The Church of Sweden - A driving force to prevent and curb violence against women?

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Abstract

Violence against women is a global problem based on historically unequal power relations between men and women. WHO states that norms that support male authority, control over women and allows violence against women must be challenged in order to prevent violence against women, as well as addressing social and cultural norms about masculinity, gender power relationships and violence. The entire society has a responsibility to respond to violence against women. This thesis examines how the Church of Sweden as an institution can function as a resource in contributing to curb and prevent violence against women. Previous research has shown that the Church has the possibility to provide a theological response to violence against women and respond in many different ways. Some theological trajectories can facilitate violence, which can be handled by constructing new ways to think theologically about violence and talk about God. Feminism is important in order to reform Christianity in favor of women’s equal value, which is possible because of Christianity’s theological base for egalitarian and just human relationships. Four bishops from the Church of Sweden was interviewed in order to examine how the Church of Sweden can contribute to curbing and preventing violence against women according to the bishops. Critical discourse analysis and radical feminist theory contribute with the understanding that discourses have the power to maintain or challenge a patriarchal social order. The results showed that there was consensus regarding the Church’s responsibility to work with gender equality and against violence against women in different ways. The bishops mentioned different suggestions for doing so, with focus on awareness raising, interpretation of the Bible, organization of the Church and challenging norms. Reluctance to connecting Christianity directly to violence against women was identified, even though there were reflections over the impact of Biblical texts that emphasized women subordination. Violence against women was commonly connected to our view of human life, at the same time as a majority of the bishops acknowledged the structural, gendered dimension of violence against women.

Keywords; violence against women, Christianity, feminism
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1. Introduction

Recently this year the official crime statistics for the Crime Prevention Council in Sweden were presented, showing that 22 women were killed in 2018 by men they had or have had a relationship with in comparison to 10 women in 2017 (BRÅ, 2019). This means that there has been more than a doubling of murders of women in a year, despite national efforts to prevent and curb violence against women. The entire society has a responsibility to respond to violence against women. The goal must be vision zero. A coordinated and multisectoral approach is both desirable and necessary. I have wondered how the Church of Sweden can function as a resource in the society to prevent and curb violence against women, which is the basis for conducting this study.

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2. Background

World Health Organization (WHO) published a report in 2013; “Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence”, stating that almost 30% of all women in the world have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. The conclusion is that violence against women is a global problem that can be prevented. One of the interventions for prevention includes challenging social norms that support male authority, control over women and allows violence against women. Addressing social and cultural norms about masculinity, gender power relationships and violence are highlighted as important components in the prevention of violence against women (WHO, 2013, p. 36). Violence against women is by the United Nations described as; “…a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men (United Nations, 1993). This understanding constitutes the base of this study.

The Swedish Church is Sweden's largest Christian religious community, with 6 millions of members. There are approximately 2225 parishes in Sweden, that are divided into 13 dioceses (Svenska kyrkan, 2016). Every diocese is led by a bishop whose responsibility is to proclaim the gospel in words and deeds, to make sure that the sacraments are administered according to the Church's confession and order but also answer for management and supervision over the parishes (Svenska kyrkan, 2018). Thus, they have a comprehensive responsibility and influence regarding how the Church of Sweden deal with different matters in the daily work. The intention is to see how the bishops view their and the Church of Sweden’s responsibility to prevent and curb violence against women. The aim is also to examine how the bishops view the relation between Christianity and violence against women, since it is relevant considering what kind of responsibility the Church of Sweden then might have while working against violence against women. A bishop in Sweden, Fredrik Modéus, wrote a debate article in 2017 about men’s violence against women. He stated that research and self-criticism are needed in the Church and that biblical texts about the subordination of the woman must be understood in relation to the context of the time. He also argues that priests, in sermon, must formulate themselves so that women are presented as free, equal and with the same rights as men. Church structures must be illuminated and changed (Modéus, 2017). The intention is
to explore if the Church of Sweden can be part of the intervention for prevention, by following the advices of WHO, by addressing social and cultural norms about masculinity, gender power relationships and violence against women in the Church's work in Sweden.

2.1 The researcher’s role

This study belongs to the field of qualitative research, which is interpretative research where the researcher is closely involved with the informants. This raises some strategical, ethical and personal challenges. My interpretations as a researcher are shaped by my personal background, biases and values (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). Thus, I need to reflexively identity these factors for the reader to understand how my interpretations might affect the study. I have a bachelor in Social Work and have been working at a women shelter in Sweden for a year. I work with women and children subjected to men’s violence on a daily basis. Our women shelter belongs to a national association, Unizon, which is based on the basic understanding about men’s violence against women as an expression of structural inequality (Unizon, 2014). This permeates my view of violence against women as well, which have affected my choice of research questions.

2.2 Aim and research questions

The purpose of the study is to examine how the Church of Sweden can contribute to curbing and preventing violence against women, according to influential bishops. The aim is to answer the following research questions:

- How do these bishops within the Church of Sweden view the Church’s and their responsibility to curb and prevent violence against women?
- How can the Church of Sweden concretely contribute to curbing and preventing violence against women according to these bishops?
- How do these bishops understand the relation between Christianity and violence against women?

2.3 Terminology and definition

There are numerous terms commonly used when referring to violence against women. In this study the definition from the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEDAW) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 will be used, which defines violence
against women as; ”any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (United Nations, 1993). Intimate partner violence is another term defined by WHO as physical and/or sexual violence by a current or a former partner since the age of 15 years (WHO, 2013, p. 6). Domestic violence as a term encompasses violence by other members of the household (WHO, 2012, p. 1). These two definitions were excluded from the study because of the lack of gender based perspective. The term gender-based violence capture this gender based perspective, however it also includes the understanding that also men are subjected to gender-based violence even though it mostly affects women (Sida, 2015). Since the study aims to specifically examine the role of Church in relation to violence against women and not men, the term violence against women is considered to be most suitable. Additionally, violence against women can manifest itself in many different ways, for example as physical, psychological, economical, sexual, latent or material violence (Operation kvinnofrid, 2019).

3. Survey of the field

At first, literature concerning Christianity in relation to feminism is presented. Feminism is relevant in this study since the theoretical framework consists of radical feminist theory. Secondly, there is a short review of literature relating to violence against women in general. The terminology used for describing violence in this part will reflect the terminology in the accurate literature, which may differ from the choice of terminology in this study. Finally, there is a section regarding violence against women in relation to Christianity specifically.

3.1 Feminism and Christianity

Riswold (2009) states that the first wave of feminism was mainly focused on women’s right to vote during the nineteenth century, but was also concatenated with abolitionism. This first wave of feminism was led almost exclusively by white, upper-class women. One criticism against the first wave was that since most of the early feminists were socially privileged and racially segregated, the realities of women of color and working-class women did not seem to be included and acknowledged in the feminist movement. The right to vote was also the only focus of the engagement, since it was seen as a factor that would improve the lives of all women equally. In the middle of the twentieth century the second wave of feminism emerged. Because of contemporary
 societal focus on social and civil rights movement etc, this wave of feminism arose in a time where issues like women’s reproductive health, access to educational resources and social problems like sexual harassment was accurate. As the first wave of feminism, the second wave was also dominated by white, middle-/and upper-class women. Audre Lorde was a writer and activist who claimed that ”it is a particular academics arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third world women, and lesbians” (Riswold, 2009, p. 7). Thus, the third wave of feminism builds upon the benefits of the first and second wave, and on the critiques arising from them (Riswold, 2009, p. 5-8). Feminism today is concerned by many different factors that affect women’s lives today, such as race, sexuality, age, ability and educational level, and should as well address religion as one of these factors (Riswold, 2009, p. 24).

