Headline violence and Silenced pleasure: contested framings of consensual sex, power and rape in Delhi, India 2011-2014
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Though coercion and rape have cast a persistent shadow over women’s and men’s prospects of sexual health and consent in contemporary India, other narratives, agency and tools are quietly emerging to transform collective claims of power and bodily dignity. In these narratives emerging from collectives, NGOs and among friends, dialogues about consent and pleasure feature prominently. This paper contrasts statements in the news made by highly visible political and public figures regarding the subject of rape with themes emerging from ethnography and semi-structured interviews with middle class people in Delhi. Using the device of social frameworks, contested framings of rape and consent are examined in order to interrogate essentialist gender norms, compare putative “causes” of rape, and highlight local efforts promoting sexual consent, health and well-being.

Feminist scholars have long interrogated the processes of ideology, legal rulings and structural violence against women (VAW) whereby rape is sometimes normalized in Indian society, documenting over 67 years of history of rape from India’s partition to the 1972 case of Mathura, riots in 2002, and widely publicized cases in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Badaun in 2012 – 2014. [1, 2, 3] Partly due to these crimes, India ranks fairly low in measures of gender equality among countries rated by the UNDP gender inequality index. [4]

Yet, within this bleak landscape, the shapes of other narratives, agency and tools are challenging the narrative of the “inevitable” sexual victimization of women, and transforming individual and collective experiences of power, agency and bodily dignity. These challenges are found in conversations among friends, events and websites of Indian-based collectives and NGOs, and in socially mediated print and on-line news coverage of rape-related statements by public figures. In the interviews that inform this research, middle class people in Delhi spoke about how they learned about sex and reproductive health, formally and informally, and described their knowledge strategies in the context of widely acknowledged social taboos regarding communication about sex and the lack of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Several questions emerged. How do people learn about consensual and non-consensual sex? How do public framings of consensual and non-consensual sexuality align with what people are learning privately? Do the predominant rape narratives address the problem of intimate partner violence (IPV)? What strategies promote learning about consensual sexualities and the prevention of coercive sexual behaviors?

A disjuncture between the often muted pursuit of information about consensual sex and public figures’ voluble narratives of rape became starkly clear a year after the initial 2011 interviews for this research, when a fatal gang rape on a bus made national and global headlines. Millions grieved while a young woman lost her life and her male friend was left to recover from the ordeal, which occurred as the two were returning home from an evening at a film. Amidst widespread protests, the release of a commissioned judicial report to reform Indian rape law [5] and a national election, numerous public figures opined about rape and women’s safety. Public dialog about how to deal with violence against women (VAW) again became a central debate as the protests fueled discussions of prevention, causation, punishment and accountability. [5, 6] Combining qualitative interviews, ethnography, and analysis of news stories highlighting the statements of public figures, this research interrogates narratives about rape and agency in ways that both confront essentializing constructions of gender, and suggest focal points for effective problem solving.
Theoretical perspectives

The theoretical device of social frames, originally detailed by Goffman (1974) [7], reveals patterns of interpretation that people use to organize, communicate about, and respond to events. Frames were later employed by Altheide [8] regarding fear in the news media. This paper uses the perspective of frames to consider the manner in which public figures depict problems in particular narrative structures that tend to gloss over complexity and ambiguity inherent in social situations, and suggest solutions that appear simple and clear. These processes, which produce stories that Altheide likens to “morality plays”, often obscure significant information and complexity that could result in different perspectives and more effective problem solving. Such morality plays reproduce existing social hierarchies and norms. He provides an example of how news coverage in the United States regarding child neglect and abuse often focuses on stranger kidnapping. This distracts attention, funding, legislation and policy away from the much more frequent problem of several hundred thousand abandoned, neglected and runaway children in cities in the United States. [8]

In a further elaboration of framing theory, Benford and Snow (2000) [9] discuss how frames play central roles in how social change actors and movements construct meaning about contested topics. They delineate separate framing processes within social change movements, such as diagnostic framing to attribute blame or responsibility, prognostic framing to suggest solutions, and motivational framing to call people to take action. Using frames and discourse oriented ethnography, we examine interviews, public events, and 25 statements by public figures in the news, as they discuss gender norms, attribute responsibility and suggest solutions regarding rape.

