clearer overview by printing them out and form a ‘puzzle’ on the floor. With the earlier highlighted areas, the studying of the content and transcriptions and the final puzzle, I found the thread and the focus that I have now put together in this study.
**Ethics**

Before this project started, an application was sent to the Regional Ethical Review Board in Umeå (EPN). The application was designed and presented to EPN by Karin Jarnkvist at Department for Social Sciences (SHV) at Mid Sweden University in Sundsvall, and is ethically approved from 29.01.2015 and have further followed the Swedish Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences. Before starting the interviews, the informant was asked to read a detailed information letter so the purpose and expectations around the informants’ participation was clear, this information was also ahead of interviews provided electronically. The informant was also asked to sign an informed consent, and have been informed about the freedom to end personal participation at any time during the process (Information letter, attachment #2 page 44, 45).

All data such as text messages and email have been handled with discretion to protect confidentiality, and tickets for transportation have also been kept anonymous and cannot be traced back to the informant. Through strict precautions, the research have continually considered confidentiality, safety, discretion and respect of integrity with regards to all participants ahead of meetings, during the interview process, as well as throughout the overall handling process of collected data. Unforeseen ethical predicaments can appear during the process of conducting qualitative research, something that I have been aware of, and the study has been done through guidelines for research on IPV. Names and places for all people involved have been changed and coded throughout the process of transcription and analyze of data in all written documents. Reflexivity, the positionality of my own preconception, values and biases have also been considered throughout the process, and there has been a continuous consultation with ‘Ethics in Qualitative Research’ by Miller, Birch, Mauthner & Jessop (2012). The information letter, informed consent as well as the interview guide have been designed and provided through Karin Jarnkvist (2014) at Mid Sweden University Sundsvall and Kampanj R.

**Findings & Results**

Findings reveal that all of the informants, regardless of gender have experienced that society has repeatedly worked in the favor of the abuser, and fails to acknowledge police reports
and medical reports that support their reason for reporting the partner. As Lundgren (1991) argued (highlighted on page 11), some of the consequences of living in an abusive relationship are that the normalization lead to internalization of the abusers motives, where self-blame plays a vast role (Enander and Holmberg, 2008:203). The image of self is broken down over time, trust in own strength and abilities is at a minimum, and the person might believe that abuse is what one deserves (Enander and Holmberg, 2008:203). If the abused is met with skepticism and ignorance by authorities, it might directly support the message sent by the abuser and destroy the courage that is needed to be able to leave.

**Lived Reality for the Women Linked to Self-value and Normalization**

Mona: Sometimes when we went to bed at night... and he was reading... I could kind of feel the vibes, feel that he was expecting ... sex... And if I didn’t crawl over and asked for sex, I would get beaten up, so...I would say that it was...it was...well, I would say that it was a rape that I asked for...(...) to avoid battering...that was my reality for 20 years. And he had a service weapon in the bedside table...loaded.

Tina: It was a form of constant belittling, and I became extremely insecure...about everything...(...) reality, was that really reality? It was like a game the whole time, so I became completely...I doubted my own sanity (...) I became completely cut off from friends and everything.

Anja: He grabbed me by the throat, and then he began to show the knife. One time, after a couple of years, he used a kitchen knife, held it against my throat and pressed...and I thought, soon this will...this will cut me open. (...) at one stage I told him ‘you have to stop hitting me, I have no more long sleeves to wear’ (...) It was so normal, it was my reality on a daily basis. (...) I haven’t...he broke me down completely, I didn’t work, we had kids, I couldn’t support myself, I didn’t have any social network, where would I go?