Feminist criticism of Christianity has been comprehensive. Christianity and religion in general is described as a powerful tool of patriarchy. Roots of sexism and misogyny comes partly from intellectual history of Christianity. For example Aristotelian biology and Aquinas theological adoption of it manifests male superiority, where men are superior and women are inferior, men stronger and women weaker. Biblical texts have been used to support the notion that women must submit to their husbands. Ideas of women being fully dependent and represented by their husbands derive partly from Genesis 2 where the woman was made from the rib of the man. Patriarchy feeds on this thinking to maintain men’s dominance over women. Feminism should therefore aim at reforming Christianity to establish and maintain women’s equal value and confront the expressions of patriarchy that maintains male domination. Despite the oppressive and sexis tendencies, Christianity also provides a theological base for egalitarian and just human relationships. Christianity has historically been a community that welcomed marginalized groups. The contemporary reform of Christianity has been possible because of the Christian theology, containing the vision of human equality and dignity and a belief in a God who liberates those who society shuns. Feminist scholars can contribute to this reform by unmasking sexism in biblical interpretation and theological ideas (Riswold, 2009, p. 20-40).

3.2 Violence against women
Historically most societies in the world have tolerated physical abuse of women within the family, since it has been considered a private matter. Male domination could be sanctioned within the
family, because of legal rights for husbands to chastise their wives. For example in English legal systems, men had the right to beat their views with a stick that was not wider than one’s thumb. The second feminist movement in the United States developed during the 1970s, where a paradigm shift began. Violence against women started to shift from be viewed as a private, family matter to a public, criminal one. Within the legal system, domestic violence was beginning to be seen also as a political construct and a social problem. Batter intervention programs and guidelines to the courts in order to hold perpetrators accountable developed and was based on the understanding of violence against women as a behavioral issue, that needs to be addressed by the whole community. This means that the need for a societal response towards this social problem was emphasized rather than an individualistic, psychological approach. The development of viewing violence against women as an international concern started quite recently and many countries still lack action and change to address this societal problem. This can be described as based on a widespread acceptance of patriarchal systems and other institutionalized violence against women. For example, international human rights organizations started to focus on violence against women as late as the 1990s. United Nations was one of these organizations, that in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that every human has the right the life, liberty and security, a standard of living regarding health and well-being. Violence against women is therefore considered a violation of these human rights. The defining of this area as an issue of human rights exposes and emphasize the paradigm shift of viewing violence against women as a both public and criminal act, and a societal problem (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 60-69).

Johnson (2015) understands violence against women as partly embedded in social meanings about masculinity and femininity and in social structures that create power imbalances between men and women. The common factor of violence against women is the men’s abuse of power, which is a part of the patriarchy. The patriarchy refers to the societal system where men are allocated more power and influence than women. Most men do not use violence against women, however many of them engage in systems where gender based violence is condoned or fostered. Gender based violence is unlikely to occur without support from the social surroundings (Johnson, 2015, p. 15-18).

3.3 Violence against women and Christianity
Johnson (2015) states that violence against women within religious environments starts with expectations about women and why they were created to the world. Culturally traditional religious
beliefs can both support female inferiority and contribute to men’s perception of having a “God-given” right of dominance over women. Misogynists within Christian social culture are claimed to misinterpret and misuse the biblical idea of submission and humility, claiming that their actions are justified. Rahman and Kabir (in Johnson, 2015) also found a connection between religious leanings towards treating women as subordinate partners and violence against women (Johnson, 2015, p. 28-36).

Nason-Clark (1996) claims that religious institutions have a critical role to play in reducing violence against women. She acknowledges that the Churches have put violence against women on their ministry agenda, however no coordinated response has been made. Patriarchy is understood as supporting those social structures that makes ownership of women natural and possible. There have been many debates concerning the Judeo-Christian belief and its impact on the development of patriarchal attitudes towards women, regarding whether these values are integrated and inherent to the religious framework or not. However, what is clear is that the root of violence comes from women’s subordination to male authority and control. The study shows that evangelical clergy in Canada understand violence against women within Christian families as spiritual abuse and understand the abusive behavior as men’s struggle with his faith. The clergy understood the men in terms of not being Christian at all or having a lack of spiritual growth. They seemed to be revulsive to acknowledge non-spiritual factors as potential determinant for the violent behavior (Nason-Clark, 1996, p. 516-526).

Gerhardt (2014) states that the social belief system that entitled men to dominate their partners was both rooted in the legal systems and in religious belief systems. Negative attitudes against women is described to have its roots in early Christian teachings. Evidence that support the belief system of denigration of women can be found in Church settings throughout history. For example, women were described to be easily deceived by the devil and a threat to men who were striving for sexual purity in accordance to Christian teachings. The author finds it important to acknowledge the impact of the misogyny within many early theologians teachings, since it shaped an institutional response towards women which still live on in the Church in contemporary society (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 60). The Church addresses many different societal problems in both theological and legal terms and recently also started to address problems in terms of human rights. However the Church has not yet adressed the issue of violence against women as a human rights issue. The author suggests that
the Church actively employ the contributions made by human rights organizations, such as documents and agreements that acknowledge human basic rights to freedom and equality. This way violence against women and violations of women’s human rights becomes more difficult to minimize, since it is viewed as institutional and legal violations of their rights instead of a private violation within the family (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 75-80).

Gerhardt (2014) also states that a theological response to violence against women should be naming it a sin and renounce all forms of violence against women as opposed to the Christian confession of faith and Scripture. The Church should resist religious, political and social policies that obstruct the gospel through prayer and humility. Including women in Church leadership is important to show that the Church does not support a religious culture that denigrates women based on their gender. Gerhardt believes that the Church have the possibility to engage in many different ways to end gendercide, for example by raising consciousness, supporting political, social and religious efforts to end violence against women and giving aid to victims. The Church must use the prophetic voice and speak up for the voiceless. Being silent about abuse and silencing the survivors of violence, is being colluded with the perpetrators. The Church also colludes with the perpetrators by not holding them accountable for their actions. Violence against women should be talked about as a sin, a crime and a human rights issue. The Church should cooperate with law enforcement and programs that hold perpetrators of violence accountable. Victims of violence should also have the possibility to receive tangible support from the Church which is necessary to heal, restore and live a life free from violence. For example, some Churches have collaborations with women shelter’s, transitional housing programs and other economic resources that women can depend on while leaving an abusing partner. The Church should also be able to refer the women to adequate counseling and legal advocacy. Since violence against women is acknowledged to not be an isolated issue, but related to factors as economic conditions, access to health care and socio-cultural norms, the Church can also contribute to reducing violence by for example providing micro financing opportunities, which has shown to be an effective strategy in reducing violence against women. Aid to survivors of victims is considered to be a necessary component of the Church’s response to violence against women. The author acknowledges that political action and engagement in social action is not often seen as the essence of Jesus’ mission. There are limits of the state power as well as limits of the role of the Church within the state. However, a Church rooted in the confession of faith both recognizes and responds to evil (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 154-160).
Petersen (2009) conducted a study where she interviewed clergy within the Anglican Church of the Diocese of Cape Town in South Africa about their experienced challenges when dealing with domestic violence. The clergy addressed patriarchal societal practices as a problem that is reflected in religious teachings that foster male domination and female submission. The interpretation of scripture and theology emerged as a controversial issue for all of the informants. Some of them meant that Ephesians 5:22 caused so much damage that is should not be used at all, while others meant that scriptures must be interpreted contextually. The clergy reported that many victims of domestic violence they have encountered were struggling with their own Christian beliefs about marriage and divorce. Some of them expressed frustration about their personal and the Church’s limitations to support the victims. The clergy did not think that their theological training prepared them for dealing with domestic violence. One suggestion that emerged regarding how the Church and clergy could deal with domestic violence, was that bishops should make it compulsory for clergy and laity to attend to domestic violence training. Also having prevention workshops with men and being positive role models for the youth was also suggested. Furthermore, the clergy could preach more about domestic violence from the pulpit and both adress the misinterpretation of scripture and highlight gender inequality in the Bible (Petersen, 2009, p. 456-463).