Background: Sexual Violence versus Pleasure in the Global and Indian Contexts

In 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that, globally, violence against women (VAW) is a “health problem of epidemic proportions” with 1 in 3 women experiencing sexual or physical violence and that rates of Intimate partner violence (IPV) far exceed rates of non-partner sexual violence (NPV).[10] These findings are largely corroborated in India. [11, 12] According to the Indian National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) [13] report from 2013, the incidence of rape has been increasing since 2009, and Delhi has the highest rate at 18.6 compared to the national average of 5.7. In 2013, offenders were known to the victims in 94.4 % of reported rape cases. In addition, research that compares survey results with crime reports indicates significant underreporting [14, 15] that may be a result of social tolerance for violence and physical punishment of women, lack of support from agencies and police, and social mores which claim that IPV is a private matter. It bears noting that as of this writing in 2014, forced sex within marriage is still not considered rape and therefore does not appear in the crime records. [5, 16]

In addition to becoming understood as a significant health issue, sexual violence is increasingly framed as a human rights problem. [17, 18] In Delhi, scholars and members of urban-based NGOs and collectives have expanded upon human rights perspectives, publishing and promoting materials, curricula and guidelines for comprehensive sex education (CSE) that work to prevent and oppose gender violence. A well-developed network of mostly urban, Indian NGOs and collectives conduct related workshops and panels and release print and digital web-based media teaching about sexuality, education about consensual sex and proposing alternatives to coercion. [17, 19, 20]. Other NGOs and feminist publishing houses have produced edited volumes, annotated bibliographies and other resources about sexuality as well as histories of women’s human rights advocacy in the Indian context. [21, 21, 23, 24]
Increasingly, scholars and advocates have been addressing issues of women’s sexual pleasure, consent and agency within South Asia, both in the present and with historical lenses. Expanding beyond Eurocentric feminisms and Foucauldian analysis and discourse, they have excavated histories that have sometimes preceded, merged with, or subverted colonial and nationalist versions of sexual repression. [23, 24, 25, 26] Although scholars caution against the illusion of a golden past of gender equality, social and historical evidence indicates a history (and present) of variation in kinship practices, sexual expression, and gender norms in India that were diminished by a combination of local patriarchal controls, colonial laws and nationalist projects. [22, 24, 27]

Sexual violence and sexual consent are also development issues. Development practitioners have noted that far from being silent, mainstream development has long engaged with sexuality, albeit often focusing on medicalized, negative and dangerous aspects such as population, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual violence. [20, 28] Beyond violence however, in the context of engaged development practice, advocates and NGOs have conducted projects and research in India that have brought attention to the pleasure and power of women’s sexuality, focusing on more affirming aspects of sexuality, such as pleasure, agency and consent. [20, 29] One project that emerged from recent development work and advocacy by an education NGO in Delhi documents rural women discussing their experiences with sexuality and their desires for more egalitarian relationships. Women named their own desire for sexuality as “the hunger of the body”. [20] Working with planners in Mumbai, Phadke [30, 31] examines the conundrums of Indian middle class women’s sexualities, reputations and participation in public spaces in urban India. She challenges the closure of public spaces to women and others who are marginalized due to intersecting factors of caste, class, race and culture, asserting claims of women and marginalized people to spend time in the city.

For the purposes of this paper, many of the Indian NGOs and collectives working on sexual pleasure and consent remain unnamed, due to concerns about the looting of NGOs in the past. (See Dasgupta in ARROW) [32] For examples of an anonymous collective and a protest campaign which provide other sources of information, please search for Hidden Pockets and Pinjra Tod in Delhi, India.

Methods

Several qualitative methods were employed to collect data. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and a focus group were used to discern subjective experiences and meaning. Initial, open ended questions and conversation, open questions such as “How did you first learn or hear about sex?” progressed to a series of questions on more directed topics including what and or how respondents learned about sexual health, sexuality, rape, and women’s sexual pleasure. Respondents numbered a total of 46, including 31 women, 11 men, and 4 transgender-identified people. Eight of 31 women identified as Lesbian or Bisexual. In all, LGBT people totaled 17 out of 46 respondents. Thirty-three of the interviews were conducted in 2011, and the remainder in 2013-2014. The choice of middle class people as interviewees and informants was influenced by several factors: the first of which is a desire to study sideways instead of “down” [33] in order to cultivate collaborative problem definition, analysis and solution finding as well as to set groundwork for future comparative and collaborative research. In addition, the middle class is thought to be “undermapped”,[30] that is, not often considered in social research. Respondents for interviews were selected by stratified purposive sampling [34] using three inclusion criteria for “Middle class”: English fluency, any education past twelfth standard (high school), and use of public transportation (metro, bus or auto-rickshaw) at least once a week. Public transportation criteria tended to exclude people in the highest wealth bracket. I recruited in different networks and neighborhoods in order to get a sampling of respondents who did not know each other. LGBT/Queer people were
purposely included in order to avoid singling them out or making them invisible, and to check if their responses revealed different perspectives. Internal Review Board approval was obtained before fieldwork and all respondents received written and verbal informed consent information.