Pia: He locked the door so I couldn’t escape (...) he threw me against the closets, and pressed his hand against my belly [pregnant] and told me he would crush it [the baby] if I made a sound (...) He smashed my head against the walls (...) he threw me over the couch and broke my nose. (...) I was told afterwards that I shouldn’t have provoked him.
Considering these extracts that reveal everyday situations, and tying them together with the courage it takes to leave, arguably reveals the importance of being met with support when reaching out for help and reporting abuse. The relationship has debatably put the abused in a subordinate position compared to the abuser who holds a position of power, and the internalization of the violence leads to a process where the abused starts to interpret the self and reality through the eyes of the abuser, something that then lead to a serious decline in own capabilities (Enander and Holmberg, 2008: 203). By combining these factors and consider if another form of power in form of authorities, works as an extension of the abuse and confirm the low image of self, the violated might automatically return to the relationship. The following extract will show the level of emotional impact that the police might have.

Pia: I sat with the police...after that ‘pregnant battering’ or what we should call it, I actually went to the police (...) I sat there, and I told him what had happened (...) And then he [the police] said something to me that I have thought about many times since... [Pia starts to cry]...I’m sorry, but for him to see...he could see that I was strong enough to be able to get out. I wouldn’t live in abuse for another 20 years, I was on my way out. And that was really...important to hear.

This part made Pia very emotional, and taking into account the impact this conversation still has on her arguably reveals how crucial the attitudes from authorities are. Later during the interview, Pia again returned to the conversation and stated that she strongly felt that what the officer told her at the time, that he recognized her strength and own capabilities to leave, was one of the factors that gave her strength to actually do so at a later stage.

Mona provides a story with a different outcome:

Mona: He went berserk at home, one of many (...) This time he went completely mad and threw the children’s toys down the stairs...and flower pots, so it was soil and shards all over the stairs. And you can’t escape when the children are home, because you can’t leave them with him. But this time, I was so scared that I even left my kids behind and ran. (...) I probably drove 130 km/h to the police station and I entered with torn clothes and battered. They [the police] stared at me and a female and a male police officer then followed me home...and... they went down to the basement to talk to him while I was
waiting upstairs shaking in the turmoil that he created (...) they [the police] had to step over it, so it was obvious what had happened. And...they came up after approximately 30 minutes and said ‘Ok, we have talked to him now, so we’re leaving’. He was still in the basement, and I begged them to take him with them and they said ‘no, we can’t do that’.

I asked Mona if she saw this as a serious attempt to leave, which she confirms. But she also, with a raised tone of voice stated that it did not help that she reported. She refers back to the episode with the police, but also to a time where she contacted BUP (Barn och Ungdoms Psykiatri/Child and Youth Psychiatry, Sweden). Mona reveals that after she reported to BUP, they wrote to her partner to include him in the matter, which according to Mona made everything worse.

Mona: He felt violated as a result of my reports (...) ‘How do you think it feels to live with someone who has reported you’, and then I got battered...because I violated him by reporting to the police, and by contacting BUP. He prohibited me to discuss our relationship with anyone. (...) I knew that if I told anyone hell would break loose, but I still did, to BUP and the police, and no one helped me. So...so I knew after this happened with the police that no one would help me, and I couldn’t understand how to get out alive with the kids.

It is further worth mentioning here, that Mona’s serious attempts to leave, the episodes highlighted above, happened 15 years earlier than the actual separation. Would the outcome have been different if she had received the support she needed?

All of the interviewed women have expressed frustration around not being heard, and have expressed that this is highly linked to the abusers social position. What I suggest with this is that the behavior from authorities ties back both to hegemonic masculinities and the aspired model of masculinity, as well as the social role theory which creates narratives around occupational positions and categorizations of social groups. Considering that Pia’s abuser does not hold a power position, he corresponds well with the expected model of an abuser, and as a result she received both assistance and support easier than the women with men in power positions. Mona’s abuser in contrast, holds both an aspired form of hegemonic masculinity due to position,
the same position that creates expectations around him as a person, and consequently wrongly protects him largely on the foundation of narratives.