Nienhuis (2005) claims that theology often has a negative record regarding violence and abuse, where there are evidence for that the negative elements both survives and thrives in the world. Two theological trajectories are described as facilitating violence; firstly that suffering is sent from God and that obedience is a sign of godliness and secondly that women have an inferior moral nature and therefore need to be under control of men (Nienhuis, 2005, p. 111) The author means that this theology must be unarmed by constructing new ways to talk about God and think theologically about violence. Every religious tradition is described as having resources for theological reconstruction and these transformative empowering resources should be brought to light. Theology can either play a facultative or disruptive role regarding unjust power relations in the society. Theological understandings of men, women, marriage, suffering and obedience should be reformulated so that they cannot be used against those struggling to live a life free from violence. It must be a plan how to respond to victims of violence who seeks religious resources, which includes that resources within the tradition that enables resistance to violence and abuse must be found (Nienhuis, 2005, p. 122-123).
Nason-Clark (2004) states that religious women are more vulnerable than those who are not religious, when abused. They may be affected by religious ideology that views women’s roles as wives and homemakers, and the explicit Christian notion of forgiveness and women’s identity with Jesus the sacrificial lamb. One interpretation could be that enduring violence might be a religious women’s cross to bear. Religious women are less likely to leave an abusive relationship and often express guilt that they have failed both their families and God for not being able to make the marriage work. The author describes that in families of strong faith many of the patterns within mainstream culture are intensified, such as the fear and the isolation and the promise before God to stay together in marriage until death do us apart. Besides having the violence condemned by the language of contemporary culture, the Church can contribute by condemning violence by the language of the spirit which may be central for the Church’s role in responding to perpetrators of violence against women (Nason-Clark, 2004, p. 304).

Cooper-White (2011) reviewed progress made in both theory and practice regarding pastoral care and counseling in relation to intimate violence against women since the 1970s. Among other things, she summarized a survey of teaching members of the Society for Pastoral Theology conducted in 2004. The survey suggested at least four trajectories for continued advancement regarding advocacy, activism and public witness to end violence against women among pastoral caregivers and theologians. These identified trajectories were; teaching, research, public advocacy and pastoral care. Regarding teaching, the participants raised different areas that they thought could put more attention to in future teaching. Information about issues of shame and the frequency of under-reporting, effective strategies to help men stop abusing women or the revival of consciousness raising groups for especially younger women. Research was understood as an important part as well, where for example studies aiming at exploring how battered women experienced pastoral care and the responses of their religious communities. This would contribute with knowledge how clergy and the communities have both helped and harmed them. Public advocacy embraces the fact that the most important thing that pastoral caregivers can do is to collaborate with others in our communities and global world to end violence against women. Regarding pastoral care, the author mentions that one of the greatest challenges in working with violence against women is that the awareness of the violence might begin to fade. She states that awareness, prevention and intervention relating to violence against women needs to be more mainstream, and more common in
pastoral literature about premarital counseling, marriage, family and divorce and in Christian resources in general. Violence against women and the consequences must continue to be acknowledged, and kept from being minimized and denied (Cooper White, 2011, p. 838-842).

3.4 Contributions to the study
What will be brought into this study from previous sections is primarily that violence against women can be conceptualized in many different ways, such as a human rights issue, a sin, a spiritual struggle, a societal problem or a private matter. Violence against women is partly connected to norms about masculinity. The Church is described as having the possibility to approach the issue of violence against women in numerous ways, for example by enacting a holistic perspective to support women or holding perpetrators accountable through co-operation with law enforcement. Furthermore, the trajectories that can be used to curb violence against women will be brought into the study. The Church can also provide a theological response to violence against women. There are theological trajectories that are described to facilitate violence, which can be handled by constructing new ways to think theologically about violence and talk about God. Feminism is therefore important in order to reform Christianity in favor of women’s equal value, which is possible because of the existence of a theological base for egalitarian and just human relationships.

4. Theory
4.1 Radical feminist theory
Radical feminist theory will be used as a theoretical framework. Thompson (2001) describes radical feminism as feminism per se, not one among other types of feminism. Thus, the word feminism will be used when referring to radical feminism. The core of feminism is the identification and opposition to male domination, and also the struggle for a fully human status for women (Thompson, 2001, p. 1). Male domination means that the male represents the human norm, which means that women do not get a fully human status. Sex is seen as central in the oppression of women, where women are subordinated to men. This male supremacy is considered to be deeply rooted in the world. Having a feminist standpoint is at first acknowledging the male supremacy and domination. This consciousness become feminist when an awareness develops that women’s social positioning in the society is structured by male supremacy, and that the male monopolization of the human status must be opposed (Thompson, 2001, p. 12-18). The ideological belief that men have
human status and women do not, is the main reason for men feeling permitted to use violence against women. The use of violence against women contributes to keep women subordinate to men, by the demonstration that women’s right to security and safety can easily be withdrawn (Thompson, 2001, p. 28).

This feminism is often referred to as second wave of feminism, dated from late 1960s and early 1970s. It can also be presented as the Women’s Liberation Movement. However the duration of the feminist struggle have been much longer than that. Feminism can be defined as; ”a moral and political struggle of opposition to the social relations of male domination structured around the principle that only men count as human and as a struggle for a genuine human status for women outside male definition and control” (Thompson, 2001, p. 4). The situation of women is socially constructed in that sense that it is not naturally given, which opposes potential explaining of women’s subordination in terms of biological reasons. The distinction between the private and the public is considered to be an ideological construct, where the subordination of women is confined to the private domain. This leads to that violent acts of men towards women can proceed unrecognized in the private. Thus, the feminist agenda is to put interest of women to the political and public agenda which requires that some aspects, such as violence against women in the home has to be considered a public matter instead of a private (Thompson, 2001, p. 6-8).

Male domination is often disguised as something else and is therefore not seen as domination. The aim of feminism is to expose the true nature of male domination as the dehumanizing system it is. The manifestation of male domination is often subtle and is deeply embedded in our society and in the psyches of individuals. Social systems like this are maintained and reproduced because of people actively participating and committing to it. Humans are seen as having a choice to not comply with norms of domination, which means that these social systems can be challenged and changed. There is also a distinction between domination and power, where domination is understood as a hierarchal social order where the interest of a few domineer at the cost of other’s interests. The social order is partly maintained through justifications of the maintenance and through threat and violence against the subordinated women. This way male domination can content and exiting, contributing with the view that men represent the human norm at the expense of a human status for women. While the interests of men are regarded as genuinely and universal interests, women’s interests are regarded as less important and therefore denied, trivialized or
derided. Since women do not have the full human status, they do not have the access to the rights of being a human as men do (Thompson, 2001, p. 9-12). Separatism is a main strategy of feminism, and can be understood as the "withdrawal of consent to male supremacist relations of ruling" (Thompson, 2001, p. 15). Male supremacy excludes women from obtaining the full "human" status, at the same time as it includes women in roles in different spheres of life. Women are confined to roles related to supporting and nurturing males, both as mothers and wives (Thompson, 2001, p. 15).