Thematic coding was used for interview analysis, using memos and coding informed by grounded theory techniques as described by Charmaz. [35] Interviews were reviewed and then transcribed and analyzed with open coding, which progressed into focused coding in an iterative, abductive process to engage with the data and look for prominent recurring themes. In order to increase trustworthiness, interviews were followed by ethnography and news analysis for method triangulation. [34]

Directed ethnographic content analysis [36, 37, 38] informed by discourse oriented ethnography [39] was used to analyze newspaper reports of the statements of public figures about rape. News articles (print and on-line) included statements of public figures regarding women’s safety and rape from 2012 through 2014. Statements were collected, verified by multiple sources, and analyzed for themes regarding gender, attribution of causes, and suggested solutions.

Lastly, I conducted ethnographic analysis of two publicly advertised events referencing consensual sexuality and violence against women, respectively. Delhi hosts many similar or related events, exhibits, panels and showings. Among these, I was invited to attend an Erotic Photography Show as well as a “Hackathon for Women’s Rights”. I analyzed off-phase field notes for themes.

Findings

Interviews

In the interviews, for both sexes, news about rape in the media was often their first information about, or depiction of, sex or sexuality of any sort. When people spoke of where they first heard or learned about rape, it was primarily from different forms of news media.

Woman: “Every day in the newspaper. Every single day- there is not even a single day that goes where they are not telling about some kind of rape.”

Man: “I’m from Delhi, you hear about it in the papers all the time.”

Many also cited TV shows and films.

Woman: “Firstly it was the television and the movies actually. The older Bollywood movies especially in the 80s, I think they have lot of these rape scenes. So it was then I got to know there is something called rape. I was very small at that time I think 5th standard and I’ve seen the movies and so I knew something that’s called rape and it’s wrong.”

Man: “The Hindi movies on TV, a lot of them had this plot where there was a hero whose sister was raped, and then he would get revenge. I must have seen so many of them when I was young, but I didn’t know what rape actually was until like 18 or 19.”

For many, the types of sexual violence they heard about in their private circles was rarely mentioned in media or public discourses about sexual violence. This omission included forced marital sex, and forced sex in relationships.

Woman: “One of the major things that no one really talks about is when your husband rapes you…. A lot of my friends have had experiences where they have almost been raped or kind of been forced into sex when they didn’t want to, but it was more like, I don’t think they consider
themselves as being raped, it’s kind of just like, oh he forced that on me I really didn’t want to have sex with him, but I did, you know because I had no choice. But serious violent rape - I don’t think I’ve had any kind of personal experience even in my social circle, but yeah it’s all over the papers all the time and you hear about it all the time.”

Woman: “If you’re married it’s like, you know it’s a husband’s right to have and so you have marital rape which no one talks about happening, but it is still rape.”

Woman: “For some women, marriage is a form of legalized rape. I mean, there’s no law against rape in marriage, so she can’t say no- so what can she do?”

The pervasiveness of sexual abuse of male or female children, usually by someone known to the family, is another theme of concern that emerged from the interviews, but was rarely discussed by public figures.

Woman: “I was 7 years old I wasn’t allowed go out to the grocery store alone- my dad, my brother and even my mom couldn’t go with me all the time...I didn’t know what was happening... it wasn’t intercourse, I had my clothes on, but he was feeling me. The saddest part was that I didn’t know how to protest, I didn’t know how to protect myself. But, I wasn’t prepared for such thing because I never knew anything could happen like that. I didn’t have any knowledge of sex at that point of time because the only thing that I heard was its immoral, it’s bad.”

Woman: “At some point we all became aware of the fact that it is possible that everyone around us has been molested at some point, not just starting with public places, but sometimes with a relative or family friend. And then other admissions of ‘this happened to me, that happened to me’, I don’t know how much we have admitted to each other.”

Man: “every friend I know who is a girl has had something between a molestation and a rape- and that’s the economically and intellectually advanced portion of society, I don’t know what is happening for the others.”

Man: “A friend of mine, a boy, an older uncle forced him to do blow jobs. This happens a lot. And when boys are little they don’t really know what is happening or what to do to stop it.”

In contrast to widespread public narratives about sexual violence, most respondents learned about women’s pleasure and consensual sex from private conversations with friends and, more rarely, family.

Woman: “See, we were all around the same age so none of us really knew about it so much. So we just discussed it, I had heard something from somewhere and they would tell me something that they had heard from somewhere else. We would somehow put it all together and try to, you know, make sense out of it all.”