Despite that there seems to be a pattern in hiding the abuse as long as possible from friends due to shame, they have first and foremost confirmed family and friends as the main support during the final separation. This points to the direction that in case of emergency and as a first choice, authorities are mainly involved and after there is a feeling of being neglected and nowhere else to turn, family and friends become involved.

**Lived Reality for the Men Linked to Gender Expectations and Relations**

As discussed in the section regarding the structuralist approach to theorizing gender, there are firm social structures that determine what a proper and expected behavior is according to gender. ‘Women are not as prone to be violent as men’, and ‘men are physically stronger than women’ are two examples of expected structures. The following extract from two of the interviews with the abused men gives a different insight in power dynamics and the misleading assumption around gendered relations, oppressor and oppressed:

Adam: She fell pregnant once, and I questioned that when she first told me with the words ‘I don’t think you are pregnant’, but after a few weeks she through the pregnancy test at me, through hot porridge at me and screamed ‘you made me pregnant’! ‘But we are both responsible for that’ I said, but I shouldn’t have said anything because that made her trash the apartment and break my nose...because she was angry.

Pontus: I went to bed [slept on the stomach] (...) I woke up by a bash in my shoulder blade, she had taken a knife and stabbed me in my shoulder blade.

Research reveals that men’s use of violence is more accepted than women’s use of violence, and this is first and foremost based on traditional values around masculinities and dominance similar to traditional values around women and caretaking (Gottzén, 2014:246). Narratives around gender and violence creates a false image that when women are responsible for IPV, it is of less serious nature which further creates a dilemma for abused men as they are not ‘entitled’ to be
victimized in the eyes of society (Gottzén, 2014:247). This ties back to the arguments highlighted in the structuralist approach to theorizing gender, as this perspective explains how predisposed ideas associated to gender relations ‘remove’ the possibility of a female batterer which again affects how the abused male is regarded in the eyes of society.

**Hegemonic Masculinities Linked to Men**

Hegemonic masculinities are as mentioned commonly linked to the aspired and most respected model of masculinities. This notion combined with gender relations and expectations reveals that there are little space for an understanding around men as the oppressed in a Swedish context, and the following extract from one of the interviews gives an insight of what might happen when the *abused* challenge the stereotyped image of ‘who can be a victim’ and turn to authorities for protection;

Adam: I tried to get a restraining order on her, because I know what she is capable of...they just laughed at me.

Me: Who laughed at you?

Adam: The police

Me: What did you say and how did they respond?

Adam: I told them how it was. I showed them the text messages and that she threatened me to come here and trash the apartment and so on – ‘HUH! Can’t you defend yourself’ is kind of the reaction I got. I said -‘Yes I can defend myself, is that what you want me to do’ and I looked at him, but he didn’t want that I guess. I just left (...) they refused to help me.

The majority of the men stated that reporting to the police was of ‘no use’ other than to document their personal worries and violent occurrences to have evidence if something happened in the future that required self-defense or led to serious injury. Another threat that lies in expected gender roles is gender based violence such as rape. In this particular extract, accusations of rape is used as a false weapon with the aim to falsely accuse the abused:
Pontus: I came to the police station, and they said ‘You are suspected for abuse and rape’
(...) they took numerous samples from both her and me, exactly everywhere, clothes and
everything... bedding... (...)

Me: So they never charged you for rape?

Pontus: No, I hadn’t have sex with her that day, I hadn’t even kissed her that day so I
didn’t have any traces of her anywhere. It was completely... well... it was devastating,
taking into custody being a suspect for rape...