4.2 Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis as theory

Discourse as a concept can be understood as a specific way of understanding and talking about the world. There are however no consensus regarding the definition of discourse and how to analyze it. Thus, discourse analysis refers to many different interdisciplinary approaches. The social constructionist discourse analysis’ starting point is that our ways of talking contribute to creating and changing our world and are therefore not neutral reflections of the world. Social constructionism, which the discourse analysis is based on, is an umbrella term for theories about society and culture. There are four premises that all social constructionist approaches share, hence also the discourse analytical approaches.

1. The first premise is that our knowledge of the world should not be understood as an objective truth, since the knowledge is not reflections of the reality. It is rather products of our categorizations of the world, that is, our discourses.
2. The second premise is that humans exist in a historical and cultural context, which means that our knowledge about the world is historically and culturally specific and contingent. The contingency refers to the understanding that our knowledge and understanding about the world could have been different and can change over time. Discourses contribute to producing the social world, which builds on the assumption that the social world is socially and discursively constructed.
3. The third premise is that there is a link between knowledge and social processes. Knowledge is created in the world by social interaction, where common truths are constructed and thence competed about what is true or false.
4. The fourth premise is that there is a link between knowledge and social action, which contributes with the understanding that our specific knowledge about the world contributes to
that some social actions become natural, while others become unthinkable. This leads to the conclusion that the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:1-6).

Discourse analysis approaches share the starting point in the structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic philosophy, that we gain access to reality through language. Representations of the reality is created through our language and are never mere reflections of the reality. Discourses therefore create meaning to the reality. Thus, the language is an important part in constituting the social world, social identities and social relations. Changes in the discourses contribute to that the social world changes, which ultimately means that discourses have the power to both change and reproduce the social reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:8-9).

The critical discourse analysis approaches share the view of discursive practices as a form of social practice which contributes to the constitution of the social world. The critical discourse analysis aims to focus on the linguistic-discursive dimension of different social and cultural phenomena. Focus is also on processes of change. This builds on the understanding that social and cultural reproduction and change partly take place in daily discursive practices. Discourses are seen as both constitutive and constituted, in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions. Social, non-discursive dimensions can also influence discursive practices, as institutional structures or the structure of political systems. Originally discursively constituted practices can become sedimented in institutions and non-discursive practices. This creates social structures which in turn affects the daily discursive practice. Critical discourses analysis acknowledge that discursive practices contribute to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups, which is understood as ideological effects. The aim is to reveal the impact of discursive practices on the maintenance of unequal power relations, and in the reproduction or changing of the social world (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:61-64).

Faireclough’s approach to the critical discourse analysis is used as a theoretical framework, which contributes with additional theoretical assumptions. Fairclough distances himself from the ideas of structuralism, and positions himself closer to poststructuralism in that sense that he claims that discursive practices have the power to challenge the existing discursive structure by integrating other words outside the structure. Discursive practices are therefore not only reproducing the
discursive structures. Fairclough understands discourse as language that is used within a specific field. Discourse is understood as a way of speaking which gives meaning to different experiences from a specific perspective. The discourses contribute to construct systems of knowledge and meaning, social identities and social relations. Thus, discourses have three functions in our social world; an identity function, a relational function and an ideational function (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:64-68).

4.3 Contributions to the study
These theories combined contribute with the understanding that discourses have the power to maintain a patriarchal social order. A patriarchal social order contributes to the enabling of violence against women and must therefore be opposed. These bishops’ discursive practices will be analyzed through the lens of maintaining or changing the social world and unequal power relations. The discursive practices will be understood as constructing the social world and the relations between men and women.

5. Research Design
Firstly, there will be a short section about the characteristics of a qualitative research design. Thereafter there will be a section about the chosen method, critical discourse analysis and the concrete analytical tools that will be used. Thence, a description of the material will be presented followed by a presentation of the content analysis. Finally, there will be a section about ethical considerations done during the research process.

5.1 Qualitative research design
This research will be conducted by using a qualitative research design, based on qualitative semistructured interviews with four bishops. The benefits of using qualitative interviews are that the researcher has control over the line of questioning and that the participants have the opportunity to provide historical information about the subject. The disadvantages with this type of data collection might be that the information is only based on the views of the participants and that the presence of the researcher might affect the result because of biasing responses of the participants (Creswell, 2009:179). In this study where discourses are viewed as both constitutive and constituted, the subjective views of the participants are relevant in the analysis since they both reflect the contemporary world and their contributions to creating the social world. There is a possibility that
my presence as a researcher affects the informants’ answers. This is something inevitable in qualitative research tradition which involves direct interaction with the informants. To handle this challenge, transparency is required in all steps of the research process, including stating past experiences of me as a researcher which affects the interview questions and the interpretations of the answers which was done in the beginning.

5.2 Critical discourse analysis as method

Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be used as a method. Fairclough’s approach also includes philosophical premises and theoretical methods. The aim of CDA is to illustrate the linguistic-discursive dimension of different social and cultural phenomena. Discursive practices are seen as important parts of social practice, which in turn contribute to the constitution of the social world. A discourse is in a dialectical relationship with other dimensions in the social world and is seen as a social practice that both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices. CDA is relevant in this thesis since it includes the perspective that discursive practices contribute to both the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups. The aim of CDA is to reveal how these discursive practices maintain the social world and the unequal relations of power (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:61-63). Thus, discursive practices used in the Church can both create, reproduce and challenge an unequal relationship between men and women.

Fairclough understands discourse as a concept in three different ways. Firstly, he refers to languages as social practice. Secondly, discourse is also understood as a kind of language that is used within a specific field. Thirdly, discourse also refers to a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective. A discourse in that sense can be any discourse where it is possible to distinguish it from other discourses. Discourses are understood as contributing to the construction of social identities, social relations and also systems of knowledge and meaning. An important part of the analysis is to examine the order of discourse, which refers to all of the discourse types that are used within a specific social institution or field. There are specific discursive practices within an order of discourse, through which talk is produced, consumed or interpreted. In every discursive practice the discourses are used in particular ways (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:66-67).
Fairclough has developed a framework for the critical discourse analysis, the three-dimensional model. Fairclough’s three dimensional model builds on the assumption that every instance of language use is a form of communicative event that consists of three dimensions; text, discursive practice and social practice. Thus, analysis should focus on both the linguistic characteristics of the text, the processes wherein the text is produced and consumed and the wider social practice where the communicative event takes place (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:66-67).

5.2.1 Analysis of text
The linguistic structure of a text shapes both the production and consumption of the text, since different discourses and genres are articulated together in the production of a text. Analysis of the text focuses on specific formal features from which discourses are realized, such as grammar, sentence coherence or vocabulary. Transitivity and modality as grammatical elects will be used in this study to be analyzed. The focus when analyzing transitivity is examining what people are described as doing. The linguistic features capture who does what to whom and why. This shows who is described as the important agent in a sentence and who is described as the receiver of the consequences of that action. When using transitivity in analysis, it is shown who is mainly given the subject status, as a participant or an object status, as affected by the action. Halliday emphasizes in his understanding of transitivity that the grammar of language is a system of options, where the speakers choose among these options due to social circumstances. This choice of linguistic form has a significance in the meaning making in language. Thus, the transitivity analysis it interested in examining both what is in the text and absent from them (Machin & Mayr:2012:105). An analysis of modality focuses on the degree of affinity with or affiliation with the speaker’s own statement. Different discourses use different forms of modality. The speaker can commit oneself to the statement by varying degrees and the chosen modality is understood as having consequences for the discursive construction of social relations, knowledge and meaning systems. Truth is one kind of modality, through which the speaker entirely commits oneself to the statement. Intonation is another way of expressing modality, through which the speaker hesitates or uses a hesitant tone which can express a low degree of commitment to the statement. This can also be done through the use of hedges which refers to the use of words ”well” or ”a bit” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:83-84).
5.2.2 Analysis of discursive practice
Analysis of the discursive practice aims at examining both how producers of text draw on already existing discourses and also how receivers of text consume apply different discourses in the consumption and interpretation of it. An example to understand the core of the analysis of discursive practices it that; ”viewers’s familiarity with TV news as a news genre shapes their interpretation and, later on, in discussion with others of the subjects covered by the news, they may draw on the discourses and genres that were used, perhaps combining them with other discourses and genres in hybris forms” (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 69). The analysis should therefore focus on what kinds of discourses that the viewers draw upon while talking about the subject with others, as receivers of a communicative event. It is through discursive practices that texts shape and are shaped by the social practice. Interdiscursivity will be used as tools for analyzing the discursive practices in this study. Interdiscursivity takes place when existing discourses are articulated together in new combinations to form a new interdiscursive mix in a communicative event. A discursive change leads to social and cultural change, thus, the use of discourses is relevant in the constitution of social practices. Therefore, the use of interdiscursive mixes is both a sign of and a driving force in discursive and social-cultural change. Then again, the use and mix of discourses in conventional ways are indications of the stability of the dominant discourse, which also means the dominant social order. Fairclough views interdiscursivity as a marker for both instability and stability since a use of interdiscursive mixes contributes to change, however power relations affects the possibilities for change. For example, power relations affect the access to different discourses that different actors have (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:64-68).