Woman: “I had conversations with my friends, my roommate was dating another woman. Pleasure was constantly discussed and pleasure was in the air, pleasure oppressed people because I had a very asexual friend who is like, I do not seem to want this. Of course our society is so divided so you can’t say anything absolutely- but to a huge large extent people arrive at certain juncture in their lives as young adults where they can choose to access information.”

Man: “In school, guys really said a lot of derogatory stuff about women just about how to get them to have sex and how to do it, but my Aunt told me a lot of stuff that sort of changed my
ideas at a lot. She told me that girls will like it when they are ready, but not when they are young and that it’s never okay to force or trick a girl. She also told me about condoms.”

Consent came to the fore as a concept that is being negotiated, learned and communicated in processes that mirror its meaning; when both parties, by mutual agreement decide that they will enter into a sexual experience with each other. Some mentioned the bind they perceived women to be in, to paraphrase Sharma: [20] Can a woman really say yes if she can’t say no- and vice versa? Respondents expressed that they sometimes educate others about consent, pleasure or safety.

Woman: “I want my niece to hear it. Like it’s okay to want to have sex and it may even just because you love someone or… it’s okay also to say no to someone you are with… in a relationship, or just saying that’s okay if you don’t want to for whatever your reason. So keep saying yes, if you want to. It should be your choice and that is something that’s important. That’s something that should told more with safe sex and protection and all of these. These things are also very, very important to be told.”

Several respondents also discussed becoming formal or informal sexual health peer counselors.

Most respondents expressed concern for others, even if they themselves felt informed and safe.

Woman: “The older I grow, the more aware I am that I have built a very healthy knowledge world for myself. The knowledge I associate with these things is a world in which I know I can be safe even if I am raped. I know the people with me will stand by my side. So knowing that made me aware of the people who don’t have this. They don’t have a friend to talk to about these things.”

Man: “When I first heard that was how sex happened, I was worried it would hurt the woman. That really bothered me. It was a long time before I knew women could like it too.”

Man: “I think it’s very hard to grow up as a girl in India. This is a closed, patriarchal society. About sex education- we don’t do things openly.”

Man: “There should be two parts to sex education- one about anatomy and health, and the other about ethics, and how a women are equals and not just a thing to satisfy your desires.”

Rape in the News: stories about rape and directed content analysis

In the interviews, newspapers were almost always cited by both men and women as early sources of information about rape, and for some this was their earliest awareness of sex. In newspaper articles, while the brevity of the headlines told limited stories, the bodies of newspaper reports corroborated the findings of the large survey results regarding the relative proportion of intimate partner violence as opposed to non-partner violence. Over four months in Delhi, in 2013-14, 18 out of 31 reports of rape in the newspapers reported that the victim knew the perpetrator, in 3 the perpetrator was a stranger to the woman, and the remaining 10 did not report the relation or lack thereof. Marital rape was not reported, as it is not considered a crime. However, during that same period, 8 out of 17 reported homicides of women were reported as perpetrated by her husband or ex-husband.

In contrast, print and online newspapers were rife with stories about public figures making statements about rape, and were foregrounded both due to recent focus from high profile rape cases and the event of a national election. In India as well as the United States, the campaign trail provided numerous public figures and politicians the opportunity broadcast their disregard for women, giving press and
constituents glimpses into their visions of society (For analysis of such statements by public figures in the United States, see Spurlock 2013). [40]

Twenty-five separate statements from the years 2012-2014 were analyzed. These fell into three thematic categories: 1. Causal attribution: Assigning women blame for provocation. 2. Absolving men from responsibility because of external forces other than women. 3. Suggestions as to how to accept, prevent or punish rape. In a cascade of logic, causes often implied or stated solutions. [see appendix for statements and sources].

**Attribution of responsibility or blame to women:**
- Girls should not use cell phones.
- What was a girl doing out at night?
- When girls wear western clothes, rape happens.
- A man doesn’t rape unless he is led on by a woman.

**Non-attribution of responsibility or blame to men:**
- These things happen by accident.
- These are boys, they make mistakes.
- When people ape the west, rape happens.
- Fast food, such as chowmein, contributes to rape.
- Men and women should be kept separate from each other.
- When the stars are in a bad position, this increases rape incidents.
- We will give school girls coats to prevent them from being tempting to men.