It is arguably worth questioning how the reality for this man would have been if he in fact had
have sexual intercourse with his girlfriend that day, and how would society have treated his word
against hers? There have rightfully been a lot of effort in Sweden to establish safe places and
centers available for women in need of help, and there are also legislations to address the IPV
problem. There are also programs and crisis centers for violent men, where they can receive
treatment with the help from professional therapists (Gottzén, 2014:249). There are however
few places for violated men to turn to in need of help and assistance when trapped in an abusive
relationship. Furthermore, as highlighted on pages 7 & 8 in the extract from the Government
Action Plan and Social Services Act (Socialtjänstlagen) SFS, chapter 5, male partner abuse is not
at all mentioned despite a text that states that all victims of crime receive support. This is
arguably a good indicator around the gender narratives and expectations on who have the ‘right’
to be a victim of IPV in the eyes of society.

The Power of Powerful Men Affecting Women

As highlighted earlier, a large part of the interviewed women stated that they had a strong
feeling of not being heard when they reported abuse and tried to get assistance from authorities.
Women in the study that have had men/abusers who are well educated or have high ranked
positions and status, state that they have experienced how the abuser have been able to
manipulate authorities, and even control the use of evidence or removing evidence from
journals. If the abuser holds a respected position in society it seems to be easier to discredit the
abused relationships with both social connections but also with regards to authorities, and this
might range from spreading rumors to actually having documents and reports disappear. The
following extract is from a conversation that Mona had with a physician a few years after the separation. Mona originally met the physician at a time when she feared for her life, and told the physician at the time that she was abused, that the children were abused, and that her husband had a loaded gun at home. She wanted to meet with her again several years later for personal reasons.

Mona: She told me that she had wondered during all these years [approximately 13 years] if she did the right thing [the physician did not at the time take the case further], so she remembered me. She was very upset that the file was missing, and she thought that my ex-husband who was also a physician probably had something to do with its disappearance.

This reveals that there are concerns around the abusers position related to violence. What factors contributed to why the physician did not take the case further at the time despite that it was of such a character that she has been questioning for more than a decade if she acted correctly? As suggested, hegemonic masculinities might contribute to an understanding around women’s position in relation to powerful and dominant masculinities in the eyes of society. This extract opens up for the possibility that the reason no action was taken at the time is linked to a respected hegemonic position that is hard to challenge (Connell 1987:186-7 in Budgeon 2014:322, Mahoney 1991:42).

Anja have recounted a similar story, and her voice is raised and she shows clear signs of both anger and resignation when she states the following

Anja: I have done everything by the book, I have documented injuries at the hospital, commonly there are no other people that directly witness domestic violence, and when there are no witnesses, and the abuser is a police, or if he should be a lawyer or similar. You are screwed.

During the interview, Anja reveals that she has been constantly informed that the main challenge in fighting for custody is linked to the abusers position in society.

Me: Have you received this information from authorities?
Anja: From the clinic of child psychiatry, they said that ‘it is a shame he isn’t a foreigner or a drug addict, if that was the case people would have helped you’. I have also been told the same from [a name] at the police department, she said it too. It’s because he holds a powerful position.

This does not only reveal the influence of hegemonic masculinities, it also reveals social role theory and the connotations made to the image of an abuser. As highlighted by Gottzén (2014) there is an overrepresentation of violence linked to men with a foreign background, but it is of importance that this is viewed in relation to class rather than ethnicity (Gottzén, 2014:248). This is further linked to narratives amongst Swedish young men as they tie ‘criminal’ and ‘foreigner’ together, and describe themselves as ‘soft’ in complete contrast to ‘violent, uncontrolled foreigners who are highly dangerous and prone to serious crime’ (Gottzén, 2014:248, my translation). The reason for highlighting these young men’s narratives is to show how social role theory linked to established narratives can protect an abuser that does not correspond with the expected. The quote reveals that these attitudes stretch beyond the age and gender group studied by Gottzén (2014) as this involves statements made by adults within a psychiatric clinic and the Swedish police force. As Connell (2005) highlights, hegemonic versions of masculinity are both constructed and used to promote a respected image of self (Connell, 2005: 842). These versions are not only known by the performer, as similar versions to a large extent are recognized by society, and there seems to be a collective agreement of the hierarchical system of masculinities. This possibly creates images of norms, and protects agents of the aspired model without doubting its legitimacy.