5.2.3 Analysis of social practice
Ultimately, the aim with the analysis is to show the connection between discursive practices and broader socio-cultural developments and structures. Social practice is the third dimension of Fairclough’s three dimensional model. The primary thing to explore is the relationship between the discursive practice and its order of discourse. What is relevant is to examine what kind of discourses that the discursive practice in the communicative event belongs and how the discourses are allocated and regulated across the text. Secondly, a map of the social matrix of discourse is to be made which refers to the partly non-discursive elements, the social and cultural relations and structures that constitute the wider context of the discursive practice. Critical discourse analysis has to be combined with a non-discourse analytical theory, in order to be able to capture non-discursive
elements that CDA cannot capture. Thus, the study is an integrated theoretical and analytical framework. The analysis is focused on the relationship between discursive practice and the broader social practice. What is relevant to address is for example change and ideological consequences of the discursive practice, or how the discursive practice relates to the order of discourse and therefore the maintenance or transformation of status quo in the social practice. The discursive practice should also be addressed in terms of strengthening or challenging unequal power relations in the society (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 86-87).

5.4 Material
The interviews were conducted by telephone while recording. The four interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes. The informants were interviewed by phone because of geographical reasons, since these bishops are located all over Sweden. There are fourteen bishops in Sweden and all of them were offered the opportunity to participate in the study. At last, four bishops agreed to participate through interviews by telephone. A fifth bishop agreed as well, but because of time limitations the interview was not possible to conduct. The transcribed interviews were analyzed by using analytical tools according to Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis. Additionally, both radical feminist theory and Fairclough’s theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis was used in the process of analysis.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish, which is both the researcher’s and the informants’s mother tongue. This choice was based on the assumption that not all are comfortable speaking English, and that more developed answers would be received by using the language that the informants are most used to using. This also leads to some methodological challenges since the interviews first had to be transcribed in Swedish and then translated to English. This placed high demands on the translations, to be able to capture the true meaning of the informants statements and avoid that important discursive elements disappeared. In order to make sure that the informants recognized themselves in the transcriptions, the interviews were transcribed shortly after conducting the interviews and the translated versions were sent to the informants, in order to get the translations approved before using them in the study. One of the bishops asked for both the Swedish transcription and the English translation, so that both could be approved.
5.5 Directed content analysis

Content analysis is a widely used technique in qualitative research, with the aim to interpret meaning from the content of text material. In this study directed content analysis was used, which is a structured process where existing theory and research contributed to focus the research question. The theory and research also provided directions about potential variables of interest throughout the material, which contributed to determine the initial coding scheme. This was done by identification of key concept as initial categories. This can be viewed as a deductive category application. Coding began immediately after the identification of the predetermined codes. Data that could not be coded were identified and analyzed later to determine if they represented a new category or a subcategory of an existing code. The results from a directed content analysis provided supporting or non supporting evidence for the theoretical framework. The theory and prior research was used as guidance in the discussion of the findings. Newly identified categories offer either a contradictory view of the issue researched, or further extend the theory. Using a directed content analysis has some limitations since the data is approached by the researcher with a strong bias. This might lead to that the researcher is more likely to find evidence that is supportive rather than non-supportive of a theory. Informants might also get goes to answer in certain way to the questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281-1283).

5.6 Ethical considerations

When conducting this research using qualitative data in the form of interviews, ethical considerations had to be made regarding both data analysis, interpretation and writing the research (Creswell, 2009, p. 90-91). Good research ethics have been followed in accordance to ALLEA (2017) where reliability, honesty, respects and accountability are principles that should follow all stages of the research process (2017). The study had to protect the anonymity of the informants. The limited amount of bishops in Sweden affects the possibility for the informants to be anonymous in the study. To avoid recognition as far as possible, these four bishops’ gender, age, employment length is not revealed and information in the quotations from the interviews that might reveal the identity of the informant is not presented. Numbers instead of names and pseudonyms for places is used to protect identities.
6. Results

After coding the transcribed material in accordance to directed content analysis, four coding categories were identified. These were awareness-raising, interpretation of the Bible, organization of the Church and challenging norms. In this chapter the categories will described in more detail in combination with presented quotations that belongs to the coding category.

6.1 Awareness-raising

All four bishops reflected over awareness-raising as an important part of their and the Church’s role in working against violence against women. Awareness-raising about masculinity and femininity among youth groups and confirmation groups were brought up as examples where there is an opportunity to influence young people. Three out of four bishops emphasized the importance of working with youth in different ways, for example by talking about gender equality in classrooms or conveying Christian messages of the view of human life to them. Examples of different contexts to raise the issue violence against women were in sermons, lectures, debate articles, chronicles, podcasts or in meetings in the parishes.

| Bishop 3 | “As for the role of the bishop, I believe it is important that the bishop stands up for equal value for men and women, equal rights with the same starting point. Questions linked to human rights should be prioritized on the bishops’s agenda. The bishop can find different ways to raise the issue” |
| Bishop 2 | “What is included in my employment is to talk about the issue, keeping it alive” |
| Bishop 4 | “We know that if we put these issues on the agenda, we can actually play a rather big role in society. In terms of what we can do both on a structural and an individual structure, is to raise these issues. We are quite an unexpected conversation partner, but who has been here for more than thousands of years. We are older than the Swedish state” |
| Bishop 1 | “In the employment as a bishop it is included to talk about the issue in different contexts, meet people, preach and so on. It is about conveying Christian messages, which contains one of most essential parts, namely the view of human life” |

6.2 Interpretation of the Bible

There were three subcategories identified regarding the bishops’ statements related to interpretation of the Bible, covering both the importance of interpretation, as well as their own interpretations and potential interpretations of the Bible. Three out of four bishops mentioned the interpretation of the Bible as crucial, claiming that the biblical texts cannot be read literally. These three bishops talked about the Bible as containing periodical texts that must be understood in relation to what was typical at the time it was written, horrible texts that we must understand from the context it is from since we have a different society today and additionally, that it is unreasonable Bible interpretation
to read the texts exactly as they are. Two of the bishops stated that there is no support in the Bible for violence against women, even though it might be interpreted that way. One of them claimed that those with fundamentalist and conservative views can find support in the Bible that the woman is subordinate the man. Two of the bishops talked about sin as a relevant concept in relation to violence against women. One bishop mentioned previous thoughts about women subordination in the New Testament and that we cannot understand things like that today. The Church’s task is therefore to interpret and proclaim the gospel in such a way that it refers to contemporary society. Another bishop gave an example of a proverb that have been used as justification for violence against children, emphasizing the need to address difficult texts in the Bible in order to discuss how we should relate to them and interpret them on the basis that we have a different society today. One bishop stated that the Bible is both external message and a text colored by the context it was written in.