**Hodge-podge of other perspectives:**
- If you can’t prevent rape, enjoy it.
- This doesn’t happen in the villages, only in the cities.
- Rape is a social crime, sometimes it’s right sometimes it’s wrong.
- When rapes happen, both the man and women should be hanged.
- I can understand why someone would rape a woman, but raping a child is evil.
- When a man tries to rape, a woman should take his hand and call him “Bhai” (brother).

Significantly, the newspaper and online journalism reports often focused on these rape comments to the exclusion of other things politicians were saying. This served to document and enable dialog, criticism and countering views to such statements, contributing to a discursive social process and a portrayal of some political leaders across India being as out of touch with more egalitarian gender norms. In this way, the media worked as an ally to sexual health advocates. [17] In addition to being picked up and circulated by other media and social media outlets, several published incidents were met with public outcry, protests and repudiations, and were sometimes followed by an apology from the original speaker.

**Ethnographic participant observation of two events in Delhi**

The first event was an Erotic Photography Exhibit called “Bound to be Free” in November 2013. In a gallery between Gurgaon and Delhi, a group of people calling themselves a collective hosted an invitational photography show with refreshments. An article about it appeared in the News and Arts
magazine *Delhi Time Out*, and I received an email from a friend suggested we go to the opening night. The neighborhood had the air of a place filled with offices mostly used during the day. Inside the gallery, low-ceilinged room where the walls were covered with sensual photographs without visible faces, with scant nudity, and with decidedly erotic content. All around the room animated faces of the public moved and reflected off the glass covered photos as people looked closely and spoke quietly with one another. Over the course of two hours I counted roughly 92 people, which made for a lot of conversation over the course of the evening, as well as for introductions to at least 15 more people.

A woman in her 30s or 40s came forward, introduced herself by her first name, and asked for our attention. She gave a brief description of the exhibit and the motivation behind it.

“We are a group that seeks to create awareness strengthen visibility of our sexuality. This photo show will travel from here to Calcutta, Chennai, Bombay and Bangalore. We made this exhibition in order to represent our desires and who we are because silence allows gross misrepresentation – such as seen in the book 50 shades of grey... Consent is at the heart of [our sexuality]. Consent is usually presumed, especially in the case of married women, however [in this context], consent is proactively sought and can be withdrawn with use of a single word or a gesture- it is sacrosanct....This community is not anti-woman. This community enables women to be completely in control, if they choose to be so, as well as a space for men to be vulnerable. It is important to challenge the typical patterns ... in fact there are many permutations and combinations, so you could for example have two women two trans two males, a woman dominant, etc. ...Today is a day of celebration, so please enjoy the photos!”

The room erupted in applause. People mingled and laughed, with Hindi and English mixing and contributing to a rise in volume. A small throng surrounded the table near the door, buying postcards of some of the photos that were being sold to raise the funds for the show to travel to other cities. Two journalists took photographs and scribbled in notepads in a corner, speaking with the woman who had introduced the show. Later, out on the terrace, organizers mingled and answered the questions of visitors. The crowd was a mix of women and men as well as some who appeared to be wearing clothes of the opposite gender, and possibly transgender and sexual minorities, but without asking, it was unclear. It appeared that women outnumbered men slightly.

The second event was called #HACK4CHANGE: a Hackathon for Women’s Rights in December 2013. *In early December, a young man who works at a SRH NGO forwarded me this invitation for a two day long event. The wording of the invitation appears below.*

> In partnership with Hacks/Hackers, [NGO] will host our first Hackathon  
> WHO: Developers, storytellers, statisticians, journalists, researchers, activists and you!  
> WHAT: Join us to create and share new stories - data visualizations, videos and interactive projects -- to raise awareness about early marriage, domestic violence, street sexual harassment, and more.  
> WHEN: 7-8 December 2013, 10 am - 5 pm  
> WHERE: [address withheld] New Delhi-1100##  
> Together, online and off, we can make violence against women unacceptable and build a world of dignity, equality -- and creativity for all.

The event was hosted in an industrial and manufacturing area in a building billed as “a collaborative environment where mentors and entrepreneurs can tap into the collective knowledge of the community”. It is a maker-space used by startups, developers, designers, consultants, and NGOs. The large main room had separate rooms with glass room dividers, conference tables, desks and plenty of
outlets for laptops. The orientation was given by a woman from an NGO that had run a successful campaign against domestic violence that exhorts people to ring a doorbell and interrupt if they hear the violent abuse of a woman. On the website of the NGO it reads: “The most dangerous place for a woman is in her own home.”