Abuse in Continuum Related to Children

Sweden holds a respected position with regards to gender equality and democracy, with emphasis on shared parental rights and responsibilities, and this is a model widely respected outside the Swedish welfare state (Svensson & Gunnarsson, 2012:2,3). However, the emphasis on upholding the respected position as the equal society with participating fathers and joint custody, might cause the overall outcome and quantitative results to override some considerations for
the individual. What is suggested with this argument is that while there are laws proclaiming children’s rights, there are children placed in abusive homes based on equal parenting rights.
Pia was the one female informant whose abuser did not hold a respected position in society which arguably supports the concerns raised in the previous paragraph. She is constantly being sued by her abuser and has to appear in court to protect her child from the father. Pia still has full custody of her son, but states that the court is constantly going against the social services advice against visitation and she has been sued three times for custody, and this custody dispute has been ongoing since 2010. She reveals that this has cost her a large amount of money, but the costs for the father are covered by the state.

Pia: The courts don’t care about recommendations from the social services. They just seem to think that everyone is entitled to their kids. They don’t care if they [the other parent] are competent or should even be allowed to be around children...if you’re a father you automatically have right to have your child (…) There has been charges against him, he can’t take care of himself, he doesn’t have a job, how the hell can he take care of a child? To even consider that goes beyond my comprehension!

Pia continues to share her concerns with a distressed tone of voice, she says that she dreads the day she need to hand her son over to the father. I ask her if she thinks she can win full custody which she denies with a sigh.

I have seen him abuse his dogs, and forced them to eat their own vomit...He is a sadist you know...for real! (…) His ex-girlfriend says the same thing, she is still terrified of him, she is too scared to appear as a witness in the custody dispute, and they broke up in 2006.

Narratives in society with regards to position and relations depart from social constructionism and form the lived reality, and in this situation the narrative of the earlier highlighted ‘equal society of Sweden’ and the father’s role seem to be so aspired that other factors are not being considered. Chasing the aspired model of equality with regards to parenting, while ignoring the actual capability of fatherhood could possibly lead to serious consequences, especially for the children involved if they are forced to live in an abusive environment.
Anja: This last time I reported him, when my son told me that his father had lifted him by the neck, and my daughter tells me she has seen it, and they both have marks on their bodies when they come home. I reported him, and they just dismissed my case. (...) They have known about violence in this relationship since 2006 and they have done nothing. (...) They are now investigating a conflict regarding the children, and I am considered to be that conflict because I have reported him. (...) I am the crazy one, I am the one running in and out of hospital documenting injuries on my kids... I am the one creating the conflict...

She continues with a raised tone of voice gesticulating

Anja: If a father wants his child, it’s all ‘hallelujah’, he can behave any way he likes. If he stands up in court proclaiming ‘I want my kids’...then you can be sure [that he will], he has a much greater leeway to...be a bad parent...just by being a man.

Anja is fighting for full custody as they have shared custody today. She states that the children reveal being hit and sometimes have physical marks on their body when returning from their father. Anja have reported numerous times, but the father repeatedly sues her in return, something that have led to questions raised with regards to her mental health. She states that her hands are tied, she cannot report as she then risk losing her kids.

Tina decided to protect her son from the father after strongly suspecting incest, and moved to a secret address in a different part of Sweden. She was later sued, sentenced for child abduction and lost custody. The child is today living with the father.