| Bishop 2 | ”I would say that if you think purely exegetically, from the perspective of the Bible text, the Bible is clear about that violence should not occur towards another person. There is nothing in the Bible text that gives any kind of sanction that someone should have the right to commit abuse against someone else. That Bible texts have been used in this way, that is something else” |
| Bishop 4 | ”The Bible is a very multifaceted book, but can be used. Even if we censor or remove those parts, the challenge remains how to interpret this text” |
| Bishop 2 | ”Men's violence against women is a sin” |
| Bishop 2 | ”For me, the basic subtext is, "Here is no longer Jew or Greek, man or woman, slave or free, all you are one in Christ". It’s such an incredibly strong expression of everyone's equal value. Then it is also a call to respond to each other with respect and equality. So, then you have to work with men's standards and women's standards, and how people are towards each other in general” |
| Bishop 3 | ”I believe that it would be wise of the Church to be linked to the movement of human rights. The basis of what the Church does it of course the theological motives. It is basically about the Christian thinking that man is created as an image of God, and with that comes both responsibility and freedom. The driving force of the Church is the belief in a God who has given us life equally, not in different ways” |
| Bishop 1 | ”It is obvious that there have been connections between some form of Christian belief and… maybe not violence, I do not dare to claim that, or yes - domestic violence” |
| Bishop 4 | ”There are number of old proverbs, most amazing but also 'spare the rod and spoil the child’, which is related to children. That has been used throughout history, which research also shows. Then one have to highlight this and say that this is not a Christian tradition” |
| Bishop 1 | ”The Bible is not an IKEA-catalogue where you can just read straight from and that’s it. The texts must be interpreted and the texts must be understood from what was typical then and what is our situation today” |
| Bishop 2 | ”The gospel cannot be credible without working to stop men's violence against women” |
| Bishop 4 | ”Every organization that has a tradition will have dark parts. Like Christianity. We have a tradition that is 2000 old. Then it is important that we acknowledge those parts, lift it up to the light, talk about it and try to understand what this is for and what it has stood for” |
6.3 Organization of the Church

All of the four bishops brought attention to the organization of the Church and its influence on the work regarding equality and violence against women. One of the bishops emphasized the importance of open, transparent organizations to be able to counteract violence against women. Equal salaries between men and women within the Church and equal distribution between men and women regarding power positions was also brought up as important parts in the work for equality. Another bishop stated that there is another weightiness when women fill these seats in power positions. Another bishop stated that the supervisory role that a bishop has enable the bishop to ask questions relating to violence against women within the supervision and by doing this affecting the Church from within which is important to reach long-term change of structures. Another bishop agreed with the importance of using the supervisory role to put the issue on the agenda and added that the Church also must have an in-built structure to handle violations and abuses, as well as having action plans for it. Two of the bishops mentioned the absolute secrecy within pastoral care, which contributes to that information relating to violence against women which is shared in the individual pastoral care will stay with the deacon or priest who received the information.

Bishop 3  “By constantly reminding that the Bible is both a text with eternal message, and a text which is colored by the time it was written in. I mean that it is an unreasonable Bible interpretation to read it just as it is. And there is a need for more teaching about it. It needs to be included in all educational context, not least for future priests”

Bishop 2  “It also gets another weightiness when women fill these seats. Then we have to think about what we are blind for, when us women have the highest power positions”

Bishop 3  “The Church can and must act in all ways that exist. Publicly, in preaching, in the Church service, by talking about it in the Confirmation Teaching, by allowing it to be part of the introduction for those who want to get involved in a congregation, in the sermons, have preparedness for it in the pastoral care…”

Bishop 2  ”They must have a basic education, to get aware and know what you should do. There should be action plans just like in any other workplace. My role is to prevent and stop, and for that very reason we build systems for it”

Bishop 4  "What I believe is, what one can do to counteract violence against women is to have open and transparent organizations, where one dares to talk about difficult things”

Bishop 3  "Thus, there is both a public role that is about raising the issue and a supervisory role that goes into the Church and the organization of the Church, which is important to be able to reach long-term change. A debate article can be of importance at the time, but you don’t change the structures within the organization through writing an article. Changing structures is done by purposeful and faithful work for what you believe in”
6.4 Challenging norms

Three out of four bishops mentioned norms about gender. One of these bishops stated that structural inequality and norms causes violence against women. Stereotypical gender roles are described to be found in children’s books literature. Thus, the Church has to influence norms and work preventively so that what could develop to violence against women is prevented early. A general inequality is understood as the precursor to violence. Another bishop stated that the Church can contribute to challenging or be involved in challenging the macho culture and norms. For example by talking about what it means to be a man today in relation to being a woman, or if the important thing is to be a human being. The third bishop acknowledged a cultural trait regarding how we have been fostered and shaped as women and men in Sweden. The bishop also talked about there being many more men with the perception that they can touch women’s bodies without consent, than women with the same perception about men. This perception was understood like something that humans have been introduced to and unconsciously passes on. Three out of four bishops mentioned the structural dimension of violence against women in some way. The fourth emphasized the view of human life, individual and cultural factors, such as one’s upbringing and the impact of growing up with macho cultural norms as the cause of violence against women. One of the bishops that acknowledged the structural level of violence against women, mentioned that Sweden have many patriarchal structures which refers to a basic structure with men’s superordination over women. Another bishop that also acknowledged the structural dimension stated that men’s violence against women is really an ideological issue, about our view of human life and how we look at other human beings. A question that was raised was if only men are evil and women good, or if we have the potential for both goodness and evil within us. The same bishop described gender equality as the basis of violence against women.

| Bishop 3 | "As a bishop, it is important for me to acknowledge that this is on a structural level. You have to start working with it early on to really make a difference. For me, it is about influencing norms and work preventively early” |
| Bishop 2 | "And why are there so many men with the perception that they can have opinions about women's bodies or touch women's bodies and why is it more common that men do it than that women perceive that it is okay to touch men's bodies without asking for permission. It is something that we have been introduced to, and unconsciously pass on” |
| Bishop 2 | "Therefore I think that if you live in a patriarchal structure where the basic structure is men's superordination over women, then it is inbuilt that you haven’t seen that you have committed abuse. You haven't had those eyes” |
| Bishop 1 | "The Church can contribute to challenging, or be involved in challenging the macho culture and norms” |
7. Analysis

7.1 Modality and transitivity

Varying degrees of modality were identified in these bishops’s statements when talking about violence against women. Following quotation expressed a high degree of affiliation with the statement, namely truth as modality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 83-84);

"Men’s violence against women is a sin” (Bishop 2)

The speaker was completely committed to the statement in this communicative event. Regarding transitivity, the speaker is also explicitly giving men the subject status and women the object status, as a receiver of men's violence (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 105). Thus, it is clear who is responsible for the violence. By conceptualizing the violence as a sin, the Church respond to perpetrators of violence against women by condemning the violence by the language of spirit (Nason-Clark, 2004, p. 304). The following speaker expressed a much lower degree of affinity with the statement, intonation through hesitating while talking about the connection between Christianity and violence against women;

"It is obvious that there have been connections between some form of Christian belief and… maybe not violence, I do not dare to claim that, or yes - domestic violence” (Bishop 1)