There were over 70 people, and the men outnumbered the women by about 3 to 2 with an estimated median age of 27. A majority of the attendees were designers, coders and IT people. The object of the weekend was to create apps or media to prevent, expose or educate the public about structural and physical violence against women. We were given a choice to form teams and work on one of several suggested projects, and were given access to open-source data, statistics, surveys, and recorded narratives that we could draw upon for the substance to the stories we would design. The data provided related to stopping teen marriages, supporting rights for Dalit women, increasing awareness of domestic violence, mapping data about street harassment and violence posted by women, and constructing a website with recorded narratives of tribal women. Delicious chai, drinks and food were available throughout the day. We were invited to design, write or make cell phone applications (apps), you-tube videos, tweeting campaigns and Wikipedia entries, new or edited.

Two other women and I formed a team with seven men to design a cell phone app for women to map incidents of harassment in Delhi with the aim that access to visual representations of these numbers and reports will indicate less-safe areas for women to avoid and for law enforcement to focus more presence. Our team huddled around several laptops in one of the glass rooms, taking short breaks for lunch, tea and conversation, meandered around to see what the other groups were doing and settled back down into our collaborative projects. Participants met other like-minded people and made new friends, mostly doing things very similar to what they did for work every other week day- only they were volunteering their time. A great deal of effort went into the products that were presented to the whole group at the end of the second afternoon, all of us had learned new things, and all of us had contributed to projects that might go on towards changing attitudes about violence against women. When I left, one glass office still held six app designers curled over three laptops.

Analysis of Ethnographic events:

Several points emerged significantly during the two events that corroborated the analysis of the field notes. First, The events served to enable participants to examine, construct and employ different frames and understanding of events, notably, that sexual assault or coercion are not inevitable or natural outcomes of desire. People were called upon to develop and exercise agency, to build cultures and communities with a common core of values that support the principles of human rights, bodily integrity and consent. Secondly, the events contrasted with narratives that segregate men and women, and instead provided contexts for men and women to come together in semi-public spaces and experience each other as allies. They were able to meet and forge new acquaintances. Thirdly, the organizers drew upon, demonstrated, and discussed experience, evidence and data, encouraging participants to engage in the construction of knowledge and meaning and to create and disseminate peer knowledge for both participants and the public. Events were structured to engage with multiple forms of media in order to craft messages, educate people and promote public dialogue.

Discussion and Conclusion

The themes that emerged from the interviews, content analysis of rape in the news, and the targeted ethnographies portray vast disjunctures in the social constructions of rape versus consensual sex, which
suggest entirely different perceptions of agency and directions for solutions. These contested meanings split along essentializing and interdependent narratives for gender.

Essentializing narratives about gender harken to distinct, dichotomous categorizations of men’s and women’s bodies and social roles, roles that set them apart from each other and often arise from “common sense”. [41] Socially prescribed separations between men and women reinforce and heighten opposing gender identities and underpin the tendency of men and women to see their counterparts as “others”, decreasing empathy and making violence more likely. [42] While naturalizing rape narratives often espoused by public figures portray men as perpetrators and women as victims, this paternalizing tendency contradicts itself and diminishes the agency of everyone by asserting simultaneously that men are not responsible for their actions, and yet insisting that women must be protected. These narratives naturalize rape and perpetuate rape myths, such as “boys will be boys”, “men just can’t control themselves”. [43]

Other important trends emerge from the ethnographic and interview data. Perhaps most significant are the facts that most women do seek and enjoy consensual sex, in their present or future lives, and secondly, that men often act as allies for women against violence and coercion. Reinforcing these silent norms and making them more explicit is necessary to counteract the simplistic, binary constructions of a “war between the sexes”. Such “war” narratives pit men and women against each other, distracting attention away from IPV and other social inequalities.

Framings of rape and consent

Though Altheide writes about frames and fear mongering in the United States news, his device and examples are partially useful in the Indian context. The framing of social problems constitute morality plays in which powerful actors attempt to determine, or construct, the public’s perception of the causes and solutions of a social problem. The 25 statements by public figures in India between 2012-2014 can be seen as windows into an ideology that serves existing power structures and promotes rigid, essentialist gender norms. In terms of attribution of causes and solutions, the stranger-as-rapist framing in public discourse justifies calls to keep women at home, out of public spaces, education, leisure or work, or isolated from other family, friends, or community who might support them. Real dangers are eclipsed by the fears directed at other issues, and attention and resources are denied in areas that could provide useful intervention. The focus on stranger rape and the emphasis on women’s behavior as causal obscures the dangers most frequently encountered by women, and prevents the crafting of solutions. In addition, the ever-present threat of unpredictable danger overshadows and trivializes discussion of agency, companionship and pleasure. [3] These stories also erase history, complexity and context, and ignore or obscure the significant contributions of region, caste, class, ethnicity and religion. In contrast to Altheide’s analysis of the news media’s complicity in creating morality plays, the Indian media often act as an allies n calling for accountability. Subsequent circulation and social mediation of the “rape” statements offers an opportunity to the public to open up the discourse about rape, contesting the gender norms that appear to normalize it and render it inevitable.