Discussion

A large part of the informants in this research mention that they have not received the help and support from society that they wish they had, and the expected representations around femininity and masculinity limits the level of support for women, largely based on the foundation of masculine power, and for the men largely based on the foundation of hegemonic masculinity. All of the interviewed women have expressed frustration around not being heard, and female informants have expressed that this is linked to the abusers social position. Encounters with the law and authorities reveal predisposed ideas as evaluations and verdicts often fell in favor of the
abuser. The male informants mainly expressed frustration around being mistrusted and somewhat humiliated when expressing concern about threats, something they both indicated was directly linked to them as men being threatened and abused by a woman, and the men also mentioned that the primary support for leaving was close family and friends, not the health care system and/or authorities. Men strongly feel that their concern is not taken seriously when abuse is reported and assistance and protection is needed. Findings also reveal that men can continue to feel threatened by their partner a long time after the break up in forms of verbal or texted threat and harassment, but there seem to be a larger component of self-blame rather than worries linked to the threats. The feeling of being disrespected and lessened by society is not as apparent after the breakup among the men as it is among the women, and this might be linked to the absence of children where struggles for custody are not an issue. The only male informant with children is Lars, and he lost contact with his child at an early stage due to custody given to the mother that led to a geographical separation.

The women in the study feel that they to a large extent are ignored, mistrusted and resisted if the abuser holds a powerful position in society when abuse is reported and assistance is needed. Their feeling of being harassed after ended relationship is slightly more intense compared to the men, but is mainly linked to details of parenting and joint custody arrangements hence their feeling of being abused after the separation is linked to treatment from society. The question ‘what help do you wish you have had besides that which was provided’ immediately raised the level of aggression in the tone of voice in the majority of the informants. The frustration around the situation is evident, and some women stated that even though they found the courage to leave the abusive relationship, they felt a continuum in the abuse through society. As domestic violence seems to be imbedded in a protected sphere of privacy where there is a common understanding and distortion that ‘it should not be talked about’, the social problem consequently has a protected arena to continue. In addition to this, as long as society keeps protecting the stereotypes, i.e. the image of a victim, the idea of who ‘can’ be the abused and the abuser, the battering will have a safe place to persist, and society will continue to functioning accordingly to these stereotypes which systematically marginalize the abused that do not fit the
stereotype, hence keeps protecting the person that differs from societies image of an abuser (Mahoney 1991:42).

Findings in this study have had similarities with earlier research regarding IPV and furthermore correspond well with both processes of normalization and chosen theories. However, few studies have paid attention to outside factors and social structures that might lead to a disadvantage for the abused, and consequently work for the abuser, when what is expected is not necessarily what is, which is something that this paper wishes to address. This study reveals that society and authorities, to a large extend, treats the IPV situation at hand according to narratives and attitudes around gender and hierarchical positions. An increased awareness around the factors highlighted in this paper, could possibly lead to a change in these attitudes and improve the quality of support for IPV survivors.

What Happened, and Where are They Today?
6 of the 7 informants have reported and documented abuse, none of the abusers have however been charged for the assault they were reported for except Pia’s abuser that received a conditional sentence for two months. 3 of the 4 women are in new relationships today, something they all refer to as happy trusting relationships with no signs of abuse. 2 of the 3 men are single, and expressed similarly to the one single woman that they need to find happiness and personal strength within themselves before they feel ready to consider a partner again.

Future Research
This study has identified several intersections between gender norms and gender narratives involving hegemonic masculinities and social role theory. People are often acting accordingly to what is expected, but continuing haunting stereotypes while examining violence will arguably not lead to a change. The study shows that the lens of which through society views IPV is highly gendered and the impact of these roles should be considered when examining IPV and assesses how to best meet the survivors need for help and assistance. The attitudes around false expectations and the overall lack of understanding around the ability to consider the unexpected might lead to serious consequences for the individual. Health care and authorities procedures around how to address IPV should be studied and reflected on in order to increase
the quality of help and support, and to debunk stereotypical images of the abused and the abuser. IPV should arguably be studied as gender neutral Intimate Partner Violence where power positions and influence is irrelevant as this paper has highlighted that there is far more to IPV than the stereotypical image of both the abuser and the abused.