This quotation exemplifies some reluctance to connect Christianity to violence against women, even though the bishop ultimately did that connection. The term domestic violence was repeatedly used by one of the bishops, instead of talking about men’s violence against women. The choice of a linguistic form has a significance in the meaning making in language. Speakers choose among a system of options due to social circumstances in the communicative event. This means that also what is absent from the text is relevant (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 105). Using the term domestic violence instead of men’s violence against women could be a sign of resistance to a complete affiliation to the perspective of men’s violence against women as a structural problem and instead
use a wide term that excludes a structural understanding of the violence. Regarding the acknowledgment of connection between Christian beliefs and violence, the four bishops were not entirely in agreement considering the practical support for violence in the Bible. The following bishop stated that;

"There is nothing in the Bible text that gives any kind of sanction that someone should have the right to commit abuse against someone else. That Bible texts have been used in this way, that is something else” (Bishop 2)

The bishop expressed truth as modality and complete affiliation with this statement. Another bishop stated that for example one proverb in the Bible have been used throughout history in justification of violence against children. All bishops emphasized that interpretation of the Bible could be an issue in relation to inequality between men and women. One of them stated that there is support for subordination of women within the New Testament with the man as the woman’s head, which might be interpreted literary. Another bishop claimed that some parts of the Church have a Bible view that preserves old gender role patterns, which create inequality between men and women. Three out of four bishops emphasized the role of the Church to actively work with the fact that some find support in the Bible for women’s subordination in the Bible because of interpretation. The suggestions raised for doing this was for example by constantly reminding that the Bible both is a text with an external message and a text colored by the context it was written in, integrate this understanding in education and interpret and proclaim the gospel in a way that refers to the contemporary society. New ways of talking about God and thinking theologically about violence are constructed this way, which is important so that theological understandings cannot be used as legitimization of violence towards women. Thus, theology aims at playing a disruptive role regarding unjust power relations in the society (Nienhuis, 2015, p. 122-123). One bishop stated that;

"Every organization that has a tradition will have dark parts. Like Christianity. We have a tradition that is 2000 old. Then it is important that we acknowledge those parts, lift it up to the light, talk about it and try to understand what this is for and what it has stood for” (Bishop 4)
The bishop emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the dark parts of the Christian tradition and proclaim alternative interpretations and contextual understanding of formulations found in the Bible. This is important since misogynists are claimed to misinterpret and misuse the Biblical idea of submission and humility within Christian social culture, and that there is a connection between a religious leaning towards treating women as subordinate partners and violence against women (Johnson, 2015, p. 28-35). The three bishops that emphasized the Church’s role regarding interpretation of the Bible, expressed high commitment to their statements of the Church having a responsibility to actively work with the issue of interpretation of the Bible. The chosen modality is understood as having consequences for discursive construction of knowledge and meaning systems (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 83-84). The bishops construct the Church as a societal actor with a responsibility to handle the fact that the Bible might be interpreted as support of viewing women as subordinate. The following quotation is another example of this strong commitment to act against violence against women and with suggestions for how the Church can do this concretely;

"The Church can and must act in all ways that exist. Publicly, in preaching. in the Church service, by talking about it in the Confirmation Teaching, by allowing it to be part of the introduction for those who want to get involved in a congregation, in the sermons, have preparedness for it in the pastoral care…” (Bishop 3)

The bishop cements the Church’s responsibility in preventing and curbing violence against women and to act in all possible ways. According to Cooper-White teaching, research, public advocacy and pastoral care were identified trajectories for continued advancement in ending violence against women among pastoral caregivers and theologians (Cooper-White, 2011, p. 838-842). The bishops together mentioned all of these trajectories in their suggestions for how the Church could actively work to prevent and curb violence against women. One bishop also talked about the importance of using the supervisory role that the bishop has and ask relevant questions to those working within the Church, to be able to reach long-term change of structures.

7.2 Interdiscursivity

Two of the bishops talked about men’s violence against women in relation to sin. As mentioned earlier, one of the bishops stated that men’s violence against women is a sin. Sin as a concept is commonly used in a Christian discourse. Talking about men’s violence against women implies that
there is a structural dimension of the violence against women, which is commonly within a feminist discourse. The speaker integrates these two discourses. The articulation of two existing discourses together in a new inter discursive mix is a driving force in discursive and socio-cultural change (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 73-76). The other bishop claimed that sin is a relevant concept, since it implies that a human has to work with oneself to develop and become a better person. There were a few examples where a Christian and feminist discourse was combined. Most common was using a Christian discourse where the view of human life and human worth were emphasized. One bishop stated that;

"The basis of what the Church does it of course the theological motives. It is basically about the Christian thinking that man is created as an image of God, and with that comes both responsibility and freedom. The driving force of the Church is the belief in a God who has given us life equally, not in different ways” (Bishop 3)

The quotation expresses a theological basis for equality without integrating a feminist discourse. By using and mixing discourses in conventional ways the dominant discourse is stabilized and therefore also the dominant social order (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 73-76). There are elements of the Bible that three of the bishops acknowledged could be an issue for women regarding subordination if interpreted literary, which means that there are contradicting meanings regarding equality in the Bible. This requires that the parts of the Bible where the woman subordination is mediated must be actively handled in addition to proclaiming the understanding of God as giving us life equally. Another bishop emphasized that there is a specific part of the Bible that strongly express everyone’s equal value and a call to respond to other humans with respect;

"For me, the basic subtext is, "Here is no longer Jew or Greek, man or woman, slave or free, all you are one in Christ”. It’s such an incredibly strong expression of everyone's equal value. Then it is also a call to respond to each other with respect and equality. So, then you have to work with men's standards and women's standards, and how people are towards each other in general” (Bishop 2)

The bishop cites the Bible to exemplify how the Bible text can be used in favor of being able to advocate for equality. To problematize men’s standards and women’s standard is common within
norm-critical discourse. Thus, the bishop integrates a Christian discourse with a norm-critical discourse. Another bishops that also integrates these two discourses states that the Church can contribute to challenging the macho culture and norms, or at least be involved in challenging them. This is relevant considering the fact that violence against women is described as partly embedded in social meanings about masculinity and femininity (Johnson, 2015, p. 15-18). Thus, actively questioning prevailing notions about gender is crucial for preventing men’s violence against women. Three out of four bishops reflected over the role of norms about gender, describing them as problematic in the society. One bishop stated that the Church need to work with notions of what it means to be macho and a man in relation to a women. The integration of a norm-critical discourse is of high importance in the Church’s work towards preventing violence against women. Following quotation is an example where the bishop combines a Christian discourse with a human-rights discourse, where the concept of equal value for men and women is included;

"As for the role of the bishop, I believe it is important that the bishop stands up for equal value for men and women, equal rights with the same starting point. Questions linked to human rights should be prioritized on the bishops’s agenda. The bishop can find different ways to raise the issue” (Bishop 3)

By viewing violence against women as a human rights issue, it gets more difficult to minimize when it is conceptualized as a both an institutional and legal violation of human rights instead of a private, familial violation (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 75-80). The combination of a human rights discourse and a Christian discourse emphasizes the paradigm shift. This new interdiscursive mix is a driving force towards a Church that wants to connect to the global work of human rights organizations. The paradigm shift challenges the ideological construct according to feminist theory, that women subordination is confined to the private domain so that violence against women can proceed unrecognized (Thompson, 2001, p. 6-8). Thus, this integration of human-rights discourse also contributes to the feminist aim to put women’s interest on the public and political agenda.