As stated earlier, the evidence is overwhelming that in India, as in most societies, women are vastly more likely to encounter violence in their homes, families and neighborhoods than from strangers. Yet the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) or child sexual abuse does not emerge in the narratives of politicians when they speak of keeping women safe, or in the most highly publicized accounts of rape. However, IPV and sexual child abuse does surface in newspaper accounts about crime against women, and in the interviews for this study.
Benford and Snow’s reference to the discursive processes of framing can readily be applied to the contested topics of rape and consent. As we see in health and development NGOs, many ground their claims in the master frame of human rights. Social change movements, through NGOs, protests and collectives, employ diagnostic framings to identify accountability and responsibility, and prognostic framings to suggest solutions such as teaching about consent and empowering men as allies. These local, small scale social actions change the diagnostic frames from blaming women for transgressions of proscribed gender norms that cause them to become victims of male predation, and instead, build alliances between people and cast light and accountability on policies, narratives and social mores that obscure the predominance of sexual violence within familiar spheres. As Batliwala writes, local, decentralized efforts are indispensable to effectively address inequalities, empower people, and advocate for social and cultural changes. [44]

As we see in the interviews and the two ethnographic events, motivational framing calls for and underpins the development of agency and the knowledge of consensual possibilities. Learning about pleasure and consent is a compelling part of the motivational framing that inspires people to take action. In Delhi, agency arises quietly and persistently in counterpoint to the political narratives of male non-responsibility and the “inevitable” nature of sexual violence. People are moved by and live out consensual sexual narratives every day. Emerging dialogs on consensual sexuality are highlighted in collective and NGO based communications and events that contrast with narratives that segregate men and women, and instead provide contexts for men and women to come together as companions and allies. Regardless of, and across gender, people forge new acquaintances and begin to create and disseminate peer knowledge. Participants construct understanding and meaning regarding healthy and fulfilling sexuality in the context of their lives. In small groups, through quiet, organic settings and activities, people build communities with values that support the principles of human rights, bodily integrity and consent. Outside of the headlines, narratives grow in which companionship and pleasure are becoming recognized as not only possible, but normal.

Appendix: Public Figures & 25 Rape Related Remarks (2012- 2014)
Chronologically ordered with Numbered quotes followed by media sources

[1] Chiranjeet Chakraborty, July 2012, Member Legislative Assembly of West Bengal. “One of the reasons behind the increase of incidents ... is short dresses and short skirts worn by women. This in turn instigates young men.”

[2] Jitendar Chattar, Oct 2012, Leader Khap Panchayat of Haryana: “To my understanding, consumption of fast food contributes to such incidents. Chowmein leads to hormonal imbalance evoking an urge to indulge in such acts.”

[3] Om Prakash Chautala, October 2012, former Haryana chief minister- agreed with lowering marriageable age of girls to “prevent” rape. “I’m with the Khaps, This will protect women”

[4] Mamata Banerjee, October 2012, West Bengal Chief minister “earlier if men and women would hold hands they would get caught by parents and reprimanded, but now everything is so open. It’s like an open market with open options. Rapes happen because men and women interact freely.”

[5] Abhijit Mukherjee, December 2012, Congress MP (Pranab Mukherjee's son): used the phrase ‘dented-painted women’, referring to women protesting the gang rape from December 16, 2012. The "sundari, sundari mahila" (pretty, pretty women) "walking on the streets with candle", were not students.
[6] Banwari Lal Singhal, Dec 2012, Legislator, Banned skirts as uniforms in schools. "The intention of this demand is to keep girl students away from men's lustful gazes and for their comfort in hot and cold weather conditions."

[7] Mohan Bhagwat, January 2013, RSS chief. "Such crimes hardly take place in Bharat, but they frequently occur in India. You go to villages and forests of the country and there will be no such incidents of gang-rape... Besides new legislations, Indian ethos and attitude towards women should be revisited in the context of ancient Indian values."

[8] Kailash Vijayvargiya, January 2013, BJP Minister Madhya Pradesh. Referencing Ramayana: “just like Sita was abducted by Ravana, a woman will be punished if she crosses her limits.”