**Conclusion**

Most reported IPV cases are of men abusing women, but with the continuously growing recognition of men as recipients of violence by women, there is also a growing understanding of some underlying factors that might contribute to the low number of reported cases (Randle & Graham, 2011:97). The purpose of this paper was to investigate how social categories intersect and how these factors might influence how the abused experience overall support from society, and how power relations and gender norms determine the quality of support. These questions have been addressed through conversations with abused women and men to examine their personal experience in relation to relevant theories.

The paper has tried to address some of the gaps in IPV research and draw attention to IPV structures that exists outside of what is expected. This had been done in an attempt to achieve increased knowledge around IPV as a problem regardless of narratives attached to the concept, which has been discussed throughout the paper. The collected data in this study reveal that men are reluctant to seek help partly because of societal expectations around hegemonic masculinities that leads to a lack of understanding from authorities and society as a whole, and partly because of shame. The study further reveals that women experience mistrusted and resisted depending on the abusers position, and when violence occurs there are intersections between gender norms and social power that might add to the suffering and the lack of support for the abused in the eyes of society and authorities. It is arguably of great importance that health care, authorities and law enforcement recognize IPV abuse as a serious crime and treat each occurrence with absence of predisposed ideas around positions and gender.
Reference List


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Attachment #1, Ethical Approval

Regionala etikprövningsnämnden
i Umeå
Avdelningen för övrig forskning

BESLUT
2015-01-29

Susanne Strand
Avdelningen för samhällsvetenskap
Mittuniversitetet

Dnr 2014-409-31Ö
Kunskapsbanken en del av Kampanj R – Att främja fler goda relationer genom tillit, tolerans och självkänndom.

Projektet behandlades vid möte 2015-01-20, P. 6 varvid nämnden beslöt att bereda sökandens möjlighet att inga kompletteringar (1 ex). Ordförande och vetenskaplig sekreterare fick i delegation att fatta beslut i ärendet när komplettering inkommit.

Kompletteringar som inkom 2015-01-29 har granskats av vetenskaplig sekreterare Marie Wiberg i samråd med ordförande Pia Sandeskog.

Nämnden godkänner den forskning som avses med ansökan.

Pia Sandeskog, ordförande
Regionala etikprövningsnämnden i Umeå
Avdelningen för övrig forskning

Kopia till företrädaren.
Välkommen att medverka i ett forskningsprojekt om våld i nära relationer!

Bakgrund och syfte
Mittuniversitetet driver ett forskningsprojekt vars syfte är att få en fördjupad förståelse för de faktorer som varit avgörande för att personer som utsatts för partnervåld lyckats bryta upp och gå vidare i sina liv. Projektet sker i samverkan med Kampanj R och Länsstyrelsen Västernorrland och är första ledet i uppbyggnaden av en webbaserad kunskapsbank om nära relationer. Där ska vem som helst kunna testa sina kunskaper om våld och relationer i ett webbaserat frågeformulär. Man ska också kunna ta del av utbildningsmaterial om olika former av destruktiva relationer och vad som främjar en god relation. För att vi ska kunna utforma denna webbaserade kunskapsbank behöver vi mer kunskap om våld i nära relation från personer som själva varit utsatta.

Förfrågan om deltagande
Du som har utsatts för någon form av våld (t.ex. fysiskt, psykiskt, sexuellt eller ekonomiskt våld) i en eller flera relationer bär på ovärderlig kunskap i form av egna erfarenheter som vi hoppas att du vill dela med dig av genom att medverka i en intervju. Ur resultatet från analysen av materialet från dessa intervjuer kommer vi att skapa frågor till den webbaserade enkäten som ska ligga till grund för kunskapsbanken.

Du har anmält intresse för att delta i projektet efter att information spridits av Anna Källdén genom Kampanj R. Därför kontaktar vi dig nu.