7.3 Social practice
These bishops exist in a specific institution, the Church of Sweden. As addressed earlier, these bishops especially draw upon a Christian discourse when talking about sin, view of human life and referring to Bible texts. They also use different discourse types such as norm-critical discourse and
feminist discourse. Thus, these three discourses belong to the order of discourse within the Church of Sweden. An order of discourse refers to all of the discourse types that are used within a specific social institution (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 66-67). The Christian discourse was the most common discourse that the bishops draw upon. However, all bishops draw upon other discourses aiming for social change beyond the Christian discourse which might be a reflection of the institution they occur within, that makes these discursive choices possible.

As mentioned earlier, three out of four bishops mentioned a structural dimension in relation to violence against women. Two of the bishops emphasized the view of human life as an important factor. Talking about violence against women without integrating the dimension of structural inequality stands in contrast with having a feminist standpoint, where acknowledgement of the male supremacy and domination is crucial (Thompson, 2001, p. 12-18). In an analysis of social practice it is relevant to address ideological consequences of a discursive practice, additionally in terms of strengthening or challenging unequal power relations (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 86-87). An ideological consequence of talking about violence against women without the structural awareness, is that the unequal power relation between men and women will not be opposed which is the goal according to feminist theory. A Christian discourse contains elements that could also promote gender equality. For example relating to the theological thinking that the bishops mentioned earlier, that God have given us life equally and the proverb "Here is no longer Jew or Greek, man or woman, slave or free, all you are one in Christ". Riswold (2009) describes this as Christianity provides a theological base for egalitarian and just human relationships, with human equality and dignity (Riswold, 2009, p. 20-40).

However, male supremacy and domination is not recognized and is therefore not sufficient as a promoter for gender equality. Male domination is deeply embedded in our society and the manifestation of it is often subtle (Thompson, 2001, p. 9-12). When talking about the view of human life instead of structures the focus become individual centered. A model for understanding violence against women could therefore be in terms of the perpetrator having a "bad" view of human life instead of being part of a society structured by male supremacy, where individual factors also play a part. This way the structural awareness is absent. Furthermore, solely acknowledging the structural dimension of gender inequality is not enough to be considered having a feminist consciousness without the standpoint that the male monopolization of the human status must be
opposed (Thomson, 2001, p. 12-18). All of this is relevant considering that the choice of model for understanding violence against women affects what actions are possible taking for curbing and preventing the violence. The following quotation is from one of the bishops that both acknowledged the structural dimension of violence against women and constructed the view of human life as the cause of the violence;

"What is really men’s violence against women about? After all, it is about our view of human life. It is about how we look at human beings, is the human good all way through, are only men evil and women good, or do we have the potential for both goodness and evil within us” (Bishop 4)

This could be a sign of uncertainty when drawing upon both a feminist discourse and a Christian discourse. The Christian discourse about view of human life, evil and goodness dominate the feminist discourse in this discursive practice. The quotation also exemplifies how women and men are constructed and divided into two different classes. This bishop can be understood as making an attempt to undermine the construction of gender, minimize the differences and the division between men and women, by talking about human beings instead of men or women. The power asymmetry between men and women can only be visible when talking about men and women, to be able to identify male domination at all. Without talking about men and women, inequality and oppression is obscured. On the other hand, power imbalances between men and women have also been possible because of the gendered dichotomies which makes the issue complex. However, according to feminist theory it is a required to identify and oppose male domination which requires talking about men and women as two different social groups (Thompson, 2001, p. 12-18). The opposing of male domination is also important since violence against women is unlikely to occur without support from the surroundings (Johnson, 2015, p. 15-18).

Separatism is a main strategy of feminism and can be understood as the "withdrawal of consent to male supremacist relations of ruling” (Thompson, 2001, p. 15). Ideas about separatism could not be found among these bishops. Instead, the ideas were more oriented towards having equal distribution of men and women in power positions. Gerhardt (2014) states that including women in Church leadership is symbolically important to show that the Church does not support a religious culture that denigrates women based on their gender (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 154-160). Having women on power positions would also open up for the opportunity for women to affect the order of discourse,
for example by purposefully integrating a feminist discourse and put women interests on the agenda within the Church.

8. Discussion

The aim of the study was to examine how the Church of Sweden can contribute to curbing and preventing violence against women, according to influential bishops. There was consensus regarding the Church’s responsibility to work with gender equality and against violence against women in different ways. The four bishops had many different suggestions for doing so, for example by addressing norms about masculinity and raising awareness about violence against women. However, the perceptions of the connection between Christianity and violence against women differed and the research question was only answered indirectly. These bishops expressed reluctance to directly connect Christianity to violence against women, even though some of them did reflect over the impact of Biblical texts that emphasized women subordination. Some of the bishops included the structural dimension in their understanding of violence against women. Nonetheless, ideas about the separatism as the main strategy in radical feminist theory was not found in the interviews. Some of the bishops did acknowledge male supremacy and expressed a will to oppose it, which is in accordance to radical feminist theory. The biggest difference from the view of radical feminist theory and the views identified in this study, was the connection between violence against women and our view of human life.

The radical feminist theory had a major impact on the research, which means that the research results would be different using another theoretical framework in combination with Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis as theory. Furthermore, a distinction between sex and gender should have been made in accordance to radical feminist theory. The theory could have been used even more in the research, for example by questioning the ideological structure of gender further. This was excluded from the study since it was not entirely related to the research questions.

Critical discourse analysis as a method fitted well with the aim of the study. By using Fairclough’s three dimensional model it was possible to examine the order of discourse within the Church of Sweden and explore how much influence the feminist discourse had. The third dimension in the three dimensional model, the social practice, opened up for the possibility to understand also the
non-discursive elements such as the organization of the Church and its influence on the work towards equality and against violence against women. However, the critical discourse analysis could have been more profound as well as the analytical tools provided by the method could have been used more.

There were agreements between my study and previous research. The bishops’ emphasized the Church’s role in actively working against violence against women, which is in accordance to the idea that religious institutions have a critical role to play in reducing violence against women. The need for creating a theological response to violence against women by naming it a sin was also found in this research, as well as framing it as a human rights issue. Furthermore, the notion that every religious tradition has resources for theological reconstruction was also articulated in the study. What could not be found in the material in relation to previous research, was ideas about how to hold perpetrators accountable, for example by cooperation with law enforcement or programs for perpetrators. What distinguish this research from previous, is the ideas about how the organization of the Church influence the work and the use of the supervisory role as the bishops have to be able to curb and prevent violence against women.

These findings only reflect the opinions of the four interviewed bishops and not the entire bishop college in Sweden. One assumption is that the bishops that agreed to participate in these interviews despite their full schedules did so because of individual interest or commitment to these issues. This means that the results could have been entirely different if all of the fourteen bishops participated in the study.

An idea for further research in the context of Sweden is to explore what women subjected to violence would need from their religious community. By doing this, the Church can respond and customize the support after what is needed according to the women.
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Appendix 1

Consent form

I hereby agree to participate in the study and know what the purpose of the study is. I have been informed about my participation in the study and that participation is voluntary and that I at any time can interrupt my participation without any negative consequences.

The information that emerges during the interview will not be passed on and my name will not be presented in the final work. The information that emerges during the interview will be treated in such a way that my identity is not cleared. The data will be preserved in such a way that unauthorized persons cannot access them. The information I provide will only be used for this master thesis, but I am aware that the final version is public.

Place and date

_____________________________________
Informant

_____________________________________
Student
Appendix 2

Interview guide

• Which duties are included in your employment as a bishop?

• How have you come into contact with violence against women in your work?

• What are, according to your understanding, the causes of violence against women?

• How do you view the relationship between violence against women and Christianity?

• How do you view the Church’s and your role in curbing and preventing violence against women?

• How can the Church of Sweden and you in your role as bishop act specifically to curb and prevent violence against women?