[9] T Thiagarajan, January 2013 Puducherry Education Minister suggested that girl students should be made to wear overcoats to prevent men from lusting after them. [note: Puducherry is a tropical city]

[10] Asaram Bapu, January 2013, self-proclaimed godman “She (Delhi gangrape victim) should have taken God's name and could have held the hand of one of the men and said 'I consider you as my brother', and should have said to the other two 'Brother I am helpless, you are my brother, my religious brother.'

[11] Nanki Ram Kanwar, January 2013, Former Chhattisgarh Home Minister “Harm can come on a person if the stars are in adverse positions. We have no answer to this, only an astrologer can predict rape.”

[12] Ramesh Bais, January 2013, MP "The rape of grown-up girls and women might be understandable but if someone does this to an infant, it is a heinous crime and the offenders should be hanged (barabari ya bade logo ke sath balatkar samajh me ata hai, lekin nabalig bachhiyo ke sath is tarah ka jaghanya apradh karma. Inko to fasi par latka dena chahiye)"

[13] Babulal Gaur, January 2013, BJP leader “western culture is not good for India. Women in foreign countries wear jeans and t-shirts dance with other men and even drink liquor, but that is their culture. It’s good for them, but not for India, where only our traditions and culture are OK.”

[14] Nusrat Ali, January 2013, Jamaat-E-Islami Hind Secretary General “Co-education should be abolished and proper education facilities meant exclusively for women should be available at all levels of education. Educational institutions should prescribe sober and dignified dress for girls.”

[15] Satyadev Katare, April 2013, Congress leader MP "Jab tak mahila tirchi najar se nahi dekhegi, tab tak purush use nahi chedega" (No man will harass a woman till she looks at him in a suggestive manner)

[16] Ranjit Sinha, November 2013, Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Ranjit Sinha, on Tuesday made out a case for legalising betting in sports, arguing “if you can’t prevent rape, enjoy it”.

[17] Asha Mirje, January 2014, NCP leader “Girls should be very careful what they wear and what time they move out in the city. Their body language should not invite the attention of potential rapists lurking around in the streets.” “Did Nirbhaya really have to go to watch a movie at 11 in the night with her friend?” "Rapes take place also because of a woman's clothes, her behaviour and her presence at inappropriate places."

[18] Mulayam Singh Yadav April 2014, Party leader: "Boys will be boys" they "make mistakes" "Rape accused should not be hanged. Men make mistakes." "When their friendship ends, the girl complains she has been raped."

[19] Abu Azmi, April 2014, Samajwadi party leader, "Rape is punishable by hanging in Islam. But here, nothing happens to women, only to men. Even the woman is guilty." "Solution is this: any woman if, whether married or unmarried, goes along with a man, with or without her consent, should be hanged. Both should be hanged. It shouldn't be allowed even if a woman goes by consent."

[20] Tapas Pal, May 2014, Minister: "Earlier, you guys have bullied me on various occasions. If you insult the mothers and daughters of Trinamool workers. Then I won't spare you. I will let loose my boys in your homes and they will commit rape. I will teach each of you a lesson," to opposition CPM workers.
Babulal Gaur, June 2014, Home minister of BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh, “It [rape] is a social crime which depends on men and women. Sometimes it’s right and sometimes it’s wrong”

Ramsewak Paikra, June 2014, Chhattisgarh home minister "koi jan bujhkar nahi karta, dhoke se ho jata hai dushkarm" (no one commits rape intentionally. It happens by mistake.)

Murali Mohan Maganti, August 2014, Telugu Desam Party MP “Women should dress decently and in a 'dignified' manner” and added that “women should uphold Indian culture” in the context of a Lok Sabha discussion on atrocities against women.

Mathe Mahadevi, October 2014, Lingayat spiritual head “Girls working in MNCs and at late nights wear tight westernized clothes which attracts male attention and leads to crime,” and “As long as women continue to wear revealing clothes, rapes will happen. Women, especially girls, should give up western clothes and wear costumes that reflect their culture and tradition. I see a strong vacuum of cultural values among the young generation,”

Meenakshi Lekhi, December 2014, BJP MP "I have lived in Delhi for a very long time and I have seen the changes happen. These days, you see more women occupy the public space as compared to then. But it is not 100 per cent safe. With the advent of technology, with more women being on roads and with more women challenging men, the onslaught is also higher."

1  http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/skirts-have-become-shorter-inviting-taunts/article3698507.ece
2  http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/khap-rape-chowmein/1/225031.html
6  http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/comment-why-we-must-not-skirt-the-real-issues-rape-patriarchy-1788666
17  http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/01/29/uk-india-rape-idUKBREA050P520140129
21  http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/06/05/uk-india-rape-idINBKBN0EG1EX20140605
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