Det är angeläget att många olika erfarenheter kommer fram genom intervjuerna. Det finns t.ex. väldigt lite forskning om våld i unga parrelationer och i samkönade relationer. Det behövs också mer forskning om våld i vuxna heterosexuella relationer och då framför allt om mäns erfarenheter. Genom att få mer kunskap om olika upplevelser av uppbrott ur våldsamma relationer kan också stödet och hjälpen till våldsutsatta bli bättre och säkrare. Därför hoppas vi att du vill medverka med din berättelse om dina unika livserfarenheter!

Hur går studien till?

Vilka är riskerna?

Finns det några fördelar?
Intervjun kan också upplevas som stärkande för dig eftersom du delar med dig av kunskap och erfarenheter som är av stor vikt, inte minst för arbetet med stöd till våldsutsatta personer.
Hantering av data och sekretess

Hur får jag information om studiens resultat?
När intervjun är genomförd har du möjlighet att kontakta intervjuaren för att samtala vidare om något som sagts under intervjun. Kanske önskar du korrigera eller lägga till något. Du har också möjlighet att läsa de citat från din intervju som kommer att användas i redovisningen av materialet. Den som vill kan också ta del av samlad resultatskrivning i form av framtaget informationsmaterial eller vetenskapliga texter.

Ersättning
Eventuell resa ersätts, då med billigast färdsätt. Vi kan tyvärr inte ge ersättning för förlorad arbetsinkomst eller andra utgifter.

Frivillighet
Deltagande i forskningsprojektet är frivilligt och du kan när som helst, utan särskild förklaring, avbryta din medverkan. Om du väljer att avbryta raderas samtligt material som relaterar till dig om du så önskar. Kontakta Karin Jarnkvist om du önskar avbryta din medverkan!

Ansvariga

Med vänlig hälsning

Mittuniversitetet Sundsvall
Attachment #3 Interview Sheet, (Translated Version)

Tell me about yourself; Current age, childhood, education and profession, previous relationship, previous experiences of violence and current partnership or marital status

Ask the informant to draw a life curve; Tell me about this curve, what do we see?

About the relationship; How and where did you meet? Duration of relationship/marriage? Did you live together? For how long? Children?

About the violence; What was the nature of the violence? How and when did it start, and when did you realize that you are abused? How did you react to this realization? Have you ever used violence, to defend yourself or to harm?

About the break-up; Tell me about the break-up, when would you say it started? Are there any particular events or factors that led to the break-up? Did you reunite? Is the relationship completely ended? How long time did it take?

About the social network; How was your relationship to family and friends affected by the relationship? Social networks importance during the break-up? How did family/friends react when you told them, and how did they support you? How did this process affect your relationship to this person/people afterwards?

About support and help; Who did you turn to/told first? What happened then? Connections to authorities and/or organizations that could help? How did you experience their support or lack of such? Any other help you wish you have had?

About feelings; What feelings are most relevant when you think about your relationship? When you reflect on the break-up? In your current life?

Association to; Shame, blame, fear, anger, hope, joy

Any other feelings you wish to talk about?

Is there anything else you want to add?

(Questions developed by Jarnkvist)
Samtycke om deltagande i forskningsprojekt

Kampanj R - Kunskapsbanken

☐ I have received information about the research project “Kampanj R”.
☐ I freely choose to participate and agree to be interviewed
☐ I have received information that I can terminate the interview at any time.
☐ I am aware that I can terminate my participation at any time.
☐ I have received information about the interviews being audio recorded and only the researchers will have access to the recorded material.
☐ I allow for my interview to be audio recorded
☐ I agree that Lotta Brännström or Anna Källdén will listen to and transcribe the recorded interview into written material
  ☐ I specifically choose Lotta Brännström to be the one to listen to and transcribe my interview.
☐ I have been informed that the material will be handled so no one can recognize my participation when the material is presented.
☐ I agree to let this material to be analyzed in this project.
☐ I agree to participate in this research that also will be used for educational purpose.

_________________________ ______________________________
Datum Namn